

Capstone: Desire and Discernment, UNCP553301, Spring 2019
Mondays, 4:30 to 6:50pm, Stokes 215N

Tim Muldoon, Ph.D.
muldoont@bc.edu
617-552-8258

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*
Muldoon, *Living Against the Grain*
Selected texts on the course website

Recommended: Greg Boyle, SJ, *Tattoos on the Heart*

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. Write an outline for each reading in preparation for each class meeting. Outlines must be posted by midnight on Monday before class. (5 points each) Note: this assignment applies only to those texts for which there is not an essay assignment.
 - c. 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 15 minute presentation on the text for the day. You will introduce the text and its author(s), highlight the main themes, and offer a critical reflection on how the text helps us to reflect on the themes of desire and discernment. Think of your presentation as an editorial on the importance of the text.
 - b. You will propose 10 questions for class discussions. These questions will be shared with the professor and students the day before class.
 - c. The writeup is due at midnight on the Sunday before your presentation to allow me to be in touch with you with questions or suggestions.
 - d. Your presentation will be a focal point for conversation during the ensuing class discussion.
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. Each journal entry will be about 500 words.
 - c. 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).
 - d. 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 15 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. Your essay will directly engage at least one of the course texts in a substantial way.
 - 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(s) 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. Note: 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. 20% final paper due **Monday December 3 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

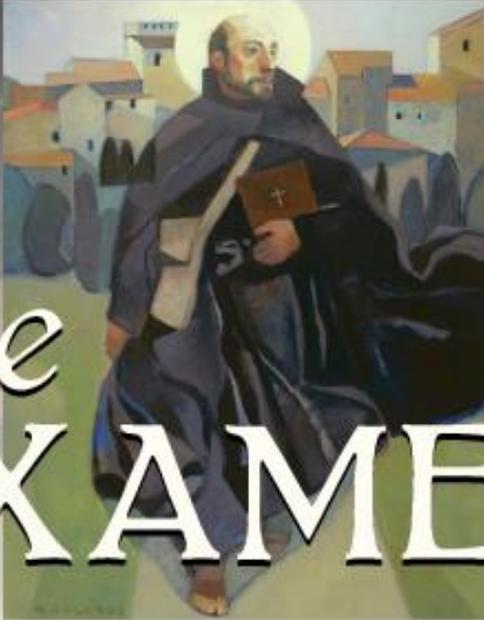
- a) Student does not consistently come to class on time.
- b) Rarely participates and at times comments are vague or do not reflect adequate preparation.
- c) Little to no interaction with peers in discussion.
- d) Occasionally demonstrates a noticeable lack of interest or lack of respect during discussion (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.

Week	Topic/Reflection	Reading	Assignment due
1	Modern social imaginaries Reflection theme: how do I selve?	Eggers, <i>The Circle</i> Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" (Canvas)	none
2	Mimesis Reflection theme: Is Mercer right?	<i>Living Against the Grain</i> , prologue and chapter 1 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	First journal assignment: Is Mercer right? What about the former divinity school student? Reflect using evidence from the text.
3	Contemplation Reflection theme: becoming beholders	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) "Hurrahing in Harvest," Gerard Manley Hopkins (no Canvas response necessary)	Outline of Burghardt only
4	The practice of the examen Reflection theme: seeking graced understanding	<i>Living Against the Grain</i> , chapter 2	2 nd Journal: Spend one hour of paying attention to something in nature, and write about the experience of your consciousness during the exercise.
5	Gratitude Reflection theme: practicing gratitude	<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) 	Outlines of articles

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dennis Hamm, "Rummaging for God" 	
6	<p>Happiness and mission</p> <p>Reflection theme: what brings you joy?</p>	<p>Victor Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> (including appendices)</p>	<p>3rd journal: Reflect on Frankl's quote in <i>Living Against the Grain</i>, p. 42.</p>
		No class meeting: Spring break	
7	<p>Discernment of spirits</p> <p>Reflection theme: the missioned life</p>	<p>Virtual meeting</p> <p><i>Living Against the Grain</i>, chapter 3</p>	<p>Outline of reading</p>
8	<p>Kinship</p> <p>Reflection theme: people who matter</p>	<p><i>Living Against the Grain</i>, chapter 4</p>	<p>Journal 4: Reflect on the Boyle quote in <i>Living Against the Grain</i>, p. 66.</p>
9	<p>Downward mobility</p> <p>Reflection theme: a long, loving look at poverty</p>	<p>Brackley on Downward Mobility (on Canvas). We will read this document in class. No student presentations for this class.</p>	<p>No assignment due</p>
10	<p>Loving freely</p> <p>Reflection theme: I see you</p>	<p>Dorothy Day, "Poverty and Precarity" (Canvas)</p> <p><i>Living Against the Grain</i>, chapter 5</p> <p>Recommended: David Brooks, <i>The Road to Character</i>, chapter on Dorothy Day</p>	<p>Outline of reading</p>
11	<p>Citizenship and Race</p> <p>Reflection: racial justice</p>	<p>Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," from <i>The Atlantic</i> June 2014</p>	<p>Outline of reading</p>
12	<p>Our immigrant nation</p> <p>Reflection theme: welcoming the stranger</p>	<p>Readings TBA (Canvas). The readings for this unit will reflect the most up-to-date developments in US immigration.</p>	<p>Journal 5: Respond to Coates' argument, demonstrating understanding of the text and a reasoned response.</p>
13	<p>Friendship</p> <p>Reflection theme: who is my friend?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aristotle's Friendship, from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <i>Living Against the Grain</i>, chapter 6 	<p>Work on final essay</p>
14	<p>Love and service</p> <p>Reflection theme: what I have learned</p>	<p><i>Living Against the Grain</i>, chapter 7</p>	



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