

College Advising Seminar (COLA) 1500: The Meaning of Love

Paul Dafydd Jones, University of Virginia

Introduction

This highly interdisciplinary course is designed for first-year undergraduate students in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia. It engages the topic of Enhancing Life in an indirect but purposeful way, employing the concept of “love” as a prism through which landmark religious, philosophical, literary, and political texts are scrutinized.

Many, if not all, of the issues raised in this class lie close to the heart of the Enhancing Life Project: the significance of religious ideas for the betterment (or, perhaps, detriment) of human life; the nature of self-consciousness, self-fulfillment, and self-awareness; the relationship between oneself and others, oneself and society at large, and oneself and the divine; the intersection between “personal” and community- and tradition-defined modes of religiosity; and the political implications of the concept of love, particularly as they pertain to racial justice in the United States.

Quite purposefully—and in a way that reflects my thinking about “Enhancing Life” as a *public* discourse, as well as an academic project—the course has practical components. It establishes the advising relationship between myself as a professor and the students as an ongoing conversation about how to shape one’s present and future, and encourages students—the vast majority of which are in their late teenage years—to think about the significance of a liberal arts education for their adult life.

This course was taught in Fall 2015; I plan to teach it again in 2018/19.

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Fall 2015 | Tuesday 2:00-3:15 | Bryan Hall 332

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Office hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30pm, Thursday 1-2pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

This class has two purposes. First, it gives students the opportunity to think in a sustained, imaginative, and critical way about *love* – what it has meant in the past, what it means in the present, and what it might mean in the future. We’ll read an array of short texts to assist us in this task: passages from the Bible and excerpts from the writings of Plato, Augustine, Heloise d’Argenteuil, Montaigne, Sojourner Truth, Rilke, and many others. Questions to be considered include the following: What does it mean to love? Are there different forms of love – say, love of God, erotic love, familial love, enemy-love, love of country, and so on? What’s the connection between love, justice, and power? How does love relate to gender and sexuality? What does it mean to fall in love and/or to fall out of love? How does love change the present and the future, and how might it enhance human life? And, finally, an issue that preys on the mind of many students: What might it mean to “do what you love”?

The second purpose of the class is to provide students with some of the resources needed to make sense of their first year at U.Va. and to think generally about their studies as they relate to the past, present, and future. We’ll talk about the challenges that arise in a new educational context, the skills needed to survive and flourish in a modern university, and the purpose and value of the B.A.

Requirements

- (a) Attendance and active participation in class.
- (b) Completion of all reading assignments. You must complete the reading *before* class and come prepared to engage in scholarly discussion.
- (c) Kick-starting discussion, with another student, in one class.

Note well: This is not an onerous or lengthy assignment. Prior to class, meet the student with whom you’ve been paired, talk about the reading, and decide upon a couple of questions to stimulate discussion. You will spend **no more than 5 minutes** in class presenting your comments and questions.

- (d) One twenty-minute advising meeting with Professor Jones in late October/early November. In this meeting we’ll consider your experience at U.Va., your academic progress, course selection for the Spring, and other matters. You are of course encouraged to meet with Professor Jones *more* than once during the semester! He’ll be

happy to see you during office hours and by appointment. What makes this meeting different is that it is a course requirement.

(e) Timely completion of two writing assignments: **two papers of 2-3 pages** (double-spaced) in response to assigned questions. The papers are due **at the beginning of class on October 13 and December 8**. Late papers will be penalized by 5% for every day past the due date.

Grading Distribution

Class participation	= 40% of final grade
Leading discussion	= 10% of final grade
Advising meeting in Oct/Nov	= 5% of final grade (i.e., you need to show up!)
Papers	= 45% of final grade (2 x 22.5%)

Attendance and participation in discussion are integral to the course. If you skip class, your participation grade will suffer. If you are absent for a large number of classes, you risk failing the class. If you absolutely must miss a session, give Professor Jones at least a week's notice.

Reading Materials

All the readings are available on Collab; go to "Resources" and you'll be able to access the PDFs. Don't worry: you're not going to be overwhelmed with lengthy assignments. The goal is to read short pieces in a careful way in order to develop your interpretative, analytical, and critical skills.

Class/community standards

I am dedicated to providing a safe and equitable environment for learning and study in this class. Power-based violence, which can take diverse forms – sexual assault, discrimination based on race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic background – is wrong and will not be tolerated.

A valuable challenge to power-based violence is respectful, imaginative, and critical academic discussion. Discussion sections, in particular, are an opportunity to model civil conversation. They are an occasion for us to affirm the value of a safe community and to prize the diversity that distinguishes this university.

If students tell me about bias, hazing, sexual violence and/or gender discrimination, I will report it to the University. Students can report instances of bias, hazing, and sexual and/or gender-based violence here: <http://www.virginia.edu/justreportit/>. This website also has links to a range of valuable resources.

The Honor Code

Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code in this class, as in all others. You must write out and sign the honor pledge on the cover sheet of your essays. Essays that I judge to have violated the Honor Code will automatically receive a failing grade and the student will be referred to the Honor Committee.

Students should be particularly scrupulous with respect to proper citation, lest doubts arise about academic honesty. The onus is on you to provide appropriate citations. “I didn’t realize that was wrong” is never an acceptable excuse. The use of materials that are not required reading and reliance on materials found on the Internet is strongly discouraged.

Office Hours

I encourage you to come and chat with me in person during the semester. If you cannot attend regular office hours, send me an email and we’ll set up an appointment to talk.

Reading Schedule

- 8/25: Introduction
- 9/1: Plato, *Symposium*, 133-147 and 173-209
You do *not* need to engage the Greek! Focus on the 25 pages of English translation.
- 9/8: Deuteronomy 6:4-25 and 10:10-22
Song of Songs 1:1-17, 3:1-5, 5:2-8
1 Corinthians 13
1 John 4:4-12
The PDF on Collab includes more texts than those listed above. You do not need to read beyond what is assigned.
- 9/15: Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on The First Epistle of John*: Homily 7, sections 4-11 (106-114); Homily 8, sections 1, 3-5, 10-14 (115-116, 117-119, 124-130)
While the entirety of Homilies 7 and 8 are on the PDF on Collab, you are required to read only the specified sections.
- 9/22: “Letter 4: Heloise to Abelard,” in the *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 63-71

St. John of the Cross, excerpt from “The Spiritual Canticle.” In Eugene Rogers, Jr. (ed.), *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 107-113
- 9/29: Library Instruction session: Alderman electronic classroom
We’ll meet outside Alderman library at 3:30 sharp and head to the electronic classroom together.
- 10/6: No class – reading day
- 10/13: William Shakespeare, Sonnets 18, 20, and 116

John Donne, “The Flea,” “The Good Morrow,” “The Canonization,” and “The Apparition”
- * First paper due at the *beginning* of class on October 13 ***
*** No email submissions ***
- 10/20: Visit to the University Career Services: Bryant Hall
For directions, see <http://www.virginia.edu/webmap/HStadiumHereford.html>
Bryant Hall is next to Scott stadium. Be at UCS at 3:30pm sharp.

- 10/27: Honor Committee Visit
- Michel de Montaigne, "On some verses of Virgil," 783-794, 811-816, 825-831
- 11/3: *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 89-94 and 103-109
- 11/10: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 65-79 (Letter Seven)
- 11/17: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Love in Action" and "Loving Your Enemies" in *Strength to Love*, 39-57
- 11/24: No class – start reading Ta-Nehisi Coates
- 12/1: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 5-71
- Study abroad visit
- 12/8: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 75-152

*** Second paper due at the *beginning* of class on December 8 ***
*** No email submissions ***