

Discover Curriculum Development Grant Proposal

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Living Love: Discerning One's Life's Work

If everyone could see what love is, each would set up a tentpole in the ocean. The world's population pitched and living easily within the sea! What if inside every lover's tear you saw the face of the Friend: Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha, the possible-impossible philosopher?

Jalal al-Din Rumi (trans. Coleman Barks)

It is hard to describe what momentary glimpses toward a deeper vision might mean in our daily lives, which is exactly where they must become real. If they have been the glimpses of our mystics only, then we must build a democratic mysticism, in which these glimpses become the daily practice of us all.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *Godwrestling: Round 2*

My work as a designer has given me an unconventional perspective on sustainability. . . . Sustainability is not really that interesting. Maintenance is not that interesting. I'm interested in fecundity and celebrations of nature's abundance and designs that enrich life. . . . The two questions my colleagues and I are now asking ourselves in our [architectural and product-design] work are: "How do we love all the children of all species for all time?" Not just our children. Not just our species. Not just now. All the children of all species for all time. And the second: "When do we become native to this place? What does it mean to be native to a place?"

William McDonough, author of *Cradle to Cradle*,
from "Address to the Woods Hole Symposium"

What if we took the time to think about our life's work, our calling, within the context of thoughtful conversations with some of the deepest visionaries and lovers the world has produced? What if love, in its broadest and most life-affirming sense, were the touchstone at the center of our deliberations about our next steps and ultimate goals? How would we approach questions of career and job, of relationships, of lifelong learning, of politics and civic engagement, of vocation and avocation while engaged with Rumi, Song of Songs, San Juan de la Cruz, Abraham Kook and Abraham Joshua Heschel, Hildegard von Bingen, Kabir, Vandana Shiva, Frances Moore Lappé, William McDonough, and the like?

Pedagogy, possible activities and assignments:

In this course we will read, actively reflect upon, and discuss a diverse array of writings that invite us to articulate our own deepest visions, and we will engage in individual and group exercises that can help us to imagine how those visions might translate into lifelong practices, commitments, and career choices. The course will be designed as an upper-division religious studies course that would meet the aims of the Religion, Theology, and Culture element of the university's New Core Curriculum. As a discussion-based course, the pedagogical model will include student facilitation, collaboration, and assistance in shaping the direction of classroom activities, questions, conversations, and exercises. Community integration through guest speakers and field trips/experiential learning will likely be components of the course. Ungraded journals and short writing assignments will help students to focus, reflect on, and elaborate insights throughout the course. Final projects will involve both private and public components: a final essay, for example, complemented by a public "vocation fair" – on the model of the public-education exhibition developed in my Holocaust/genocide course – or "vocation workshops" – offered to RLCs or other student groups – to share with a larger student community some models, questions, and insights we will have developed during the quarter.

Syllabus design:

While I cannot provide a draft syllabus at this time (I need the course release time precisely to have the opportunity to develop this syllabus) - the syllabus for the course would likely be composed of several units that mirror the pattern found in the collection of quotes that begin this proposal. That is, each (one- or two-week-long) unit would seek to integrate (1) a thoughtful encounter with a classic primary text from sacred love literature (Christian, Jewish, Hebrew, Hindu, Sufi); (2) a secondary reflection on vocation discernment or conscious living (e.g., Waskow, Heschel, Parker Palmer, Starhawk); and (3) examples of visionary practice in diverse fields as exemplified by the "design principles" of William McDonough or projects featured in Lappé's *Hope's Edge*. It is hoped that such a pattern could serve as a model for developing habits of mind and heart that would serve in ongoing personal formation and transformation and in engagement with the world throughout a lifetime.

Assessment of student learning:

Student learning would be assessed by teacher, student, and the larger community: by the teacher on the basis of a student's careful preparation and active participation in class sessions and her/his thoughtful reflection and competent written expression; by the student through a collaboratively designed SALG-type instrument; and by the larger campus community through invited feedback on the final public component of the course (as has proved valuable in the Holocaust/genocide public project).

Plan for development and implementation:

Paul Crowley and I have determined that the course could be designed as early as Spring '08 (if this proposal is approved and the course release could be processed in time). This would be desirable, as I have one or two RS majors who are very anxious to begin working with me in research and development for this course. The course could be offered as early as next year and every second year, on average, after that.

Course readings to be drawn from the following texts (and others, to be determined):

Coleman Barks, *Rumi: The Book of Love* (HarperOne, 2005)

Ben Zion Bokser, *Abraham Isaac Kook* (Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1978)

Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Scribner, 1970)

Paula Cooley, "Emptiness, Otherness, and Identity" *JFSR* 6.02 (2006)

Collected Works of St. John of the Cross (Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1987)

Sarah Ruth van Gelder, "How Do You Love ALL the Children?" (*Yes!* futurenet.org)

Stephen Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men* (University of Wisconsin, 2004)

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (Harper and Row, 1955)

Stephen Hopkins, *An Ornament for Jewels: Love Poems for the Lord of Gods* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

Frances Moore Lappé, *Hopes Edge* (Tarcher, 2003)

Audre Lord, "Use of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 2007)

William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle* (North Point Press, 2002)
Film: *The Next Industrial Revolution*

Alicia Ostriker, "A Holy of Holies: The Song of Songs as Countertext" in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield Academic, 2000)

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (Jossey-Bass, 2000)

Vandana Shiva, "Sacred Waters" from *Water Wars* (South End, 2002) and "The Seed and the Earth" from *Biopiracy* (Between the Lines, 1997)

Song of Songs, Genesis 1-3 (Bible)

Starhawk, "The Ethics of Magic" from *Dreaming the Dark* (Beacon, 1997)

Arthur Waskow, *Godwrestling: Round 2* (Jewish Lights, 1996)