



## CORE 1101

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### **Catalogue Description**

This first course in the University Core Curriculum seeks to forge a community of conversation inspired to explore perennial questions central but not exclusive to the Catholic intellectual tradition. People throughout the different cultures and traditions of the world strive to understand the transcendent mysteries of the human journey that are addressed by the world's religions, philosophies, art, music and literature. The first signature course invites students into this conversation via some of the great texts and other cultural artifacts that focus on transformative journeys as they are portrayed in Catholic, Greek, Islamic, Hindu, and other traditions. Students are asked to reflect upon their own transformative experiences and envision their personal journeys. Classes meet twice a week for 75 minutes. This course is linked with the 1-credit University Life course.

### **Questions addressed by the central texts**

This course is a text-based discussion of the ideas each text raises. Students are expected to have read the assigned texts before class, and to participate in each class in discussion of them, orally and in writing. The course is meant to introduce students to the habits of critical thinking and writing, and to reflection on the profound issues of human

life as an integral part of their university education. The texts are selected to further this reflection.

Nostra Aetate addresses the relation of Christian to non-Christian believers. It stresses a positive view of Judaism, the Jewish roots of Christianity, and positive aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam and "whatever is true and holy" in other traditions. It asks us to reflect on our own tradition of belief in relation to other traditions that provide different answers to the great human questions we share. "Nostra Aetate" provides a good opening text for this course in that it raises fundamental questions that the remainder of the course will continue to explore:

"People expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir human hearts: What is humanity? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?" (*Nostra Aetate*, 1)

Plato stands at the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition as it distinguishes itself critically from the world of myth (though this is a distinction and not a full severing). Plato asks us to think about the difference between what is real and what only apparent, what true and truly known, and what false or merely opinion. He also puts us to the question: for what are we willing to die? How important is truth to us?

The Gospels are central to Western Civilization. They proclaim that the ultimate mystery is transcendent, personal love. This Love seeks converse with those who might least be expected to be welcome at God's table and are often not welcome at ours: the poor and the outcast of society. The gospel asks us what we mean by "justice" and whether justice is possible apart from Love. The gospel asks not only "what is truth," but "am I truthful?"

The Bhagavad Gita comes from the traditions of Hinduism. The *Bhagavad Gita* is the story of Arjuna as he decides whether to make war against his relatives and takes counsel from his God, Krishna. Krishna soon reveals to Arjuna different aspects of Hindu beliefs and paths of practice that move toward personal liberation. The Gita raises profound questions about the relation of duty to morality, the culturally inculcated desire for rewards through action, and what devotion to God might look like. The *Gita* also raises questions regarding the meaning of the body and soul, the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of liberation and the path to it, and even the nature of time and the world itself.

Saint Augustine's Confessions asks what it means to rightly praise and thank God, what it means to be a rightly ordered human being, how this might be achieved, and what obstacles stand in our way. Augustine draws themes and questions from Plato and from the gospels into a concrete personal journey that asks after the nature and purpose of being human, the source and nature of evil, and the role of divine love in our lives.

Dante's Divine Comedy incarnates a Christian journey of self-discovery that asks its readers to experience the iniquity of the world, the tragedies of human selfishness, the progress of conversion, and the extraordinary love of God for all creation. Dante raises issues of the nature of human iniquity, of justice both human and divine, of the relation between sensible and spiritual beauty, of the destiny of the human person, and the nature of God.

Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)* begins from the Christian doctrine that God is Love and proceeds to reflect on different forms of human love in their relation. He especially raises questions regarding the nature of erotic love and divine or agapeic love and their relation. Benedict then goes further and discusses the relation between Christian charity and political justice, the relation between Church and state.

Other modern texts will also be chosen by the individual instructor to further discussion of these issues from other perspectives.

**Course Objectives** (Measurable outcomes assessed through class activities such as in-class writing at the beginning of each class period, discussion, written mid-term exam, mid-term speech, final team project.)

At the completion of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Discuss core texts of the Catholic intellectual tradition and how they inform the journey of transformation.
2. Identify and engage the moral issues and questions central to the Catholic intellectual tradition.
3. Integrate new information from multiple perspectives.
4. Demonstrate Freshman level proficiency in Reading & Writing, and in Critical Thinking.

## Questions considered through reading and discussion

What is real?  
What is truth? How does one differentiate the real and the true from apparent and false?  
What do we know about the beautiful?  
What do we know of the divine or transcendent?  
Is there a meaning to suffering?  
How does one endure suffering?  
What is Love?  
What is the meaning of freedom?  
How does the human person attain transcendence?  
How do we understand the just, the right, the call to do good?  
How do we decide what to do?  
What kind of community do we desire?  
How can we improvise within social, political, and economic constraints?  
What roles do family, friends, race/ethnicity/national origin, socio-economic background, and national crisis play in one's journey through life?  
How do we come to appreciate the human in others in the face of our differences involving gender, sexual orientation, religion, linguistics, ethnic, social, political, and economic status?

## Course Requirements and Evaluation

The primary focus of this class is reading and discussion. Students are expected to demonstrate that they have read and prepared to discuss the material prior to class.

In addition, the following class activities are being planned for Fall 2006.

**Film Series** runs concurrently with the course, on Fridays 1-3 and Thursdays 7-9 in Pirate's Cellar.

Students are required to prepare a written critique for 4 of the 11 films in the series.

**Service Learning option** links the community service requirement in Freshman Studies to the academic goals of the Journey of Transformation course.

**Spiritual Retreat option** is being developed.

**Group project** (counts as final exam)

This final team project challenges students to work together and draw upon core texts, the film series, and their own experience, to create a fully collaborative mixed-media project that expresses their responses to some of the perennial questions central to the Catholic intellectual tradition. Students are assigned to a group at the beginning of the semester, and work on a team project that is presented during finals week. The project is a creative synthesis of the entire semester, focused on a question that the students choose in consultation with the instructor.

## Grades

1. In-class writing and group prep	20%
2. Contribution to class discussions	20%
3. Midterm	10%
4. Four film reviews	10%
5. Final exam (summative team project)	20%
6. Other (defined by the instructor)	20%

### Grading Scale

95-100=A, 90-94=A-, 86-89=B +, 83-85=B, 80-82=B-,  
76-79=C +, 73-75=C, 70-72=C-, 66-69=D +, 60-65=D, 0-59=F

## Course schedule

### Week 1 Introduction

Two or three poems or excerpts that indicate very different views of human existence introduce students to the idea that they are entering into a conflict of interpretations.

Billie Collins poem from summer reading  
Nietzsche's "Parable of the Madman" (*The Gay Science*, #125)  
Saint Francis, "Canticle of Brother Sun"  
Rumi, *Prayer of the Chalice*  
Visuals: *Journeys*

## **Weeks 2-4 Being called**

*Nostra Aetate*

Plato, *Allegory of the Cave, The Apology*

*The Gospel of Luke or The Gospel of John*

Supplementary Materials: Plato's *Phaedrus, Acts of the Apostles*

Film Series: *Passion of Joan of Arc, Jesus of Montreal*

Visuals: *What do you see powerpoint, Reality, Suffering*

## **Weeks 5-8 Seeking a Path**

*Bhagavad Gita*

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Bks. 1-3, 7-10

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*

Inferno: Cantos I, II, III, V, XXXIV

Purgatory: Cantos II, VIII, XIX, XXVII, XXX, XXXI

Paradiso: Cantos III, VII, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII

Supplementary Materials: Augustine Sermon 27a, Attar *Conference of the Birds*,  
Sermons of the Buddha

Film Series: *The Mission, Motorcycle Diaries, Groundhog Day*

Visuals: *Beauty, Representation, Love*

## **Weeks 9-13 Contemporary journeys, perennial questions**

Pope Benedict XVI: *God is Love*

Choose two from the list.

Voltaire, *Candide*

Tolstoy, *Death of Ivan Illych*

Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* or *The Long Loneliness*

Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Supplementary materials:

Film Series: *O Brother Where Art Thou? Entertaining Angels, Stand and Deliver, Hidden*

Visuals: *Community, To Have/To Be, Freedom*

## **Required Texts**

*The Bible*, New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, 3rd Edition or any modern translation

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

ISBN: 019528478X

Format: Hardcover, 2180pp

Pub. Date: January 2001

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Augustine, *The Confessions*

Boulding translation

\$12

ISBN: 0375700218

Format: Paperback, 358pp

Pub. Date: December 1998

Publisher: Random House, Incorporated

*Bhagavad Gita*

Mitchell translation \$14  
ISBN: 0609810340  
Format: Paperback, 224pp  
Pub. Date: August 2002  
Publisher: Crown Publishing Group

E-reserves and photocopies of *Nostra Aetate*, *Deus Caritas Est*, and the Jowett translation of the Plato texts will be supplied to the students.

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## Options for the modern texts

Voltaire, *Candide* Penguin \$11  
ISBN: 0143039423

Tolstoy *Death of Ivan Illych* \$ 6  
ISBN: 0553210351  
Format: Mass Market Paperback, 134pp  
Pub. Date: January 1981  
Publisher: Bantam Books

Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* \$18  
ISBN: 1570751560  
Format: Paperback, 221pp  
Publisher: Orbis Books

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* \$16  
ISBN: 0060617519  
Format: Paperback, 288pp  
Pub. Date: August 1981  
Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers

Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* \$ 7  
ISBN: 0671023373  
Format: Mass Market Paperback, 179pp  
Pub. Date: January 1984  
Publisher: Pocket Books

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* \$ 8  
ISBN: 0345350685  
Format: Mass Market Paperback, 496pp  
Publisher: Random House Publishing Group

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* \$ 13  
ISBN 1400033411  
Pub: Knopf

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