

IDS1200 Discover What Matters

Section 06 - Fall 2024 – MWF 10:40-11:45AM

Instructor: Josh Fenska

Office Hours: Wednesday, 12-4pm, Zoom or on campus, by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Discover what matters. And build your life around it.” Such is the essential purpose of an Aurora University education. This thematic seminar course will engage students in a process of discovery and reflection by grappling with enduring questions about what matters in their individual lives and the world around them. Students will read and discuss core texts, develop effective communication and critical thinking skills, and meet one-on-one with faculty members to receive guidance and feedback. The course is designed to help launch a student’s journey through a successful and meaningful college experience.

SIMPLE COURSE OUTLINE:

In this course, we’ll explore some of life’s most important (and most challenging) questions. We’ll explore “what matters” and what difference that can make for how you live—in college and beyond. Three big questions will organize our semester:

1. Discovering what matters in education: What are we doing in college?
2. Discovering what matters in life: What is your vision of what makes life worth living?
3. Discovering what matters for future work: How can your values function in your field of interest?

REQUIRED TEXTS

Alejandra Campoverdi. *First Gen: A Memoir*. New York: Grand Central, 2023. ISBN: 978-1538757185

- Professor’s note: To honor the significance of “first generation” students at AU, Campoverdi will speak on campus on November 20. In this course, her lively memoir will raise important questions about life.

Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz. *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most*. New York: Viking, 2023. ISBN: 978-0-593-48930-7

- Professor’s note: This book comes from a popular class at Yale University—a humanities class exploring what makes life worth living. It asks very important questions, explores ancient and modern answers, and then invites each of us to consider how we will live.
- Syllabus note: For the sake of brevity, this book appears in the rest of this syllabus simply as “Volf.”

GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

The university’s approach to general education reflects a commitment to the transformative power of learning. Grounded in the university’s core values of integrity, citizenship, continuous learning, and excellence, Aurora University seeks to develop and graduate students who communicate effectively and think critically. This course is designed to help you make progress towards fulfilling the following two University Learning Outcomes:

- *Effective Communication*. Students will communicate clearly and offer well-supported arguments within their writing and speaking.
- *Critical Thinking*. Students will demonstrate skills of analysis, problem solving, and application.

IDS1200 COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course is designed to help you achieve the following learning outcomes:

- 1. Critical Thinking** - Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills by pursuing questions about “what matters.” Students will be able to analyze content from course materials to address these questions, evaluate the evidence they discover, and offer relevant conclusions. Assessed in the *Essays #1 & #2* and the *Final Essay*.
- 2. Reading and Literacy** - Students will demonstrate critical reading and literacy skills by sharing responses to course texts in writing and class discussions. Assessed in *Quizzes, Forum Posts, and Class Participation*.
- 3. Active Discussion and Speaking** - Students will demonstrate effective oral presentation skills in both class discussions and individual public speaking. Assessed in *Class Participation, Classroom Co-Leadership, and Final Presentations*.
- 4. Writing** - Students will be able to offer focused, well-supported, organized and clear arguments in writing. Assessed in the *Essays #1 & #2, Forum Posts, and Final Essay*.
- 5. Collaboration** – Students will be able to work effectively in partnership with the instructor and other students in the class. Assessed through *Class Participation and Classroom Co-Leadership*.

“LIFE WORTH LIVING” OUTCOMES

After successfully completing this course, a student will be able to:

- Describe and analyze their default visions for their college experience and a good life.
- Describe and analyze distinct perspectives on a good life from diverse philosophical and religious traditions.
- Develop and articulate a vision for integrating key values into a specific field of work.
- Dialogue respectfully and constructively in truth-seeking conversations about the good life across important and enduring lines of difference.

FIVE COURSE PRINCIPLES

Respectful learning: “Respect” will emerge in a variety of ways throughout our course: respect for the diverse authors we read, respect for wider philosophical and religious traditions, respect for our shared humanity, and respect, specifically, for each other. At the most practical level, this will mean treating each other with dignity even—or especially—when we disagree.

Pursuit of existential meaning: In this course, we will explore some of the deepest questions of life. We must acknowledge from the beginning that we will not get to the bottom of such questions or become experts who know all there is to know. Along the way, we will often discover that we have more questions than answers. Nonetheless, this course aims to inspire a lifelong journey in pursuit of what matters.

Truth-seeking pluralism: We live in a diverse world, characterized by important and enduring lines of difference. We *will not* take the observation of our world’s diversity as a reason to give up in the pursuit of meaning; rather, we *will* take it as an opportunity to dig deeper into the most important questions. To say it another way, while we *will not* attempt to make diverse perspectives produce the same answers, we *will* anticipate that each of us can learn in the process of listening.

First-person engagement: Some college classes will (wisely) ask students to bracket their views and refrain from personal answers. This class, however, will prioritize first-person engagement with existential questions. After considering what others have said about important topics, we will ask students to identify, analyze, and develop their answers.

Life-giving learning community: The classroom at its best is much more than an opportunity for students to listen to a lecture. In this course, we will partner together in a learning process. And, together, we hope to become a community that will motivate each participant to live out their vision for life far beyond the classroom itself.

GRADING & ASSIGNMENT SCALE

Assignment

Writing Assignments	400
Essay 1	50
Essay 2 Milestone	20
Essay 2	100
Final Essay Milestones	30
Final Essay	200
Presentation & Collaboration	300
Classroom Co-Leadership	75
Final Presentation	75
Class Participation	150
Quizzes & Forum Posts	300
Quizzes	100
Forum Posts	200
Total Points Possible:	1000

GRADING

A = 90%-100% | B = 80%-89.99% | C = 70%-79.99% | D = 60%-69.99% | F = below 60%

Letter grades in this course are assigned as described by the Aurora University Undergraduate Catalog:

- A (4 quality points per semester hour) Denotes performance that consistently exceeds expectations and demonstrates comprehensive understanding of the subject.
- B (3 quality points per semester hour) Denotes performance that meets and at times exceeds expectations and indicates good preparation in the subject.
- C (2 quality points per semester hour) Denotes performance that meets expectations and demonstrates adequate preparation in the subject.
- D (1 quality point per semester hour) Denotes performance that is inadequate or inconsistently meets expectations and makes it inadvisable to proceed further in the subject without additional work.
- F (0 quality points per semester hour) Failure. Denotes performance that consistently fails to meet expectations.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Below are brief descriptions of each course assignment. You should expect more details for each assignment throughout the course; be sure to consult the assignment-specific instructions (typically posted in the Communication Forum in Brightspace).

Quizzes and Forum Posts

Frequently in this course, you will complete short quizzes in class or written forum posts in response to assigned readings. While there will not be a quiz or response for every class session, *students should be prepared in every class for a Quiz on the assigned reading for the day (or for any previous reading from the current unit).*

Essay #1 (“The Purpose of Education”)

In 1947, Martin Luther King, Jr., published an essay entitled “[The Purpose of Education](#).” This short essay assignment challenges students to articulate their own visions for the purpose of education, in response to a variety of perspectives presented in Unit 1. This essay will also focus on fundamental skills in writing, citation, and editing. (Please refer to Brightspace and in-class instructions for more details.)

Essay #2 (“Your Vision in Dialogue”)

This short essay will challenge students to articulate their own vision for what matters in life, in “dialogue” with one specific author/tradition. This essay will demonstrate an understanding of how others have answered some of life’s deepest questions, with a response to the author’s current vision, which may agree or disagree with the chosen author/tradition. (Please refer to Brightspace and in-class instructions for more details.)

Field Interview

This assignment will help you connect the dots between our class materials and *a field of work that interests you*. Students will craft a hypothesis about how certain values/virtues may function in a field of work. Then students will craft questions and interview a professional with expertise in their field of interest. This interview will then serve as a type of qualitative research that students will integrate into their Final Essay and Final Presentation. *As needed, students may seek assistance from the professor for identifying a professional to interview.* (Please do not schedule or conduct this interview until the professor gives further guidelines in class.)

Final Essay (“Your Vision at Work”)

These will be formal argumentative essays (5-7 pages) requiring citations of readings and other materials from the class. These Final Essays will be a capstone assignment for this course, asking students to demonstrate how aspects of their vision may function in a field of interest. There will be several milestone assignments (such as a First Draft to be reviewed by a peer) leading up to this Final Essay. (Please refer to Brightspace and in-class instructions for more details.)

Final Presentation

This is a formal oral presentation in place of a final exam in this course. You will present your hypothesis, research, and conclusions from your Final Essay. (Please refer to Brightspace and in-class instructions for more details.)

Classroom Co-Leadership

To promote collaboration, participation, and presentation skills, students will be asked to work together in groups to co-lead a portion of one class during the semester. At the beginning of Unit 2, each student will be assigned to a group and each group will be assigned a chapter. On the day that chapter reading is due, students will deliver a presentation to help the class understand the background of the figures and concepts presented in the chapter, and will bring good discussion questions for the class. Note: To allow time for revision, 4 days prior to the due date of the assigned reading, each group should submit (1) a presentation slide deck and (2) a list of discussion questions. (Please refer to BRIGHTSPACE and in-class instructions for more details.)

Class Participation

Class participation is *very important* in this course. You are expected to attend class, contribute to discussions, and participate fully in any class activities (including a scheduled “Professor-Student Meeting”). Some days, participation in the classroom will include activities such as smaller group discussions with peers. *Simply put, class participation means listening carefully and then respectfully offering your own questions and responses when you have an opportunity.* You will receive an update at least once during the course of your current participation “rating” (A, B, C, D, F). You will then have an opportunity to increase this rating by increasing your involvement in class. Your rating may also decrease as the class progresses. Your final grade for participation will be recorded at the end of the class based on your participation rating at that time. (One example of what may decrease your participation score: scrolling through social media instead of paying attention while another student is talking.)

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Reading Assignment</u>	<u>Due Dates</u>
Unit 1: What Matters in Education			
Week 1	26-Aug		
	28-Aug	Campoverdi, Prologue	
	30-Aug	Campoverdi, Ch 1	Forum 1
Week 2	2-Sep	Kimmerer, "Asters and Goldenrod" (PDF)	
	4-Sep	Campoverdi, Ch 4	
	6-Sep	Campoverdi, Ch 5	Forum 2
Week 3	9-Sep	professor-student mtgs (no class)	
	11-Sep	professor-student mtgs (no class)	
	13-Sep	professor-student mtgs (no class)	Essay #1: The Purpose of Education
Unit 2: What Matters in Life			
<i>Asking Good Questions about the Good Life</i>			
Week 4	16-Sep	Volf, Intro	
	18-Sep	Volf, Ch 2	
	20-Sep		Forum 3
<i>Positive Psychology and the Good Life</i>			
Week 5	23-Sep	Max, "Happiness 101" (Link)	
	25-Sep	Seligman (PDF)	
	27-Sep	Volf, Ch 1	Forum 4
<i>Graeco-Roman Visions of the Good Life</i>			
Week 6	30-Sep	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (PDF)	
	2-Oct	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i> (PDF)	
	4-Oct	Volf, Ch 4	Forum 5
<i>Utilitarian Visions of the Good Life</i>			
Week 7	7-Oct	Singer (PDF)	
	9-Oct	Volf, Ch 5	
	11-Oct	Volf, Ch 6	Forum 6
<i>Jewish, Christian, & Muslim Visions</i>			
Week 8	14-Oct	Volf, Ch 3	
	16-Oct	Volf, Ch 7	
	18-Oct	King, "The Drum Major Instinct" (PDF)	Forum 7
Week 9	21-Oct	FALL BREAK (no class)	
		<i>Buddhist Visions of the Good Life</i>	
	23-Oct	Singer & Chao-Hwei (PDF)	
	25-Oct	Volf, Ch 10-11	Forum 8

		<i>Native American Visions of the Good Life</i>	
Week 10	28-Oct	Kimmerer, "The Council of Pecans" (PDF)	
	30-Oct	Volf, Ch 12	
	1-Nov	Volf, Ch 8	Essay 2 Milestone
		<i>Joining the Conversation about the Good Life</i>	
Week 11	4-Nov	Volf, Ch 9	Forum 9
	6-Nov		
	8-Nov		Essay #2: Your Vision in Dialogue

Unit 3: What Matters for Future Work

Week 12	11-Nov	Campoverdi 6	
	13-Nov	Campoverdi 7	Milestone: Hypothesis & Qs
	15-Nov	Campoverdi 8	Forum 10
Week 13	18-Nov	Campoverdi 9	
	20-Nov	Volf 13	Note: Campoverdi Events
	22-Nov	Volf 14	Milestone: Field Interview
Week 14	25-Nov		Milestone: Draft Outline
	27-Nov	<i>Thanksgiving Break (no class)</i>	
	29-Nov	<i>Thanksgiving Break (no class)</i>	
Week 15	2-Dec	Volf, 15 & Epilogue	
	4-Dec		
	6-Dec		Essay #3: Your Vision at Work
Week 16			Final Presentations

Note: according to AU's Final Exam schedule for 2024-2025, our final presentations are scheduled for **Monday, December 9, 11:15am-2:00pm.**

CLASS POLICIES

Attendance and Tardiness

A college classroom is a professional environment. Consistent class attendance, punctuality and participation are expected of all students. Successful performance in this course depends on the skills and knowledge you accumulate while both conducting your readings and attending class sessions. Poor attendance or tardiness will have a direct effect on your grade in the class. A policy of attendance is also necessary in order to make sure class time is used efficiently, to eliminate disruptions caused by students arriving late or leaving early, and to ensure fair evaluation of all students' participation in the course.

It is understood that events in your life will sometimes cause you to miss class or arrive late, and considerations will be made in special cases at the discretion of the professor. Letting your professor know that you will be missing class is considered professional behavior, but this does not mean an absence is "excused."

Arriving Late: Arriving late is defined as a failure to be in class when the professor takes attendance. If you arrive to class after attendance has been taken, **you will be marked absent**. You must discuss your late arrival with the professor at the end of that day's class session in order to have this changed to a late arrival in the attendance record. It will not be changed after this point. If you were more than 15 minutes late to class, it may remain recorded as an absence at the discretion of the professor.

Leaving Early: Leaving early is defined as leaving before the professor dismisses the class. This will also be entered into the attendance record. If you left more than 15 minutes before class ends, it may be recorded as an absence at the discretion of the professor.

Officially Excused Absences: For a student to receive an officially excused absence, the student is required to provide official documentation. University-sponsored events, such as participation in sporting events or other University functions, will generally qualify as an officially excused absence, but it is still the responsibility of the student to notify the professor in advance of the absence. Depending on the nature of the officially excused absence, the student should consult with the professor to determine if any due date extensions will be granted (see late work policy).

Unexcused Absences: In the case of an unexcused absence (including attendance tardiness), all assignments are still due at the time and date announced, regardless of the student's attendance. Assignments submitted late will be penalized per the course late work policy, which is outlined in this syllabus. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, exams or other in-class assignments in the case of unexcused absences.

Attendance/Tardiness and Your Course Grade: Absences and tardiness or leaving early from class will have a negative effect on your participation and attendance grade, which constitutes more than 15% of your grade in the class. See the Participation and Attendance Rubric (next page) for more information.

- In addition, after **four** unexcused absences, your final course grade will be lowered by **½ letter grade for each additional unexcused absence**.
- After **four** instances of arriving late or leaving early, your final course grade will be lowered by **¼ letter grade for each additional case of arriving late or leaving early**. These penalties will be applied to the final course grade at the end of the term.

Participation and Attendance

Your participation and attendance grade constitutes 15% of your final course grade (150 points possible out of 1000 total points for the class). It will be added to your final course grade at the end of the term.

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted except in special circumstances as determined by the professor. For serious emergencies, your professor will decide whether your late work may be accepted for full or reduced credit. Serious emergencies include: serious illness, accidents, family emergencies, natural disasters, etc. Contact your professor with the information about your emergency and request approval to make up the missed or late work. If you receive approval, make up the work according to the plan set by you and the professor.

For all other matters (e.g., work, technical, or other personal issues), your professor will decide whether your late work may be accepted. **If it is accepted, there will typically be a per diem late penalty of 5% of the assignment value per calendar day late.** For late work make-up which is not emergency-based, you should request approval BEFORE the final assignment deadline. Typically, only one non-emergency late submission will be allowed per student per course.

Make-up work or examinations, if approved by the professor with evidence of an excused emergency, will vary in substance and procedure for administration at the discretion of the professor. Before any make-up work or examination is given, it is incumbent upon the student seeking the make-up to prove to the professor's satisfaction that a make-up option is justified. (NOTE: See Attendance Policy for more details)

Guidelines for Assignment Submission & Other Noteworthy Items

The following guidelines should be followed when completing any assignment for this course, unless specified otherwise by the professor. Failure to comply with these guidelines may result in a lower grade assigned for the specific assignment:

- All assignments should be submitted **via Brightspace**.
- All assignments are **due by 8am** on the day marked in the course schedule, unless the instructor assigns a different time in writing (e.g. in the Communication Forum in Brightspace). This time is chosen because your assignments are often a basis for in-class discussions. *For a 9:15am class, functionally speaking, it will be better for most students to turn in assignments the night before class rather than turning in assignments early in the morning. However, until 8am on the day noted, assignments will not be counted as "late."*
- Failure to follow directions for assignment submission may result in a point penalty to your grade.
- All assignments must be submitted as *professional documents* complying with all University policies and procedures governing *academic integrity*.
 - All assignments must be *free of spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors*.
 - All assignments must be *typed using 12-point Times New Roman font* unless the professor indicates otherwise.
 - All assignments should conform to MLA style and citation guidelines.

In-class/Group Assignments

Many of the assignments in the course will be done in class. If you are absent from class on these days, you will receive a zero for the assignment or it will affect your participation grade in the course. The course may also include group-based assignments, for which class time will be allotted for group work. If you are absent on these days, your individual score on the group assignment will be penalized, regardless of how much work you may have done on the project outside of class.

Expectations for Classroom Etiquette

There are certain behaviors that are disrespectful and unprofessional in a classroom environment. These will be interpreted as disengagement with the course, and therefore, lack of participation. Many of these are also disruptive and annoying to your fellow students. A few of these include:

- a. showing up to class late or leaving early
- b. using electronic devices (texting, reading emails, surfing internet, etc.) excessively
- c. talking while others are talking (the professor or other students)
- d. doing homework (from this class or other classes) during instruction time
- e. packing up your stuff before class is done
- f. sleeping
- g. inappropriate comments or language

Use of Technology in the Classroom Policy

Please refrain from instant messaging, text messaging, using social media, e-mailing, surfing the internet, playing games, doing assignments for other classes, etc. during class time. Acceptable uses of technology (laptops, mobile devices) include taking notes, following along with the instructor in whole-class activities, as well as working on assigned in-class activities, projects, and discussions that require technology use. It is easy for your technology to become a distraction to you and to those around you. Inappropriate uses will be noted and may affect your final grade. Therefore, it is the policy of this course that computers, mobile phones, tablets, and other wireless internet access shall be used in class only for purposes that are educationally relevant to class and only in a manner that is not unreasonably distracting to fellow students.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools for Coursework in IDS1200

New technologies in artificial intelligence (AI) can serve as powerful tools to process information and generate written content. These tools range from simple grammar checkers to chatbots that will produce fully composed written work. There may be cases where use of these AI composition tools will be appropriate for certain tasks or other work in your college courses. The IDS1200 first-year seminar course, however, is specifically designed to advance your skills in effective communication and critical thinking. Therefore, the use of these tools as a substitute for your own writing and thinking will weaken your opportunities to enhance these skills. If you present content composed by AI as your own original work, it will be seen as misrepresentation and may be treated as academic dishonesty. Your instructor will specify how and when the use of AI tools is appropriate within this class. If your instructor does not specify, you should assume that it is *not* appropriate.