



First Year Seminar (CORE 101)

Every incoming student takes the First Year Seminar the fall semester of their first year at Wheaton College. The First Year Seminar is composed of 2/3 shared content that is the same across all the sections and 1/3 specialized content that is unique to the faculty member and course section. The specialized content for each section of the First Year Seminar is centered around a different enduring question. Read about the different questions and topics of the First Year Seminars being offered in the Fall of 2020 and plan to register for one that catches your interest.

What Is the Christian Imagination?

(CORE 101-1)

How may we imagine the good life Christianly? How is the imagination shaped by scripture and by theological resources? How does the Christian imagination interact with our ability to seek the good life as disciples of Jesus Christ? Answers to these questions will require students to draw on interdisciplinary, liberal arts sources. In the seminar, we will seek a biblically-shaped, theologically faithful imagination which will inspire students to seek the good life.

Why Do We Suffer?

(CORE 101-2, CORE 101-14, CORE 101-15)

To answer the query of “What is the good life” we must also wrestle with the reality of suffering and ask how suffering is for Christians a way to live the good life. The question of why we suffer also raises related questions, which are significant for coming to a more adequate way of asking about suffering particularly in a Christian context. Some of the questions that will be addressed in the final weeks of the semester are: (a) What is evil and what is the origin of evil? (b) Why might God allow suffering? (c) How does suffering fit into (and why is it central to the Christian story? and (d) How should we respond to our own and others’ suffering?

What Is Reality?

(CORE 101-3, CORE 101-10)

This seminar will help students examine how to discern between appearance and reality in both the natural and the spiritual realms. The good life is difficult to attain if one cannot distinguish between true and the false – or between reality and illusion. IN a world that increasingly demands our allegiance to principles and issues that appear to be good but are not always so, we must develop the spiritual discernment needed to determine what is true or false, what is good or bad, and what honors or dishonors the Lord. As we consider the relevance of appearance versus reality to the good life, we will reflect on Biblical, literary, and philosophical responses to our perennial question, ultimately allowing Scripture to guide us.

Accounting for Nature's Beauty

(CORE 101-4)

As Fyodor Dostoevsky once remarked, “Beauty will save the world.” What could he have meant by this enigmatic claim? This seminar speaks to such perennial questions as: “What is beauty?”, “What does beauty tell us about reality?” and “What, if anything, is it there for?” Recognizing the role that beauty plays in the good life, we’ll explore its centrality in the arts, its surprising role in the sciences, its relationship with truth and goodness in philosophy, its revelatory role in theology, and beauty as a means of grace in our day-to-day life. This venture will involve reading texts about beauty but also beautiful texts; in this seminar, you will encounter beauty. It provides, we’ll discover, a window onto a reality that is as transforming as it is unmistakable. Beauty holds the power to transform the individual and the potential to remake the church as a compelling alternative to a culture that has sold out to the power of politics, finance, and celebrity. Ultimately, the beauty that will save the world is the (shocking) beauty of the cross; day-to-day, it is the beauty of a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Happily Ever After

(CORE 101-5, CORE 101-6)

Over two centuries after Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm first published their collection of fairy tales, images and tropes from those tales remain omnipresent, from the fictional “Storybrooke” to the very real Cinderella’s Castle at Disney World, and from “Tangled” to “Into the Woods.” “Happily ever after” is not a mere cliché, but instead a powerful phrase that summons images of glass slippers, poisoned apples, and big, bad wolves. More importantly, it also completes the sentence that begins “And they lived...,” serving as the capstone of stories about the lost who are found, the lowly who are raised up, the poor who become rich. In this FYS section, we’ll explore how both familiar and lesser known fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm define “happily ever after” in relation to the good life. In reflecting on the enduring cultural, moral and spiritual resonance of these products of German Romanticism, we’ll discuss the tales themselves, theoretical studies and essays on the fairy tale genre, and selected adaptations in popular media.

Can Politics Be Civil?

(CORE 101-7)

This section will examine the relationship between civility and democracy, an important theme in politically divisive times. In particular, we will explore the questions: “How do we treat each other well in political communities?” and “How can we engage in politics with civility and respect?” To help us wrestle with these questions, the focused readings in this seminar will examine the nature and purpose of political communities and discuss specific research findings in moral psychology, sociology of race, and political communication that affect how, when, and where people engage in politics. We will use the lens of virtues and vices to identify sinful patterns to avoid and to point us toward God-honoring ways to debate political questions and seek human flourishing.

How Should We Face Death?

(CORE 101-8)

Any answer given to the question, “What is the good life?” will be linked to the question of how we face the end of that life. After all, it makes sense that a good life will lead to a good death. So how should we face death? What kind of spiritual, emotional, and physical preparations should we make for death? What is the proper Christian approach to death, given its relationship to sin (Genesis 2:17, 3:19)? How does the fact that death has been defeated by Jesus Christ change our approach to death (1. Cor. 15:53-57)? And what does the reality of death teach us about the meaning of life?

What Is an Image?

(CORE 101-9)

The question “What is an Image?” is about a lot more than art. Idolatrous images are a primary obstacle between God and his beloved people (2 Kings 21). On the other hand, the Israelites were commanded to make images as well (Exodus 25:18). We ourselves, furthermore, are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). Does this constitute a static possession or a dynamic destiny (I Cor. 15:49)? If Christ is himself the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), are images of Jesus acceptable? What about images of God the Father or God the Holy Spirit (Deut. 4:15)? In the 21st century, we are saturated by images like never before – and they are not all holy. As Christians, should we resist these images or embrace them? Should we recover the best images from Christian history, or should we make new ones?

What Is a Thriving City?

(CORE 101-11)

Students will consider what it means and takes for human communities, and especially cities, to thrive. They will examine various notions of the common good, explore the ways in which it is pursued and achieved or neglected and undermined, and integrate relevant resources from Scripture and the Christian tradition in critiquing and constructing a vision of thriving cities. This question complements the FYS’s theme

question of “What is the Good Life?” by revising the social and community dimensions of that question, by expanding on those dimensions to explore the conditions for and endowments required for living the good life together, and by giving concrete expression to the discourses, institutions, and practices that advance or hinder the pursuit of the good life in community. (*For Aequitas Students Only*)

Culture & the Good Life

(*CORE 101-12*)

How do our cultures shape our understanding of The Good Life? The ways we experience and define The Good Life (Buen Vivir, eudemonia, magandang buhay) are never just products of an individual mind or a solitary encounter with God and scripture. They are always, and necessarily, produced and experienced in a socio-cultural context. This First Year Seminar will engage in a critical, but positive, understanding of the ways people in various cultural contexts think about “The Good Life,” relating these ideas to scripture, tradition and the U.S. context. For us as much as anyone who has ever lived, our communities shape with us our ideas and practices that allow us to make such formulations. Throughout this seminar, and particularly in the final four weeks of the Instructor’s Choice material, we will draw on sociocultural anthropology and related disciplines to encourage a culturally engaged and socially particular interrogation of what it means to live The Good Life.

What Is Love?

(*CORE 101-13, CORE 101-27*)

This seminar will take up the particular enduring question, “What is love?” We will examine various forms of love, including: romantic love, familial love, friendship, love of neighbor, God’s love for us and our love for God. This examination will be grounded in the biblical affirmation that “God is Love” and a biblical and theological account of God’s love for humanity. This perennial question “What is Love?” will complement the theme of the First Year Seminar “What is the good life?” by encouraging students to consider how love directed outside of oneself toward a friend, a spouse, a child, a neighbor, and God is essential to the “good life” – a life in which a person, by God’s grace and call, is turned away from sinful self-preoccupation to love for others. The main text unique to this seminar will be C.S. Lewis’s classic book, *The Four Loves*

Cosmology and the Good Life

(*CORE 101-16*)

Students will explore the question “How is cosmology connected to the good life?” in this section. Historical, theological, scientific, philosophy of social science and cultural criticism readings will be used to explore how all cosmologies are either explicitly or implicitly intertwined with a conception of the good life. Students will start by investigating traditional Chinese, Japanese and Hindu cosmologies and the form of the good life these cosmologies presuppose. Next, they will look at how astronomers learn about the cosmos and learn about contemporary scientific cosmology. Students

will then be in a position to explore what vision of the good life is intertwined with contemporary scientific cosmology in American society. Finally, drawing on the entire semester students will explore whether there is an alternative to the contemporary American/scientific cosmology default conception of the good life.

Living Well in Community

(CORE 101-17)

This perennial question that students will pursue at the end of this FYS will be anchored by Marilynne Robinson's novel "Home", which will be placed within the context of scripture, theology, and works from other disciplinary perspectives as students explore various challenges within community, particularly the loneliness of singleness and the dangers of racism.

What Does It Mean to be Human? Soul, Mind, or Brain?

(CORE 101-18, CORE 101-25)

There are a variety of ways of exploring this question, as a neuroscientist, the instructor will be framing it within the history and development of brain science. Our understanding of what it means to be a human being has been profoundly impacted by research on the brain over the last two centuries. The primary thesis for the section is that there has been a movement in the culture from 'I have a soul', to 'I have a mind', to 'I am a brain.' Included are readings on how our knowledge of brain abnormalities/pathologies (i.e. Alzheimer's Dementia, tumors, etc.) contributes to our understanding of what it means to have value as a human being, and what it means to flourish. In the last 30 years, however, advances in brain imaging technologies have enabled us to look inside the "black box" of the mind and have challenged the way we think about what it means to be human and if human flourishing can be reduced to a matter of neurological eudemonia.

Neuroscience and Christian Spiritual Formation

(CORE 101-19)

Regularly, newspapers and media outlets report on advances in neuroscience that propose to explain our personhood via biological networks in our brains, thereby reducing human persons to the neural hardware in self-contained system, or as Richard Dawkins might say, "nothing but DNA replicators." As we examine, in this First Year Seminar, the question of "What is the Good Life?" how are we to respond to the research that reports we are nothing but our biology? And, most importantly, how does this inform our spiritual formation and our understanding of being the Imago Dei? Students will leave this section of the course with an appreciation for how science and faith interact within a Christian worldview and able to connect neuroscience findings with their own spiritual formation.

Diversity & Community

(CORE 101-20)

Our course will study human flourishing in the context of community: “In what ways is human flourishing defined by and rooted in community?” “How can we flourish given the challenges and realities of our differences?” Individual and group identities are often based upon the intersection of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic resources, and race. What the good life entails and who may pursue it are profoundly influenced by a sense of the differences between individuals. Men and women in other historical and cultural contexts often defined the good life in strikingly different ways—particularly in their emphasis on the centrality of community to human flourishing. In this seminar, students will examine the question of living well in diverse communities through a series of case studies on cross-cultural encounters in early North America. Topics include *American Beginnings: Columbus and the Taino*, *After the Mayflower: Pilgrims and the Wampanoag*, *Salem Divided: War and Witchcraft in a New England Community*, and *Carolina Risings: Bondage, Freedom, and Revolt in Stono and Charleston*. In doing so, they will engage with course materials that draw upon the insights of several disciplines including history, anthropology, theology, and environmental studies.

Adulthood & the Good Life

(CORE 101-22)

What does it mean to become an adult? Do people want to become adults? This course looks at the transition to adulthood and the various ways in which both scholars and the media have defined the adult “good life.” We will look at the changing nature of adulthood in contemporary western societies and the nature of spiritual and identity development in light of these changes. We will also discuss some of the key spiritual formation perspectives and practices that can foster the “good life” during the adult transition. As Christians on the cusp of adulthood, what does it mean to “grow up” in a way that is faithful to our calling to love God and neighbor? This First Year Seminar will address that question as we seek to discern the meaning and purpose of Christian adulthood.

What Is an Individual?

(CORE 101-23, CORE 101-26)

The perennial question—What does it mean to be an individual?—provides students the opportunity to consider how beliefs, assumptions, and narratives concerning personhood and identity influence our understanding of “the good life.” Key questions will be based on an understanding of the term individual as “indivisible,” or part of a larger whole, as well as “distinct from others.” Readings will consider how philosophers, theologians, writers, and artists have thought about individuality in terms of embodiment, the shaping power of culture, and the rise of humanitarian movements that emphasize our sympathetic attachments to both local and global communities.

Christian Spiritual Practices

(CORE 101-24, CORE 101-33)

When thinking about the good life, people today are inclined to first think about what possessions are needed in order to have such a life. We have been trained to think that we are what we have or what we consume. However, we get a much different answer from the ancient world. To paraphrase Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do.” The good life, then, is more determined by our habits than by what we possess. The Christian tradition acknowledges this emphasis on habit and habit formation and also emphasizes the importance of the heart: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23). The selected theme builds on the overall topic of the good life and Christian discipleship. Specifically, we will survey “How do Christian spiritual practices contribute to the good life?” We will explore how Christians have understood the development of virtues and the disciplines that promote them as vital to the good and full life. Accordingly, students will be introduced to several classic Christian spiritual disciplines that promote habits for flourishing.

Emotions and the Good Life

(CORE 101-28)

Humans are created to be whole beings who experience a variety of emotions as they interact with the world around them. How does our understanding of emotions contribute to our understanding of well-being, including spiritual well-being, and vice versa? In this course, we will explore both psychological and theological understandings of emotions in human experience, including theories of emotion, the development of emotion and its regulation, the ways in which we understand emotional functioning to be healthy or maladaptive, and emotions in the Bible and in Christian thought. Through the exploration of these topics, we will seek together to better understand how our emotions can enable us to richly engage with our environments and with God and help us live “the good life.”

Freedom and the Good Life

(CORE 101-29)

Freedom is, quite obviously, a central feature of American life, and democratic life more generally. But the question of what it means to live as a free person has long occupied theologians, philosophers, and a wide range of other thinkers as well. This seminar will prod students into thinking more carefully about what it is we mean when we talk about “freedom” and the degree to which freedom matters for our lives as Christians and members of a distinct political community.

How Do Power and Tragedy Shape the Good Life?

(CORE 101-30, CORE 101-31)

An exploration of how expressions of power—be they individual, cultural, political, or divine—and experiences of tragedy shape and challenge the Christian pursuit of the Good Life.

How Do We Love “the Other”?

(CORE 101-34)

The concepts of “the Other,” “otherness,” “othering” have taken root in diverse academic disciplines, including sociology, nursing science, psychology, literary criticism, and transcultural studies. The Bible provides us with crucial accounts of Christ demonstrating the love of the Other, the sick, the outcast, the profane, and the foreign. While our love of Christ compels us toward the love of the Other, the capacity to empathize (even though it seems innate) is a trained skill. This seminar is based on a premise that the use of the imagination is a spiritual discipline for learning to love the Other in different contexts. Through readings, discussions and projects, students will take on the challenge of seeing the world from the viewpoint of the Other, those who are distanced from them racially, geographically, culturally, linguistically, gender-wise, etc. Without the training of one’s imagination for the sake of love, “Good Life” is simply not possible.

Where Do We Come From? God’s Universe Within

(CORE 101-35)

Our question leads us to explore the influence of past events in the history of the cosmos, Earth and life on the human body and mind. Our two primary books are *God’s Universe* by Owen Gingerich and *The Universe Within: Discovering the Common History of Rocks, Planets and People*, by Neil Shubin. Gingerich, a Harvard University astronomer and Christian, explains how the mainstream scientific enterprise and subsequent interpretations complement Christian understandings of divine action and the biblical accounts of origins. Shubin, a University of Chicago paleobiologist, writes from a mainstream scientific perspective and perceptively interprets the world we know, including our bodies, in the context of discoveries from astronomy, geology and paleobiology. Shubin asks questions like, “Where did the elements in our bodies come from?” “Why is there so much liquid water on Earth and not on other planets?” “Why do we live by the day-night clock in our bodies?” Both books introduce readers to the scientists, men and women from many different cultures, who were responsible for breakthroughs in knowledge of the history of the cosmos and life. Additional articles further elaborate concepts of divine action, the methods, authority and purviews of science and theology as ways of knowing, and historical and contemporary examples of scientific discovery.

Who Is God?

(CORE 101-36)

“Who is God?” is a foundational question for human existence, for only when we rightly know God can we rightly know ourselves and God’s creation. Scripture reveals many names for God, but in the New Testament, “Father” takes pride of place. This class explores the Old and New Testaments as well as church history and theology to understand what Christians mean when we call God “Father.” We then explore familial dimensions of the story of salvation: God’s partnering with a mother, Mary, to bring his Son, and Christians’ identity as sons and daughters of God. This FYS invites you to grasp in a deeper way the character of God who is our Father.