

A Hunger for a Better World

By Donna Rapaccioli, Josep Franch, Joseph Christie

As society faces urgent challenges, Jesuit universities cultivate the “seven hungers” that motivate today’s business students.

We have arrived at a time when so many challenges face the world that the demand for large-scale, systemic change has become clear and urgent. Too many populations face extreme global poverty and lack of access to essential goods and services. Technological advancements provide widespread quality-of-life improvements, while also exacerbating income inequality as more workers lose their jobs. In an increasingly interconnected world, individuals and organizations have incredible opportunities to create both positive change and lasting destruction.

Fortunately, institutions around the world are recognizing the roles they must play in addressing these challenges. The Business Roundtable recently stated that [all stakeholders are essential](#) and that its members “commit to deliver value to all of them, for the future success of our companies, our communities, and our country.” The [United Nations’ Global Compact](#) calls attention to the fact that corporations cannot continue to do business as usual. The [Sustainable Accounting Standards Board](#)—which recently merged with the International Integrated Reporting Council to form the Value Reporting Foundation—has created new metrics companies can use to disclose sustainability information to investors.

Organizations that serve higher education are also taking up the cause of social justice. For instance, the U.N.’s [Principles for Responsible Management Education](#) and the [Global Business School Network](#) are pushing management education institutions to become forces for good. Accreditation bodies are recognizing societal impact in their standards, and even ranking agencies are starting to include dimensions of social impact.

Make no mistake, the students enrolled in our schools—from undergraduates to senior executives—are already thinking about how their work impacts the world. Among U.S.-based employees responding to [a recent survey](#) from McKinsey, nearly two-thirds said that COVID-19 had caused them to reflect on their purpose in life. And nearly half said that they are reconsidering the kind of work they do because of the pandemic. Millennials were three times more likely than others to say that they were reevaluating work.

It is time for business schools to revamp their offerings with the goal of producing the leaders who will advance social justice and improve the world for all. At a minimum, business schools have a twofold responsibility: to generate new knowledge that informs and transforms the way business is conducted, and to support students and faculty as they develop concrete strategies for addressing critical issues.

Many institutions already have joined forces to drive change in the world, including the 160 Jesuit universities located around the globe. The business schools at 60 of these institutions share the same overarching mission—to educate competent leaders who will embrace a compassionate, conscientious, collaborative new paradigm.

Those of us who lead Jesuit business schools believe that our curricula must take a new approach that gives students a foundation in the humanities as well as a technical education in the field. While our courses embrace the efficacy of the market economy, they also stress that economic activity

must serve the common good—especially the women, children, minorities, migrants, refugees, and indigenous communities who are most often excluded from the benefits of the market economy. While our mission is faith-based, it has broad implications for society at large.

We believe that seven “hungers” or “desires” drive and inspire our students’ idealism and sense of hope at the deepest level. Here we describe these seven hungers, as well as ways that some Jesuit schools have addressed them in their programs and their co-curricular activities. Our goal is to equip students with the skills and competencies they need to succeed in today’s economy, while also helping them develop as whole individuals.

1. A Hunger for Integrated Knowledge

The problems students will face in their professional lives are not going to come in silos or disciplines. Not only will graduates need to have a great deal of information at their fingertips, they also will need to understand how to combine pieces of knowledge as they seek creative solutions. They will need frameworks that allow them to integrate their intellectual, affective, and volitional capabilities—that is, their minds, their hearts, and their wills.

It is time for business schools to revamp their offerings with the goal of producing the leaders who will advance social justice and improve the world for all.

To give students experience at integrating knowledge across disciplines, many Jesuit schools require undergraduates to complete annual projects that combine skills from multiple fields. Project topics might include business ethics, innovation, financial responsibility, community-engaged learning, and diversity and inclusion.

Another approach is to encourage students to reflect on the leadership journey. For instance, at Esade Business School in Barcelona, Spain, a capstone module on Leadership, Values, and Self-Knowledge provides undergraduates a chance to consider the personal and professional challenges managers face throughout their careers.

2. A Hunger for Community

As they enter the workforce, students will need to build meaningful communities where people feel genuinely connected, engage with civility, and use their gifts and talents to create good in the world.

Because the pandemic unravelled some of the conventional bonds that tie the academic community together, some Jesuit schools have launched summer programs such as virtual coffee chats and monthly “water cooler” events where faculty, students, and administrators can spend unstructured time together. Other schools focus on creating more equitable and inclusive climates through student advisory boards and scholars’ programs designed for first-year students.

XLRI–Xavier School of Management in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India, has instituted a number of community-based initiatives. For instance, it has adopted several villages where MBA students make two-day visits, and it also sends students to work with nongovernmental (NGOs). In addition

to teaching business ethics, XLRI has made Introduction to Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability a core course across all flagship programs. The school also has plans to become a carbon-neutral campus.

The Loyola Institute of Business Administration in Chennai, India, has been giving out the Mother Teresa Award for Corporate Citizen since 1995. The award recognizes a corporation that has shown exemplary social commitment for the environment, and students are involved in the selection process.

3. A Hunger for Experiential Learning

Some Jesuit schools integrate immersive experience-based learning into every part of the curriculum, including onboarding and orientation. For instance, at Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business in New York City, the MBA orientation is built around a non-profit consulting experience in an international setting. In addition, at many Jesuit schools, service learning projects not only offer hands-on learning opportunities, but also enable students to create a positive impact in society.

At Esade Business School, a service learning experience coordinated by the University Development Service makes Esade's community talent accessible to social enterprises and non-profits in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. During the 2018–2019 academic year, 109 Esade students participated in 60 projects in 12 countries. While the projects were put on hold during the pandemic, they are currently being resumed.

4. A Hunger for Dignified Work and Meaningful Impact

Work is not just about earning a living. In the words of Pope Francis, it is also “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development, and personal fulfilment.” Because students today have a greater appreciation for this dimension of work, many Jesuit schools are increasingly building their student projects and case studies around the U.N.'s 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

At the Gabelli School of Business, the [Responsible Business Coalition](#) is designed to catalyse action in industry around sustainable business. During its initial incarnation, the coalition has focused on the fashion industry and has convened CEOs, NGOs, and industry networks to generate change agendas. Students and faculty have the opportunity to support these efforts. The coalition plans to expand its model to other industries, such as social-impact finance, media and marketing, technology, and analytics.

Work is not just about earning a living. In the words of Pope Francis, it is also “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development, and personal fulfilment.”

Faculty at the Gabelli School also redesigned the undergraduate introductory Principles of Management course to focus on organizational and individual purpose. An undergraduate honors program called Ignite Scholars dives deeper into this concept, recruiting students with a passion for social-impact leadership and engaging them in advanced coursework and workshops that prepare them to be agents for positive change.

As another example, Esade Business School has created a steering committee that will revise all core courses to ensure they include sustainability issues.

5. A Hunger for a Moral Compass

Students want to do more than discuss ethical behaviour. They want to acquire moral discernment and develop moral courage. Many Jesuit schools support students in this process by helping them understand the moral and spiritual characters of leaders through historical examples, role-playing exercises, case studies, and guest presentations.

At the Gabelli School's annual Business Ethics Case Competition, undergraduates form interdisciplinary teams to tackle case studies that have business, legal, and ethical implications. Past competitions have focused on Uber's surge pricing model and Walmart's seafood sourcing practices, as well as liability issues that arise with autonomous vehicles.

6. A Hunger for a Global Paradigm

Having seen the dangers of ethnocentrism and nationalism, today's students want to embrace a more cosmopolitan perspective. They recognize that all of us dwell in many communities, from the community of our birth to the community of the human family. They want courses and experiences that allow them to explore the limitations of nationalism and the benefits of inclusion.

To create a truly global learning experience, Jesuit schools have promoted international student mobility, assembled cohorts of students of many nationalities, and sent students on study trips to other countries. Faculty look for globally sourced business cases from large markets such as China and India and smaller economies such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Israel, and Colombia. The goal is to increase students' exposure to various cultures and enable them to learn cross-cultural practices in an applied way.

7. A Hunger for an Adult Spirituality

As polarizing debates split communities and nations, students look for ways to use their managerial skills to bring people together both inside and outside their organizations. Jesuit universities aim to spark within students a longing for a spirituality that sustains and empowers—that gives ample room for both faith and reason, while adding meaning to individuals' lives.

The Gabelli School offers a course on Jesuit History and Leadership Culture. During this class, MBA students travel part of the same route covered by Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuit order of

priests in 1534. As they journey along “*El Camino Ignaciano*” in Spain’s Basque region, students reflect on their personal experiences to generate self-awareness and build leadership skills.

At Esade, a Spirituality Team promotes personal and human growth by delving into the lives of Esade community members, who come from diverse backgrounds and faiths. The school also offers a mindfulness retreat as an optional activity for MBA students.

A New Approach

To cultivate and satisfy these seven hungers, business schools must take a new approach to shaping the leaders who can create a just social order. This means business education must make an essential and systemic shift to a curriculum that is relevant, effective, and meaningful.

This new programming would encompass anthropology, ethics, corporate social responsibility, governance, and sustainability. It would emphasize that all economic activity must serve the common good and incorporate environmentally sustainable practices. Based on Ignatian philosophy, such a curriculum would emphasize that “becoming” is more important than “knowing.” It would recognize the importance of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation.

If business schools make these programmatic changes, they will generate positive momentum and educate the next generation of leaders to become forces for positive change on a global scale.



***Donna Rapaccioli** is dean and university professor at Fordham University’s Gabelli School of Business in New York City.*



***Josep Franch** is dean and an associate professor of marketing at Esade Business School in Barcelona, Spain.*



***Joseph Christie** is director of XLRI–Xavier School of Management in Jamshedpur, India.*
