

Capstone: Desire and Discernment, UNCP553301, Fall 2017
Tuesdays, 4:30 to 6:50pm, Stokes 217N

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Office hours: by appointment before or after class

Course description

This course, like all Capstone courses, aims to help students

- (1) review the process of their education
- (2) preview the process of making long-term commitments in four key areas:
 - spirituality
 - relationships and family
 - citizenship
 - work/career

It will do this by taking a long, loving look at the ways that human beings experience desire, and the ways that they act upon those desires to construct a life well lived.

The course will progress in two complementary ways. First, it will expose students to Christian spiritual practices of discernment, rooted primarily in the Ignatian spiritual tradition: practices of meditation and reflection, which we will learn and practice in class and at home. Second, it will involve careful thinking about stories of discernment which involve the sifting and pruning of desires. Our class discussions will reflect on these stories, in order to help each other consider what they mean for our own lives.

The trajectory of these inquiries is eminently practical: it will help students to be attentive, reflective, and loving in their discernment process. It will draw particularly from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola as a text and tradition of discerning desire, for the sake of what Aristotle described as “great-souledness” (*megalopsuche*) and what Ignatius of Loyola described, simply, as love.

Practices

1. Students will not use anything that requires power in the seminar room (laptops, iPads, smartphones, and so on).
2. Students will practice active listening, showing love by the way we engage in conversation.
3. Every day, we will begin with some form of an Examen. (see attachment)

Texts

Dave Eggers, *The Circle*
Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
Greg Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*
Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*
Selected texts on the course website

Grading

1. 20% class participation (includes attendance and questions raised for class). Please bring a journal you can write in for each class.
 - a. Your presence in class is mandatory for all class meetings, without excuse (interviews, rehearsals, other lectures or student activities, etc.). Absence policy: note that each class meeting is equivalent to three meetings of a MWF class or two meetings of a T-Th class. Unexcused absences detract 1/15th from the participation grade. Excused absences (illness, professional reasons, etc.) detract 1/30th, unless you are absent for only part of the class meeting.

- b. Participation policy: grade is subjective, based on the following. Please see the attachment for the class participation rubric.
- i. Do I regularly participate in class discussion?
 - ii. Do my questions and contributions to discussion show evidence of critical reading of the texts?
 - iii. Do I show willingness to initiate new lines of conversations or raise perceptive questions?
2. 20% class presentation
- a. Each student will prepare a 45 minute discussion on the text for the day. You will introduce the text and its author(s) for no more than 5 minutes, propose questions, and moderate the discussion. For each discussion, the professor will be a participant but not the leader. Your grade will be subjective, based on both a short writeup of the text and questions (1 page), and the work in moderating the discussion. You may request a partner for the class presentation and divide the work, as there will likely be more students than class meetings.
3. 20% dialogue journals
- a. Students will complete a total of five journal entries over the course of the semester. These graded entries will be posted on Canvas.
 - b. You will choose the writings that impact you the most and elicit a response. Your task is to use the readings and/or our class discussion to inform your reflection.
 - c. Each journal entry will be about 500 words.
 - d. I will respond to each journal entry with probing questions for your consideration that you might return to in subsequent journals (though this is not necessary and will not affect your grade).
 - e. Grading for the journal entries will be based on the following:
 - i. Does my writing show evidence of wrestling with the ideas of the authors?
 - ii. Do my later writings show evidence of thinking that has developed over the course of the semester?
 - iii. Does my writing show evidence of the discussions in class?
 - iv. Is my writing flawless (grammar, spell check)?
 - v. Is my writing creative?
4. 20% midterm paper **due Monday October 16 at 9am**, calculated by the rubric below.
- a. In 1500 words (give or take), you will look back on key elements of your experience at Boston College, using concepts from the class: social imaginaries, selving, mimesis, faith, etc. How do you see your experience at BC through the lenses represented by these terms?
 - b. You must cite at least one of the texts we have read up to this point.
 - c. Midterm paper rubric:

Does the student show a nuanced understanding of concepts from class?	20 pts
Does the student show a good understanding of the text he or she uses in the paper?	20 pts
Does the student use his or her new understanding of class concepts to understand the meaning of experiences while at Boston College?	20 pts
Is the essay well written? Creative and engaging?	20 pts
Does the essay have perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Is there evidence of spell check as well as proofing and editing?	20 pts
 - d. NB: the paper is not a test of what you believe or why you believe it. It is a test of how well you have understood the conceptual framework of the course, and applied it to interpret your college experience.
5. 25% final paper due **Monday December 4 at 9am**, calculated by the rubric below.

- a. In 2500 words (give or take), you will address the four themes in the course (work, relationships, citizenship, spirituality), expressing what you have learned from the texts and what you will be striving for when you leave Boston College.
- b. You must cite at least three readings from the course and show how they have influenced your thinking on the four themes.
- c. You must show mastery of the following ideas:
 - i. Mimetic desire
 - ii. Indifference
 - iii. Self-appropriation and authenticity
 - iv. Examen
 - v. Social imaginaries
 - vi. Discernment
 - vii. Consolation and desolation
 - viii. Contemplation and love

Final paper rubric:

Does the student address the four themes (3a), and show mastery of the ideas (3c) discussed in the course?	20 pts
Does the student show a grasp of the Ignatian framework for understanding the relationship between authentic desire and discernment?	20 pts
Is the essay well written? Creative and engaging?	20 pts
Does the student show a critical understanding of the texts and discussions from the course?	20 pts
Does the essay have perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Is there evidence of spell check as well as proofing and editing?	20 pts

Class participation rubric

A /A-

- a) Always comes to class on time
- b) Is always well-prepared to discuss assigned readings: student can answer questions, point to relevant examples from the text, and relate topics to prior class readings. Student's participation advances the level and depth of the dialogue
- c) Participates (speaks) in every discussion in a manner that reflects (b).
- d) Encourages the participation of others through positive body language, thoughtful feedback, engaged listening (your attention is fully on the speaker), and responding to or drawing out the comments of other students. NOTE: Talking too much can shut down dialogue: good participation means good listening!

B+/B

- a) Habitually comes to class on time and well-prepared.
- b) Makes an earnest attempt to advance the dialogue and engage others.
- c) Makes relevant comments based on the discussion or reading, participating in almost every discussion.
- d) Body language and listening skills neither advance nor obstruct the participation of others.
- e) The group dynamic is occasionally better, and never worse, because of the student's presence.

B-/C+/C

- a) Habitually comes to class and is on time, but is not consistently prepared to participate in a significant way.
- b) Although participation is not consistent in discussion or class, when student is prepared, student participates actively.
- c) Body language and listening skills neither advance nor obstruct the participation of others. The group dynamic is not affected by student's presence.

C-/D/F

- a) Student does not consistently come to class on time.
- b) Rarely participates and at times comments are vague or do not reflect adequate preparation.
- c) Little to no interaction with peers in discussion.
- d) Occasionally demonstrates a noticeable lack of interest or lack of respect during discussion (e.g., talks while speaker is talking, falls asleep, does not pay attention to speaker).
- e) Group dynamic and level of discussion is occasionally harmed by student's presence through lack of engagement, negative body language, inattentiveness or dismissive comments.

Schedule

NB: Exercises are due on the date assigned, not the following week.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment due
9/5	Modern social imaginaries	Eggers, <i>The Circle</i>	First journal assignment: write a 500 word response to the novel, analyzing Mae's desires.
9/12	Contemplation	Walter Burghardt, S.J., "A Long, Loving Look at the Real," reprinted in George S. Traub, S.J., ed., <i>The Ignatian Spirituality Reader</i> (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 89-98. (Canvas) Brackley, ix-19	Second journal assignment: contemplate an old picture of you or someone in your family. Write about your memories.
9/19	Mimesis	Read summary of Anne Becker's Fiji research (on Canvas) Read Alice G. Walton, "Why the Super-Successful Get Depressed," <i>Forbes</i> January 26, 2015, and Alina Tugend, "Comparing Yourself to Others: It's Not All Bad" (<i>New York Times</i> , July 1, 2011) on Canvas. Read Shane Snow, "The Fascinating Reason Many Billionaires Get Depressed (And How They Snap Out Of It) on Canvas	Assignment: watch one hour of any show that involves commercials or ads. Analyze what desires the producers of the show and the commercials want to elicit.
9/26	Authentic freedom; Vocation; Consolation and desolation; Two standards; Downward mobility	Brackley, 20-124 "Hurrahing in Harvest," Gerard Manley Hopkins	
10/3	faith, spirituality, belief, religion, and God	Read Michael Himes, "Living Conversation" from <i>Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education</i> (Fall 1995), 21-27 (on Canvas). Brackley, 224-252	3 rd Journal: Spend one hour of paying attention to something in nature, and write about the experience of your consciousness

			during the exercise.
10/10	The practice of the examen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Emmons, "Why Gratitude is Good," from the Greater Good Science Center at Cal Berkeley (Canvas) • Christopher Peterson, "Giving Thanks by Mental Subtraction," <i>Psychology Today</i> Nov. 24, 2010 (Canvas) • Dennis Hamm, "Rummaging for God" 	
10/17	Personal sin and social sin; ontic evil	Victor Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> (narrative)	
10/24	Finding and practicing meaning	Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> (Logotherapy to the end) Brackley, 20-54	Journal 4: Reflect on Frankl's book.
10/31	Kinship	Greg Boyle, <i>Tattoos on the Heart</i>	Journal 5: Reflect on Boyle's book.
11/7	Citizenship and Race	Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," from <i>The Atlantic</i> June 2014	
11/14	Ignatian Discernment	Brackley, 126-172	
11/21	Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aristotle's Friendship, from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy • William Deresiewicz, "Faux Friendship," <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i> Dec. 6, 2009 • Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam A.H.H." 	
11/28	Care for our common home	Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i> ("On Care for Our Common Home")	Work on final essay
12/5	Love	Brackley, 172-222	



the EXAMEN

The *Examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

- 1** Ask God for light.
I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.
- 2** Give thanks.
The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.
- 3** Review the day.
I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.
- 4** Face your shortcomings.
I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.
- 5** Look toward the day to come.
I ask where I need God in the day to come.

Version of the Examen from *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer* by Jim Manney © Loyola Press