

Instructor: Eve Spangler
Office: 400 McGuinn
Telephone: 2-4146
E-mail: eve.spangler@bc.edu

Class Meetings: Sc305.02/Un539.02: Wednesdays 3:00p.m. – 5:30 p.m.,

Office hours: Tuesday, Thursday 1:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays 1:30-2:30 p.m.,
and by appointment

Introduction:

This class is an opportunity to reflect on your preparation to balance doing well in life and doing good in the world in the areas of intimacy, spirituality, community (public engagement) and work. I will argue that to find satisfying answers to life's challenges, you need to know how to ask good questions. For a sociologist, good questions are those that allow you to see the intersection of biography and history, to understand how personal choices are shaped by societal forces. Good questions, in turn are connected to good answers: ones that allow you to act productively while steering a middle course between hearsay, prejudice and formula on the one hand and exhaustive scholarly research on the other. A good answer allows you to make decisions while respecting the fact that most knowledge is incomplete, ambiguous and, often, contested.

We begin this class with attention to “good questions.” You will be asked to reflect on the best question you were asked and to wrestle with the three questions offered to us by Fr. Michael Himes as he seeks to help us with the issues of vocational discernment.

Next, we will practice “thinking in context” by using the work of C. Wright Mills and Peggy McIntosh as they apply to your BC experience. You will also be asked to produce a short paper on what you have learned about yourself by analyzing your college transcript.

To cover the topics of intimacy, spirituality, community and work we will work with works of fiction to ground your own reflections on your past four years and your hopes for the future.

We will conclude with a budget simulation exercise that should allow you to integrate your life plans around a specific (if simulated) economic plan – another exercise of living in context.

Course Requirements

All the readings can be found in WebCt format. If students wish, I can provide a Xerox pamphlet of the same materials.

A schedule of assignment dates is attached below. Students will be **REQUIRED** to attend all classes, to participate in class discussions and to write weekly 3-5 page reflection papers, some addressed to assigned readings and some to your own reflections. **ABSOLUTELY NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT UNLESS AN EXTENSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ME BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF THE ASSIGNMENT.** Please note that, with twelve papers, this is a writing intensive course. Your final grade will be computed as follows:

12 essays @ 6% each = 72%
class participation = 28%

Academic Integrity

Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at

bc.edu/bc_org/avp/enmgt/stserv/acd/univ.html#integrity

If you have any questions pertaining to academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me. If you are caught violating BC's policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and I will notify the senior class dean, in accordance with the Boston College rules governing academic integrity.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Recognizing Good Questions

Readings: Fr. Michael Himes, "Fostering Vocational Discernment among Undergraduates,"

Essay (Due September 13): What was the best question you were ever asked, and why was this particular question so productive? How would you identify the qualities of good questions?

Weeks 2 and 3: Asking Questions in Sociological Perspective

Readings; C. Wright Mills, "The Promise," (chapter 1 of *The Sociological Imagination*)
Peggy McIntosh "White Privilege, Male Privilege"

Essay (September 20): How have certain race, gender, class, age and sexuality categories been normalized in your life at BC? ***Please be very specific.*** If you were to challenge this normalization, what changes would you make in your own behavior? What would you expect of other students, the administration, the faculty? How would you achieve them?

Essay (September 27): Using your college transcript, what do you learn about the major choices you have made while at BC? If you had it to do over (or if you were advising freshmen), what would you do differently? Do you like the balance you struck between

enjoying your strengths and challenging yourself in subjects that do not come easily to you? Did you find real engagement in any of your classes or with any of your professors? What qualities drew you? Are you better prepared to be a force for good in the world and, if so, how did BC help or hinder this development? What courses did you recommend to friends and why? Which courses do you think will still be important to you ten years from now? What is the most important thing we would NOT know about you from the transcript.

Weeks 4 and 5: Intimacy

Readings:

Tobias Wolf "Say Yes"

Lorrie Moore "People Like that are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling on Pedonc"

Nancy Scheper-Hughes "Death without Weeping"

Caroline Knapp "Introduction" to *Drinking: A Love Story*

Essay (October 4): Discuss the varieties of love portrayed in these readings? What do they have in common? How do they differ? What made you curious in each story? Please do NOT summarize the stories, but discuss the common themes and contradictory visions of love implicit in these stories.

Essay (October 11): How have you experienced loving relationships in your life? What have you learned from each? How have you experienced love in work relationships, service trips or other activities? What challenges have been posed to you by the experience of love?

Weeks 6 and 7: Spirituality

Readings:

Nadine Gordimer "Bride of Christ"

Irving Yalom "If Rape were Legal"

Gish Jen "The Water Faucet Vision"

Essay (October 18):

What definitions of spirituality are suggested by the readings? What are the principal gains/joys of spirituality and what obstacles does the world pose to attaining a satisfying spirituality? How are worldliness and spirituality combined or played off against each other in these readings?

Essay (October 25)

As best you can remember, when you came to BC, what were your hopes, fears, experiences with spirituality? How did your spiritual life change during your time at BC and what specific experiences are the source of this change?

Weeks 8 and 9: Community

Readings:

John Sayles "At the Anarchists Convention"

George Orwell "Shooting an Elephant"

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Essay (November 1):

What definitions of community/politics are suggested by the readings? What are the principal gains/joys of community/politics and what obstacles does the world pose to attaining a satisfying political or community commitment?

Essay (November 8)

As best you can remember, when you came to BC, what were your hopes, fears, experiences with community and public participation? How did your political/civic life change during your time at BC and what specific experiences are the source of this change? What are your plans for involvement in the life of your community after graduation?

Weeks 10 – 12: Work

Readings:

Julia Alvarez "In the Name of the Novel"

Tim O'Brien "The Things They Carried"

Alice Walker "Everyday Use"

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi "Finding Flow"

Essays (November 15): What definitions of work are suggested by the readings? What are the principal gains/losses of work and what obstacles does the world pose to attaining a satisfying work life?

Essay (November 29): Please share the Csikszentmihalyi reading with your parents. Reflecting on your own and your parents' and siblings' work experiences, what are the dimensions of satisfying work for you and for them. What was your worst work experience and what did you learn from it? When and how have your parents found flow? What did they learn from that experience?

Essay (December 6): Prepare a budget for yourself and your family (configured however you wish) at age 30. What do you learn from this budget about the integration of intimacy, spirituality, community and work?

