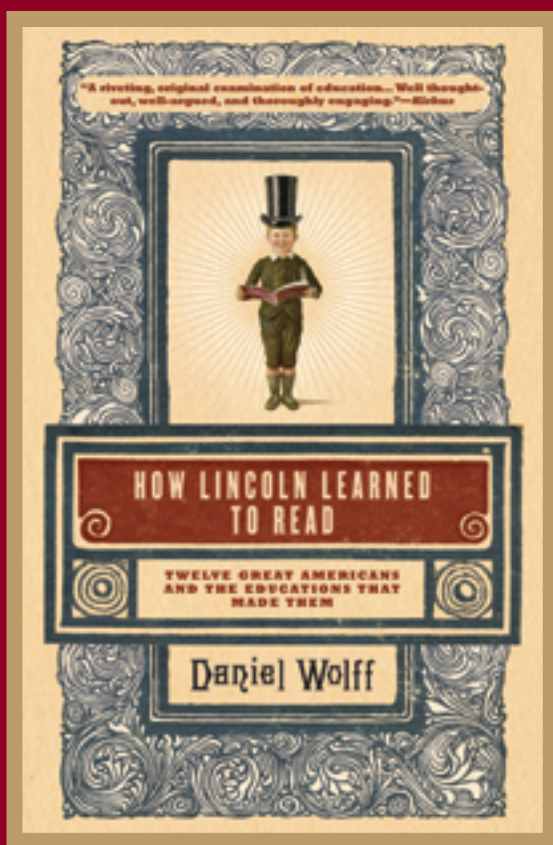


BOSTON COLLEGE MAGIS:

ON PILGRIMAGE TO DISCOVER THE
DEEPEST EXPRESSION OF OURSELVES



**FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC CONVOCATION
SEPTEMBER 16, 2010
WITH AN ADDRESS BY DANIEL WOLFF**

GO SET THE WORLD AFLAME!



Statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola outside of Higgins Hall

THE JESUIT MISSION

The early Jesuits struggled to describe what they called “our way of proceeding.” Their distinctive spirituality can be seen as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on its meaning, and ends in deciding how to act. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: being attentive, being reflective, and being loving. It results in the kind of good decision-making that St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, called discernment. Discernment enables each of us to seek the greater good before us. Having this deep interior knowledge of the heart is to communicate with God and trust that the hand of God is at work fortifying and directing us in our lives. One of the many goals of a Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.

We can think of discernment as the lifelong process of exploring our experience, reflecting upon its meaning, and living in a way that translates this meaning into action that creates a harmonious community for us all. We can also think of this process as something that we focus on with special intensity at particular moments in our lives, for example, during the four years of college or when we have to make important decisions. When we discern, we want to do so freely and with a sense of what God is calling us to do.

Through the practice of discerning, we grow in our ability to imagine how we are going to live our lives and discover vocations. The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” When we arrive at this place of convergence, we understand the fit between who we are and what the world needs of us; St. Ignatius urges us to be unafraid to live with the consequences of this realization and to respond with generosity and magnanimity, because this is the way that we can love as God loves.

We are not solitary creatures. From the womb, we live in relationships with others, growing up in cultural, social, and political institutions that others through the wisdom of their accumulated experience have created for us. To be human is to find our place in these relationships and these institutions, to take responsibility for them, to contribute to nurturing and improving them, and to give something back to them. Jesuit tradition uses the Latin word *magis* or “more” to sum up this ideal, a life lived in response to the question: How can I be more, do more, give more? Having the courage to seek this wisdom is an important step in how we lead virtuous lives.

It is certainly the hope of Boston College, as a Jesuit, Catholic university, that students will feel at home here no matter what their background and beliefs. You are at Boston College because you belong here, and this place is now and shall be part of your formation. From the multitude of experiences over the next four years, it is our hope that students will grow in expanding their hearts and minds, enriching their souls, and developing their talents, so they will grow in wisdom, faith, and love. Boston College also desires that students will come to know more deeply God's profound and abiding love for them and for all men and women, and that all Boston College students will make their choices in light of that love for God. Boston College hopes that students will choose to become men and women who are formed to be magnanimous people who seek the greater good and spend their lives in pursuit of it, convinced that their faith in God leads them to stand with the poor and marginalized of the world.



THE PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

The goal of our life is to live with God forever.

God, who loves us, gave us life.

Our own response of love allows God's life
to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts of God,
presented to us so that we can know God more easily
and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use these gifts of God
insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.

But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,
they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice
and are not bound by some obligation.

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.
For everything has the potential of calling forth in us
a deeper response to our life in God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this:

I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening of God's life in me.

A WAY OF PROCEEDING IN A JESUIT UNIVERSITY:

Our perspective on the world affects our experience, and our experience becomes our sense of reality; therefore, this sense of reality influences how we interact with the world. If we see the world as a cynical or loving place, this perspective embodies and becomes our understanding of our surroundings. St. Ignatius of Loyola thought that the right vision comes from a trusting relationship with God who loves us.

To think about this relationship with a loving God is a spiritual, intellectual activity that we will ask all of our students to engage in as they embark on their individual and communal journeys here at Boston College. The choices and the decisions that we make through the course of our daily lives either draw us closer or move us further away from God. St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, believed that God is love. St. Ignatius's understanding of God took him on a quest for self-knowledge that required a great deal of time and sacrifice to discover where God's love was present in his life.

Ignatius's own spiritual growth happened in response to a difficult and painful experience. In 1521 while defending the city of Pamplona against a French attack, a cannonball struck his leg, causing a severe injury. During his subsequent recuperation from two painful leg surgeries, Ignatius had a great deal of time to consider his life and what he truly wanted and desired. While recovering, Ignatius had access to only two books: the *Vita Christi* and the *Flos Sanctorum*. These literary works examined the life of Christ and the stories of the saints. From reading these two books, one of the things that Ignatius came to understand from his conversion was that he was created by God. This conversion made something stir within Ignatius's heart. This stirring inspired him to rethink his view of the world and that of God. Ignatius realized that he was created by God for a purpose, as are all men and women.

This new orientation for his life and his new understanding of God provided Ignatius with a more authentic understanding of reality, which gave him a new vision of himself. Ignatius's vision of God was very tangible and personal. He had seen and experienced God in such a profound way that he was now able to truly find God in all places and in all things. This experience St. Ignatius describes in the *Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises*: "All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily."

When we understand that God is love, it is foundational for us to understand that we are loved completely and fully by God. In order to deepen our understanding of this, Ignatius asks each of us to reflect upon and contemplate God's love, which is the concluding prayer of the *Spiritual Exercises*. There is great value in reflecting upon all that we have within our lives: our family, friends, talents, and gifts. Through reflecting upon our experience, expressing gratitude, and having patience, we are better able to find and retain a perspective that helps us to shape and model our lives. In many ways, a Jesuit education helps to direct each of us to continuously listen to our own heart. Being in the habit of understanding and responding to our heart is how we become transformed and grow into people who we want to be and who we are meant to be.

As first year students, we are embarking on a pilgrimage that has no set route but does have a clear destination. To be authentic pilgrims, each of you must engage in the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the experience with an attentive, responsible, and loving heart. There are many roads and possibilities on this pilgrimage from which we must choose; however, to reach our destination, we need to live authentically that which dwells within each of us. This destination, which is our deepest desire, can only be reached if we unite the heart and the mind. To reflect daily upon this authenticity enables each of us to discern the right direction to proceed.

Like Ignatius, we make good decisions when we examine and attend to the relationships within our lives. This discernment needs to be at the heart of our decision-making. By modeling ourselves after St. Ignatius of Loyola, who informed his reflection through reading during his convalescence, we will ask you to begin your journey into BC by examining Daniel Wolff's book.



Before reading Wolff's book, please reflect upon the following prayer by the late Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Pedro Arrupe, S.J.:



*Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is,
than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.*

*What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out
of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings,
how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you
know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy
and gratitude.*

Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.



To ask the right questions is to begin to experience discernment, which needs to be at the heart of all of our decision-making. We would ask each of you to ponder these key questions:

What stirs inside of you?

What are your deepest desires?

A HISTORY

The First Year Academic Convocation and First Flight welcome each incoming class into the academic conversation already resounding throughout the Heights. The First Flight Procession that each student partakes in is an act of faith; faith that your classmates, the faculty, and the entire Boston College community will work together to engage a myriad of ideas that shapes your character, expands your intellect, and deepens your soul. As a student body, Jesuit community, and faculty collaboration, the event commissions all first year students. In the same way that our freshman class is welcomed into the University, our seniors follow the same route in May on their day of graduation as they are set forth into the greater community of graduates, professionals, and alumni.



Convocation and Graduation Ceremonies on Linden Lane.

First Year Academic Convocation looks to engage students intellectually, socially, and spiritually. As the tolling bells of Gasson Tower signal the start of the procession, the entire freshman class, gathered as residential halls, proceeds down Linden Lane. Each residential community arrives in front of Gasson Hall, the first building built in 1913 on the Chestnut Hill campus. It is within this storied tower that the early Boston College students were asked to discover their own voices in what was originally called the Recitation Hall. As a committed community, we will empower each of you to discover and cultivate your own unique voice here on the Heights. To begin this pursuit, each first year student is invoked by both a Jesuit and lay educator to “Go Set the World Aflame.” St. Ignatius gave this same charge in 1542 to St. Francis Xavier, who was carrying the Gospel to the East. This charge embodies one of the goals that we set for each freshman as they enter into our Boston College community. We ask that all students develop their voice through the expansion of their hearts and minds and take the gift of a Boston College education and carry it forth.

Traditions and rituals draw us into the experience of our lives. They also help us feel connected to something larger than ourselves. The First Flight Procession, the blessing, and the lighting of torches are all part of how we look to connect a

2,000-year-old Judeo-Christian tradition, a nearly 500-year-old Jesuit, Catholic order, and a 150-year-old institution, Boston College. As we feel part of something larger than ourselves, it is important to recognize the camaraderie and the companionship that we form among ourselves and how that connects to the alumni who have come before us. We also want each of you to come to realize that as members of the BC community, we believe in you. It is our hope that in the four years that pass between Convocation and Graduation, you will become attentive, intelligent, loving, and compassionate people who are committed to something greater than yourselves.

St. Ignatius attempted to model a life and provide a path alongside Jesus that would enable each of us to examine our lives in a tangible way to pursue the most profound questions. The Society of Jesus is here at Boston College to be our companions in contemplative action as we search for truths about our lives and the world around us. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson asked the question, “Who am I, and how do I fit into this world?” It is through many conversations that we hope you will begin to answer these major questions in your life. We will ask each of you to reflect upon your experiences, relationships, deepest desires, and motivations so that you can make informed decisions and choices by engaging in the process of discernment. The First Year Academic Convocation is an event, a literary experience, a discussion, and an address that centers on the vital issues put forth in a program facilitated by the Office of First Year Experience called Conversations in the First Year.



Mass of the Holy Spirit on O'Neill Plaza and First Flight Procession.

Boston College hosts the First Flight Procession and the Convocation address on the same day as the Mass of the Holy Spirit. It is the Mass of the Holy Spirit which expresses most profoundly our connection to our mission. We ask that each of you begin to ponder how your personal faith and beliefs are developing. We would invite each of you, regardless of your personal religious beliefs, to be open to the gifts of God's grace, which St. Paul refers to as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. These fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we begin each school year, we pray that the Holy Spirit continues to fill our hearts with the fire of God's love, which can better enable each of us to **“Go Set the World Aflame.”**

Since all incoming students have been issued Daniel Wolff's book and a charge to begin engaging in conversations with faculty, staff, and their fellow classmates, we hope that we struggle together to be an active, loving community of learners that grows intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

We have been fortunate to have been inspired by a litany of wonderful people through our First Year Academic Convocation.

Paul Farmer, through Tracy Kidder's work *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, invited students to examine how our commitment to educational excellence can allow us to better form a true vocational life, centered in service, by looking beyond the comforts of wealth and basic health care to those who enjoy neither luxury.

President Barack Obama challenged students to close the empathy gap present in American society today, particularly surrounding questions of race and identity, in the context of his memoir *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*.

Senator John McCain engaged students on the topic of service and leadership in both the public and private spheres through Robert Coles's *Lives of Moral Leadership*.

Jeannette Walls illustrated the power of love and redemption through her astonishing memoir *The Glass Castle*, which detailed her nomadic childhood.

J.R. Moehringer exemplified the Jesuit ideals of discernment through his reflective, loving, and honest depiction of his life and his search for self-understanding, while battling disillusionment and personal adversity in his memoir *The Tender Bar*.

Ann Patchett wove together a story of family that asks each of us to be attentive to our faith, love, vocational calling, duty to ourselves, and the larger society as a whole.

As the class of 2014, each of you will have the opportunity to read *How Lincoln Learned to Read: Twelve Great Americans and the Education That Made Them* and to also welcome Daniel Wolff to campus to discuss his work. By examining the lives of these twelve great Americans, we witness the great obstacles that each had to overcome, along with the serendipitous educational experiences that influenced each individual's vocational calling. Discovering and cultivating passion enabled each of these Americans to make his or her mark on the fabric of our country's history.



Daniel Wolff is the author of *4th of July, Asbury Park*, picked as an Editor's Choice in the *New York Times Book Review*. He has written for publications from *Vogue* to *Wooden Boat* to *Education Weekly*. His other books include *You Send Me: The Life and Times of Sam Cooke*, two volumes of poetry, and collaborations with the photographers Ernest Withers, Eric Meola, and Danny Lyon. He is currently reporting in New Orleans for a book and a documentary project, *Right to Return*, with director Jonathan Demme.

It is our hope that this guide will help to ignite your passion and curiosity. Make no mistake: Boston College expects a great deal from you, its newest students. You will bring your intelligence, energy, imagination and compassion to create an even greater Boston College community. You are vital to the mission of this university. Our task is to support you in the realization of your goals and dreams with us and beyond Boston College.



BEFORE YOU READ: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Before you read the book, examine your self-understanding by reflecting on yourself and how you relate to others. Here are some questions to help you get started:

What events, experiences, or people have influenced or shaped who you are today and who you want to be?

How do you define family, and how has your relationship with your family changed since you were young? How do you envision this notion of family changing over your four years at Boston College?

How have you found a community outside of your family? How does one feel connected to a community? Can you become lost in this search for connection?

How has the search for connection affected your development? What are the expectations that groups have for you?

How would you describe your identity now? How are you open to changing yourself and allowing yourself to be changed by others in your time at BC?

When in your life have you felt superficially judged by others? When have you judged others, perhaps prematurely? How have issues of class affected your growing up? Can you think of someone whose life you have impacted, for better or worse?

How have experiences of adversity contributed to the building of character in your life?

How do you deepen your own self-understanding?

How does faith shape who you are and how you interact with others?

Discovering God in all things, which is an Ignatian desire, calls us to look always for opportunities to experience the Spirit working in our everyday lives. In what ways have you come to see and understand God's love in the world?

How do you find time for personal reflection within the hectic pace of life? Are there sacred spaces where you contemplate and find comfort?

What is it about your deepest self that seems to find expression in your life? How does one listen with the heart?

What are your goals for your time here at BC? What are your ultimate desires in life? How do these goals match with your heart's desires?

A WAY TO APPROACH THE TEXT

As you begin to read Daniel Wolff's book, it will be particularly important to think critically upon the educational opportunities that lay ahead for each of you. By looking at the lives of these twelve great Americans, we can come to understand how each of them helped to define him or herself and was connected within the currents of our own American history.

By drawing upon the variety of human experiences in this book, we can begin to understand how we have been defined and redefined as a culture and a country, what is important knowledge, and who should have access to this knowledge. Reflecting upon the influences and factors that have shaped each of these Americans' lives is an important first step in our individual self-exploration as we transition from high school to college.

To flourish as human beings, we need to pay attention to both the relationships in our lives and what we feel called to be in life. Identifying and embracing those areas that bring us joy is at the heart of life's journey. By exploring our experiences and reflecting upon our interactions, we can begin to translate meaning into action.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart." Thinking about what you treasure helps each of us to discover a deeper connection to God. Through critical reading and reflection, which Ignatius calls discernment, we are drawn into our own history, dreams, and the subsequent history and dreams of others. Taking some time to think, to be quiet within and outside oneself, enables us to examine how we make decisions and our own motivations. Discernment is a lifelong habit of assessing our choices so that we can make decisions that help us to live a truer and more authentic life. Through this discernment, we can begin to understand our values that order our choices in our lives. It is through our discernment that we are able to understand and respond to our individual callings. Being attentive helps us to connect with God and discern our vocational calling.

Daniel Wolff's work chronicles the lives of great Americans who have pursued their individual passions and developed skills and talents that synthesize both formal and experiential learning. As you arrive here on campus, we will ask you to reflect upon the educational journeys of these influential Americans and apply their lessons to your own educational path. The journey into one's deepest self and our subsequent search for self-understanding are key effects of great lit-

erature. Great literature has a probing quality that affects our whole being while making us think outside of ourselves.

This self-directed discernment requires a close examination of our past and present to understand our desired future. In short, the ability to know one's true self is at the heart of our own discernment process.

While reading Wolff's work, it will be important to think about the motivations behind each person's choices and how those decisions connect each of the characters in a unique way within the currents of our history. Understanding how, as people, we are all connected in ways that we cannot truly understand or fathom is important to consider as you embark on this new journey into college. Like these great Americans, the choices that we make and the individual passions that we pursue shape and define our lives and the larger culture as a whole, often in ways that we have not yet imagined.

One of the pillars of a Jesuit, Catholic education is the idea of the *Magis*. *Magis* is derived from the Latin phrase *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—"for the greater glory of God." *Magis* is a central word in Ignatian spirituality that calls each of us to actively pursue the "more" or the "greater" in our lives. Like these twelve Americans, we need to find and discover our passions and actively engage them; however, this *magis* is not a quest for perfection or for superlatives but one of magnanimity and humility. As you find yourself here at Boston College, we will ask each of you to discover and pursue your "more." We want you to think in large terms by asking big questions and imagining worthy dreams, all the while thinking about what each of you is being called to be as a man or woman.

In the Jesuit tradition, we will encourage each of you to strive to do great things for God, which requires you to search out your deepest desires and reflect upon them. The *Magis* is not possible if there is not sensitivity or awareness to what stirs our hearts. Understanding the *Magis* often appears with clarity within moments of discernment. These moments when we are choosing between two good options is when the Ignatian *Magis* appears, specifically when we are asked to choose which is greater. Paying attention to what our heart is calling us to do allows us to truly listen to God. When we seek to achieve the best good for us, our discernment process requires reflection, evaluative perception, and understanding. In many ways, the *Magis* that is seeking to do the more enables us to find God in all things that we do.

Pursuing the more enables us to discover what it is that we deeply long for, which is God's love in our life. Being truly attentive to ourselves and the world

around us enables us to see and experience this love more richly. Karl Rahner, S.J., a German Jesuit and 20th century theologian, wrote, “The entire world belongs to God, who is adored, experienced, and accepted everywhere as the one who, through grace, has set all things free to come to share His life...everywhere in spirit and truth.”

As a BC community, one of our deepest desires for each of you is that you will reflect upon your life in a loving way so that you begin to realize how much God has been in your life even when you did not realize it. As you begin to see and experience God’s love, we hope that your passions ignite, and you begin to develop and grow in new and more profound ways that you have not yet considered. Striving for those transcendent moments needs to be at the heart of your journey.

How Lincoln Learned to Read clearly shows people who are passionate, devoted, and in love with their individual vocational calling. This realization comes about in many different ways and through many different educational modes. Being attentive to each individual’s educational process of discernment gives us insight into the influences that impacted their subsequent watershed choices. Each of these twelve Americans has come from and experienced different aspects of American culture that impacted their development. Without a doubt, these unique cultural experiences enriched their respective vocational calling. If we can help each of you to fall in love here at BC, while embracing your own unique cultural experiences, it will only strengthen and create a more harmonious community.

By coming to see these iconic Americans as participants in the human experience with their own strengths and flaws, it is our hope that you will be better able to think critically about how we see ourselves as Americans and what has shaped and moved our country forward. This unique perspective on American history will give each of us a knowledge base that will help to provide more clarity about who we want to become. It will also help us to define the expectations that we have for ourselves and the expectations that the world has for us.

As you move forward in Daniel Wolff’s writing, pay attention to how these Americans were shaped and defined. By being attentive and by reflecting upon where we have been, we can better understand how we live in the present, which will ultimately help us to discern what we are called to do in the future.

While reading this work, we have provided some key questions for each of you to consider. The experience of raising questions is an experience of transcendence.

Raising questions will draw you out of yourself and asking questions is at the heart of your journey. In order to help you to be attentive, here are some questions to reflect upon:

How has each of these Americans acquired the knowledge and skills that they needed to make such a long-standing impact on our country?

What are the qualities that each person was inherently gifted with and which ones were acquired? How do we best acquire the skill sets that will allow us to make an impact?

How have you acquired what Daniel Wolff calls “what you need to know”?

How is one able to predict what skills or knowledge will be most important in the future?

What aspects of each individual journey resonate so intimately with you?

How did these individuals discover and cultivate passion?

How did they come to choose their paths?

How does learning require reflection and integration to have an impact?

As each of you enters into this Jesuit, Catholic, liberal arts university, you must consider how we live in the 21st century, and how the world is growing rapidly and changing in unforeseen ways. In the midst of this globalized and technologically driven world, we will ask you to critically evaluate all that has come before us. To enter into the university core curriculum is to enter into a foundation of knowledge and experiences that will better equip each of you to synthesize and adapt to the ever-changing world that you are part of each day.

The Summer Day

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

by Mary Oliver



What do you plan to do with this opportunity that awaits you here at Boston College?

“What is it you plan to do, with your one wild and precious life?”

As you enter into your first year of college, it will be important to examine the decisions that you make while here at BC. Taking time to reflect upon your motivations, your desires, and your fears will give you a much better perspective on your life—where you came from, where you are presently, and where you are heading. Boston College hopes to partner with you during this journey through the careful discernment of the intellectual, spiritual, and social components that affect you during your undergraduate journey.



Go Set the World Aflame!



Gasson Tower



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**CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR:
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