

Open Exploration: Arts, Humanities, and Beyond Track Syllabus

2016-2017 Undergraduate Seminars on Faith and Vocation

Christian Study Center of Gainesville

Program Introduction

How do you think about work? Whether you are studying for an exam, working a part-time job, or anticipating a career, how does work appear in your life? One way or another work will fill the overwhelming majority of your waking hours, and yet, we rarely pause to think about the work we do or reflect deeply on our vocation in the world. As a student in the Undergraduate Seminars on Faith and Vocation, you will have the chance to do just this. You will get the opportunity to develop a holistic approach to vocation that views all of human experience, including the work we do, within the framework of biblical wisdom, theological reflection, and cultural awareness, all in the context of a community learning environment.

In contrast to ways of thinking that are available to us in the larger culture (and often in the Church), the mentors leading your seminar meetings will encourage you to dissolve the dichotomy between work and other supposedly more spiritual activities. Reading materials and in-home discussions will guide you to recognize the profoundly spiritual significance of work itself and to embrace a vision of work as an expression of love for God and neighbor. You will also enjoy space to discern God's calling and grapple with challenges that are specific to your anticipated vocation. In preparation for life ahead, you will be urged to reflect on deeper levels where the pursuit of personal vision encounters disappointment, faith intersects with fear, and failure inspires hope. The seminar experience will provide a rich environment for developing a vision for work as ministry in all stages of life and areas of influence, bearing fruit both now and for years to come.

Track Synopsis – Open Exploration: Arts, Humanities, and Beyond

This track is for students who find themselves thinking about vocation and identity in the world with a range of enthusiasm, open-mindedness, or even uncertainty. It will include special attention to the humanities and arts, but also to those who want to consider vocation with eyes wide open to possibilities. We will read, reflect, and discuss vocation as an all-encompassing way to think about our place in the world. Above all, we will be concerned with how to think about vocation from a Christian theological framework, but also with a high premium on employing an imaginative approach to these issues. For us a theological lens will not so much answer questions as it will provide a mirror to think about ourselves and a window for seeing the world.

Track Objectives:

1. To employ the imagination in theological reflection as we seek to understand vocation and work as our creative participation in culture - for the future but also for the present as students
2. To read carefully and discuss thoughtfully assigned readings about the interplay of: work, vocation, culture, and the common good
3. To engage in an open-handed yet intentional conversation with track participants about our topic
4. To consider the role of creativity and the arts in thinking about our cultural participation
5. To work towards a vision of vocation that is rooted in Christian understanding and sensitive to a humanities context

Program Expectations:

What you can expect:

This program is designed to foster Biblical and theological reflection in a community learning environment.

What is Theological Reflection?

Students are encouraged to engage in the study of scriptures and life in an observant, reflective, creative, and imaginative manner through theological reflection. Theological reflection is not simply Bible study, although it certainly ought to involve understanding of scripture. It is imaginative work rooted in Christian understanding.



Theological reflection employs the mind and imagination to deeply consider the implications of ideas that emerge from concepts about God and ponder possibilities that flow from these implications about God and God's world. Theological reflection is certainly rooted in or guided by scripture, but not always accompanied by citation of chapter and verse. It starts with an idea or concept that flows from Christian understanding at some level, be it direct focus on scriptural content or consideration of a writing or thought from Christian tradition. Then, as the concept is pondered and questioned, imagination of possible implications takes shape as the concept is put to work in the world. Christian writers like Dorothy Sayers and Flannery O'Connor assert that Christian creedal statements ought not to be final answers to questions, but rather, when accompanied by the imagination, they should open up ways of seeing the world. Christian theological concepts, then, are not cul-de-sacs where exploration stops, but boulevards which invite exploration. Theological reflection is an exploration of these boulevards and their vistas as an exercise in loving the Lord with a whole heart, a whole soul, and a whole mind.

Learning in Community:

This program provides a meaningful learning experience through interaction with others in the form of group discussions and prayer. In order to grow a healthy community, the seminars take place in a hospitable setting (primarily in the homes of track leaders) and employ a thoughtful, conversational approach. Learning is best accomplished both through individual effort and through processing shared experiences with others. Reading, thinking, discussing, rethinking, and implementing ideas in the context of a community leads to a much richer conversation and consequently to a greater take-away by participants. In a healthy community of learners, each member is valued for their contribution to the whole and each person stands to learn more from others' perspectives than simply reading on one's own. Therefore, full participation is required from each student.

Students participating in the seminars enjoy:

- Enriching reading and dynamic discussion
- A meal provided at all meetings
- Free copies of all reading materials
- Help with transportation if needed (please contact your track leader and a ride can be arranged)
- \$300 fellowship award to invest toward vocational development and discernment for students who fulfill program requirements (see below)
- An opportunity to reflect on the seminar experience in the form of writing at the conclusion of the program

What is expected from you?

Engage in Biblical and theological reflection and contribute to a healthy community learning environment:

- Fulfill all program requirements:
 - Attend consistently and participate actively (*all sessions are required except the December 8th, 2016 event*)
 - Read each session's required reading in advance (*as specified in track schedule below*)
 - Engage in community by sharing ideas and questions and listening to others
 - Because we believe that personal contemplation and writing are an excellent way to deepen Biblical understanding and theological reflection and digest concepts introduced throughout the program, all students are required to submit an essay after the conclusion of the program. Submit a Final Essay articulating how your Christian faith informs your thinking about vocation by midnight on Sunday, March 26, 2017 (See FAQ's online for more details about how to write and submit the Final Essay)
- Propose a plan to put the \$300 fellowship award to work toward your own vocational development and discernment. (See FAQ's online for details about submitting a Fellowship Proposal)
 - Proposals may be submitted through our website beginning on Sunday, January 1, 2017. The absolute deadline for fellowship proposals is midnight, Tuesday, February 21, 2017. Because we recognize the potential for job interviews/grad school visits during the spring semester, we are willing to award fellowships before the conclusion of the program. However, students who receive the award early must commit to fulfill all remaining program requirements listed above.



- Invest your fellowship award in a way that serves your own vocational development and discernment, as approved through the proposal process.
- Students who do not attend all meetings and fulfill all program requirements are not eligible to receive a fellowship award because we value both personal enrichment and a strong community learning environment. Lack of full participation from each student detracts from personal reflection and damages the community learning experience for the group.

Track Schedule:

Unless otherwise indicated, all meetings will be at the track leader's home.

- **Tuesday, September 27, 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.**
Objective: Orientation, Program Kickoff
Location: Christian Study Center Classroom, 112 NW 16th St.
Reading: *Culture Making*, Andy Crouch (TBA)
- **Monday, October 10, 6:00 p.m.**
Objective: Discuss reading + poem
Reading: *Culture Making* (Chapters 1, 2, 3)
- **Monday, October 24, 6:00 p.m.**
Objective: Discuss reading + “Why Work?” by Dorothy Sayers
Reading: *Culture Making* (Chapters. 4, 5, 6, Interlude)
- **Monday, November 14, 6:00 p.m.**
Objective: Discuss reading + Zimmermann and Hunter
Reading: *Culture Making* (Chapters 7, 8, 9)
- **Thursday, December 8, 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.**
Objective: Pizza, Film Viewing and Discussion
Location: Christian Study Center Classroom, 112 NW 16th St.
**Though this session is not required to receive a fellowship award, attendance is strongly encouraged because it is a chance to interact with students from other tracks.*
- **Sunday, January 1, 2017**
Fellowship Proposals accepted online now through midnight on Tuesday, February 28, 2017
(See FAQ's online for proposal details)
- **Monday, January 23, 6:00 p.m.**
Objective: Discuss reading + Annie Dillard's “Living Like Weasels”
Reading: *Culture Making* (Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13)
- **Monday, February 13, 6:00 p.m.**
Objective: Discuss reading + Wendell Berry's “Manifesto: Mad Farmer Liberation Front”
Reading: *Culture Making* (Chapters 14, 15, 16, optional: Postscript)
- **Tuesday, February 21, 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.**
Objective: Wrap-Up, Program Finale
Location: Christian Study Center Classroom, 112 NW 16th St.
Deadline for Fellowship Proposals tonight at midnight (see FAQ's online for proposal details)
- **Sunday, March 26, Midnight.**
Final Essay Deadline (see FAQ's online for essay prompts and submission details)

