

VALUES AND VOCATION SEMINAR: SECTION 1

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Course Description:

In this course, we will explore from a variety of perspectives how people make choices about their vocation. Using theological, sociological, and psychological lenses we will examine the ways in which one discerns and examines what is “their calling.” The course will look at the differences between a career and vocation, the impact of values on career choices, and then examine the social processes that shape our individual lives. Students will be asked to reflect on their own life choices and understand the impact of culture and institutions on their experiences. Some of the questions we will explore as a group include: How do you discern your calling? How might this differ from one’s career? What are the current socio-economic realities that might impact our choice of work and/or our vocation? How do we negotiate our individual gifts and desires within the context of the communities in which we live and to which we are responsible? What role might social justice play in deciding how we are going to live and work?

Course Objectives:

- 1.) To explore and reflect on our individual gifts, interests, values, and life experiences and how those shape our choice of vocation.
- 2.) To examine various practices from the Christian tradition (and others), that assist one in discerning God’s calling.
- 3.) To be aware of and reflect on the socio-economic realities that shape individuals’ life choices, and in particular recognize the importance of class, race, and gender to shaping these life experiences.

Course Requirements:

1.) Class participation and attendance. Class participation is very important as well as regular attendance. In order to gain a better understanding of the subject matter, you need to be willing to engage in class discussions. You should be prepared to discuss questions pertinent to each session’s readings, such as: What is the author’s main point? How did what you read resonate with your own experience? Do you agree with the author’s main ideas? **Class participation and attendance are worth 20% of your final grade.**

2.) Weekly Quizzes and Essays. These quizzes will be given at the beginning of each class every other week. The quiz will consist of 1-2 essay questions that will ask for your reflections on the week’s readings and class discussion. There will be a total of 6 quizzes and the syllabus outlines when each quiz will take place. **These quizzes together are worth 20% of your final grade.**

3.) Paper #1: Book Review: Examining the Various Questions about Vocation through

Contemporary Literature. For this paper, students will be asked to select one of the books listed at the end of the syllabus that tells the story of a person's search for meaning and their life's work. The books, both fiction and non-fiction, examine the impact of such things as immigration, race, gender, love and relationships, and civil unrest on the character's vocational choices. More detailed instructions for the paper are attached at the end of the syllabus. **This project is worth 30% of your final grade and is due March 21st.**

4.) Paper #2: Final Self-Exploration Paper. This is a 5-7 page paper that explores your values, beliefs, and experiences, and how they are shaping your process of vocational discernment. This paper is due at the final class; you will be asked to share your reflections from the paper in the last class. More details as to the organization of the paper are at the end of the syllabus. **This paper is worth 30% of your final grade and due on the last class.**

Papers, Academic Integrity, and Other Issues:

- 1.) All papers and assignments must be typed and double-spaced
- 2.) Deadlines are important. Late papers will be dropped ½ letter grade each day that they are late, unless you have made previous arrangements with me or there is some emergency.
- 3.) Finally, students are expected to honor the standards of academic integrity at all times. Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated and may result in an **F** for the course.

Chicago Semester will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students can alert us in the "Additional Information" portion of the Application Form prior to their coming, or they can notify the Director privately if necessary. Students should also alert their instructors during the first two weeks of class so that accommodations can be made. For further assistance, contact Clinton Stockwell at Clintons@chicagosemester.org.

Required Texts:

A Sacred Voice is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience, by John Neafsey
Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol

Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream, by Barbara Ehrenreich

In the Name of Salome, by Julia Alvarez

****Course Reading Packet**, available from instructor and in the library (Articles from reading packet are designated in the syllabus by "RP" and numbered in the packet)

Course Outline

Week 1, February 5th - Introduction: What is a "Vocation?"

Some issues that we will discuss today include what is the difference between a job, a career, and a vocation? What types of work have you done? What types of jobs have been held by members of your family, starting with parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents? What is the role of

work in one's life? How do culture and society shape what we understand as "work?"

Week 2, February 14th - Understanding a "Sacred Calling:" Personal Vocation and Social Conscience

Read Chs. 1-5 in *Sacred Calling*, by John Neafsey.

We will begin today by looking at the various meanings of vocation and the role that social analysis plays in discernment. *Quiz #1.*

Week 3, February 21st - Social Justice and "Public Vocation"

Read Chs 6-10, in Neafsey.

Today we will talk about the importance of authenticity, passion, and social justice in vocational discernment.

Week 4, February 28th – What is the "American Dream?"

Read Chs. 1-4 in Ehrenreich.

In this class, we will begin to look at the economic environment that shapes the workplace and how it affects the American middle class. *Quiz #2.*

Week 5, March 7th – "The American Dream," continued

Ehrenreich, Chs 5-Conclusion and Reading #1 from RP, Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character*. Today we'll continue the conversation about the impact of the corporate culture on the life of under- and unemployed professionals.

Week 6, March 14th – Discerning God's Will: Introduction to Spiritual Exercises from Various Religious Traditions

Readings #2 and #3 from RP from Placher, *Callings*.

For the next two classes, we will be exploring how one's faith and spiritual journey impacts one's choice of vocation. We will also discuss various spiritual practices that have been employed through the ages to help people discern God's will. *Quiz #3.*

Week 7, March 21st – Spiritual Exercises, Continued.

Today, we will visit the Labyrinth at St. James Cathedral and discuss how this medieval practice has been used as a tool for discernment. Meet at St. James at 9am at 65 East Huron.

Paper #1 due - no readings.

Week 8, March 28th - Finding One's Calling in the Current Global Context: Life Choices

and Structural Realities

Read all chapters in *Savage Inequalities*, by Jonathan Kozol and Reading #4 in RP from Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

Many times we think that an individual's career is freely chosen. However, in this week's class we will begin to explore how social structures, such as the economy, race, gender, religion, and class affect our educational experiences and career choices. **Quiz #4.**

Week 9, April 4th – Globalization: Life Choices and Structural Realities

Articles #5 and #6 from RP from *Rethinking Globalization*.

We'll discuss in this class our interconnectedness with workers around the world.

Week 10, April 11th – Work, Family, and “Having it All:” Understanding the Role of Gender and Work in Our Lives

Reading #7 from RP from Hochschild's *The Time Bind*.

People often make decisions about career and family based on their understandings of gender roles and the importance of paid work in people's lives. In this class we will examine what our ideas are regarding women and men, and work and family. **Quiz #5.**

Week 11, April 18th – Compassion: Understanding Values and Motivations for Work

Readings #8 and #9 from RP: from *Compassion* and from *Letters to a Young Poet*.

We all have values that we hold dear to us that shape who we are and what we do. Today's readings will help focus the discussion on our motivations for doing the work that we do and how our vocational desires are often influenced by the lives of others.

Week 12, April 25th - Vocation and Social Justice: Narrating our Stories and Vocational Vision

Read all chapters, *In the Name of Salome*, by Alvarez

The next two weeks we will read the semi-historical account of Salome Urena, national poet from the Dominican Republic. **Quiz #6.**

Week 13, May 2nd – No Class: CS Evaluations

Week 14, May 9th - Telling Our Stories

Final paper due and class presentation on vocation.

Reminders:

In this class, we are all learners and teachers; if anything is ever unclear or uncomfortable for you, please do not hesitate to talk with me. It is important that this class be a safe *and* challenging learning environment for everyone.

For Persons with Disabilities. Chicago Semester will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students can alert us in the “Additional Information” portion of the Application Form prior to their coming, or they can notify the Director privately if necessary. Students should also alert their instructors during the first two weeks of class so that accommodations can be made. For further assistance, contact Clinton Stockwell at Clintons@chicagosemester.org.”

Paper #1
Book Review
Due: March 21st

From this list, please choose a book to review and write about (see me if you would like to use a book not on this list*):**

- 1) The Namesake, by Jhumpa Lahiri
- 2) Evensong, by Gail Godwin
- 3) Gandhi, An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth, by M.K. Gandhi
- 4) Fasting, Feasting, by Anita Desai
- 5) Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life, by C.S. Lewis
- 6) The Long Haul: An Autobiography, by Myles Horton
- 7) Ella Baker: Freedom Bound, by Joanne Grant

Instructions for Paper:

All of the books listed above – though some may be fiction, others autobiographical accounts of people’s lives –have one thing in common: each of the characters or protagonists is searching for meaning and truth in their lives. They are also reflecting on the impact of their families of origin, political ideologies, religion, race, immigration, gender, and social movements on their life choices, their callings, and the pursuit of personal truth and their role in social transformation, be it implicit or explicit in their stories. For some, the search for meaning leads them to a particular vocation; for others, the importance of relationships and family greatly impacts their calling. These various life experiences shape their identities and their vocational lives.

Once you have selected a book, these are the things that I want you to keep in mind as you are reading. You are asked to answer and address these questions in your paper, which should be 5-7 pages long, double-spaced.

- 1) Summarize the main plot/story line. Who are the main characters? What things did they experience in their lives?
- 2) When did the protagonists first begin to search for meaning in their lives? What was the impetus for these explorations?
- 3) What role did family and religion play in shaping their lives? How did religion and family open up options for them? How did they impose restrictions on their lives and identities?
- 4) Did the protagonists experience a crisis in identity or come to a crossroads where they had to make decisions about their lives? If so, what did they do? Who did they call on this time of crisis? What supports did they have (or lack) that shaped their responses to the crisis?

5) Was there any part of the book that resonated with your own experience/search?

Paper #2
Self-Exploration Paper
Due on the last class

For this final project, you will be asked to write a 5-7 page paper exploring your vocational aspirations and articulate a vocational vision for yourself. This self-exploration paper is designed to help you assess several things: your personal values and how they relate to your work and the type of environment in which you'd like to work; your ability to balance paid work and family and community life and commitments; and, the impact of your faith and spirituality to this decision. This might sound daunting, but it is to help you think through issues that you likely will confront in your life as you carve out and embrace your calling.

As usual, the paper should be typed, and double spaced. Your paper should touch on the following issues. Also, refer back to our readings, particularly Ehrenreich and Neafsey, for help in framing important work related issues that will impact your vocational vision:

- 1) Work Values and Motivations: What values are important to you? Why are they important to you? What are your motivations for your college major and career choice? What clues do your motivation and values provide about your calling?
- 2) Life Experiences: As a child, what career(s) did you dream about pursuing? What has been the impact of the following things on your vocational path: family, gender, race, class, religion, and/or immigration? Describe a specific instance when one of the above issues directly shaped or influenced your experience.
- 3) Faith, Social Justice, and "Public Vocation:" Talk about how your faith, spiritual practices, and social justice shape your life choices. How might your work contribute to social transformation? What are you called to do beyond your career? How is vocation a public rather than private choice?

As you answer these questions, you may well raise other questions for yourself, which you are welcome to explore. The point is that I want you to think about your own vocational vision and its connection to the readings, discussions, and work others have done before you on vocational discernment.