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**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

<b>Course Number:</b>	FS 301	<b>Instructor:</b>	David W. Springer, Ph.D.
<b>Unique Number:</b>	37655	<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:dwspringer@mail.utexas.edu">dwspringer@mail.utexas.edu</a>
<b>Semester:</b>	Fall 2006	<b>Phone:</b>	(512) 471-0512
<b>Meeting Time:</b>	Tuesday 1:00-3:00pm	<b>Office Room:</b>	2.202C
<b>Meeting Place:</b>	SSW 2.140	<b>Office Hours:</b>	Tuesdays Noon to 1:00pm or contact Hollee Ganner (471-9824; <a href="mailto:hganner@mail.utexas.edu">hganner@mail.utexas.edu</a> ) to schedule an appointment

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**THE ART OF BEING HUMAN: CONSTRUCTING MEANING OUT OF LIFE**

*“The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.”*  
~Albert Einstein

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This interactive seminar will explore how individuals overcome life’s challenges in order to create a meaningful and happy existence. Critical reflection on selected readings and films will cover a range of topics, such as happiness, discipline, compassion, humor, balance, suffering, power, conflict, love and grace. Students will critically reflect on their own lives using an interdisciplinary perspective, and relate their experiences to class material.

Note about Course:

The Task Force on Curriculum Reform, as one of its recommendations for revising the undergraduate core curriculum at The University of Texas at Austin, promoted the development of Signature Courses that will expose entering UT students to the broad goals and possibilities of a university education, while promoting a greater sense of intellectual community among undergraduates. Signature Courses are designed to make students aware of the high standards necessary for college-level academic work and help students cultivate skills to meet those standards. This freshman seminar is being piloted this fall as a Signature Course.

**II. REQUIRED READINGS**

Dalai Lama, & Cutler, H. C. (1998). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Prather, H. (1970). *Notes to Myself*. Moab, UT: Real People Press.

### **OPTIONAL READINGS**

Peck, M. S. (1978). *The Road Less Traveled*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Phillips, C. (2001). *Socrates Café: A Fresh Taste of Philosophy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Prather H. (2002). *How to Live in the World and Still be Happy*. York Beach, ME: Conari Press.

### **III. TEACHING METHODS**

This class will use a combination of readings, lectures, films, and small group discussions. This Freshman Seminar meets for two hours a week. Thus, students will attend various “third-hour” campus activities, which may include lectures by Freshman Seminar instructors and/or visiting speakers; library, writing lab and time-management workshops; museum exhibits; concerts; athletic events; and other campus activities approved by the professor.

### **IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

This is a seminar, writing emphasis course, which means that contributions from each student are needed to advance the learning process. In order to count as a substantial writing component course, this Freshman Seminar requires at least sixteen (16) pages of written work during the semester. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to participate in class learning. Here is a brief summary of how the course will work.

Students must accumulate credit for a total of twelve (12) “third-hour” activities. The purpose of third-hour activities is to introduce students to resources and experiences at The University of Texas at Austin. All students must attend the following two (2) third-hour activities: a workshop conducted by a staff member of the Undergraduate Library and a session on Time Management presented by a member of the Learning Skills Center. Students are also strongly encouraged to visit six “Gems of The University of Texas at Austin” (and are required to attend at least three of these six gems): The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; The Blanton Museum of Art; The Fine Arts Library; The Julia Matthews Wilkinson Center for Prints and Drawings at the Blanton Museum of Art; The Texas Natural Science Center; and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. See Section V.3. of the syllabus for more details.

Students are expected to attend class sessions regularly and to participate in an interactive framework between students and professor. Students are expected to complete the readings prior to class, and should be well prepared to participate in discussions and experiential learning assignments. Failure to regularly attend the class and demonstrate through discussions that one has comprehended the readings will be strongly considered in assigning the final grade. Students are responsible for any material missed due to absences. The professor and students have the ethical responsibility to their colleagues to see that the class environment is maintained as a respectful setting.

**No late assignments will be accepted**, except in the case of extreme emergencies and then only with the permission of the professor. Students are expected to turn in all required assignments on the agreed upon due date **at the beginning of class**. Assignments turned in after class starts will be considered late. All late assignments will be assessed point penalties at the rate of **2 points each day late**. If the due date is a problem, then the student should see the professor and negotiate another due date ahead of time.

### **Policy on Absence for Religious Holidays**

The UT *General Information* catalog states that "A student who is absent from a class or examination for the observance of a religious holy day may complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence, if proper notice has been given" (p.79). Notice must be given at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates the student will be absent. For religious holy days that fall within the first two weeks of the semester, notice should be given on the first day of the semester. For further information, the student may refer to the following link (<http://www.utexas.edu/cee/uex/resources/models.html>).

### **Special Accommodations for Students with a Disability**

Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

### **Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty**

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, the student may refer to the Web Site of the Student Judicial Services, Office of the Dean of Students (<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>).

## **V. COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

### **1. Reflection Papers:**

Reflection papers to readings are due at the beginning of the classes marked on the schedule. Each reflection paper should be 4 pages in length, typed, double spaced with 12-point font and one-inch margins on all sides. You will write a total of 4 reflection papers, each worth 15 points (for a cumulative worth of 60% of the final grade).

Since the papers are brief, by "reflection paper" I mean an essay in which you critically reflect on what you consider to be the main points of the readings, class discussions, or movie. The goal is not to simply summarize the readings/discussions/movie. However, to write an effective reflection paper you must, obviously, understand them and communicate that understanding.

These are some questions you might ask yourself as you read the books and watch the films: What are the main points the author/film tries to make? What are the most forceful aspects of the work, and what, if any, effect does the book/movie have on your thinking about your own life? I'll also be looking for the following as I grade the reflection papers:

- Personal critical reflection (how much critical self-reflection about your own past experiences, future visions, hopes, dreams, and so on are evident in the paper). Each reflection paper should include reflecting on at least one passage from the Prather text.
- Integration of critical thought, experiences, and readings blended together (how well do you demonstrate the ability to integrate critical thought, your experiences, and class material).
- Integration of self with class material (how well do you demonstrate that you have struggled with the integration of your personal characteristics [e.g., values, ethical dilemmas, personality traits, spirituality, etc.] with key concepts covered in class readings and discussions).
- Analysis of student strengths (how well do you analyze your strengths).
- Analysis of student areas for growth (how well do you critically reflect on what your areas for growth are at this point in your life, and how you plan on addressing these areas).
- The quality of the writing as well as the content. Written material should be carefully proof-read and errors (punctuation, typographical, spelling) corrected. Good writing requires a reiterative process that must be followed if quality is to improve. I strongly encourage you to read your paper several times and, if possible, have someone else proof read it.

To answer these questions, you will have to state your own views on relevant subjects. You may talk about yourself or your experiences. But this should not be an essay solely about you and your feelings (this is not a diary); try to connect your experiences to the larger questions and concepts discussed in class. In your reflection paper you may want to draw on evidence or arguments from other sources. If you do use information from other sources, make sure it is properly cited.

## **2. This I Believe Essay:**

*This I Believe* is an exciting national project that invites you to write about the core beliefs that guide your daily life. National Public Radio (NPR) airs these personal statements from listeners each Monday on [Morning Edition](#) and [All Things Considered](#). *This I Believe* is based on a 1950s radio program of the same name, hosted by acclaimed journalist Edward R. Murrow. In creating *This I Believe*, Murrow said the program sought "to point to the common meeting grounds of beliefs, which is the essence of brotherhood and the floor of our civilization." More information about *This I Believe* can be found at the following link: <http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/about.html>. (Taken from [NPR.org](#), April 4, 2005.)

Each student will write one essay, which you will actually submit to *This I Believe*. This essay will be worth 20% of the final grade.

*This I Believe* provides essay-writing instructions. These instructions, copied below from the *This I Believe* Web site (<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/guide.html>), will also be used as the grading criteria for this class.

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We invite you to contribute to this project by writing and submitting your own statement of personal belief. We understand how challenging this is -- it requires such intimacy that no one else can do it for you. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

**Tell a story:** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching -- it can even be funny -- but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

**Be brief:** Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. That's about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

**Name your belief:** If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on a core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.

**Be positive:** Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us what you do believe, not what you don't believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we." Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.

**Be personal:** This is radio. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

For this project, we are also guided by the original *This I Believe series* and the [producers' invitation](#) to those who wrote essays in the 1950s. Their advice holds up well and we are abiding by it. Please consider it carefully in writing your piece.

Sample essays can be found at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4564213>

### **3. Class Attendance and Participation:**

Discussions will have two basic components. Each student will have the opportunity to comment about an aspect of the readings/movie that is important to him or her. This could mean talking about what part of the readings/movie most impact or resonate with you. It could mean taking issue with some aspect of the readings/film. I will assume that everyone has completed the readings and is prepared to respond (we will be watching films in class). So, come to class each week prepared to speak coherently about the readings or watch a film with a critical eye. I will act as discussion leader, and sometimes will provide informative notes and lecture material to supplement class readings and discussion.

At the end of the semester I will judge your overall contribution to class discussion. This portion of your participation grade will be based on your: (a) familiarity with readings; (b) ability to hear and understand what others say; (c) ability to express yourself clearly; (d) ability to synthesize the thoughts of others to form new insights, conclusions, or questions; (e) ability to disagree constructively; (f) cooperation in

building a stimulating and supportive intellectual atmosphere in class; (g) ability to use Socratic questioning; and (h) the accumulation of credit for a total of twelve (12) “third-hour” activities.

The “third-hour” campus programs may include lectures by Freshman Seminar instructors and/or visiting speakers; library, writing lab and time-management workshops; museum exhibits; concerts; athletic events; and other campus activities approved by the professor. All students must attend the following two (2) third-hour activities: a workshop conducted by a staff member of the Undergraduate Library and a session on Time Management presented by a member of the Learning Skills Center. Students are also strongly encouraged to visit the “Gems of The University of Texas at Austin” (and are required to attend at least three of these six gems): The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; The Blanton Museum of Art; The Fine Arts Library; The Julia Matthews Wilkinson Center for Prints and Drawings at the Blanton Museum of Art; The Texas Natural Science Center; and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. A handout on the “Gems” will be provided by the professor. The Undergraduate Writing Center (located in FAC 211) is also an excellent resource that is open from 9am to 8pm on Mondays through Thursdays and from 9am to 3pm on Fridays.

The library orientation sessions will be offered several times during the semester in PCL 1.124, and do not require a reservation. The contact person for questions about the library sessions is Meghan Sitar, (495-4449; [msitar@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:msitar@austin.utexas.edu)).

The dates, times and locations for the library sessions, time management sessions, “Gems of the University”, and third-hour lectures given by other Freshman Seminar professors are provided at the following link: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/connexus/freshsem/thirdhour.html>. Students may want to consult the Web-page list for activities added throughout the semester.

To help me make a fair assessment of your effort, at the end of the semester you will provide me with a one-page self-assessment of your participation. Your assessment should include your attendance and in-class participation, as well as e-mail and outside activities (including any documentation or corresponding assignments for attending “third-hour” activities) related to the course. Because a significant portion of your grade is based on class participation, it is obvious that attendance is crucial; you cannot participate if you aren’t physically present. Missed classes will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. If you have to miss a class and have a good excuse, please let me know as soon as possible.

## **VI. COURSE GRADING CRITERIA**

Reflection Papers (4 Papers @ 15 Points Each)	60%
This I Believe Essay	20%
<u>Attendance and Participation</u>	<u>20%</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **GRADING SCALE**

100 – 90 Points = A
89 – 80 Points = B
79 – 70 Points = C
69 – 60 Points = D
59 and Below = F

## VII. COURSE OUTLINE (TENTATIVE)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics, Readings and Assignments</u>
September 5	<p><u>Topics</u>            Introductions and Class Overview            Review Syllabus</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Syllabus</p>
September 12	<p><b>VIEW MOVIE IN CLASS</b></p> <p><u>Topics</u>            Constructing Meaning and Finding Happiness in Life</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Dalai Lama &amp; Cutler – Introduction, Chapter 1</p>
September 19	<p><u>Topics</u>            Happiness            Discipline</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Dalai Lama &amp; Cutler – Chapters 2, 3 &amp; 4</p>
September 26	<p><b>REFLECTION PAPER 1 DUE (TO COVER PART I OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)</b></p> <p><b>DR. DAVE COLLINS GUEST LECTURE</b></p> <p><u>Topics</u>            Warmth and Compassion            Intimacy            Examining Your Life</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Dalai Lama &amp; Cutler – Chapter 5</p>
October 3	<p><u>Topics</u>            Connection to Others            Empathy</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Dalai Lama &amp; Cutler – Chapters 6 &amp; 7</p>
October 10	<p><b>REFLECTION PAPER 2 DUE (TO COVER PART II OF DALAI LAMA TEXT AND ANY RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS OR ACTIVITIES)</b></p> <p><u>Topics</u>            Transforming Suffering</p> <p><u>Readings</u>            Dalai Lama &amp; Cutler – Chapters 8 &amp; 9</p>
October 17	<p><b>LIBRARY DAY</b></p>

