

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. – 5:20 p.m, Carney 308

Office hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 1:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., 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, work, community (public engagement) and spirituality.

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 and shape 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.

To arrive at good answers, answers that allow you to act effectively in the world, you will need to understand your own action logics, to understand the dynamics of interpersonal relations, to be knowledgeable about the options for achieving organizational impact, and to be sophisticated in positioning your efforts in a larger societal context. Tools for achieving each of these aims are threaded through the course readings and writing assignments.

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, work, community and spirituality we will read works of fiction to ground your own reflections on your past four years and your hopes for the future. I am using fiction in a social science course in the belief that few adults read

scholarly studies but all of us read fiction and use it to help ourselves to think about our own life choices.

In addition, we will be tying “leadership development” tools based on understanding individual learning styles to the work on love; tools for assessing and improving difficult group dynamics to the curriculum on work; tools for achieving organizational transformation to the curriculum on community; and tools for serving the world to the unit on spirituality.

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 at on-line reserves.

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”

Class exercise:

What was the best question you were ever asked and what made it so good? How would you identify the qualities of good questions?

Essay (Due January 22):

At this moment, in your senior year, how would you answer Fr. Himes' three questions: what is your joy? What are your talents? What does the world need from you? How did you figure out answers to these questions?

Weeks 2 and 3: Asking Questions in Sociological Perspective: Thinking in Context

Readings:

C. Wright Mills, "The Promise," (chapter 1 of *The Sociological Imagination*)

Peggy McIntosh "White Privilege, Male Privilege"

Class Exercise #1:

What are the most significant features of your environment at BC? In the United States? How do they shape your ability to answer Fr. Himes' questions?

Class Exercise #2:

In small groups, discuss the ways in which wealth, whiteness, heterosexuality are normalized at BC. For each example, what behaviors would help to "de-normalize" unearned privilege?

Class Exercise #3:

Capstone questionnaire on the BC Core Curriculum.

Essay (January 29):

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, alumni? **How would you achieve the changes you, yourself, can make?**

Essay (February 5):

Looking back on your time at BC, what do you learn about the major choices you have made while at BC? To answer this question, reflect on the societal factors that shaped your choices. Please use your college record including your transcript, your experiences in service-immersion programs, extra-curricular activities and dorm/apartment life. 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” broadly construed.

Weeks 4 and 5: Intimacy and Individual Learning Logics

Week 4

Reading:

Dalmar Fisher, David Rooke, Bill Torbert, *Personal and Organizational Transformations*, Chapter 4 “Stages of Personal Development”

Class Exercise:

Journalize: find three incidents that illustrate the learning logics. At least one of the three must be primarily about you. What is your learning style? Where is your growth edge? What activities allow you to develop the characteristics of the next higher action logic?

Essay (February 12):

Please provide three vignettes of interactions you have observed in which participants seemed to illustrate one of the action logics (opportunist, diplomat, expert, achiever/individualist, strategist). Each vignette should focus on a different action logic. One of the vignettes should be about YOU. What did you learn about your own action logics from this exercise?

Week 5:

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*

Class Exercise:

Come to class with “good” questions about the stories. We will draw questions out of a hat to answer. **Students will be selected to lead this discussion.**

Essay (February 19):

Love is not the answer? The premise of these stories is that finding someone (or something) to love is not “the answer” to life’s challenges, but the beginning of (sometimes) the scariest and most challenging project in your life. Using the stories as a basis, how have you/do you plan to handle the challenging loves in your life? How does this reflect your most prominent “action logic”? Again, are you playing to your strengths? Challenging your weaknesses?

Weeks 6 and 7: Work and Effective Group Dynamics

Week 6:

Readings:

Fisher, Rooke and Torbert, Chapter 2 “Fundamentals of Action Inquiry,”
D. Stone, B. Patton and S. Heen “Introduction,” to *Difficult Conversations*”

Class Exercise:

Recall a moment where, in a group context (family life, an athletic team, a roommate group, a workplace, etc.), you were either “in the zone, ” i.e. functioning with grace and skill, or in deep trouble. Journalize: recreate the dialogue of that moment. Using the “parts of speech,” where were you right on the mark, where might you have done better?

Essay (due February 26):

Please complete the exercise set out in Fisher, Rooke and Torbert, p. 27. Analyze the vignette you have captured. Following the readings and class discussion, how might this incident have been moved in a more fruitful direction?

Week 7:

Readings:

Julia Alvarez “In the Name of the Novel”
Tim O’Brien “The Things They Carried”
Alice Walker “Everyday Use”

Class Exercise:

Come to class with “good” questions about the stories. We will draw questions out of a hat to answer. **Students will be selected to lead this discussion.**

Essay (Due March 12)

What themes do the readings suggest about work in adult life? What is the relationship between work, understood as simply making an effort to accomplish some task, and “meaning making” i.e. achieving something worthwhile in the world through your efforts? What challenges, tradeoffs or compromises might be demanded in the world of work?

Weeks 8 and 9: Achieving Community Impact

Week 8

Readings:

Bowles and Diehl “Leadership for Organizational Learning,”

Class Exercise:

Discuss one campus project you have joined during your time at BC. How might that project/team/group have had greater impact at BC? What would Bill Joiner advise?

Essay (Due March 19):

Individuals often feel able to change their own behavior or even team/group dynamics. But we often feel that we could never change a whole organization – one as large as BC or a government program or corporate employer. But organizations DO change over time, so somebody must be able to make a difference. Using the Peggy McIntosh piece we studied earlier, design one major initiative for diminishing wealth, race or heterosexual privilege, using Bill Joiner's framework.

Week 9:

Readings:

John Sayles "At the Anarchists Convention"

George Orwell "Shooting an Elephant"

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Class Exercise:

Come to class with "good" questions about the stories. We will draw questions out of a hat to answer. **Students will be selected to lead this discussion.**

Essay (March 26):

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?

Weeks 10 - 12: Spirituality/Serving the World

Week 10:

Readings: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi "Finding Flow"

Class Exercise: How would you like to change/serve the world? What course of action would you propose to the President of the United States (or the Pope, or the head of IBM) if you were going to be trapped in an elevator with them for a couple of hours?

Essay (due April 2)

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?

Week 11/12

Readings:

Nadine Gordimer "Bride of Christ"

Irving Yalom "If Rape were Legal"

Gish Jen "The Water Faucet Vision"

Essay (April 14): NB – This essay is due on a Tuesday!

How do the definitions/manifestations of spirituality portrayed by Gordimer, Yalom and Jen allow people to serve the world? Alternatively, do these definitions/manifestations serve only to divide people from one another?

Weeks 13 and 14: A life plan

Class Exercise: constructing a shopping list for your budget at age 30

DINNER AT EVE'S HOUSE

Essay (April 30):

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?