

EAC 762: Meaning and Purpose in Higher Education
Spring 2026
Tuesdays, 9:35AM-12:20PM

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Office hours immediately after class or by appointment

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Course Description

Meaning and Purpose in Higher Education invites graduate students pursuing careers in higher education to cast a vision for their work that is attuned to and grounded in the deeper purposes, values, and philosophies that matter most to them. The course engages perspectives from a variety of philosophical and religious traditions as well as inspirational writings from educators and theorists who reflect different identity narratives and various historical and contemporary moments and movements. Learners will also delve into research that illuminates the complex story of meaning, purpose, spirituality, and religion in higher education communities across time. Taught in a hybrid format, this course weaves together opportunities for contemplative individual work alongside interdependent work and dialogue in a community of practice.

Guiding Questions and Objectives

As a learning community, we will support and challenge one another as we consider these guiding questions:

- How are meaning, purpose, spirituality, and religion embedded (or not) within higher education systems and structures—as well as in the lives of people (students, staff, and faculty) who make up higher education communities?
- How have our personal journeys led us to the work of education? How do we experience work in education as a calling?
- What grounds our work in education (e.g., purposes, values, philosophies, and hopes)?
- What does it look like to flourish—and support the flourishing of others—in the educator life?
- How do we endure the educator life in the midst of challenge and failure?
- What makes the educator life meaningful and worthwhile?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe how meaning, purpose, spirituality, and religion manifest, historically and currently, in diverse higher education settings and within the lives of students, staff, and faculty;
- Critically reflect on the spiritual and existential contours of your life story and how they connect to and inspire your work in education; and
- Create a sustaining vision for a meaningful and flourishing life as an educator.

Guiding Principles

Pursuit of existential meaning: In this class the big questions of life are at the forefront. Together we will connect our scholarly work and professional pursuits to that which inspires our sense of meaning, awe, and wonder. The questions we will engage in this class will be relevant to our own purpose in life as well as to our work as higher education practitioners, leaders, and researchers.

Truth-seeking pluralism: Pluralism is cultivated in educational settings where learners feel supported and free to express their own identities, beliefs, and values while they are challenged by exchanges across difference that disrupt their assumptions and stereotypes. Growth in pluralistic capacities often goes hand-in-hand with deep reflection on, exploration of, and commitment to beliefs, values, and practices that are personally and culturally relevant. In this class we will seek to honor our differences and explore them with care and respect. The readings we will explore are intentionally curated to feature authors of different theoretical and paradigmatic perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and religious identities. In our dialogue, we put different writers in conversation with one another, embracing the tensions and drawing our own conclusions along the way.

First-person engagement: You are invited to bring your full self into this community of learners. This class makes space for us to share important stories from our lives. I encourage us all to think beyond typical positionality statements common in qualitative (and sometimes quantitative) research and to more sincerely contemplate and assess how our lived experiences lead us to the values that guide us in the work we do and the ways we engage and serve the communities that are centered in our work.

Life-giving learning community: In this class we will seek to build a community where we can be authentic, curious, engaged, empathic, and supportive of one another. To create community, we will take part in meaningful conversations and collaborative activities, offering one another ongoing encouragement along with caring and constructive feedback. This *interdependent* nature of this course provides you with an opportunity to write and create in a self-directed way—but to go about the work buoyed by the support of a humanizing community, including a faculty mentor and group of peers.

Classroom Community Principles

Here are some community principles that matter a great deal in this class (I welcome your thoughts on these and any others that matter to you):

Honoring Identities and Narratives

The identities, narratives, lived experiences, and perspectives you bring to this class are valued and honored in the learning we will do together. We identify with different races and cultures; social classes; gender identities; sexualities; (dis)abilities; and religions, secularities, and spiritualities. I invite your feedback anytime about the extent to which this class feels welcoming, just, and equitable. If there are ways I can offer support to you, please be in touch. Support might look like (but is not limited to):

Affirming gender identity. To affirm the identities of genderqueer, nonbinary, and transgender students in the classroom and beyond, please let me know if you wish to use a name and/or pronouns other than what is indicated in the student directory.

Creating equitable accommodations. NC State “is required to accommodate an otherwise qualified individual with a disability by making a reasonable modification in its services, programs, or activities.” To use available accommodations, you can register with the [Disability Resource Office](#). For more information on NC State’s policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation (REG02.20.01) (<https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-01>).

Respecting religious, secular, or spiritual observances. We honor diverse religious, secular, and spiritual identities and commitments in this class. We can make arrangements for you to miss class for religious, secular, or spiritual observances. Please let me know in advance of the event or holiday. For more information about NC State policies regarding absences for religious observances please see: <https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-03-attendance-regulations/>

Showing Up For One Another

This classroom community is not the same without you! Your presence matters and makes a difference here. Given the asynchronous days, wellness day, and spring break, our class meets nine times. Please do what you can to join us each time. Of course, things come up. If you have an illness, emergency, hardship, or an important personal or professional commitment, we can arrange for make-up work. To the greatest extent possible, please don’t miss more than one class meeting and if you are able to give advance notice, please do. There is flexibility and grace, and I am sensitive to your circumstances. Please know you can talk to me about any situation, and we can work out a plan together to help you be successful in this class. “Showing up” also means turning work in on time. Unless I hear from you, late work loses 5% per day past the deadline. Extensions may be granted for students facing significant hardship or emergency situations without the loss of points. Please contact me if such situations arise. To receive a final grade in the class, all assignments must be turned in by the last day of classes.

Attributing Carefully

It is important to attribute ideas and words to the person/people who put them out into the world. I expect high regard for integrity in this class, including careful attention to crediting the work of others when their ideas are cited in your written assignments. Please review the University policy on academic integrity and plagiarism found in the Code of Student Conduct: <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01>.

Using AI Ethically

In this course, you are able to explore and utilize generative AI tools, such as chatbots, text generators, paraphraser, and so forth, as part of your learning and coursework. These tools can be valuable for brainstorming, drafting, and enhancing your understanding of the material. However, it is important to critically assess and cite any AI-generated content used in your assignments and projects. You are expected to demonstrate your own understanding and critical thinking in your work. Proper attribution and transparency about your use of an AI tool are expected. Here are some examples of ethical and responsible generative AI use:

- Use AI tools only for tasks that are appropriate for your level of learning and understanding. Do not use AI tools to replace your own thinking or analysis, or to avoid engaging with the course content.
- Cite any AI tools you use properly, following APA style. Example:
 - OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT (Mar 14 version) [Large language model].
<https://chat.openai.com/chat>
- Provide evidence of how you used the AI tool and how it contributed to your work and learning. For each deliverable that draws on AI, provide a statement that explains what you learned from the AI tool, how you verified its accuracy and reliability, how you integrated its output into your work, and how you acknowledged its limitations and biases.
- Take full responsibility for any mistakes or errors made by the AI tool. Do not rely on the AI tool to produce flawless or correct results. Always critically reflect on the output.

If you have any questions about what constitutes ethical and responsible use of AI tools, please consult with the instructors.

Adapted statement from NC State DELTA Teaching Resources (<https://teaching-resources.delta.ncsu.edu/develop-an-ai-syllabus-statement/>)

Offering Constructive Feedback

I care very much about your experiences in this class and will provide a feedback form on occasion to gather your reflections. You are also welcome to share your input throughout the semester.

Course Materials

There is one required book for this class:

Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters Most by Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz (2023)

All readings and course materials are available on Moodle. I made every effort to select timely, engaging pieces to coincide with each unit's theme. I gave a lot of thought to representing different identity narratives across our readings this semester. I considered authors' identities and the populations featured in the articles when selecting readings. In addition to the readings, you may be asked to watch videos or listen to podcasts before class meetings that focus on the theme for the day. Links to the video and podcasts are provided in Moodle.

Course Format and Organization

This hybrid course meets in real time every other week; the weeks in between class meetings are intended to provide space for your engagement with and reflection on course materials and guiding questions in preparation for conversations we will have when we gather.

The class is organized by the central questions posed in *Life Worth Living* and uses some narratological elements that get us to consider the past, present, and future (for our own lives and higher education).

Assignments

Class Engagement (150 points) and Centering Exercises (50 points)

This class involves in-depth reflection and conversation. Engagement looks different for everyone—and we all bring our own strengths when it comes to engagement. For some, engagement involves reflection through writing while alone; for others, engagement involves processing ideas out loud in the company of others; for others, it's a combination of both. You will have a chance to practice multiple forms of engagement through this class. Twice during the semester, you will be asked to write a 500-word self-assessment of your engagement, which will be used to determine your engagement grade. In your self-assessments, please describe how you have done the work of deep reflection and conversation and name your engagement strengths and ways you'd like to continue to grow. **These self-assessments will be due on March 10 and April 28.** Also, each class will begin with a centering exercise (e.g., a poem, a meditation, a brief activity)—we will rotate responsibility for centering, which is an important part of your engagement in this class.

Educator Autobiography (150 points)

Our first exercise in this class will involve writing an educator autobiography, which is a personal narrative about the life experiences that culminated in your current work in higher education and the aspirations you hold for the future. This assignment is an opportunity to reflect on how your educator identity evolved over time as a result of significant events, people, and revelations in your life. You are encouraged to consider core dimensions of yourself as part of this exercise, including your salient identities, values, and beliefs. Consider as well the religious, spiritual, or existential elements that bring meaning and purpose to your life. The autobiography

is an avenue for making sense of your story. The intent of this exercise is to develop self-understanding and to be authentic about who we are in the midst of our professional work in higher education. Your autobiographical narrative has no particular page limit, but should be at least five double-spaced pages to achieve the level of depth expected. In the initial weeks of class, you will be invited to engage in reflective exercises and create a rough sketch of your autobiography. **Please bring your rough sketch to class on February 3.** You will then exchange stories with a peer during a dialogue in class before writing the autobiography. **Your autobiography will be due by the end of the day on February 13.** Given that our stories are fluid and changing, you will have an opportunity to revisit your autobiography toward the end of the semester in light of the new learning you will experience in this class and in life over the course of the next several months.

Educator Dialogue (150 points)

This assignment extends our classroom community to communities beyond. You will engage in a one-on-one conversation with an educator you admire. This person could be a teacher, professor, educational administrator, education researcher, and/or policymaker. The person can be a mentor, friend, family member, or acquaintance; the intent is to connect with someone whose vision for their life and work inspires you. This activity encourages storytelling and sharing educator journeys. As you learn about the educator's story, you will be encouraged to share some of your story (as told in your educator autobiography) with them. Sample questions to guide the conversation will be co-created and practiced in class among peers (when we share the rough sketches of our educator autobiographies). You are welcome to tailor these questions to focus on areas that matter to you. Following the conversation, you will write a 1,500-word reflection about themes from the conversation, and we will share these themes and identify patterns in a class roundtable discussion. **Your reflection will be due the day of the roundtable discussion, March 10.**

Exploration of Meaningful Life Vision within a Higher Education Population (Part 1) (150 points)

This paper will involve analyzing a context-specific population in higher education. For example, graduate students in education, undergraduate students today or in a particular historical period, education faculty at our university (or within a specific institutional type—liberal arts college, research university, religious college). The goal of this 1,000-word paper is to offer insight on the population's espoused and enacted vision for a meaningful life. You will need to gather evidence to make the case for your observations; evidence can include many possibilities! Evidence can be your personal experiences as a member of this population (or as someone who works/has worked with this population). Evidence can be data you've collected or have the access to explore. Evidence can come from news stories, research articles, books, policy briefs, websites, historical accounts and documents, social media posts and trends, and other sources. You are encouraged to draw on at least a few different types of evidence as you write your paper. **This paper is part one of a two-part series and is due March 31.** Part two is the Educational Intervention Idea, described below.

Educational Initiative Idea (Part 2) (150 points)

This assignment emphasizes what we can do (a course, a program, a set of practices, etc.) to help a particular population in a specific context develop and live by a clear meaningful life vision. Consider the population you explored in part one and the evidence you gathered. In 1,000 words, craft an initiative designed specifically with this population (their context, their strengths, their challenges) in mind. What do they need to support their cultivation of a life that is meaningful, purposeful, and flourishing? **This paper is due April 14.**

Culminating Assignment: Vision of the Good Life (200 points)

The purpose of this course is to inspire your exploration of meaning and purpose in the educator's life. Together we've looked retrospectively on our own and others' stories and considered dimensions of meaning, purpose, religion, and spirituality in higher education settings presently and historically. Now it's your turn to craft a 2,000-word sustaining vision for a meaningful and flourishing life as an educator. Consider the questions: What is a good life? As a person? As an educator? In shaping your answer, it will be helpful to reflect on the course questions that we've carried with us through the class:

- How are meaning, purpose, spirituality, and religion embedded (or not) within higher education systems and structures—as well as in the lives of people (students, staff, and faculty) who make up higher education communities?
- How have our personal journeys led us to the work of education? How do we experience work in education as a calling?
- What grounds our work in education (e.g., purposes, values, philosophies, and hopes)?
- What does it look like to flourish—and support the flourishing of others—in the educator life?
- How do we endure the educator life in the midst of challenge and failure?
- What makes the educator life meaningful and worthwhile?

In addition, take some time to consider these questions:

- What are the commitments, costs, and challenges that come with your vision?
- What will help you live out the vision you espouse?
- What ethical, moral, and/or spiritual non-negotiables are important for your vision?
- How might your vision for yourself be distinct from or similar to the visions of other educators?

Your vision may involve reflection on all of these questions or only a subset. If your paper reflects on multiple course questions, make sure to include some discussion of how your answers to the different questions relate to each other. If your paper responds to only one of the course questions, give some indication of why that limitation fits with your vision of the good life. If you decide to frame your vision without reference to any of the course questions, include a justification of your decision.

Keep in mind that your vision will evolve over time. Your paper serves as a “snapshot” of where you’re at on this crucial question of the good life in education as of this moment in time. Your essay need not subscribe to any of the traditions or perspectives we have discussed—but please do weave in (and thoughtfully describe and cite) those that have resonated. Return to the educator autobiography that you wrote at the beginning of the semester. What values, beliefs, truth claims, and stories from that piece feel important to your vision for the future? Be sure to bring those elements into your vision alongside the new learning you’ve done in this class.

Once you’ve written your vision, find a way to illustrate it by creating an artifact that can serve as a reminder of what a meaningful life as an educator looks like to you. The creative artifact can be anything—there are no boundaries on what this creative work should be: drawing, painting, pottery, jewelry, collage, photography, music, dance, poetry...whatever suits you. Don’t feel like you must be particularly good at the art form you choose. Choose whatever feels right to you in the moment. The intent is to have an artifact alongside your written vision to help you sustain your vision in the future. **Your vision and artifact will be due April 28, and please come prepared to share your artifact and key sections of your vision.**

Course Schedule

FOUNDATIONS

Week 1 January 13 Zoom Introduction
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Read:

Life Worth Living, Introduction

[*The Summer Day*](#), Mary Oliver

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

The introduction to *Life Worth Living* invites you to respond to a series of life inventory questions. Reflect on these questions (and jot down any notes if that’s helpful for you) as you prepare for our first class session.

In Class:

Six-word stories

Orientation to the course

Introduction to *Life Worth Living*

Due:

Choose a day to lead the centering exercise.

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

Week 2 January 20 Zoom

Histories: Meaning and purpose in our lives and the higher education context in the past

Read/Listen:

Turpin, A. L. (2020). The history of religion in American higher education. In L.W. Perna (Ed.) *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 50-109). Springer.

You 2.0: Change Your Story, Change Your Life <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/healing-2-0-change-your-story-change-your-life/>

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

There is quite a storied past when it comes to religion and spirituality in higher education! What do you know about this history already? What did the Turpin reading reveal to you about this history? If you were to break up this history into eras with key turning points to help you remember and make sense of it, what does that look like for you? It may help to sketch a timeline or a visual!

In the Hidden Brain podcast episode, Jonathan Adler says, “You can't totally control the things that happened to you in your life. You have some more say about how you make sense of it.” What types of stories do we tell about our lives? How does the way we make sense of our story affect us?

In Class:

The historical story of religion and spirituality in higher education

Community of inquiry (co-creation of autobiography prompts)

THE QUESTIONS

Week 3 January 27 Asynchronous

What's worth wanting?

Read/Listen:

Life Worth Living Chapter 1: What's worth wanting?

Life Worth Living Chapter 2: Where are we starting from?

You 2.0: What Is Your Life For? <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/you-2-0-what-is-your-life-for/>

Rumi, *Don't go back to sleep* https://www.poetryverse.com/rumi-poems/dont-go-to-sleep#google_vignette

Astin, A. W. (2004). Why spirituality deserves a central place in liberal education. *Liberal Education*, Spring 2004, 34-41.

Colby, A., Malin, H., & Morton, E. (2022) What college students are after and why. *Journal of College and Character*, 23(3), 189-209, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2022.2087680

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

What qualities characterize and differentiate each of the four modes of being in the world?

Where do you most often find yourself, particularly in your work in higher education, across the different modes of being in the world? (Autopilot, Effectiveness, Self-Awareness, Self-Transcendence)?

Think about the people you most admire, including educators/people working in higher education. To what extent do their lives resemble the “happy, healthy, long” vision or another sort of vision entirely?

In the Hidden Brain podcast episode, Victor Strecher shares his powerful story and how his experiences shaped his life purpose. What aspects of Victor's story resonate with you the most and why?

Based on Astin's depiction of the higher education context in the early 2000s, what mode of being seemed most prevalent in these settings? Two decades later, has this changed in any way? If so, how?

Based on Colby and colleagues' findings, what's your assessment of how college students (generally) are situated in relation to the four modes of being?

In our last class meeting we co-created prompts to guide story-sharing conversations. Upon further reflection—and in light of this week's readings and podcast—would you revise the prompts in any way? [Using the document with our co-created prompts](#), offer your thoughts using the comments function.

When you imagine your own story—and how you have cultivated purpose in your life and your vocation as an educator—what moments and people come to mind for you? What are the major chapters, transitions, and developments that your story would feature? You can also consider our co-created prompts alongside the assignment description in the syllabus to guide your storytelling. Create a rough sketch of your story (the precursor to your educator autobiography) and bring it to our next class meeting. Your sketch can be in any format that is helpful to you (e.g., a timeline, journaling, bullet points, collage).

Week 4 February 3 Zoom What's worth wanting?

In Class:

The four modes of being

Educator autobiography peer conversations and debrief

Due:

Rough sketch of your educator autobiography

Week 5 February 10 Asynchronous Who do we answer to? How should we live?

Read:

Life Worth Living, Chapter 3: Who do we answer to?

Life Worth Living, Chapter 6: How should we live?

Living by the word, Alice Walker

What is your life's blueprint? Martin Luther King Jr.

Edwards, S., Khalsa-Baker, N. K., Hsu/Chhî, F., Shipman, A., Kaur-Colbert, S., Chander, V., & Sanford, M. (2024). Building Dharmic* solidarity to expand the discourse about religious diversity in US higher education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 57(4), 432–446. <https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/10665684.2024.2387557>

Waterman, S. J., & Bazemore-James, C. (2019). It's more than us: Knowledge and knowing. In E. S. Abes, S. R. Jones, & D-L Stewart (Eds.), *Rethinking college student development theory using critical frameworks* (pp. 158-170). Routledge.

OPTIONAL READING: Haber-Curran, P., Dean Scott, S. R., & Moreno, T. D. (2025). It is on us: The ethical responsibility of student affairs faculty in anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) legislative climates. *Journal of College and Character*, 26(1), 26–37. <https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/2194587X.2024.2447858>

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

Using the Life Worth Living authors' Smokey Bear analogy, reflect on: Who and/or what is your bear? Who and/or what is your forest? How does the way you live your life point to your bear and your forest?

Consider the words of this week's authors--Alice Walker, Martin Luther King Jr., Sachi Edwards and colleagues, and Stephanie Waterman and Cori Bazemore-James. How are the writers addressing the question, "who or what are we responsible to?" Try writing a sentence or two for each of these four articles that summarizes the responsibilities expressed by the writers. Imagine a conversation among these writers: what do you think they might say to one another?

We will have an opportunity to get to know Sachi Edwards (lead author on the Dharmic* solidarity paper) in our next class meeting. Sachi and her colleagues call on us as educators to disrupt Christian hegemony within and beyond higher education settings and observe that, "When institutions chose to hide behind the guise of secularism, and ignore systemic Christian hegemony by pretending to ignore religion altogether, it is ultimately religious minorities who suffer the most" (p. 442). How do your observations of religion on campus compare with those of Sachi and her colleagues? What are our responsibilities as educators for cultivating just and equitable higher education settings for students of different religious, secular, and spiritual identities?

Now that you've created a rough sketch of your story and shared it with a peer, it's time to write your educator autobiography this week. Please see the assignment description in the class information document.

Consider who you would like to engage in an educator dialogue and extend an invitation. If you wish, you can share the prompts you are planning to discuss with them in advance of the conversation. Keep in mind that your reflection and our class roundtable discussion will take place on March 10.

Due:

Educator autobiography (upload it to Moodle by the end of the day Friday, February 13)

Week 6 February 17: Wellness Day

Week 7 February 24 Zoom Who do we answer to? How should we live?

In Class:

Reflections on responsibility and relationality in higher education and beyond

Higher education leader or scholar guest

Week 8 March 3 Asynchronous What should we hope for?

Read/Listen:

Life Worth Living, Chapter 5: What should we hope for?

[Gitanjali 87](#), Rabindranath Tagore

[The Hill We Climb](#), Amanda Gorman

What does Jewish-Muslim friendship look like right now? Interfaith America Podcast

<https://www.interfaithamerica.org/podcast/mohajir-russo/>

Dillard, C. B. (2019). To experience joy: musings on endarkened feminisms, friendship, and scholarship. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 32(2), 112–117.

<https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/09518398.2018.1533149>

Irungu, J. N. (2010). Sustaining hope through college. *Journal of College and Character*, 11(1).

<https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.2202/1940-1639.1002>

Catalano, D. C. J., Duran, A., Feldman, S., Gonzalez-Siegel, V., Jourian, T. J., Kannan, K., ... Woods, C. (2025). Hope amid relentless challenges: Trans and queer center(ed) diversity workers navigating the U.S. sociopolitical context. *Journal of College and Character*, 26(1), 38–48. <https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1080/2194587X.2024.2439597>

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

What hopes are featured among those whose work we are reading and listening to this week? What distinctive and/or common threads do you notice in these hopes? What might be at the root of different ways of orienting around hope?

In what ways is hope a noun? A verb?

What do we hope for as educators? What should we hope for?

Continue working on your educator dialogue assignment in preparation for our next class meeting when the reflection will be due and we will share themes in class.

Choose the higher education population whose meaningful life vision you will analyze in the second half of the semester (see the assignment description in the syllabus). Over the next few weeks, stay attuned to and gather evidence that will help you craft your paper.

Week 9 March 10 Zoom What should we hope for?
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In Class:

(Re)imagining hope in our lives and higher education

Educator dialogue themes roundtable (please be prepared to share key themes in conversation with your peers)

Due:

Educator dialogue reflection

Class engagement self-assessment

Week 10 March 17: Spring Break

Week 11 March 24 Asynchronous What should we do when we fail? What is the role of suffering in a meaningful life?
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Read:

Life Worth Living, Chapter 9: When we (inevitably) botch it

Life Worth Living, Chapter 10: When life hurts...

Life Worth Living, Chapter 11: ...And there's no fixing it

[*A prayer for the end of suffering*](#), Thich Nhat Hanh (you can read or listen to the poem via the link)

Shaheen, M. (2020). Creating my borderlands: Queer and Muslim identity development through a scholarly personal narrative. In J. T. Snipes & S. Manson (Eds.), *Remixed and reimagined: Innovations in religion, spirituality, and (inter)faith higher education* (pp. 89-103). Myers Education.

Bryant Rockenbach, A. N., Roseboro, C., & Luzader, J. (2012). A phenomenological analysis of college students' spiritual struggles. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53, 55-75.

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

As we grapple this week and next with failure and suffering in the meaningful life, consider these reflection questions...

What is at least one perspective or story featured in the readings this week that challenged you in some way—perhaps something that you’d not considered before or that you disagreed with? If you were in dialogue with the person who shared the perspective or story, what would you say? How would you approach that encounter?

The *Life Worth Living* authors suggest, “If it takes being upended to see when we’ve failed, maybe a key to leading our lives well is to be upendable. Never waste a good crisis, a friendly callout, or an uncomfortable truth.” Think about someone you admire (perhaps yourself!) who you’ve observed working through a failure...how did they respond and what do you admire about their response?

What failures are we working through in education and as educators?

What do you notice in the stories of struggle that feature people in the higher education community (i.e., the Shaheen and Rockenbach et al. articles)? How does the theme of contrast surface in these stories, and what does contrast offer us in making meaning of suffering and struggle?

(Borrowing this question from *Life Worth Living*): What kinds of responses to the world’s suffering do you have the most hope for? (Personal Transformation? Practical material interventions? Systemic–political, economic–change?)

What connections do you experience between your educator identity and alleviating suffering?

Write part I of the paper exploring the meaningful life vision within a higher education population (see the assignment description in the syllabus).

Week 12 March 31 Zoom

What should we do when we fail?

What is the role of suffering in a meaningful life?

In Class:

Higher education leader or scholar guest

Community of inquiry

Due:

Part I of the paper exploring the meaningful life vision within a higher education population

Week 13 April 7 Asynchronous How does a meaningful life feel?
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Read/Listen:

Life Worth Living, Chapter 4

Palmer, P. (2018). Keep reaching in: Staying engaged with your soul. In P. Palmer, *On the brink of everything: Grace, gravity, and getting old* (pp. 113-128). Berrett-Koehler.

Don't Hesitate, Mary Oliver

The Practice of Flourishing, Life Worth Living Podcast <https://faith.yale.edu/media/life-worth-living-book-club-part-5-of-5>

Welkener, M. M., & Bowsher, A. (2012). Soul-building: Students' perspectives on meaning, purpose, and the college experience. *Journal of College and Character*, 13(3). <https://doi-org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/10.1515/jcc-2012-1881>

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

When you think about the language you use to describe “the good life” or “the meaningful life,” what words and phrases come to mind? What people or experiences in your life journey brought you to think of the good/meaningful life in this way?

As you consider the readings and podcast episode this week, how are the writers and speakers (i.e., our friends around the seminar table!) characterizing the good/meaningful life? What are they saying about their vision for the good/meaningful life? What perspectives draw you in, intrigue you, challenge you, or frustrate you?

The *Life Worth Living* authors invite us to contemplate these questions (see p. 61): What kinds of connections can you discern between circumstances (in the world and in your life) and your orienting emotions? Where do you hope to see your emotional response change? What emotions do you desire to feel more often or more deeply? It may help to go back to the life inventory that you did in the introduction chapter to *Life Worth Living*. See if you can explore these questions in relation to your life in general as well as in relation to your educator life more specifically.

What do we need to embrace more—or let go of—as we seek to live a good and meaningful life?

What contexts and experiences help us live good and meaningful lives more fully? How well do educational contexts support people (including us as educators!) in living good and meaningful lives?

Write part II educational initiative idea (see the assignment description in the syllabus).

Week 14 April 14 Zoom How does a meaningful life feel?

In Class:

Educational initiatives roundtable

Due:

Part II educational initiative idea

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Week 15 April 21 Asynchronous Sustaining visions: Meaning and purpose in our lives and the higher education context for the future

Read/Listen:

Life Worth Living, Chapter 7: The recipe test

Life Worth Living, Chapter 13: It turns out we have some work to do

Life Worth Living, Chapter 15: Making it stick

Contemplative practices and resistance in higher education, Student Affairs Now Podcast

<https://studentaffairsnow.com/contemplative-practices/>

Reflection Questions and Exercises:

From *Life Worth Living* (The Recipe Test): Does one of the three aspects (agency, circumstance, affect) take priority in your vision, or do you try to balance them? If you tend to give one priority, what reasons can you give to justify that priority?

What practices in your life will give you resilience to sustain your vision of the good life? What role might contemplative practices play in helping you to enact your vision of the good life?

What kind of community do you need to support you in living out your vision of the good life? What communities within education might support you?

Go back to your educator autobiography—are there ways that the vision or values you articulated have changed this semester as we have contemplated together what a meaningful and flourishing life looks like?

Write your vision statement and identify or create your artifact (see the syllabus for the assignment description).

Week 16 April 28 Zoom

Sustaining visions: Meaning and purpose in our lives and the higher education context for the future

In Class:

Vision sharing (come prepared to read aloud key sections of your vision and show your artifact)

Closing celebration

Due:

Vision and artifact

Class engagement self-assessment