

Capstone: Desire and Discernment, UNCP553301, PHIL553301

Tim Muldoon, Ph.D.

muldoont@bc.edu

508-960-9222

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 through the Capstone themes.

1. First, the course will involve careful reflection on the sifting and pruning of desires. It will introduce philosophical reflection on desire from ancient Greece to modern philosophy, paying particular attention to the Ignatian tradition of discernment of spirits. Some guiding questions:
 - a. What are ways that we can structure our lives and specifically our habits that help us to ensure that the decisions we make are likely to yield the greatest happiness and flourishing?
 - b. What might you learn about the growing science of happiness to help you to make life choices at this formative period of your twenties? (Cf. Meg Jay, *The Defining Decade*)
 - c. What kinds of disciplined approach to your desires might lead to wise choices? Are there certain kinds of desires which you might want to structure your life to avoid? Are there other desires which you want to carve out time and energy for?
 - d. Does prayer influence your discernment? What practices nourish you in discerning a life of meaning and of self-giving?
 - e. What spiritual practices have you learned? Did you grow up in a family that practiced religion? Do you perceive a relationship between spiritual practices and religious practices?
 - f. In what ways have you learned about the Ignatian tradition here at Boston College? Have you practiced an examen or gone on a spiritual retreat? How has this tradition helped you to be reflective about your life and your desires?
2. Second, it will invite particular reflection on our relationships, and the desires that we have for the relationships we seek to cultivate over the course of our lives. Some guiding questions:
 - a. What are the most important relationships in your life, positive or negative?
 - b. What has been your experience of friendship?
 - c. What have been your experiences of romantic relationships?
 - d. As you reflect on your relationships, what are the predominant feelings and emotions that arise?
 - e. How do you establish relationships? How do you nurture them?
 - f. How do you balance attention to relationships in comparison to your attention to work/school responsibilities?
3. Third, it will invite students to reflect on their experiences of work and preparation for a career, asking how their Boston College education has formed them. Some guiding questions:

- a. How do you understand the differences between labor and work? Is there a difference? (Consider Hannah Arendt's distinction.)
 - b. What are the differences between a job, a career, and a calling or vocation? What do you understand yourself to be preparing for through your studies at Boston College?
 - c. What do you understand to be the proper relationship between job/career/vocation and the other dimensions of your life: relationships/family; personal growth; contribution to society; creative expression; and others? (Consider Josef Pieper on leisure)
 - d. What does a good work/life balance look like at your life stage? How do you conceive of that balance as you contemplate other life commitments like marriage and/or parenthood?
 - e. Today, people have multiple jobs and even multiple careers. (One guide is that a person can have 25 different jobs and 5 different careers.) Which talents do you hope you will be able to leverage in these different jobs and careers? What jobs/careers might your undergraduate education prepare you for? What hopes are you entertaining for graduate or professional study?
4. Fourth, we will reflect on our citizenship within communities: family, local community, society, nation, and world. Some questions:
- a. In what ways do you actively impact the communities of which you are a part?
 - b. How might you build up your communities, and how might your life choices contribute to their common good?
 - c. What do you understand the phrase "men and women for others" to mean for your life?
 - d. What are the practices by which you might build up and maintain relationships that sustain the social fabric in your community?

The trajectory of these inquiries is eminently practical: it will help students to be attentive, reflective, and loving in their discernment process.

Practices/policies

1. Students will practice active listening, showing care by the way we engage in conversation.
2. Every day, we will begin with a reflective exercise.
3. No screens are allowed in class except in the cases of presentations.
4. Please bring a notebook or journal for in-class writing assignments.

Texts

Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Tim Muldoon, *Living Against the Grain*

C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

Josef Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*

McCarter/Muldoon, *How to Remake the World Neighborhood by Neighborhood*

Selected texts on the course website

Accommodations

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or Dean Paulette Durrett, (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities (all other disabilities). I will be very happy to provide any necessary accommodations but you must let me know at the start of the semester, and you must be registered.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any form, including the use of AI. Please review the policy of the University here if you are in doubt:

<http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity>

Remote learning

Students are expected to participate in live classroom learning as much as possible. However, you will receive no penalty for participating via Zoom rather than in person for any reason. Stay home if you are sick. Please note: if you anticipate being away from the classroom for more than one class, please let me know. Remote learning is permitted only in the case of illness (or suspected illness).

Screens in the classroom

Students may not use screens of any kind in the classroom except when permitted by the professor for specific group work. Tablets are permitted, but not encouraged for note-taking. Exceptions are permitted for students with relevant accommodations. Please have a notebook handy for each class.

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.).
 - b. 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.
 - c. Hand write notes for each reading in preparation for each class meeting, and post a photo of your notes on Canvas. Students are exempted from this assignment on the day they lead discussion.
 - d. 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% leading class discussion
 - a. Each student will prepare about 10 questions for class discussion 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. These questions will be shared with the professor and students the day before class. Please email the questions by noon on the day before your assigned date.
 - c. Your presentation will be a focal point for conversation during the ensuing class discussion.
3. 20% Projects

- a. Students will complete a total of two essays and one citizenship presentation over the course of the semester. Each essay will be about 1000 words.
- 4. 10% Book review
 - a. Each student will select one book related to one or more of the course themes to read and review. The student will write a 500 word review and be ready to share a summary of it orally in class on the date assigned.
 - b. I will provide a number of recommended texts, but students may also negotiate a text in conversation with me. I encourage you to peruse the titles to learn more about themes and perspectives.
 - c. The review will answer the question “how does this text help me to discern my freedom and responsibility as a person for others?”
 - d. Book review rubric:

Does the student show a nuanced understanding of concepts from class?	25 pts
Does the student show a good understanding of the text he or she uses in the paper?	25 pts
Is the essay well written? Creative and engaging?	25 pts
Does the essay have perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Is there evidence of spell check as well as proofing and editing?	25 pts

- 5. 30% final paper due **Monday of the final week of class**, 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.

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? Does the student provide ample footnotes, demonstrating careful and not cursory reading of the material?	30 pts
Does the essay have perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation? Is there evidence of spell check as well as proofing and editing?	10 pts

Recording

This class may be recorded by the instructor to assist students enrolled in the class who miss any sessions due to an excused absence, such as illness. In addition, the recordings can be a resource for all students who would like to review the material covered in class. All recordings will be stored within the Canvas site and will only be available for viewing by members of this course. Students may not record/stream video or audio, or take photos in the classroom, or share

portions of any recorded video or audio of the class with anyone outside the class except with the written permission of the instructor and such other permissions as may be required by law or University policies.

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

Week	Capstone theme	Text
1	Introductions	Selving: Gerard Manley Hopkins, "When Kingfishers Catch Fire" Beholding: Hopkins, "Hurrahing in Harvest"
2	Spirituality (<i>euphuia</i>)	Desire: Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (Callicles section) René Girard, "Triangular Desire"
3		Discernment: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> III Saint Paul, selections from epistles Ignatius of Loyola: selections from <i>Autobiography</i> Walter Burghardt, S.J., "A Long, Loving Look at the Real"
4		Byrne, <i>The Ethics of Discernment</i> , chapter 1
5		Charles Taylor, <i>A Secular Age</i> on authenticity and social imaginaries Muldoon, <i>Living Against the Grain</i> , up to chapter 2
6	Relationships	Victor Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> Harvard study of happiness
7		Lewis, <i>The Four Loves</i>
8		Aristotle on Friendship (<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VIII-IX)
9		Relationships readings on Canvas
10	Work/vocation	Arendt on Work and Labor Josef Pieper, <i>Leisure the Basis of Culture</i>
11		Work readings on Canvas
12	Citizenship	Citizenship readings on Canvas <i>Living Against the Grain</i> , chapters 3-4
13	Citizenship	Presentations <i>Living Against the Grain</i> , chapter 5
14	Citizenship	Presentations Brackley, "Downward Mobility"
15	Citizenship	McCarter/Muldoon, <i>How to Remake the World</i>
16	Conclusions	<i>Living Against the Grain</i> , chapter 6-7