GEED 490 H
Spring 2010
Lecture Section: M 4:40 or 7:00
Discussion Section: TR 4:40-5:30
Stevens 101

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M-F 10-12

Liberal Arts and Critical Issues: Christians and American Culture

Careful thinking about American popular culture will enable Christians to better honor God and serve their neighbors.

Introduction. Timed to come at the culmination of a student's undergraduate education, Liberal Arts and Critical Issues invites students to interact with an issue of contemporary importance. This spring, we consider "Christians and American Culture."

--What are the cultures of America? Which of them are most influential?

--What factors influence popular beliefs, values, and behaviors?

--What facets of American culture(s) should be celebrated by Christians? Which features of American culture(s) should Christians oppose?

--In what ways do the cultures of America create problems for non-Americans?

--How does popular culture interact with trade, politics, and education?

These and many other such questions will shape our time together.

Two other introductory points:

1. Students take Liberal Arts and Critical Issues after they have completed most of their college work, including most of their major. They are likely to be more expert in their own disciplines than their LACI professor. Since LACI topics are inherently interdisciplinary, students must accommodate themselves to a co-learning environment in which professor and students teach and sharpen each other.
2. In the contemporary world, much of the most important work in business, education, industry, science, churches, and government consists of cooperative teamwork. Therefore, LACI requires significant group work.

Course Objectives

1. To nourish George Fox University as a Christian intellectual community by subjecting all seniors to a common capstone experience, with interdisciplinary participation of a cross-section of the faculty.
2. To ensure that every GFU student is conversant with, and has reflected carefully on and articulated coherently, an approach to practical reason that can help inform her understanding of, and participation in, a wide variety of cultural practices.
3. To give the student an experience of the practical application of his personal faith and/or worldview, and of key interdisciplinary insights, in addressing a contemporary problem (chosen each semester to combine lively current interest with long term significance).

4. To help students integrate what they have learned earlier in their college experience, to see the various elements of their education as fitting into a coherent whole, and to connect it with a clearer sense of vocation – that is, to integrate and apply at an advanced level the breadth of their studies.
5. To prepare students to take on crucial roles as culture makers in their communities and nations, embodying Christ-like loving service as leaders, experts, public advocates, and active citizens, and drawing on their liberal arts education in its entirety.

Texts

- Mock, R. (Ed.). *Senior Capstone Core Text*
- Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith* (Brazos Press, 2011)

These materials are not typical textbooks. Students are expected to read carefully and critically. What do the authors have right? Wrong? What do they neglect that ought to be said?

Resource Website: https://sites.google.com/a/george
Many course resources are found here.

Additional readings may be distributed in class or made available through the class website.

Assignments		**Grading Scale**
1. Lecture Attendance	5 points	
2. Discussion Precis	10 points	A = 91-100
3. Interview Assignment	20 points	B = 81-90
4. Ways of Knowing Truth Paper	30 points	C = 71-80
5. Research Project		D = 61-70
Class Presentation	25 points	
Public Display	5 points	Plus or minus grades will be
6. Evaluations	5 points	given in roughly the top and bottom third of each grade.
Total Points	**100 points**	The professor may adjust the syllabus and/or grading scale as justice and proportion dictate.

Assignments.
1. Lecture attendance. This course includes both the lecture sessions held on Monday at 4:40 (and repeated at 7:00) and our discussion sessions. There are ten Monday lectures; attendance at each is worth ½ point. Note: students receive a separate pass/fail grade for attending lectures. The five points here are an easy way to improve your overall average (slightly).

2. Discussion Précis. In the first discussion session, the class will decide on a schedule of discussion topics. Beginning Tuesday, Jan 17, students will post short précis of some

reading relevant to the topic for that week to the class Foxtale site. A précis should include: 1) a main point from the reading, 2) something confusing (or just wrong) in the reading, and 3) some idea from the reading worth in-class discussion. Précis should be succinct.

Please read your classmates' précis. The quality of this course (and students' enjoyment of the course) will be largely determined by the quality of our discussions—and a good discussion is facilitated by good preparation.

Précis must be posted on Tuesdays (or earlier) so classmates can have a chance to read them. Late précis will receive no points. 1 point each.

3. Interview Assignment. By **February 16**, you will post to our class FoxTale page a 500-600 word report on your attempt to make a personal connection with someone whose experience of American popular culture is distinctly different than yours or the people you associate with most (immediate family, friends, colleagues, etc.). This person might be of a different social background (native country, ethnicity, age, religion, socio-economic status) or have a starkly different theology or personal philosophy. You might interview the person, have an extended email correspondence, or in some other way make a personal connection with the person. In your report, explain how the person's experience is different from yours and/or most of our class. Explain how the difference makes a difference: how does the person's view of popular culture influence the way he lives? Besides quality of writing, you will be graded on the extent to which your interview adds to the viewpoints available to our class. 20 points.

4. **Ways of Knowing Truth Paper.** (30 points.) Write a 1000-1500 word paper to describe your approach to good decision making. How should a person decide what position to take on an important issue? On what basis will *you* choose to respond to important issues? Be sure to address the approaches to discovering truth (from the Reader) and indicate how you are influenced by your specialty, your liberal arts experience, and your Christian faith. Next, show how your approach to knowing truth applies to some important issue raised by American popular culture. This paper is due **March 23**.

Expectations: I will grade the ways of knowing truth papers as follows:

Quality of expression (6 points): Is it clear? vivid? powerful? concise? Well-organized?

Reflection of course content (9 points) Does it show mastery of what we have studied? Does it reflect insightful choices of what to incorporate and what to leave out?

Quality of argument (9 points): Is it well-reasoned? Is it insightful?

Quality of application (6 points): Does appropriately and creatively apply course ideas to real life?

5. Interdisciplinary Group Presentation. (25 points) An integral feature of the LACI experience is working in interdisciplinary groups. Graduates of GFU will find themselves will find themselves in working groups in business, science, churches, politics, and other areas of life. Such groups will make public presentations of their work to diverse audiences.

In February, you will be assigned to an interdisciplinary working group. There will be five such groups in our section. Your group will select some interesting and important aspect of the topic "American Culture." You will research that topic, drawing on all the disciplines represented in your group. You will then put together a report including all of the following elements:

1. (4 pts) **Background** (historical? statistical? other?) **report** on your topic, showing how your topic is an important part of our examination of American culture(s), communicating clearly the human interests at stake.
2. (10 pts) **A plan of action** for American Christians describing what they ought to do about this issue. This plan of action is the heart of the project: you have to show why Christians ought to act, what their goal(s) ought to be, how they can act, how the action(s) you recommend will result in improvements, and how we will know if your plan is succeeding.
3. (4 pts) **Evidence** that your report and your plan draw on a wide variety of disciplines in the course by:
   a) using sources and ideas from Course Readings, Lecture Presentations, and Interview Reports, and
   b) drawing visibly on the various disciplines represented by members of your group.
4. (4 pts) **Support**, using several of the ways of knowing in the Core Text, that the factual claims in your report are true, and that the goals and actions you advocate are morally on target – all backed by citations to sources.
5. (3 pts) **An in-class presentation** that is clear, persuasive, and interesting, and which successfully engages your fellow students (ranging from keeping them awake to generating animated discussion or participation).

Group reports will be presented to the class on **April 3, 5, 10, 12 and 17**. You will be graded on how well you accomplish the five tasks outlined above. You will need to turn in some version of the report (the Power-point file, visual aids, or whatever) that I can refer to in assigning the grade, although I will be grading based on what happened in class, not on what you turn in. The group presenting on April 3 will receive a 1 point bonus; the April 5 group will receive an ½ point bonus.

6. Evaluations. (5 points) You will evaluate the four other groups' in-class presentations and evaluate the public display. 1 point for each evaluation. This is another easy way to bump up your average—do the eval; get the point.

7. Final Display. (5 points) Your working group will create a display that embodies its presentation. The displays of all the working interdisciplinary groups from all LACI sections will be on public view from 12:00- 4:00 pm on **Monday April 9**. Someone from your group will need to be present at the display at all times during those hours to interpret the display to passing judges, fellow students, onlookers, and me. The display will be evaluated based on criteria in a rubric I will hand out well in advance.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date of Monday Lecture	**Topic of Lecture**	**Precis due on Tuesday**—Suggested readings. Remember, there are many other resources on the website. You may also find relevant materials on your own.
Jan 9	Introduction to LACI: Patrick Allen, Caitlin Corning, Elizabeth Todd	*Core Text*: Introduction and GFU Mission, Vision, and Values
MLK Day:	No lecture	Resource Website: Synopsis of Christ and Culture *Core Text*: Christian Counter Culture by John Stott (pg 120 – 134)
Jan 23	On Being: The Next Generation – Steve Sherwood	*Core Text*: Ways of Ignorance by Wendell Berry (pg 2-17); The Ways of Truth (page 18 – 36)
Jan 30	On Being Odd: The Pendulum of Christian Perfection – Becky Ankeny	*Core Text*: The Ways of Truth (page 36 – 59) Uncommon Decency by Richard Mouw (pg 60 – 74)
Feb 6	On Being Change: Christian Dissent and Social Change	
Feb 20	On Being Dual Citizens: The Kingdom of God and the Nation State – Mark Hall	A Public Faith (Ch 2 or 3 – Idleness or Coerciveness) *Core Text*: Civility lecture, readings (88 – 115) and/or discussion of examples from current events
Feb 27	On Being a Christian in Contention	*A Public Faith* (Ch 4 –Human Flourishing); *Core Text:* Civility in the Public Square and a Covenant of Civility (pg 116-119)
Mar 5	On Being Anxious and Addicted	*A Public Faith* (Ch 5– Identity &

		Difference)
Mar 12	On Being Witnesses: In the Aftermath of Crime – Naseem Rakha (Oregon Author of *The Crying Tree*)	*A Public Faith* (Ch 6 – Sharing Wisdom)
Mar 19	On Being: How Shall We Therefore Live?	*A Public Faith* (Ch 7 –Public Engagement)
	March 26 Spring Break No lecture	
April 2	No lecture	
April 9 All Campus exhibits	No lecture Attend the exhibit taking time looking at the overall exhibit as well as greeting each of your teams. Also you'll need to evaluate the group projects form our class – we use your evaluation alongside the unknown judges.	