

Capstone: **Life, Money, and Generosity**
Professor Betty Bagnani

Proposed for Spring 2017

If you want to know what a man is really like, take notice of how he acts when he loses money.

Simone Weil

Money is the opposite of the weather. Nobody talks about it, but everybody does something about it.

Rebecca Johnson

Brief overview of course:

This course is about becoming. It encourages students to reflect on the type of person they are becoming and the type of person they want to become. It asks students to review the process of their education at BC and to explore the role their family and friendships have played in who they are becoming.

After that wide reflection, this course attempts to simultaneously reflect on money and an integrated life. As implied by the Simone Weil quote above, we explore how money can cause tensions that can affect the kind of person we become. In this way we may more deeply explore the nuanced question of how to become the person we want to be post-graduation. We explore assumptions about money that may or may not be influenced by our experiences on BC campus, study abroad, and/or service trips; as well as explore writings on money and the integrated life.

The framework of the course is funnel-shaped. The first part of course starts wide with students reflecting on their education at BC, their responses to Father Himes' three questions, and the role of family and friendships. Then, it allows students to reflect on their assumptions about and tensions around money. In the middle, the course narrows to consider some tools relating to budgeting and debt. The final part of the course reverses the funnel as it widens from these tools to consider readings that integrate money with other areas. Some of the readings examined will be research on money in psychology, sociology, and behavioral economics. In so doing, the instrumental value of money will be contrasted with the wider, intrinsic goods, as defined by each student. At the end of the course, after completing an autobiography, interview, and letter to a niece/nephew/son/daughter, each student is encouraged to more fully reflect on what kind of person they seek to become in a life that will contain money and so much more.

Assignments:

1. Throughout semester:
 - a. Examen Journal
I have used weekly examens in class in the first-year *Portico* course and in the *Introduction to Financial Accounting* course. Links will be made to Chris Lowney's writings in this area. Students will keep a journal relating to examens.
 - b. Spending Sabbatical Exercise
To encourage students to actively examine their relationship with money, students are encouraged to not spend money during one day of their choosing each week. This is not a one-size-fits-all exercise and will require some nuances, such as allowing students to use their meal plan dollars to buy meals on those days, etc. Students will make journal entries relating to their planning and experiences.
2. Other written assignments (discussed at end of this proposal):
 - a. Autobiography (first draft after week 6, final version after week 9)
 - b. Interview (first part due after week 4, second part due at end of semester)
 - c. Letter to your daughter, son, niece, or nephew (due at end of semester)

Reading Schedule

Note: For longer works, we may be reading only short selections, which will be available through course reserves. Also, as the course is further developed, current articles will be added.

Weeks 1 and 2:

Reflections on a life lived so far

- * *Boston College Mission Statement*
- * *On Discernment, Three Key Questions*, Fr. Michael Himes, 2010
- * *Heroic Living*, Chris Lowney, 2010
- * *Selected articles to help students reflect on their education and key choices*

Week 3

Reflections on family and friends

- * [*Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle*](#)
- * [*First Semester Friendships*](#), *Huffington Post*, March 4, 2014
- * *Friendfluence: The Surprising Ways Friends Make Us Who We Are*, Carlin Flora, 2013

Weeks 4 and 5

Reflections about money

- * *Money: A Love Story*, Kate Northrup, 2013
- * *The Overspent American*, Juliet Schor, 1999
- * *Creating the Good Life: Applying Aristotle's Wisdom to Find Meaning and Happiness*, James O'Toole, 2005
- * *Selected articles on College Debt*

Weeks 6 and 7

Some tools

- * *Selected articles and spreadsheet on budgeting*
- * *Selected articles on understanding college debt, credit card debt, credit score*

Week 8

Money and happiness

- * *Happy Money: The Science of Happier Spending*, Dunn and Norton, 2013.
- * Conference papers from [*Happy Money 2.0: New Insights Into the Relationship Between Money and Well-Being*](#), 2014

Week 9

Being human and deciding about money

- * *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions*, Dan Ariely, 2010
- * *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Thaler, 2009

Weeks 10 and 11

Beyond paying bills

- * *Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology, and Global Poverty*, Judith Lichtenberg, 2013
- * *Wealth and the Will of God: Discerning the Use of Riches in the Service of Ultimate Purpose*, Paul Schervish and Whitaker, 2010
- * [*The currency of the new economy is trust - TED.com*](#), Rachel Botsman, June 2012

Weeks 12 and 13

Living an integrated life

- * *How Minimalism Teaches You...*, Boston Globe, April 29, 2016
- * *All the Money in the World*, by Laura Vanderkam, 2012
- * *How Much Do the Wealthy (Think They) Need...?* Michael I. Norton, 2015
- * [*A Letter to Our Daughter, Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan*](#), Facebook.com, Dec 1, 2015

Descriptions of Proposed Written Assignments for capstone: **Life, Money, and ...**

- a. Autobiography (first draft after week 6, final version after week 9)
Put into writing some of reflections so far in the course. This paper should address at least the following topics and should cite at least 4 of the readings:
- Your reflection on your education at BC. What structures facilitated? What choices facilitated? What areas are unfolding?
 - Your current responses to Father Himes three questions.
 - Your reflection on your friends and their role in your education and self-knowledge. What qualities are needed to sustain beyond your years at BC?
 - Make explicit assumptions and tensions about money that you have observed in yourself. Cite key influences.
 - One person whose relationship with money you admire and why.
 - Key observations from your spending sabbatical journal so far.
- b. Interview (first part due after week 4, second part due at end of semester)
First part: What kind of person do you want to interview for a capstone course? Is there a quality about them that you admire and/or would like to emulate? What questions about their relationship with money would you ask? What does that phrase “relationship with money” even mean to you at this stage in your life? Give specifics.
Second part: What were key tensions raised by interviewee? Discuss key observations and links to class readings. What were you seeking to learn? What did you learn?
- c. Letter to your daughter, son, niece, or nephew (due at end of semester)
While you are not Mark Zuckerberg, you can write a letter that reflects your hopes and how you would give money. In your letter, address at least the following topics:
- Your hopes for this child and for the world.
 - Three takeaways from this course that you want to communicate and why. Cite readings and any commentary in footnotes so that this child can refer to them in the future.
 - Assuming you had a sizable amount of money to give to others, what you would do with it? Explain your reasoning on why you made these choices.
 - Assuming you had a small amount of money to give to others, what you would do with it? Explain your reasoning on why you made these choices.
 - Provide some commentary in this section on how you made these choices over others.

Proposed Grade Distribution for capstone: **Life, Money, and ...**

	<u>Approximate %</u>
Class Participation (includes journals)	25%
Presentation of Class Reading (TBD how assigned)	10%
Quiz grades (on some of readings)	15%
Written Assignment: Autobiography	20%
Written Assignment: Interview	10%
Written Assignment: Final Letter	20%