

International Association of Lasallian Universities. “Lasallians in the World Solving Real Problems of the World: Research Agenda of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU).” *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 4, no. 2 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota: 2013).

© International Association of Lasallian Universities. Readers of this article have the copyright owner’s permission to reproduce it for educational, not-for-profit purposes, if the author and publisher are acknowledged in the copy.

Lasallians in the World Solving Real Problems of the World: Research Agenda of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU)

International Association of Lasallian Universities

A Catholic University, as any University, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society . . . University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions. (Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*)

Research Guided by Faith

As a network of Catholic universities in the Lasallian tradition, it is imperative for IALU to encourage and support Lasallian researchers all over the world to strive not only for the creation and growth of knowledge in the disciplines, but also for the integration of that knowledge guided by faith, the application of that knowledge in the service of God, the Church and society, and the orientation of that knowledge towards integral human and Christian development.

Lasallian scholars located in all the continents of the world commit themselves to this call – to put teaching, research, and community engagement *in the service of society* – as a full expression of their active faith. Interpreting this call to action within the context of every society with which Lasallian researchers engage themselves, they work “together and by association” towards total human development and social transformation – to live a tradition of active faith by being focused on service to society, especially the marginalized.

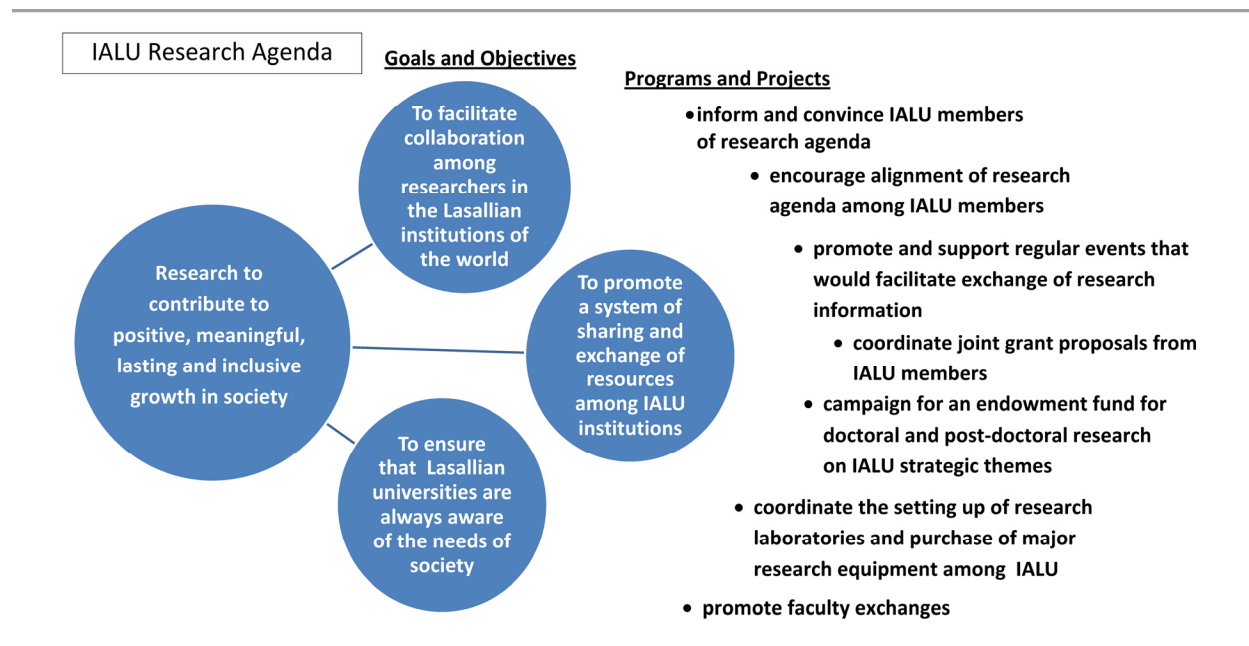
Doing Research That Matters In the World We Live In, Now

Lasallian researchers may expect their respective universities to continue to promote excellence in the different academic disciplines, while at the same time promoting inter- and multi-disciplinary research that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries. Excellence in the academic disciplines combined with an academic and research environment that allows the disciplines to weave into each other are potent mechanisms for the promotion of high impact research that truly benefits society.

The Executive Board of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU), at its January 2013 meeting, established this document with regard to the IALU research agenda. The principal author is Dr. Arnulfo Azcarraga from De La Salle University – Manila, who was assisted in the final draft by William Mann, FSC, D.Min., of Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota. The first nine paragraphs are based on a document entitled “Research @ De La Salle University,” approved in August 23, 2011, by the University Research Council of De La Salle University in Manila, Republic of the Philippines, which describes the agenda and research framework of that university.

Through interdisciplinary research, Lasallian researchers actively engage in research that matters in the world we live in now. They put their collective will, wisdom and action in studies and projects that alleviate poverty; promote peace and social justice; protect the welfare of women, youth at risk, and other vulnerable sectors of society; create wealth and resources to bridge various societal divides; provide models and avenues for stewardship of God’s creation; and influence policy, governance, and the management of institutions – thus using research to secure positive, meaningful, lasting, and inclusive growth in society.

Figure 1: Research Agenda, International Association of Lasallian Universities



Measuring Research Impact

The traditional measures of high impact research and scholarly output that are anchored on dissemination of new knowledge continue to be valid. These include publication in high quality journals and, for some fields, the presentation of research results in high quality conferences. Such public dissemination of new knowledge, i.e. knowledge that has been scientifically and methodically discovered and articulated and properly reviewed by peers, by itself constitutes a proper “impact” to society. By itself and in itself, the dissemination of knowledge is a contribution to society and remains a critical function of any University – Lasallian or not.

As for *applied research* and (*participatory*) *action research*, and even for direct applications of available knowledge and technology to solve practical societal problems about which no new knowledge is created, the research impact may only be truly measured in terms of the *positive societal change* that has resulted from the work. Has poverty been alleviated? By how much? Is the alleviation of poverty permanent? Has there been true peace and social justice? At what scale? Has the divide been bridged between those that have access to knowledge and those that do not? Are the rivers clean? Is the air healthy? Does government have the right information to design appropriate social interventions? Is private business a partner of government towards

social peace and justice? Assessing the positive, meaningful, lasting and inclusive societal change that has resulted from research is indeed more difficult, but such change remains to be the true measure of impact of Lasallian research. This is the yardstick that Lasallian researchers use in calibrating their willful and collective engagement with the world. Positive, meaningful, lasting and inclusive growth in society is the main driver, the prime motivation and the definitive impetus for Lasallian research all over the world.

Bridging Faith and Scholarship in the Service of Society

Every Lasallian researcher seeks to bridge faith and scholarship by ensuring that the scholarly pursuit of truth through systematic and scientific research remains in constant dialogue with the human search for meaning and transcendence. As Lasallian researchers, they are in a unique position to enable such a dialogue. By engaging in the expansion of disciplinary knowledge, they contribute to human enlightenment in the secular world. And never losing sight of their commitment to society, and of their mission to put students at the core of all Lasallian learning experiences, Lasallian researchers vigorously pursue truth and contribute to the creation of new knowledge, with all the ethical and moral implications thereof, so that they are able to use their collective will and their formidable intellectual force to secure social transformation.

Responding to a call to action within the context of the societies where Lasallian scholars find themselves, they commit to truly serve society and thus live a tradition of *active faith* a Lasallian tradition of *Faith, Service and Communion*.

IALU Collaborative Research Themes: 2013 – 2018

Proceeding from a deeply Lasallian perspective, and as an expression of solidarity with the world and the societies it serves, IALU resolves to promote the alignment of some of the university-based research spread all over the world. In full cognizance of the fact that Lasallian researchers in the world can achieve significantly more by working together and by association, IALU strategically pursues research themes that directly address societal issues and needs. Each of these themes has the “human person” at its core, and society’s poor as the focus.

While IALU promotes and fosters research collaboration among Lasallian researchers in strategic areas, these themes certainly must not preclude the pursuit of other lines of research according to the individual missions and visions of IALU member institutions. For the period 2013 to 2018, the following are the IALU strategic research themes.

1. ***Food, Nutrition and Health*** (e.g. *biochemistry of food products, science and engineering of potable water, cancer risks and cures from food, economic impact studies of nutrition programs in schools*)
2. ***Sustainability and the Environment*** (e.g. *dealing with climate change, eco-design of houses and urban centers, industrial ecology, air and water quality monitoring in mega-cities*)

Of course, IALU always values and supports research on the life and heritage of John Baptist de La Salle and on modern educational practices and the evangelization of the young.

Towards positive, meaningful, lasting and inclusive growth in society, strategic research among IALU member institutions can take various forms, including:

1. studies that are meant to gather data and information in order to understand and characterize a phenomenon (e.g. a food substance, an attitude, a social occurrence, current or past event);
2. studies and experiments designed to explore, analyze, and elucidate the dynamics and particularities of some system (e.g. groups of persons, ecosystems, organizations, entire nation) using some framework, method, or scientific approach;
3. impact studies that evaluate and assess the effect of any kind of measure, policy, or intervention, as these apply, for example, to schools, communities, business organizations, and even society at large;
4. research and development projects that build procedures, processes, and systems as well as physical contraptions, gadgets, apparatus, and even infrastructural elements;
5. creative work in various forms, such as film and documentary, literary work, and visual art, that celebrate humanity, reflect society, or ponder into what is left unsaid, unstudied, and unattended; and
6. policy recommendations that may improve governance in government and non-government institutions.