Making wise decisions is the most important skill in life. It requires sizing up situations and determining the best course of action. This is discernment, a hallmark of Ignatian spirituality. Over a lifetime, we learn this art well or poorly. According to Ignatius’s Foundation [23], all our thoughts, words, and actions should be directed toward the single goal of God’s Reign. In the best of cases, we struggle all our lives to integrate our complex selves into single-minded service. The Spirit transforms us, resolving inner contradictions and sharpening our moral perception. In the end, beyond techniques and criteria, discernment is a matter of character and sensitivity, of becoming the person we should be.

Dean Brackley
*The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:**

This course will investigate the theological and psychological dimensions of the Church’s tradition of discernment of spirits. While our primary focus will be on the method described in *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, we will also explore various contemporary interpretations and adaptations. The approach will be both theoretical and experiential, examining the language, context, and presuppositions for discernment in personal and communal contexts. Students will explore practical application of these principles in their personal lives and in their ministerial experiences. Course goals include:
• A deeper understanding and awareness of the dynamics of human decision making
• A thorough understanding of the Ignatian rules for discernment, both in their historical context and in contemporary applications
• Developing skill in applying the rules to the dynamics of one’s own spiritual process
• Practical application to current ministerial settings

Please note that all classroom activities and written assignments are designed with **GPPM Program and Learning Objectives** in mind, and all students will be evaluated in light of the following specific criteria:

**GPPM Objective 1.B:** Students will integrate their core theological competencies in their chosen area of concentration.

**GPPM Objective 2.A:** Students will demonstrate a depth of practical and theoretical knowledge in their area of concentration.

**GPPM Objective 3.B:** Students will apply skills from their area of concentration for use in their faith community.

**GPPM: Objective 4.A:** Students will integrate the perspective of the poor and the marginalized in their reflection on theological and pastoral issues.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**


**SUPPLEMENTAL READER:** (On Camino)
METHODOLOGY AND REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Class attendance and active participation.** Each class meeting will combine lecture and student activity (discussion, group work, role plays, etc.). Because of the highly interactive nature of our class sessions, consistent attendance is expected. **Students are also expected to come to class having completed all reading assignments and ready to actively engage the material.**

2. **A Personal Reflective Journal.** The Reflective Journal is a personal space for you to respond to the topics presented in class and in the readings. It is a place for you to reflect on your personal experiences of the movement of God’s Spirit in your life in light of the principles of discernment. I.e., it is an opportunity for you to apply the Ignatian rules on an ongoing basis, thus integrating the material more organically.

   Some weeks, you may be asked to reflect on particular questions assigned by the instructor. In other weeks, you may choose what to write about. **These two-page journal entries are to be turned in on a weekly basis.**

   The Journal should be a seriously reflective process and should include at least two references to one or more of the readings and/or resources presented in class. Journals will be evaluated in terms of the depth of your personal exploration and reflection along with your clear integration of class material.

3. **A Final Paper or Project. (10 – 12 pages)** on a topic chose in collaboration with the instructor. This paper will be due on the final day of class.

4. **A one-page overview/summary of your final paper, and a ten minutes presentation of your topic in class.**

GRADING:

- Class Participation 30%
- Journals 30%
- Final Paper/Project 40%
Please note: All written assignments should, of course, reflect graduate level writing. This means, at the very least, no spelling errors, correct grammatical constructions, proper use of punctuation, and a discussion of the topic that is characterized by unity, coherence, and emphasis. Please carefully proofread all written assignments. Failure to produce graduate level writing will negatively impact a student’s grade. Those who may need additional help with writing skills should seek appropriate assistance from University resources before submitting assignments for grading.

Students may find the following publications helpful:


OVERVIEW OF CLASS MEETINGS

CLASS #1: (03/31/2020)

TOPICS:

Introduction to Course
Who are we and why are we here?
What does it mean to make a decision?
The search for God’s will
Underlying assumptions re: Discernment of Spirits
Introduction to Ignatius Loyola
Review of Syllabus

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the conviction that God is active, personal, and—above all—present to us. This perspective influences how we live and how we pray. The daily grind of our everyday lives takes on transcendent importance. It’s the place where we connect with God. This means that the choices we make in our daily lives either push us away from God or draw us more closely to him. Our lives matter.

IgnatianSpirituality.com
CLASS #2: (04/07/2020)

READINGS:

Required:


TOPICS:

Ignatius of Loyola, The Man
   Early History
   Conversion
   Spiritual Journey
Contemporary Influences on Ignatius
   The Ignatian Worldview
CLASS #3: (04/14/2020)

READINGS:

Required:


TOPICS:

Ignatian Spirituality
Characteristics and Contemporary Relevance
Ignatian Styles of Prayer
An Experience of Ignatian Contemplation
READINGS:

Required:

Ignatius of Loyola, SpEx, #23, #45 – 90, in Ganss, pp. 113 ff.


TOPICS:

At the Center of Ignatian Spirituality: Discernment
The Principle and Foundation
The First Week
Rules of Discernment for the First Week
CLASS # 5: (04/28/2020)

READINGS:

Required:

Brackley, pp. 56 – 125.

SpEx, #91 – 189.

TOPICS:

The Second Week
Rules for Discernment for the Second Week
The Call of the King
The Two Standards
The Three Classes of Persons
The Three Kinds of Humility
CLASS #6: (05/05/2020)

READINGS:

Required:


TOPICS:

The Election
Ignatian Decision-Making
Three Times
Two Sides of the Brain
Ten Touchstones for Discernment
CLASS #7: (05/12/2020)

READINGS:

Required:

Ignatius, SpEx, #167 – 237.

Brackley, pp. 174 – 222.


TOPICS:

Deepening Identification with Christ
   The Third Week
   The Fourth Week
Discernment and Confirmation
   The Contemplatio Ad Amorem
   (Principle and Foundation Revisited)
CLASS #8: (05/19/2020)

READINGS:

Required:

Brackley, pp. 224 – 255.


TOPICS:

Ignatian Mysticism of Service
Finding Goad in All Things
Communal Models of Discernment
Student Presentations
Many religions provide a long list of things to be wary of, shunned, despised. Ignatian spirituality offers an alternative means to discerning what is “of God.” Rather than provide for people definitive lists of what is “in” and what is “out,” Ignatius implored retreatants to seek the experience of God from the inside out, constantly discerning awareness of any “disordered inclinations” that are leading us away from God as well as those things that gave us peace and a sense of consolation. He noted that often those things that we most fear, most get stirred up over, or consider a weakness are instead the Spirit Not of God preventing us from being open to where God is calling.

Lisa Kelly
The Ignatian Life Blog
CLASS #10: (06/02/2020)

READINGS:

Required:

TOPICS:

Student Presentations
Reprise of Course
Conclusions
Final Paper Due
Evaluations
“The Exercises are, in the last analysis, a method in the pedagogy of love—the pedagogy, that is, of the most pure charity toward God and toward one’s neighbor. They root out carnal and worldly love from the human heart, thus opening it to the beams of God’s love. A demanding love it is, calling forth in a person a response of love and service/ Service, which is itself love. This is the message of the very last paragraph of the book of the Exercises. ‘the zealous service of God our Lord out of pure love should be esteemed above all.’ In the Exercises we find terms and concepts which are logically reducible to one another. The ‘glory of God,’ for example, can be replaced by the ‘service of God.’ The same may be said of ‘praise’ and ‘reverence.’ Only one term is final and irreducible to another: love.”

V. Rev. Pedro Arrupe, S.J.
Superior General of the Society of Jesus

*Essential Writings*, ed. By Kevin Burke, S.J.