

Hi, and welcome to our podcast. You teach, we learn. We are your hosts. I'm Jessica Mansbach. And I'm Polina Pine, streaming to you from Loyola University, Chicago. We love teaching, and we are excited to introduce you to our colleagues from Loyola. And from around the world who look at their connections between teaching theory and practice, and who are passionate about student learning. Thanks for joining us for today's conversation.

**Polina:** Hello everyone and welcome to a new episode of our podcast and our guest today, I'm very happy to present our honored guest, Dr. Schwer is a trained educator, dedicated minister, author and experienced spiritual director here at Loyola University Chicago. At Loyola, she focuses on recognizing, inviting and empowering faculty and staff to embrace their roles as animators of the university's mission. Through orientations workshops, seminars and consultations, she fosters deeper connection to mission-driven work. Additionally, she oversees mission efforts in the Athletics Department and has served as team chaplain since 2013. Welcome, Dr. Schwer, welcome, Lauren.

**Lauren:** Thank you so much.

**Polina:** So first of all, it's really nice to have you today in our episode of the podcast. We have a privilege to talk today not only about teaching and pedagogy and mentoring, but also to talk about the Jesuit mission in our work, in the work that we do. Could you please maybe start from telling a little bit about what is your mission and what are you doing at Loyola University Chicago?

**Lauren:** Wonderful. That's a good question. It's funny, I'm often asked to talk about the university's mission, my own mission is not often asked about. So I appreciate that opportunity. I think when I think about what my mission is, I think a lot about how do we support people, see people, create space for people and hold at the same time. How do we empower people, encourage them to discover, hone, utilize their own voice and talents and gifts all for the betterment of the common good, of humanity. I'm coming out of the Ignatian tradition. Ignatius of Loyola is the Saint, the founder of the Jesuits, our namesake obviously. And he wrote down his own experience actually to this wonderful guy called the Spiritual Exercises. And in the midst of that, he talks about that God has a project in the world. It's a project of love, it's a project of justice, it's a project of peace. The life's purpose is to examine yourself and to figure out what your unique role in that project is. And so that's what I think my mission is, is to constantly be evaluating. It's funny, we're going to get quickly into Ignatian pedagogy, I apologize. To pay attention to your own context, pay attention to your experience. And then as you're doing the reflection on that, trying to come to an ever developing, always dynamic, what your role is in this project of justice, love, and peace. So that's my mission. And then I would say, the nice thing is I'm very informed by the Ignatian tradition. So working at a Jesuit school is very, very straightforward for me

because my mission really, as I've come to understand it, it's unique to me in my own space and my own identities and the way I've lived my life. But it very much parallels that, which is our mission at Loyola. So yeah, I don't know if that's a good place to start or not.

**Polina:** Yeah, that's absolutely. Yeah, thank you. You know, I right away have a few following questions, following up questions. So your mission at Loyola, your position at Loyola is to support not only the students, but also the faculty educational pathway. So how do you see the difference in working the faculty members, let's say in one department? As a group, as a team, let's say teaching similar subjects, similar topics, similar classes versus teaching solo, let's say their own class, their own subject, or let's say higher level classes. So what are the differences and similarities and how should I as an educator, let's say, to teach my students when the class is taught in a team?

**Lauren:** I think I maybe heard a couple questions in there. So, I'm to see if I can get to all of them. And if I don't get to them, please feel free to repeat. So first, what I'll say is, you know, this is my 15th academic year at Loyola. And for the first 11 years, I was student facing. And I was really focused on the faith development and different programming and the retreat program developing that building that and campus ministry. And then I found in my own discernment, in that figuring out of what my role was meant to be, that I had reached a point where, you we all, it was during the pandemic. So all kinds of life circumstances, pandemic circumstances, my age circumstances, was hit in my 40s. I found that I was, while I could still do the work, I didn't have the enthusiasm or the energy for the work any longer. And I wanted to get out of the way. So that someone who did have that energy and enthusiasm and passion could step into those positions. So, I shifted away from students and I shifted over to faculty and staff. My very snarky answer of what the difference is begins with faculty and staff like to do things during the workday. And so my work-life balance is enormously better because I don't have to work nights and weekends nearly as often. But that aside, when I think about working with staff and faculty as they bring their own expertise in their field, as they bring their own passions and focus in their scholarship and then thinking through how that intersects with our mission or why we come to Loyola. What does Loyola offer that brought you here, that can support you, that can encourage you in the work that you are called to do uniquely as well? I think the difference is I feel more of a collaborator. I feel more like a, maybe more of a teacher than I do a minister because we're not a church, we're a school. And campus ministry serves the faith development of students. So, I had a very explicit minister identity then. Whereas now I see myself as a bridge builder, as an access point creator, and helping us all own this entity of the mission of the institution. So, I think that would be the difference between working with students and staff is it's a lot more of translation, bridge building, inviting kinds of things. Now then you got to a question that was about team teaching versus

independent teaching. Is that right? Wonderful. I think, I mean, I think both independent, like teaching an upper level class by yourself and team teaching can both be so exciting and both can be so challenging. I actually currently teach a graduate level course at the Institute of Pastoral Studies that I teach by myself. I have, I have 13 students this semester who are extraordinarily passionate about the topic.

I just watch them engaging with this material in these meaningful ways. Their writing assignments are bringing things to life in beautiful ways. They're working together and learning how to be spiritual directors and engage with the spiritual exercises. I find it to be so edifying because this thing that I'm deeply passionate about, these students come to me and can be deeply passionate about it as well. I also get to be the one figuring out which readings I think are the most relevant and helpful. I can be intentional about what kinds of readings I'm offering. Most of the writing around the spiritual exercises is written by men. I want to make sure we get female voices. How am I diversifying the different perspectives that we are getting feedback for about the exercises, those kinds of things. So I like being autonomous in those ways. And I also help out with an internship at the university that's for graduate students. And I teach that with two other faculty. And there is such gift with being able to finish a class and be like, what just happened? Did I say that right? Did I make any sense? Or, hey, everyone, I can't do this. I need this 30 minute because I have to get a doctor's appointment, but I'll jump on right after. And one of our faculty members had to deal with an illness in the last few weeks, and we were able to cover entirely for him. Being part of a team, I think, is as inherently Ignatian as doing independent work as well, because you get to pull the gifts and talents from each person. And if you're working with the right team where you're able to acknowledge both your strengths and your limitations and lean into each other for the strengths that others are offering, what extraordinary educational experience to offer to students for them to be able to encounter the gifts of so many talented faculty. So I don't know if that answers your question, but I'll stop there.

**Polina:** It absolutely does. And you know, I really like how you said, and I probably will even, you know, I even took the notes of this because how you put it together. It's acknowledging the gifts and talents of each other. That's the key of the team teaching, right? It's not a, so team teaching is actually bringing something to the, it's like for me, excuse my very simple analogy, but it's like making a chili.

**Lauren:** Exactly.

**Polina:** So many different things putting together in one pot and at the end something beautiful comes out of it.

**Lauren:** Absolutely. And it would be different if one of those ingredients wasn't there. It doesn't mean you couldn't eat it, but it's richer because you have the layers of flavor.

**Jessica:** And for me, Lauren, I heard Bridge Builder and Translator and at FCIP we talk about translating as well as we talk with faculty and tell them, many of them are probably already doing the things that we recommend, even if they don't have the language for it. I wonder if you'd say a little bit more about the bridge building piece.

**Lauren:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, I think about it in a couple of different ways. I think, Jess, I can't agree with you more. I think we have employees and colleagues at Loyola who are living the mission in extraordinary ways already and sometimes just don't have the semantic language to say exactly the kind of buzzwords that we might use in the Ignatian tradition, right? So, I think that's why I see my role as not just being someone who tells people about things, but my first job is to go recognize and celebrate what's already being done. And then from there, if there's opportunity to clarify or opportunity to teach, or if there's something that needs to be added, I can do that. And then my hope is then to get out of the way, to watch how people adapt, integrate, put into practice in their own unique way that will be different than anything I suggest. So that recognition of what's already happening, I think we have to start there because otherwise, those of us with the title Ignatian Pedagogy or Ignatian Spirituality, we're missing out on the gifts that are already happening. And so in some ways it's almost selfish. I get to look around and say, hey, look at all the great work they're doing. This is really fun. In a world where so many things are hard, to be able to celebrate something is really, think, it certainly feels like a gift for me in my own role. You asked about bridge building. I think in some ways, bridge building is about creating spaces where people can come together and meet and intersect and meet people like we're all coming to where we are. You know, we are a Jesuit Catholic institution. There are extraordinary benefits and gains and gifts that come out of being both Jesuit and Catholic. And those are loaded words. And for some people, the word Catholic scares them or holds religious trauma or holds the fact that the church is imperfect. The Jesuits are imperfect even Ignatian spirituality is imperfect, though I think it's very close to be perfect. I'm wildly biased. But I think sometimes we live in a culture that is either yes or no, black or white, this or that. And I think the bridge building is saying yes and, this and. And I think that feels very Ignatian to hold the tension of both. That yes, the Catholic Church has caught, I was living in Boston when the priest abuse broke in Boston in January of 2002. The Catholic Church has done horrible things and the Catholic Church has inspired remarkable people and given people space to make meaning and connect to God, to God the creator has given us Catholic social teaching, which challenges those of us who are part of that tradition to say the dignity of the human person is prime mission and where we have to start when we think about how we engage the world. And I can go on for

all those other things, but I think holding both is the invitation and the challenge and the tension we are asked to do at a Jesuit institution. But those bridges, everyone comes at that from a different place. So we have to continue to go and be together and meet one another.

**Polina:** Yeah, Lauren, I have also the question about what you just said, so it's about the bridges. So when you teach your classes or when you build the bridges, because apparently your work also includes different activities outside of the classroom, so how does Jesuit spirituality and your mission engage and interact with other faces and secular worldviews?

**Lauren:** For sure. Actually, forgive me. I'm still less than a year out of writing my dissertation, but I wrote about the experience of religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities and how they connect to the mission and how they bring the mission to life in ways we wouldn't have without them. And it was every time I got off of a call with a focus group or an interview, I would be near tears just talking to these remarkable individuals who are doing such cool work that is meaningful and relevant and being themselves at the same time from a place that a religious identity is not something that they claim. And so I'm thinking about there was a botanist at one of the schools who helped build a garden with sustainable plants that would be hardy near a place where there had been a mass shooting. And so she brought her talents and gifts around botany to respond to healing for a community that was not just specific to the university she was at but also the wider community. Like things like that. It's just remarkable. The things I picked up and gleaned from my research, I would say one, it is important for those of us, I'll speak for myself, who are in positions like in the Division of Mission Integration, where my job is to help people connect to the mission. It's important for me to continue to name that everyone is welcome. And I think because of the religious connotations of my work, explicitly naming people are coming from any or no faith tradition. And we believe all of you belong here and all of you have a role to play. My belief and I hope that everyone's experience, people's experience in the work will then will feel this. But the call to that, the work that everyone has uniquely, whether they are religious or not, will be just enhancing what they were already coming to do anyway. That it won't feel like a burden, but in fact something that makes life a little easier or gives language to hold on to. Yeah, so I think, but the other thing I'll say, and I'm, I was really struck by this in my research is that the folks I interviewed didn't want the mission watered down. They didn't want it so simplified so that anyone could understand it. The folks wanted to hear the context it was coming out of so that they could then figure out how to adapt and integrate it into their own language in their own way. If we simplify it to something so simple, like sometimes people say, cure a personalist is just holistic education. Tell me a university that won't talk about holistic

education. Think University of Illinois would say they want to do holistic education. Student affairs professionals nationwide are going to talk about holistic education, whether they're at a Jesuit school or not. But for us, knowing that this comes out of a cure a personalist didn't get used until the 20th century. It makes me laugh so hard, but we have tripled down on it and it's a wonderful value. This idea of caring for the whole person, it's coming out of the spiritual exercises in the 1500s, where Ignatius of Loyola, while writing this spiritual work, said, everyone will experience this uniquely and we need to welcome who the spiritual director needs to welcome the person in front of them in their totality. to rec, like he didn't use the word intersectionality, but he was talking about intersectionality in the 1500s that the person in front of you holds many identities and has had many experiences, and they're all going to work together in a way that you've never seen before. So let them tell you who they are and honor who that is. And for me, that's bigger than holistic education. That's saying every part of that person is sacred. Part of our job is to honor that and to look for that in the person, which is easier said than done with some folks, right? It's, it's not hard to look at to talk to Jessica and be like, Yeah, Jessica is amazing. So many gifts and talents, sacred human, like this is amazing. When someone thinks differently than us when someone is blatantly disrespecting other people or causing harm, that becomes much more challenging conversation, a different topic. But in terms of cura personalis itself, I think that comes from something really rich and deep. And I think particularly when we look at the demographic, cliff that's rapidly approaching, we need to identify why we are different than Northwestern, than U of I, then UIC, then DePaul, then Dominican. What is it that Loyola, what is it unique about us that why they should pick us when there are fewer students to fill different spots in enrollment? So I think our mission is actually the thing that's going to keep us alive. There are many factors and I'm very grateful to all the people at Loyola doing all the financial things and all the things I should do my preface and copy out there. But I do think our mission will be a contributing factor in what will be our long-term sustainability as an institution.

**Polina:** As less professional educator in Jesuit education than you, Lauren, I can tell that I even feel the difference between Loyola University versus other Catholic universities. And it's really, really detectable to me.

**Lauren:** What is so detectable? love to hear. I know. I'm sorry I turn it back to you, but tell me more.

**Polina:** Thank you. So first of all, the major difference is, I don't wanna say much or less, but I feel that Jesuit education is wider in terms of inclusion. And also this paradigms of Jesuit education, I haven't heard. I'm an amateur, of course, in Catholicism and in faith in general, but I haven't heard such emphasis on these five paradigms of pedagogy. And

also this welcome that many of our students, including, for example, I'm really fond of Arupe College. So this is one of the examples of Jesuit mission and Jesuit education. So we want to strive to help the world and the people through education. And regardless at which level of knowledge and education a student is, we will always be ready to teach them to go through not only faith and spirituality, but also through other aspects of education. And just like you mentioned, through educating a student as *cura personalis*. So, I'm coming from the sciences and this is, and I feel that I'm a little bit limited from, because I'm touching the student only in one spot. I'm touching the soul of a student in one spot. And, but I can feel pretty confident that the students will get other things. That I cannot give them from my colleagues.

**Lauren:** Which is, forgive me for this to go back to your earlier point though, in your question about team teaching versus individual teaching. You may individually teach in a classroom in a particular course, but the students are experiencing a team approach because they have to take so many different faculty. And so while maybe we're not as intentional about naming each other's limitations and strengths when we're teaching separate courses, they're going to encounter those anyway.

And so they're going to look, so you might teach the student soul in that one science class, but different points are going to be touched by different faculty and co-curricular activities, the ways they engage in their residence halls and in there with your academic advisors. And when they're in fraternities and sororities and all the different ways people can be involved, their souls are going to get touched in so many ways that it makes us malleable. It's almost like you've got mold, like, like molding clay, and you have to like warm it up and move it around before you can start forming it. And all of the different ways the faculty and staff connect with students, it's like warming it up so that they can then build what their shape is and who they want to be in the world.

**Polina:** Well, that sounds amazing again, another metaphor. But you know what? On the other hand, I feel that while we are warming up this clay of the souls, we have to be super careful. And we have to, and I'm talking about myself only because this is my perspective. So we need to understand that we're also human beings and we are not perfect. And even if we teach them, we need to understand that we have to be careful. We cannot claim perfection from the students. We have to give them opportunity. To make mistakes and to accept these mistakes. And maybe not in our class, they will learn the particular subject or particular semantics or particular notation that we teach them in class we need to be forgiving and we need to be flexible with how we accept their answers. Because the way we think, it's not necessarily the way they think. And compassion, would say, and listening to the students is extremely important, especially. Again, sometimes I feel that in sciences

we are very dry, just because sciences are more defined, I would say, than other disciplines. But even in sciences, we need to listen to the students and not only to push our agenda.

**Lauren:** And as you were speaking, even before you named the sciences piece, in my head I was thinking, that must be so much harder in the science classroom because hearing people's answers in chemistry, is a right or wrong answer in terms of, I haven't taken chemistry since the 1990s, I should be very clear, but I remember there were equations, and I had to remember there were moles, I don't know. Anyway, all that said, I find in faculty know their field, faculty know their expertise, faculty know the culture of their community, and again, it goes back to that beginning of Ignatian pedagogy with our knowing the context. We have the context of Laila, but we know the context of our own unique subject. And it's the invitation for all of us as faculty to think about, so what does this mean here in this space? And the context today is not the same context it would have been in everything else the same a year ago or five years ago or 10 years ago, right? Like the world continues to change. I think you mentioned Arrupe College, you mentioned so many different ways that we live out our mission. What strikes me is I can't speak as an expert to other charisms in Catholic higher education. I've hung out with the Franciscans for a little while, but outside of that, I've been pretty embedded in the Jesuit tradition for most of my, all of my adult life pretty much. But what I love about the Jesuit tradition is this invitation to recognize our disordered attachments so that we can be free for what we're being invited to. And the reality is, with all these ways we approach education; we get attached to things. Like, I get attached to PowerPoints I made two years ago, not because I think it's a perfect PowerPoint, but because I don't have to go make a new one then. Right? Like, because we are imperfect, we're humans, we're like faculty, we have a limited amount of time, we have personal lives, we have other responsibilities, we get tired and want to watch television. All of those things count to who we want to be. And so the invitation we have in the tradition is to say, where are we attached to things? What are the things we want to maintain? What do we want to hold on to? But how are they emerging differently in this immediate context and climate and culture? And that allows us to be creative. That allows us that's how a Arrupe college happens. That's how the know, the Cristo Rey Network is a mode of high school secondary education that started in Chicago as well and has been replicated around the country. I there are like, I mean, I think there are almost 50 of those schools. I could be wrong on that stat, but we have two of them in Chicago where high school students in communities that have lower high school success rates get to get a private education. No family pays more than a thousand dollars. And they, one day out of each school week, they go and they work somewhere. They get work experience. They develop professional skills. They develop things for a resume. And then they have a huge,

they have great graduation rates, great college placement rates, but that came out of responding to the needs of a community and a culture in a specific time. And that we get to adapt, emerge, re-envision, recreate. That's awesome. I just, I get so excited. I'm not good at just following a system. I like the creativity of like, what can we do better? How can we do this differently? Yeah.

**Polina:** That's never an ending process, feel. That's exactly why we are here. That's exactly why we still have our place in the educational process, in spiritual process. And I'm sorry, you were talking about the spiritual exercises, and I also see that you are a co-author of the book that talks about the spiritual exercises. Again, I'm very uneducated in this area. But I bet that some information will help me to develop my soul and develop my body. Would you mind to talk a little bit about spiritual exercises in general and maybe to bring us some examples that we can use in our professional life?

**Lauren:** Yeah, totally. just very briefly, Ignatius of Loyola, you can go read his story sometime. I won't go through his history. He's got all kinds of fun little moments and it's a good story. But he had a pretty significant life transformation and conversion experience to faith. And in that process, he had an extended period of meditation in a cave, an extended time of prayer in a cave. And it changed his life. changed, it developed intimacy with God. It helped him understand who he was supposed to be in the world. And then he went back and he wrote it down. And he didn't actually write it down for people to follow. He wrote it down for companions of those who wanted to do it. And so it's, always tell students who want to do the exercises and they tell me they bought the book. I'm like, stop, stop, That book's not for you. It's for the spiritual vectors. If you want to do it, come talk to me. We'll get you a director. But the whole point of it, it's, it's, already mentioned this disordered attachment and freedom, but Ignatius says the point of the spiritual life is to find those disordered attachments so that we are free to respond to our call in the world. Whatever that might be uniquely for us. And so the Jesuits, if you meet a Jesuit, they've done it at least once, if not twice, a 30-day silent version of this. They go away for 30 days. But you mentioned earlier that you feel a sense of inclusion a little bit wider in a Jesuit school than at other Catholic institutions. Even in the 1500s, which is context looks nothing like our context. We're in Spain, we're, you know, I saw these things, but it's also the 1500s. Ignatius knew then he did not want his spirituality to only be available to priests. And that would have been radical in the 1500s. This is when the Protestant Reformation is going on because the Catholic Church is corrupt. They're telling people they can't have direct access to God, they got to go through priests. And Ignatius doesn't want this to be just for priests, he wants it to be for anyone who has a desire to seek this connection to God. And I think that inclusion seems so low bar in 2025, but would have been radical in the 1500s.

**Polina:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

**Lauren:** And so in his opening notes, in the annotations, the 19th annotation is saying, for those people who can't go away for 30 days of silence, you can do this over 30 weeks. And you can commit to an hour of prayer each day and do it that way to make it accessible. Like he was already translating, already pre-creating spaces of accessibility, already trying to build bridges. And I think knowing that that model is, and he was imperfect. He was, he's the only saint with a notarized police record for brawling in a bar while intoxicated, right? He, like was totally prideful, very fashionable, rationalized ways of working with people to get where he wanted people to get, always for the greater glory of God, of course, but you know, he was imperfect. But there's something in that exercises, the spiritual exercises for me, that I will simplify them down to something very, I hope this will make sense, but you spend time looking at how you are loved. Then you with that scaffolding, you're able to look at where you've been broken, where you have caused harm. And to say, I am loved and I'm broken. I can be both of those things. And the yes and right, I hold both of those things. But ostensibly, the person doing the exercises is someone who wants to connect to the Christian God. Although we've had Jewish folks and Muslim folks who have done the exercises, we've been able to adapt as well for those folks. Ostensibly, you recognize yourself as loved by God, that that love is coming from the creator, from the Anhai. And as you recognize this part about yourself, you want to know God better. And then the rest of the exercises takes you through the life of Jesus. And you spend time with Jesus not in abstract theological terms, but in imaginative ways of pretending that you're imagining that you're having conversations with Jesus. And you can say, why do you even talk to this person? That person seems like a jerk. I wouldn't talk to that person. Or you seem really tired. I get tired too. What do you do when you're tired? Like just very human interactions, like developing a relationship with Jesus. There's also a major meditation where we're invited to say, are you free enough? To contribute to this project of justice and love? Or are you not free to say you're ready to do that? And it's in that, in the understanding of yourself as loved and broken and knowing the person who loved you, that you get to say, I want to be part of this. I want to be part of this project. And I'm imperfect and I'm going to mess it up way more times than I'm going to get it right. But oof, I want to be part of this. And for me, that's where the call for justice comes from, for me to be right. So, okay, I'll stop. Sorry.

**Polina:** I just wanted to ask a question. So you mentioned that you were able to modify for Jewish and Muslim participants, but how about secular participants?

**Lauren:** So it's a good question. I think there are elements of the exercises that absolutely can be done with folks who are religiously unaffiliated. There's a huge chunk of the

exercises that are spending time with Jesus. If someone doesn't have a religious tradition and doesn't believe in Jesus as son of God or that Jesus was God, but is really open and interested in exploring imaginatively what conversations with Jesus would look like, it can be adapted. I think that's not impossible. But for anyone who's like, I don't believe in Jesus, I don't want to talk to Jesus, and I think that can be, it is Christocentric. And that can be a stumbling block for people who are uncomfortable with religious language. But the examine, I mean, is an amazing tool that comes out of spiritual exercises. And there are secular examines, there are uber Catholic examines. I would be happy to direct you to a page of examines that we created for Ignatian Heritage Month back in November of all kinds of different topics. And we had our Muslim chaplain do one, we had our Catholic chaplain Protestant chaplain do one had people throughout campus ministry, our health sciences campus, my team, know, lots of different ways of doing that. But that comes out of the spiritual exercises because Ignatius believed who we are is the relevant material to the prayer. And I think that also was something different than other traditions at the time, rather than if you would like to follow this, you need to pray these prayers and you need to believe this and your identity becomes less important as what's happening here. But Ignatius was all about paying attention to your experience. And again, that's where Ignatian pedagogy comes from. Like knowing your context, what is your experience? Do the reflection or the prayer on it. Take action and then what happened when you took the action and then starts all over again. That is coming directly out of the exam. It's coming directly out of the exercises. And so I could say so many things. I'm just going to stop there.

**Polina:** Now, you know, it leads me to the idea of doing some research on this. I'm confident there is research that is done on the spiritual exercises here at Loyola. But could you please maybe talk about what kind of scholarship is done here at Loyola on your practices and or maybe you have any ideas of the scholarship that can be done and disseminated. So what would have it been?

**Lauren:** Those are big questions. So I will say, I'll speak from my experience. I think sometimes a spirituality conversation, a conversation about a particular approach to the spiritual life is not always seen as academically rigorous as other disciplines. And it doesn't lend itself to the same kind of approaches to scholarship. I don't know that I know of any scholarship around the exercises that happening at Loyola right now. I know what I'm doing. I can tell you if staff were given a sabbatical, what I would go right about. Unfortunately, that is not the case as an adjunct faculty and as a staff member. I think there's a lot of work to be done around going and listening to those who are connected to spiritual exercises in cultures and circumstances that are different than the Western white narrative that has created some extraordinary resources, extraordinary commentaries. I actually think they're magical and wonderful. And there's a book by Michael Ivins that's a

commentary of the exercises. think it's brilliant. And I teach all the time. I think there's an opportunity to expand, broaden, widen, and invite more in. And the only way we're going to do that is if we go out and listen and learn from. And I don't know where that's happening. And so that's where I would want to go. I would want to hear from communities that are, I will say that exercises have somehow snuck into the Protestant world in wonderful ways. It's wild to me, the Episcopalian priests in Chicago have found the exercises. I don't know how that happened, but everyone's looking for spiritual directors and wants to do the spiritual exercises. So I'm constantly trying to help people get paired. But I think the way Episcopalian communities will do the exercises will be different than the way we do them in Catholic communities. And so what can we learn from them? In the same way that I think from my dissertation, religiously unaffiliated people live our mission differently than I will as a Catholic. And that's awesome because then I get to learn too. I get to understand something, a different perspective, a different approach. And that way we can all keep learning together. So anyway, I don't, again, I don't really know if there is scholarship happening specifically with the spiritual exercises at Loyola, I am not.

**Polina:** Yeah, but I am the reason I ask is just I cannot wrap my head around because any scholarship that is done in spiritual exercises or any religious exercise or religious scholarship, it for to me, it sounds extremely sensitive and extremely. So one who would try to do research or scholarship in this particular branch. I don't want to say science, but let's put it this way. Existence, think it's just has to be very ethically aware.

**Lauren:** For sure. Now I will say, I mean, I think the IRB approval process would be complicated for sure. Absolutely. Yeah, no question. And to say that I'll reflect from my dissertation one more time. And then I think the parallel would be true. I reached out to my colleagues who do the work I do at other Jesuit institutions to try to find people to be in focus groups interviews with me. I couldn't believe they did all these people. think I think I interviewed 17 people, 90 minutes of their time in the summertime. They all said yes, they were like and especially coming out of the focus groups, I would write them to say thank you and all those things after almost every single person wrote back to me and said, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share this. Like, thank you for writing this. Thank you for letting me be part. Like, they were expressing gratitude to me in a way that I, first of all, don't believe I deserve because I was so deeply moved by them. And my translation to what we're talking about, people are transformed by the spiritual exercises and people want to talk about it. And they may not share some of the difficult intimate moments, but they want to share how they are different. And they want to share how they have found different meaning and purpose and call in their life. And so I think there is scholarship that could be done. It would have to be done, you use the word sensitive. I think that's exactly the right word. It would have to be done very intentionally and in a way that honors and

supports the person. But then and but I think it could be done. And I, and I just go back to what I was talking about cura personalis. The 16th, 15th and 16th annotations of the exercises say the creator deals directly with the creature and that the creature is the unique. They are different than anyone else who will sit there. This research would be unending because there are an infinite number of ways that people will encounter the exercises. And we just get to keep learning and witnessing all these changes and transformations. And I think that's. So again, if you hear of anyone who's like, I think we should give staff a sabbatical for three months so they can just have some time to go, that's not nearly enough time, but I could make a chunk start there, I think. So.

**Polina:** Yeah, thank you, Lauren. I've talked so much because literally I was told by Jessica that we are going to have an amazing guest and this is exactly what is happening. And I have more questions to ask and more topics to discuss. But I think Jessica also wants to jump in and ask the questions I did. I wasn't letting her do it.

**Jessica:** You've talked a lot about your dissertation research and the spiritual exercises and your own teaching. How would you say that your teaching has been informed by your research and your work as a staff member at Loyola?

**Lauren:** Yeah, I would say I don't know that my research has impacted my teaching as much because I am teaching in the Institute of Pastoral Studies, people who are spiritual training to be spiritual directors. I find it to more deeply impact the work my regular job of working with faculty and staff and trying to engage people with the mission. I think about you know Loyola 201 is a is an orientation that all new staff have to go through that my area is responsible for my teammate, Klamisha and I run that. And we we definitely after my research, was like, oh, I want to try this different. I want to do this different, like I different ideas of how to approach things. For any of my programming, really always I always want to take the stance of a student. I have I have knowledge I can share. I have lots of things I can say. But I think any time working with adult learners and graduate programs or working with colleagues who are adult learners, because we're all learners to leaving room for the wisdom of the room to unfold and be upheld and celebrated, I think is important. And I think for me, I'm always conscious of naming in the room. I think sometimes we say, you know, we love having religious diversity have Jewish area, we have a kosher kitchen and a room for our halal students and we have mosques for Muslim brothers and sisters and Pooja prayer room for our Hindu students. I think we do, I really do think we are a space that celebrates those with religious traditions.

There isn't an equivalent of that for folks who are not religious. So how do we then create that? And maybe we aren't creating a room, but how are we acknowledging that they are there? That is, that's something that I think about a lot. And sometimes I actually just

sometimes just saying this is my dissertation and I'm excited to spend time with you. Sometimes in some ways almost as easier than saying, and if you're not religious, I'm so happy you're here. But instead of saying, this is what I wrote about, and here was the point of it. Sometimes even just naming that, I've had folks tell me, oh, I knew when you said that that it was OK for me to be here, and that I was welcome here kind of thing. yeah, I think it's too a lot about not watering things down. The Examine is a wonderful reflection tool. Sometimes people are like, oh, yeah, it's just highs and lows. Well, it's not. It's much more than that. And if we just If we water it down to that, then again, if you don't think RAs at U of I are doing highs and lows at their check-in meetings, of course they are. It's good to do that. It's team building, right? So how do we make sure that we're doing things in its authenticity?

**Polina:** So we are in almost March, right? So March Madness. So could you please talk a little bit about how the mission is integrated in the athletic department?

**Lauren:** Gosh, I can't say enough about the leadership of the athletic department. Steve Watson is an extraordinary leader. And Holly Strauss O'Brien is also that she is deep. The two of them are our team. They value our mission deeply. They want us to be a Jesuit athletic department, an Ignatian athletic department. And so they have been extraordinarily generous with time and resources with me thinking about how we can integrate the mission effectively into the mechanisms of the athletic department. So, the things that come to mind that jump off the page right away. So first of all, every athletic team has an athletic chaplain, and the chaplains are made up of some Jesuits in formation, some Jesuit faculty, some lay people. I've worked with women's volleyball for a while, with men's volleyball for a while. I'm now working with the golf teams. But those chaplains are there to do that support work. I talk about supporting and then empowering. The chaplains are really in that role of supporting them. every student athlete knows they have one more layer of care that exists. And then all the chaplains do different things. So when I worked with men's volleyball, I did a weekly meditation with them. With women's golf, thinking about what does community service look like for them in meaningful ways that connects with their actual passions instead of just random community service. Those kinds of things. So the Chaplain program is pretty substantial. And then once a year, the Chaplains run a series of workshops for all student athletes, four different workshops, each have a different topic. You always get the same topic if you're a freshman, the same topic as sophomores, etc, etc. So when they graduate, they will have done all four workshops. all student athletes, mean, leadership says this is mandatory, you will be here. The student athletes show up, they engage. It's pretty awesome. It's fun to work with the student athletes. So that's one major piece. But I think the other piece that came out of the summer of 2020, in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, obviously, and then George

Floyd, the Athletics Department was like, what should we be doing? And so we threw a lot of spaghetti at a wall. We had like 16 different committees. We now have one committee, the Ramblers Achieving Equity. And we continue to meet every other week. We do a lot of things that it's led to. Every year we have a different focus of injustice that we are taking a stand against. This year it's racism. We've done, how do we stand with folks who are part of the LGBTQ community? One year around religious inclusion. I think we're in the process of figuring out what the fourth one is. We had one in there that wasn't quite taking a stand as much as we would have liked, but we're in process of figuring out the next ones. Making sure that is something that is known and part of our experiences. The athletic department does a great job of having pride matches and pride games for different sports, whether it's the focuses on the LGBTQ community or not. Every year we do an educational trip to a museum in the Chicagoland area. So two years ago, we took all of the student athletes and coaches and administrators and chaplains to the Holocaust Museum in Skokie. So that would have been in spring of 2023. Last year, everyone went to the DuSable Museum of African American History on the South Side. And this year, we're going to, these are just about to start in two weeks, we're going to the Chicago History Museum to see the protest exhibit and the Emmett Till exhibit. So trying to utilize and connect to the resources in the city of Chicago. But again, we're going to try to get on a four year cycle so that, you know, each student will have the opportunity, every student athlete will have the opportunity to go to all of these places and continue our ongoing learning. So, and there are other things we're doing too, but very rooted in what our mission is, this work around justice. You said something way long ago about like, yes, the spirituality, but the other pieces of education. I'm always struck by the last three words of our, I guess four, because and is in there, of our mission statement, which is learning justice and faith. And I think that those are the three key components of what our mission is. We can delve into all the depth of all the other things but I think the way we're trying to do things in the athletic department engages not learning, it engages justice and engages faith. And I think if we use those as markers for any of our areas in the classroom and staff departments, in the ways we work with each other, how do we pull from those things in an effort to be connected? So.

**Polina:** Thank you, Lauren. Thank you.

**Jessica:** I mean, talk about sort of what makes Loyola University Chicago unique, right? You've compared us to other institutions and talked about wanting our Jesuit identity to be a selling point, distinct attractive feature to students. And when you describe the work that's happening in the athletic department, it sounds like that's exactly what it is, right? Like so thoughtful, so intentional, so well organized and a really important co-curricular experience for the athletes. It's really neat.

**Lauren:** I'm constantly grateful to, like I said, to Steve and Holly, because they're the ones who set the tone as the leaders of that area. And then Kieran Murphy is the one who is the chair of our Ramblers Achieving Equity Committee, and he works tirelessly. And everyone else does, and everyone plays their own. I could honor everybody on the committee, but there is no question about the commitment of all those people who show up at that table. And it's such a gift to be in a space where we know we're working towards the same goal.

**Polina:** Thank you, Lauren. It's been a really amazing time to learn from you, to hear from you. now I will go and do my homework. I will be thinking, rethinking, summarizing how I will incorporate your practices in my rigorous science curriculum.

**Lauren:** And I would love to hear from you sometime of how you do that with chemistry. Again, I would learn so much. I don't need to learn more about chemistry, but I would love to learn about how you do chemistry.

**Polina:** Yeah, just again, to admire my department. In our department, we have at least two educators, myself and my colleague, Dr. Binaku who went through not only yearly training of the Ignatian Pedagogy Certificate Program, but we are also incorporating these practices in our classes.

**Lauren:** That's amazing. Thank you for what you're doing.

**Polina:** Thank you, Lauren. Thank you, Jessica.

**Jessica:** Awesome. Thank you so much, Lauren. This was really, really great. We appreciate your time and all that you shared with us today. And we're delighted to have you as guests.

**Lauren:** Thank you so much for having me and thanks for engaging in these conversations with me. It's so encouraging to me to hear how other people are doing things and then for the chance to just have a dialogue. So thank you so much for having me.