



From Classroom to Capitol Hill: Integrating Jesuit Values through Jesuit Refugee Service/USA Advocacy Day

- Clara Sayans, M.Ed., Outreach Officer at Jesuit Refugee Service/USA.
- Richard Clark, Ph.D., Professor in the Sociology and Criminology Department, John Carroll University.
- Audrey Hudgins, EdD , Clinical Professor, Seattle University.
- Carey Kasten, Ph.D. Professor of Spanish language and literature, Fordham University
- Julie Mughal, Associate Director for Humanitarian Action in the Center for Social Impact, Fairfield University
- Jessica Trout, MSW- Jessica Trout is the Assistant Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement, Saint Louis University

Abstract

This article presents Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS) Advocacy Day as a best practice for promoting Ignatian identity through experiential learning, civic engagement, and professional formation. Since 2015, Advocacy Day has brought together students, educators, and parishioners from Jesuit institutions across the United States to advocate for refugee rights on Capitol Hill. The initiative exemplifies *citizen-centered advocacy* (Eguizábal, 2008) rooted in Catholic Social Thought and the *Universal Apostolic Preferences*, particularly the call to *walk with the excluded* and *accompany youth in the creation of a hope-filled future* (Sosa, 2019).

Guiding this best practice is an Advocacy Day facilitator's guide that draws on the *Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm* to equip students with practical advocacy skills, fostering a commitment to justice, cultivating empathy, and grounding action in faith (Núñez & Lozano, 2024). Reflections from students and educators demonstrate the transformative impact of this initiative on civic confidence, leadership development, and solidarity with marginalized communities. Through curricular, co-curricular, and in-person modalities that align advocacy with Ignatian pedagogy and mission, Advocacy Day offers a replicable model for forming

compassionate, informed, and engaged global citizens. This case study contributes to the broader conversation on sustaining Jesuit identity through action-oriented formation experiences.

“Know where you stand, and stand there.” - Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J.¹

1. Introduction

The Jesuit Refugee Service defends the rights of forcibly displaced persons through public, political, and community advocacy at a global level. In the United States, this mission manifests through engagement with policymakers to adopt compassionate, welcoming, and just decisions that often have global consequences. For ten years, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS)² has organized an annual Advocacy Day to lobby Congress on key issues affecting refugees. This initiative unites students, educators, and parishioners to advocate for humanitarian aid, just immigration policies, and the protection of vulnerable populations. In 2025, over 300 people from nine Jesuit universities and additional Jesuit institutions across 35 states and Washington, D.C. met with 97 Congressional offices.

Advocacy Day is a living example of *citizen-centered advocacy*, defined as:

“an organized political process that involves the coordinated efforts of people to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion. It strengthens citizens’ capacity as decision makers and builds more accountable and equitable institutions of power”. (Eguizábal, 2008, p. 2)

This collaboration empowers participants to engage with governance structures, use their knowledge and skills to influence public policy, and create a more just and humane world.

¹ For more on Father Berrigan, S.J., see “A Man of Peace: Recalling the life and legacy of Daniel Berrigan” in *America Magazine: The Jesuit Review*, April 30, 2016,

<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2016/04/30/man-peace-daniel-berrigan-life-legacy-222044>.

² Jesuit Refugee Service/USA is one regional component of a global organization, Jesuit Refugee Service. For the sake of brevity, we will use the acronym JRS to refer to Jesuit Refugee Service/USA. For more on Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, visit <https://www.jrsusa.org/>.

The *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*—context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation—structures the article’s exploration of this dynamic and engaging initiative. *Context* invites an understanding of the Jesuit roots of this concrete example of a faith that does justice (Kolvenbach, 2008). *Experience* describes how this high impact practice is brought to fruition through a newly developed facilitator’s guide that has made the practice more accessible to multiple institutions. *Reflection* offers responses from students and parishioners who have shared this transformative experience. *Evaluation* presents lessons learned and opportunities for improvement. We conclude with some thoughts on Advocacy Day as a replicable model for Jesuit institutions that seek to develop compassionate, informed, and engaged citizens in a variety of political contexts and structures around the world— citizens who know where they stand, are equipped with the tools to stay there, and are inspiring manifestations of Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J.’s wisdom.

2. Context: Why Advocacy Day?

Jesuit education has long emphasized the formation of socially conscious, compassionate individuals committed to the common good. As Adolfo Nicolás, S.J. noted, “Jesuit universities cannot be content with merely criticizing and diagnosing the great problems of humanity; rather they must engage various fields of knowledge in dialogue to find and propose alternatives” (Rodríguez, 2024, para 10).³ Historian John W. O’Malley, S.J. (2015) also contextualizes the importance of “active engagement” and the development of students as “responsible participants in the community ... concerned for the common good and ready to make sacrifices for it” (p. 13).

Built on this foundation, initiatives such as Advocacy Day bridge the four key dimensions of the *Ledesma-Kolvenbach Paradigm*—practical (*utilitas*), social (*iustitia*), humanistic (*humanitas*), and transcendent (*fides*)—encouraging students to live out these principles through actions that promote justice and equality (Núñez & Lozano, 2024). Practically, Advocacy Day equips participants with actionable strategies for advocacy. Socially, the experience fosters commitment to equity. Humanistically, it promotes understanding and empathy, cultivating a

³ Author translation.

deeper sense of shared humanity. Transcendentally, Advocacy Day integrates reflective practices and spiritual dimensions, encouraging participants to connect advocacy to their faith and moral values. Together, these dimensions ensure a holistic approach to advocacy for refugees and forcibly displaced peoples that aligns with Jesuit educational values. Grounded in *Catholic Social Teaching*, these values also resonate with humanist scholars, regardless of religious belief (Aguado & Martínez, 2012).

At the same time, Advocacy Day is grounded in the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs), which have guided the global Jesuit mission since 2019 and foster a common language and collaborative spirit among Jesuits and lay partners. As Fr. General Arturo Sosa, S.J. (2019), emphasized, its successful implementation depends on deepened collaboration across ministries and apostolic sectors, a principle that Advocacy Day brings to life through its emphasis on networking as well as its cultivation of a culture of inclusivity and shared purpose. The resultant collective action reflects the Ignatian commitment to addressing complex social challenges through solidarity and mutual support. It also mirrors the UAP call to *walk with the excluded*, as participants engage directly with policymakers to advocate for those whose dignity has been violated. Moreover, the event contributes to the UAP of *accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future*. Through education, encounter, and advocacy, participants are invited into a transformative process rooted in Catholic Social Thought. They are informed on global injustices and are empowered to act, becoming advocates who have new hope and understand their responsibility to the global community.

Advocacy Day counters the *globalization of indifference* by fostering awareness, empathy, and action (Francis, 2013). Participants deepen their understanding of global issues, cultivate leadership, and foster a sense of ethical responsibility. The process of converting knowledge to action ensures that Jesuit education remains relevant and transformative, preparing students to be agents of change, committed to building a more just and hope-filled world.

3. Experience: What is Advocacy Day?

With this context, we can build understanding of the fundamental elements of Advocacy Day. Each spring, advocates gather in person and virtually for a day of engagement with their Congressional representatives to discuss three issues and propose related action steps (e.g., legislation, letters of support, etc.) to address the needs of refugees and forcibly displaced persons around the world.

Educators at Jesuit institutions recruit and steward participation while JRS guides the preparation process. In the weeks leading up to Advocacy Day, JRS provides Congressional biographies, talking points, and supporting materials, and trains participants to present legislative priorities to elected officials, helping craft persuasive messages that center human stories. Under the careful supervision of faculty and staff at each institution, participants deepen their understanding of the topics so they can confidently engage in discussions with Congressional representatives. Providing students with the knowledge, skill, and guidance to advocate at the federal level is a signature practice of Advocacy Day, one that invites active and engaged advocacy on real world issues. Doing so alongside hundreds of peers from across the country creates a groundswell of grassroots support—subsidiarity—and makes a strong national statement.

Originally designed for in-person participation, Advocacy Day pivoted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, which set the stage for an expansion of the initiative to Jesuit institutions across the U.S. In 2024, a group of educators collaborated with JRS to co-create a facilitator's guide⁴ to support this development, enabling Jesuit institutions across the country—high schools, colleges and universities, and parishes—to participate. The guide offers plans for integration into curricular or co-curricular modalities, whether in-person or remote.

4. Reflection: What are the outcomes for Advocacy Day participants?

Grounded in Jesuit values and pedagogy and designed for flexible, turn-key implementation through a robust facilitator's guide, Advocacy Day transforms participants' understanding of *citizen-centered advocacy* (Eguizábal, 2008) and empowers them to speak truth to power as a

⁴ The facilitator's guide, which has been downloaded 230 times, is available at this link: https://www.jrsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/12/JRSUSA-Advocacy-Day-Facilitator-Guide_FINAL.pdf.

means of taking responsible action on the issues of the day. The reflections presented below are organized by the modality of participation, curricular, co-curricular, and in person.

Curricular Integration: Centering the Margins

Using a curricular approach, faculty include advocacy modules in their syllabi that dedicate classroom time to guiding students through research on their representatives' positions in relation to issues identified by JRS. Students then conduct mock meetings to visualize the process and increase their confidence. Reflections after the meetings focus on critically understanding the Congressional perspectives and interrogating the systems and structures in which elected officials operate. This participant reflection demonstrates the efficacy:

"[Advocacy Day] pushed me beyond my limits in the best way possible. If you told me I would end up speaking to a congressman...I would not believe it for a second. The professor wanted us to excel, and I believe we all did that. "(Student participant, 2024)

One faculty member noted that Advocacy Day invited her to see students' strengths in a different light. Students who rarely spoke in class shone in the advocacy space, sharing valuable information with representatives in strong, persuasive language while highlighting their own personal connections to immigration. Another faculty member noted an increased civic confidence and a heightened sense of political agency in her students, including first generation students. Students felt empowered to engage directly with Congressional representatives on issues they cared about and can now imagine future civic engagement efforts to center the margins. One student reflected:

Through Advocacy Day, I feel like I gained confidence, articulation, and power when it comes to the views I believe in. I left feeling motivated to continue contacting my representatives, searching for opportunities to interact with them, and expressing my beliefs to the people who have power to act on them. (Student participant, 2025)

In many cases, community members from within and outside of the university joined students in Congressional meetings, creating valuable cross-generational dialogue that allowed students and community members alike to hear diverse perspectives on an issue.

Co-curricular Integration: Locating Power Through Advocacy

Some Jesuit institutions integrate Advocacy Day as a co-curricular experience by inviting students who are particularly passionate about the issues and interested in honing their advocacy and civic engagement skills. For example, at one university participants were drawn from students already engaged in tutoring in local schools or through an alternative spring break experience with a refugee resettlement program, enabling them to draw upon real-life encounters with refugees and migrants. These students offered a unique perspective from their experience of encounter and, when coupled with having their voices and views heard at the highest levels of government, provided them with an important sense of agency (Sokol, 2015).

The Advocacy Day approach is effective in helping students locate their power through advocacy, especially important in a time when they may feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges faced by the U.S. and our global community. One student shared, “it was great to hear from people who are trying to make a difference. I appreciated the reflection afterwards because it made me feel more empowered to use my voice” (Student participant, 2025). Co-curricular models offer students a high impact leadership activity that complements curricular learning. At one institution, a co-curricular initiative, *Policy Pods*, invites student engagement in a range of state-level advocacy efforts, including immigration and refugee policy. Advocacy Day amplifies students’ capacity at the federal level. By using JRS resources and facilitator’s guide, staff can seamlessly integrate this activity into co-curricular programs. One staff member offered this reflection, “Knowing the training provided by JRS, the materials provided, and through experience, I am able to better support a program I run!” (Staff member, 2025).

In Person Advocacy: Empowered for Lasting Impact

Advocacy on Capitol Hill itself is a unique place-based experience. One faculty member who accompanied students to Washington, D.C. emphasized the benefits: research suggests that personalized direct contact from constituents is the most effective approach for influencing policymakers (DiMuzio, 2017) while offering students the opportunity to make a human connection with Congressional representatives or staff.

In-person advocacy efforts also require students to be well-versed on the issues and helps them to hone team building skills and camaraderie. For first-time participants, meeting with a Congressional office can be intimidating but after completing the visits, students are excited and feel empowered to continue advocating at federal, state, and local levels. One student shared, “Advocacy Day left me feeling energized, empowered, and eager to be a voice for change” (Student participant, 2025). Another stated “I feel empowered to get more involved in civic life and use the skills I learned on this trip to make a lasting impact” (Student participant, 2025).

5. Action: What can we do with this Advocacy Day experience?

Advocacy with Congressional officials is considered a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008). Students and educators experience firsthand how to bridge the *knowing–doing gap* (Banki, et al., 2013), which is critical to student growth and provides hands-on experience in democratic and civic skills and can be important in developing a student’s sense of agency (Lenoir & Van Metre, 2024). In this section, we offer ways that Advocacy Day equips students and educators for action as global citizens.

Empowering Students as Agents of Change

Students surveyed across six Jesuit universities in Spring 2025 unanimously reported that participation in Advocacy Day empowered them to become agents of social change. They learned the importance of their voice, particularly in advocating for those on the margins. One student commented on the power to effect change, “...getting the chance to talk with people who have a hand in shaping political action showed me that being my normal, everyday self IS important. My voice does matter” (Student participant, 2025).

Students also learned the utility of becoming well-informed on political issues and practicing advocacy for social change. As one student noted, “It reminded me how easy it is to participate in change when it often can feel so overwhelming” (Student participant, 2025). Students can participate in Advocacy Day over multiple years, allowing them to evaluate their personal growth over time.

Real-World Learning and Skill Development

Students emerge from the experience with a deeper understanding of government and the role civically-minded citizens play. Advocacy Day hones practical research and public speaking skills and, in the true spirit of *Eloquentia Perfecta*, puts these skills to use for the common good. For many students, it is their first interaction with a Congressional official, which can transform how they view their role in society: their voices and opinions matter on a national and global scale, which can become a habit of mind as they enter career fields and adulthood.

Building Community and Fostering Mentorship

Advocacy Day builds community. Like immersions, engagement outside the classroom offers students and educators a shared experience in a unique atmosphere that allows for personal interaction, a deeper understanding of common concerns, and a greater opportunity for growth through sustained mentorship. Working toward a common goal alongside advocates from JRS and Jesuit institutions across the country, students see that collaboration makes real change possible and that solidarity within and beyond campuses can multiply the impact on communities within the U.S. and beyond.

Countering Indifference and Inspiring Hope

As Jesuit educators, it is important to instill a sense of hope through action. Advocacy Day provides students with a real-life example of how to use their voices for change and become civically engaged citizens in a democratic society. A first generation student notes the transformative nature of Advocacy Day, “As a refugee myself, I never imagined advocating for

refugee rights with elected officials in my adopted country” (Student participant, 2024). Advocacy counters apathy and creates hope.

Advocacy Day provides campuses and parishes an actionable means of living into the Jesuit tradition, creating a safe environment to speak truth to power in the face of indifference. JRS models and promotes responsible action, inviting campuses to live up to their Ignatian values. Advocacy Day uniquely supports Jesuit institutions doing the work of justice in a challenging climate for just and humane immigration policy.

6. Evaluation: How might we enhance Advocacy Day?

As we can see, Advocacy Day is an important nexus between experiential learning and Ignatian pedagogical practices. Inviting students to engage directly with Congressional officials can be a daunting task for both students and the faculty-staff mentors who curate this rich learning experience. As such, it requires high levels of organization and engagement since the experience happens outside the confines of the classroom, yet such engagement is foundational to the development of global citizens capable of taking responsible action in the face of complex challenges.

The facilitator’s guide can continue to chart a course of accessibility. Each year, educators can come together under the leadership of JRS to evaluate the experience. Creative pedagogical approaches, resources, and co-curricular activities can be added to expand the guide’s utility and serve as a living document that reflects the current political moment.

The guide offers new participants clarity on options for introducing Advocacy Day at their institutions. Advocacy Day itself can be expanded to a wider range of institutions, such as Jesuit high schools, colleges and universities, and parishes across the U.S. thereby scaling up to include Catholic and Ignatian institutions that are grounded in the values reflected in Catholic Social Thought. Globally, the concept of Advocacy Day is one that could be modified to suit other governance structures such as parliaments. Democratic forms of governance are built on the concept of citizen participation and all democracies experience policy and practice

challenges concerning refugees and forced displacement. At all levels, outreach efforts can bring this high impact practice to more people.

More formal efforts to evaluate the Advocacy Day initiative could be pursued through grant solicitations. Funding to support the formation of a student, educator, and parishioner advisory board would be a concrete step toward enhancement of all aspects of the experience. Implementing additional opportunities for follow-up and community engagement beyond the single day of advocacy would create possibilities for more enduring outcomes in support of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

7. Conclusion

Father Berrigan, S.J. calls us to “Know where you stand, and stand there” (Editors, 2016). Advocacy Day, a best practice for promoting Ignatian identity through experiential learning, civic engagement, and professional formation, invites us to respond to his call to action in the context of refugee policy. In this article, we have explored this dynamic and engaging initiative as we seek to expand awareness of its utility and impact. In a world poisoned by the *globalization of indifference* (Francis, 2013), Advocacy Day is an antidote. It is a model that is flexible, adaptable, and replicable for the political contexts and governance structures the world over. This moment in history calls us to responsible action and advocacy on behalf of our refugee brothers and sisters. Will you join us?

Bibliographic References

- Aguado, R. & Martínez, J. (2012). GDP and beyond: Towards new measurements of sustainability based on Catholic Social Thought. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 4(2), 124-138.
- Banki, S., Valiente-Riedl, E., & Duffill, P. (2013). Teaching human rights at the tertiary level: Addressing the ‘knowing–doing gap’ through a role-based simulation approach. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 5(2), 318-336. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hut011>

- DiMuzio, M. (2017, February 15). *ICYMI: The untapped power of constituent engagement*. Congressional Management Foundation. Forbes Tate Partners.
<https://forbes-tate.com/icymi-congressional-management-foundation-the-untapped-power-of-constituent-engagement/>
- Editors. (2016, April 30). A Man of Peace: Recalling the life and legacy of Daniel Berrigan. *America Magazine: The Jesuit Review*.
<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2016/04/30/man-peace-daniel-berrigan-life-legacy-222044>
- Eguizábal, J. I. (2008, November). *Ignatian Advocacy and Spirituality* [White paper]. Ignatian Advocacy workshop, El Escorial, Spain.
<https://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/pjnewarticles/102-7-01nachoeng.pdf>
- Kolvenbach, P. H. (2008). The service of faith and the promotion of justice in American Jesuit higher education. In *A Jesuit education reader* (pp. 144-162).
<https://docs.gonzaga.edu/academics/Colleges-and-schools/college-of-arts-and-Sciences/Majors-Programs/Catholic-Studies/docs/KolvenbachFaithandJusticeJesuitHigherEducation.pdf>
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter* (Vol. 9). Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lenoir, B. W., & Van Metre, A. (2024). Leveraging experiential learning to increase undergraduate students' advocacy skills and political efficacy. *Communication and Democracy*, 58(2), 284-303.
- Núñez, A., & Lozano, J. M. (2024). Jesuit Pedagogy's 'Missing Link'. *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*, 13(1), Article 4. <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/jhe/vol13/iss1/4/>
- O'Malley, J. W. (2015). *Jesuit schools and the humanities yesterday and today*. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 47(1).
- Pope Francis. (2013, July 8). *Homily of the Holy Father at Lampedusa* [Speech].
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html

Rodríguez, Y. (2024, June 21). *ITESO lanza su proyecto de comunicación de la ciencia*.

Entresaberes ITESO.

<https://entresaberes.iteso.mx/iteso-lanza-su-proyecto-de-comunicacion-de-la-ciencia/>

Sokol, B. W., Hammond, S. I., Kuebli, J., & Sweetman, L. (2015). *The development of agency*. In W. F. Overton & P. C. Molenaar (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science, Theory and Method, Vol. 1* (7th ed., pp. 284-322). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Sosa, A. (2019, February 19). *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019-2029*.

Rome. <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/>

Biographical References of the Authors

Clara Sayans, M.Ed, serves as the Outreach Officer at Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, where she leads institutional engagement efforts to promote learning, advocacy, and social transformation in solidarity with forcibly displaced communities. She holds a Master's in Education from Comillas Pontifical University and a postgraduate certification in International and Sustainable Development from ESADE Business School.

Richard D. Clark, Ph.D. - Richard Clark is a Professor in the Sociology and Criminology Department at John Carroll University. He is the past recipient of the university's Curtis W. Miles Faculty Award for Community Service and the Lucrezia Culicchia Award for Teaching Excellence.

Audrey Hudgins, EdD, is a scholar-practitioner of migration, leadership, and community development in local and global community-engaged contexts. As a Clinical Professor at Seattle University, she teaches applied interdisciplinary undergraduate courses and mentors students in community-based participatory action research, fieldwork, and study abroad experiences. She has received the Provost's Award for Outstanding Term Faculty Research and the College of Arts & Sciences Award for Outstanding Teaching.

Carey Kasten, Ph.D. is a professor of Spanish language and literature at Fordham University. She researches contemporary Spanish culture and Spanish-speaking communities in New York City. She is the author of *Mutuality in El Barrio: Stories of the Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service* (Fordham, 2024) and *The Cultural Politics of Twentieth-Century Spanish Theater: Representing the Auto Sacramental* (Bucknell, 2012). Dr. Kasten directs Fordham's "Initiative on Migrants, Migration and Human Dignity".

Julie Mughal is the convenor of the Jesuit Universities Humanitarian Action Network (JUHAN) and the Associate Director for Humanitarian Action in the Center for Social Impact at Fairfield University. Prior to Fairfield, she worked at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Geneva and Save the Children in the U.S. and Pakistan. She is the author of *Land Without Hats*,

a book that explores the difficulties faced by widows in the developing world and their courage in the face of adversity. She holds an M.A. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

Jessica Trout, MSW- Jessica Trout is the Assistant Director of Advocacy and Civic Engagement at Saint Louis University in the Center for Social Action. Jessica has received the Phil Lyons Outstanding Staff Advisor Award at the 2022 Leadership and Service Awards for her work with SLU's Policy Pods, a program she designed and implemented in 2018.