

## ***A Prolegomenon to Dynamics of Spiritual Growth:***

I count it a privilege to teach this class. I am committed to what I teach in it, but experience has taught me that this class may not be the best place for every student who registers for it. Timing is so important in the spiritual life. This may not be the season for you to take this class. Countless lives have been saved through surgery, but that does not mean that everyone needs surgery today! Some of you may not be ready for this course and taking it might do more spiritual harm than good.

### ***Who tend to benefit?***

- Those who have experienced some amount of personal brokenness.
- Those who truly desire to grow in their walk with the Lord and have some consistent patterns of devotion.
- Those who want to go deeper into a specific spiritual discipline.
- Those who want to get a personal sense of how the process of sanctification works.
- Those who have experienced benefits of spiritual discipline and seek a deeper understanding with a desire to share their knowledge and experience with others.
- “The best thing we can give to those we will be caring for is the knowledge of God and His Word through the passion of our own relationship with Him. That is what this class will introduce you to. If you have another worldview of teaching, you will be frustrated.” Previous CE323 Student

### ***Who might not benefit?***

- Those who see their lives as completely under control and see Christian growth as a process of sin management.
- Those who believe that Christian growth comes exclusively from either emotional experiences or intellectual content.
- Deeply hurting persons who are unable/unwilling to discipline their lives.
- Those with little appreciation for or lived understanding of spiritual community. For these students spirituality is a private matter, and there may be frustration with the community dimensions of the class.

### ***Some Ground Rules***

- A desired outcome of this class is community building, so we want to give attention to what might be seen as a “soft” and certainly non-graded dimension of this class.
- Consider this class to be the “lab” for other courses you have taken. This is the class where you can practice some of the things you have been learning about in other courses.
- There is an expectation that you will seek to engage this material in a significant way and recognize that my inability to grade an activity does not minimize its importance.
- In class conversations and group meetings seek for a good blend of both support and challenge in what you say to others.

- The great ecumenical creeds of the church (i.e., Apostle’s creed, Nicene, Chalcedon) establish the broad theological outline for this course. In public discourse, both professor and students are expected to submit to these standards.

**Some Questions you may have:**

- *Will I have to be unduly vulnerable in this class?* In a word, no. The class does require a level of vulnerability. However, we will seek to safeguard what is said, and ultimately your decision on how open to be is always a judgment call left to each student.
- *My faith tradition is in the minority at Wheaton (e.g., Charismatic, Roman Catholic, or Lutheran). Will my patterns of devotion and spirituality be respected?* Yes, this course is about following Jesus more closely by developing a more grounded and robust spiritual life. All Christian traditions provide valuable spiritual practices, teachings and patterns. The class contains an implicit invitation to enrich one’s spiritual practices while, at the same time, drawing even more deeply on one’s own tradition.
- *I have a concern about some spiritual writers. I have been warned that some are really naïve and that many writers in Spirituality have soft and inclusive theologies.* Our textbooks and class readings are all written by orthodox writers who are committed to historical and biblical spirituality. These writers are “formational theologians” and have a different task than “informational theologians” you have encountered in many other classes. The church needs both types of writing and thought.
- *How does this course fit into an academic program?* The mission statement of Wheaton College declares, “Wheaton College exists to help build the church and improve society worldwide by promoting the development of whole and effective Christians through excellence in programs of Christian higher education.” This course is concerned with helping to develop “whole and effective Christians.” Part of what is needed for this outcome is what Paul called “training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). For example, Scripture calls us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Simply hearing that command is not sufficient to enable many Christians to adopt a prayerful lifestyle. The wisdom of the church through the centuries is that training and instruction in the concrete details of devotion is important.

**What I am committed to:**

- Teaching a “mere Christianity” spirituality.
- Praying for the students of this class by name.
- Being respectful of your faith tradition and your personal style while challenging you to follow Jesus more closely.
- Preparing well and teaching as best as I am able.
- Being available to meet with you outside of class.

# CE 323 Dynamics of Spiritual Growth

Spring 2006 (T 7:00-10:15PM, BGC 136)

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## About this course

This course is intended to introduce you to both the academic fields of Christian Spirituality and Christian Spiritual Formation and to help you nurture your own spiritual life. Consequently, the course will have both an academic side as well as a very personal and applied side. I invite you to take this course with a desire to excel at both the bookish side as well as the personal side. You have been trained for years to take the academic aspects of a course seriously (e.g., paper writing, quizzes, and reports), and I ask you to take the applied side even more seriously. It is in applying the material that you have the opportunity for repentance and growth. It will be easy to “fake” a performance in these areas, but the ease of doing so does not minimize the importance of doing this half of the course with all your might.

## Course Covenant

At the back of the syllabus is a course covenant to be signed by all students taking the course. The purpose of the covenant is to clarify the standards and expectations of the course and to help foster a climate of care and inquiry.

## Course Outcomes

- Possessing an understanding of the major biblical passages concerning the spiritual life.
- Coming to understand and appreciate the place of both church life and private devotions in the spiritual life.
- Applying various paradigms and diagnostic structures to the spiritual life.
- Understanding and being inclined to practice spiritual disciplines in an appropriate and grace-filled manner.

## Course Technology

WebCT. This class will make extensive use of WebCT, and each student will need to establish a WebCT account during the initial week of the course. You will take your reading quizzes using it and will find class materials posted there. Set up your account or use an existing one at [webct.wheaton.edu](http://webct.wheaton.edu). If you have questions, go to the help page, [www.wheaton.edu/media/support/webct](http://www.wheaton.edu/media/support/webct). When

you enter your email address, please enter your wheaton.edu address, even if you have mail forwarded; email providers like hotmail and yahoo will block, as spam, emails sent directly from WebCT.

## **Major Assignments**

### **I. Applied Assignments/Soul Projects (50%)**

#### **A. Lectio Divina & Yearnings Reflection (5%)**

Each class member will have the opportunity of leading a small group class in the practice of “Lectio Divina” during a class period.

#### **B. Spiritual Adventure (15%)**

During the term each student will participate in a three-week, self-designed “spiritual adventure.” Students contract with the instructor concerning the exact details of his or her adventure. See “Spiritual Adventure Action Plan” for additional details. As part of this assignment, students will meet in small groups. At the end of the adventure, each student will write a two to three page reflection paper on his or her “spiritual adventure.” See Spiritual Adventure form at end of syllabus.

Without a doubt, the issue of grading seems a bit out of place when we are talking about spirituality. At one level, it might seem best if we just adopted a “grade yourself” policy. Yet, that would not seem to give due to the fact that Christian spirituality has content and a set of established practices and principles. So, in this course, we’ll use a bit of a hybrid approach. I’ll ask you to self-report and evaluate certain spiritual practices you agreed to do, and you’ll also take WebCT quizzes, exams and write papers with an eye on seeing how well you have mastered the material.

#### **C. Love of God Project (15%)**

The most profound truth of the Christian religion is God’s marvelous and passionate love for his people. In this project you are to explore various dimensions of God’s love, in the hope that you will discover anew the depth and tenderness of his love. See the Love of God Project form at end of syllabus for details.

#### **D. Independent Enrichment Projects [IP] (15%)**

These projects are designed to encourage students to engage the course topics through a variety of activities. To receive full credit for this assignment, each student will need to accumulate 50 points (20 points will need to have been earned in A quad). A list of the possible options is available on my website. Points are recorded in class, after you give a brief oral report on what you did.

## II. Conceptual Assignments (50%)

### A. Quizzes (30%)

A series of WebCT quizzes which will be taken outside of class in the computer lab. The dates for these are given in the syllabus.

### B. Examinations (20%)

#### Text Books

Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (CD)  
Bacovcin, *The Way of a Pilgrim* (WP)  
Wilhoit, *Feasting at the Banquet: Resources on Christian Spirituality* (F)

Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (WH)  
Smith, *Embracing the Love of God* (ELG)

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### Section I: Yearnings, Sin and the Gospel

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**Week One**                      **Introduction and Course Overview**  
**Jan 10**

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**Week Two**                      ***The Gospel***  
**Jan 17**

Reading: F, Lovelace (“Dynamics of the Spiritual Life”),  
“The Pilgrim’s Progress.”



WebCT Quiz. Remember that you have a WebCT quiz every week. They are available for one week between classes and must be completed, not begun, by 6:30 PM on the day of class.

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**Week Three**                      ***Born Homesick: Our Thirsts and the Spiritual Quest.***  
**Jan 24**

Reading: F, “Born Homesick,” “The Weight of Glory,”  
“Sacred Romance.”

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### Section II: Invitation to the Contemplative Life

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**Week Four**  
**Jan 31**

**Introduction to the Contemplative Life.**

Reading: Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (all).

Lectio Divina 1 (Isaiah 62:3-5)

Yearnings project due. Meet with instructor to discuss this.

Christian spirituality acknowledges that “the heart is restless until it rests in God.” In this assignment you will be asked to explore the unmet yearnings in your life and understand how these can be used to draw you closer to God.

Take at least ninety minutes in solitude, and catalog on paper (for your own use only) the yearnings/aches most evident in your life.

To help systematize your reflections, you might think of them in the following terms:

- 1) Relational issues (the desire to be deeply known, a yearning for intimacy, a desire to experience unconditional love).
- 2) Personal issues (a desire to excel, the quest to make a difference).
- 3) Social issues (justice, peace, equality).
- 4) Philosophical/aesthetic issues (issues of truth, faith, belief, beauty, performance, worship).

**Use the form at the end of the syllabus to guide you.**

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**Week Five**  
**Feb 7**

***Saying no to hurry and attending to the heart.***

Reading: **CD**, Solitude, **F**, Persona, Tyranny of the Urgent.

Lectio Divina 2 (Psalm 40:1-3).

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**Section III: Formation of the Whole Person**

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**Week Six**  
**Feb 14**

***Deep Change***

Reading: **CD**, Chapter 1 (Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation), **F**, Willard.

Lectio Divina 3 (Romans 8:38-39).

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**Week Seven**  
**Feb 21**

**Spiritual Diseases**

Reading, Bacovcin, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, pp. 3-86. Consult “Reader’s Guide” on my website.

Lectio Divina 4 (Zephaniah 3:17-20).

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**Week Eight**  
**Feb 28**

***Spiritual Practices: Prayer as the Foundation***

**Spiritual Adventure Contract Due.**

Reading: CD, Prayer, F, Lewis, Prayer and Work.

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**Section IV: Spiritual Practices**

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Adventure

**Week Nine**  
**March 7**

***No Class Meeting (Spring Break)***

**Midterm via WebCT due by 5:00 PM Friday, March 17.**

Adventure

**Week Ten**  
**March 14**

***Spiritual Practices: Extended Prayer***

Reading: F, Sanny, “How to Spend a Day in Prayer.”

Adventure

**Week Eleven**  
**March 21**

***Spiritual Practices: Spiritual Disciplines of Engagement.***

Reading: CD, Meditation and Study.

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Adventure

**Week Twelve**  
**March 28**

***Spiritual Practices: Spiritual Disciplines of Abstinence.***

Reading: CD, Fasting and Simplicity.

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**Week Thirteen**  
**April 4**

**Spiritual Practices: Spiritual Disciplines of Discernment**

Reading: **CD**, Guidance, Submissions and **F**, Prayer of Examen.

**“Spiritual Adventure” Reflection paper and completed “Spiritual Adventure Action Plan.” Due Today.**

What you should turn in:

1. Your completed and approved “Spiritual Adventure Action Plan.”
2. For those that did the cafeteria approach, attach a brief log in which you describe in a few sentences when and what you did for the various assignments (such as the random acts of kindness, the time in solitude).
3. Write a brief reflection paper of 2 to 3 typed pages and staple this to your completed action plan. In this paper look at your own experience and note what surprised, pleased, mystified and disappointed you. Also make connections between what you have learned in class and your own adventure.

*You must indicate the grade you believe you should receive on your spiritual adventure.*

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**Week Fourteen**  
**April 11**

**Community Spiritual Formation**

Reading: “Community Spiritual Formation” on reserve.

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**Section V: Accepting God's Love**

Love of God  
Love of God  
Love of God

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**Week Fifteen**  
**April 18**

***Accepting God's Love.***

Reading: Smith, **ELG** (All).

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**Week Sixteen**  
**April 25**

***Forgiveness.***

Reading: **F**, Prayer of Forsaken, Prayer of Tears.  
Last Day to record IP Points.

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**Week Seventeen**  
**May 2**

***Final Examination***

**Love of God Project Due.**

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## Spiritual Adventure Contract Form A (Complete either Form A or B)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CPO: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cafeteria Model.** This approach allows you to sample a number of spiritual disciplines. **As you practice these disciplines, keep a simple log of what you do and when you did it. Turn the log in with your report.**

**Three-week long project.** Select one item from the list below and practice it during your adventure.

- Spend one ninety-minute time of solitude and silence each week. Carefully select a quiet spot where you will not be disturbed.  
 Week 1  Week 2  Week 3
- Every day (5 times a week) use The Daily Office found in the *Book of Common Prayer* for your morning or evening prayer.  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5
- Observe the Sabbath by attending church, refraining from work or study, and giving the day to service, hospitality and spiritual activities.  
 Week 1  Week 2  Week 3
- Each day read a chapter from the Book of Proverbs that corresponds to the day of the month (e.g., on the first, read chapter one, etc.).  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5
- Each day pray through a different Psalm. Seek to do this at the same time each week so you can anticipate the time. For guidance on praying the Psalms consult: Eugene Peterson's *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*; Deitrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*; Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms*.

**Weekly Projects.** Select two items from the list below and practice each one for a week during your adventure.

- Read an extended biblical narrative (e.g., the Abraham saga in Genesis). Read it through enough times so that on each reading you can put yourself in the shoes of a different character. Record what you notice about each character.  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5

- Each day read through the same New Testament epistle in its entirety.  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5
- Practice the discipline of solitude by allowing God to be your vindicator. Do not defend, excuse or explain your actions unless explicitly asked for an explanation by another, and then keep your words few and full of truth.  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5
- Pray daily for an enemy/detractor. Use the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) as a basis for your praying. Seek to bless them.  
 Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4  Day 5

**Daily Projects.** Do two from the list below. You might want to do these on the week when you are not doing a weekly project.

- Fast and pray. Read Foster on fasting for advice.  
Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- Set aside two hours to listen to Scripture-based music. Study the words on the lyric sheets. Jot down what impresses you and use these impressions to shape a concluding time of prayer.  
Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- Find a private spot and spend three hours in silence and solitude (do not speak or study). Deliberately place yourself before the Lord.  
Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- Read Richard Foster's chapter on "Unceasing Prayer" in *Prayer*, follow his suggestions for developing a breath prayer, and then pray it throughout the day. (Text available on my web page.)  
Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Complete this after you have finished your adventure. I should receive a grade of \_\_\_\_\_ for my spiritual adventure.**

## **Spiritual Adventure Contract Form B** (Complete either Form A or B)

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CPO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**One discipline approach.** In this approach to the spiritual adventure, you will explore and practice one discipline.

The spiritual discipline I plan to utilize is (use the disciplines in Foster):

What will you read or study to help guide your practice?

The Details. Tell me exactly what you plan to do. Be sure to mention details like length, location and resources.

Evaluation. How will we know if you accomplished what you set out to do? Suggestions: journal, log of activities, etc.

**Complete this after you have finished your adventure. I should receive a grade of \_\_\_\_\_ for my spiritual adventure.**

## Love of God Project Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CPO: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this project is to encourage students to take time to meditate on and engage the truth of God's love. Complete four of the following activities, noting the date and time spent on each activity.

### Soul projects based on *Embracing the Love of God*.

- If after reading about "God's Acceptance" you discover a hunger to experience God's love, spend at least one-half hour "praying to be drawn" (p. 23).

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

Briefly summarize what you did and found:

- After reading *Embracing the Love of God*, spend an hour and a half in solitude. Before God and your soul, seek to discern what are some of the ways you keep the reality of God's love at a distance.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

Briefly summarize what you did and what you discovered:

- Forgiveness is so central to experiencing God's love. Take an hour in silence and solitude to discern where you may need to extend forgiveness or receive it. Ask God what forgiveness issues you should work on first. Make plans to do it.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

Briefly tell what you did and what you discovered:

- Read over some passages that emphasize the passionate or tender side of God's love. Examples are: Isaiah 62:3-5; Zeph. 3:17-20; Romans 8:38-39; John 3; Hosea 11 & 14; Psalm 131. Select one of these passages to ponder and meditate on. For one week seek to meditate on this passage daily.

What passage did you select? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

Days you mediated on this passage:  M  T  W  T  F  S  S

Briefly describe how you meditated on the passage and what you learned:

- Locate a copy of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (available on my website). Read chapters 11-13, 27-32 (Rev. 3, 4, 13), which emphasize what she learned about divine love through her vision.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

What did you learn about God's love through this reading?

- Set aside an hour to reflect before God on those places of guilt and shame in your life. Apply Smith's principles in "Forgiving Yourself" to those that seem to be impressed on your heart by the Lord.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date you completed the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Time you spent on project.

Briefly indicate what you did and what you learned:

# Yearnings Project

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CPO: \_\_\_\_\_

- I spent at least ninety minutes in solitude.

Briefly describe when and where you did this. How did you prepare for this time?

- I cataloged on paper the yearnings and aches most evident in my life.

In a few sentences describe the intensity and general content of these feelings.

Which of these areas was most evident?

- Relational issues (the desire to be deeply known, a yearning for intimacy, a desire to experience unconditional love).
- Personal issues (a desire to excel, the quest to make a difference).
- Social issues (justice, peace, equality).
- Philosophical/aesthetic issues (issues of truth, faith, belief, beauty, performance, worship).

(Complete next page)

## Yearnings Project p. 2

At the moment, do you see more inclined to: 1) distract yourself from these aches; 2) “medicate” the pain/ache away; 3) use them to draw yourself to God?

What promises do you need to keep with yourself concerning these yearnings?

# Dynamics of Spiritual Growth

## Lectio Divina Leadership

(Turn in on the day you lead your group)

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Passage:** \_\_\_\_\_

The emphasis should be on preparing yourself to lead this activity well. This is not to be a Bible study, but a guided and prayerful reading of the text. Over prepare by praying for your group members, but keep your overt leadership to a minimum. Foster a disciplined sitting before the text and a prayerful reading of it.

1. Tell me about how you spent time with the passages to become familiar with it.
2. Tell me about how you prayed for the group and the time of sacred reading prior to your meeting together.
3. Lectio—reading and meditation. What are you going to do to encourage a slow thoughtful reading and meditation on Scripture?
4. Oratio-prayer. What are you going to do to encourage a time of prayer based on this passage?
5. Contemplatio-contemplation. How are you going to structure a time of silence so that members can have a wordless and quiet rest with God? (use the back side)

# Course Covenant

To help foster a climate conducive to the study of Christian spirituality I have constructed this course covenant. Please carefully read over it and indicate that you have read it and agreed to abide by it by signing the ‘Covenant Agreement Sheet’ in class.

## Attendance and Punctuality

This class has both decided academic and personal components. The expectation is that students want to both learn about the spiritual life as well as practice spiritual activities. We will often begin class with a time of group prayer, so it is important that you be settled in your seat when class begins. In this class “if you’re early, you’re on time; if you’re on time, you’re late.” Because of the experiential nature of this class, tardiness and absence should be avoided (generally three absences or five tardies reduce your grade by at least one letter). Work is due at the time indicated in the syllabus, and late work, if accepted, is penalized one letter grade per day late.

## Academic Honesty

As students and faculty of Wheaton College, we are members of an academic community with high scholarly standards, a commitment to pursuing truth, a recognition that our actions affect others in the community and seeking to follow Jesus’ example of integrity and truthfulness. Academic honesty is essential for establishing and maintaining the trust that is fundamental to the educational process. Examples of academic dishonesty, which will result in disciplinary action, most pertinent to this class include, but are not limited to:

- **CHEATING:** Using unauthorized material or unauthorized help from another person in any work or examination submitted for academic credit.
- **FABRICATION:** Inventing information, citations, reporting participation in activities never done, or inflating the effort put in and/or the effect of various self-reported spiritual activities.
- **FACILITATING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Providing unauthorized material or information to another person.
- **PLAGIARISM:** Representing the work of another as one's own without acknowledging the source.
- **MISREPRESENTATION.** Giving the impression of having done more significant work than you actually did. Examples include: padding references with works not consulted, doing less than your fair share on a group project.

## Communion of the Saints

The readings in this class give you an opportunity to participate in the Communion of the Saints as you sit at the feet and learn from those who have gone before us. The expectation is that we will seek to engage these authors and traditions with a spirit of inquiry, learning and respect.

## Participation & Non-graded Assignments

There are a number of activities that are assumed to be part of the regular class experience. While these are non-graded, it is expected that they will be completed in an appropriate and robust manner.

## Engagement in Class

It is expected that students will come and engage with the material and other students. Please refrain from distracting activities. For example: the double-mindedness of checking a text message while someone is sharing a prayer request is not only rude, but tears at the fabric of the community we need to establish.

This classroom is a portable communications device-free zone—turn off cell phones, don’t text message, etc.