**IDS 142: Living a Life of Significance**

**Fall Semester 2022**

Instructor: Dr. Mark S. Schantz, Chair, Department of History

Contact Information: 325 Humanities Center

Student (Office) Hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays by appointment, TBD

Class Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-10:50 a.m., Humanities Center 317

**Preamble:** I am unequivocally committed to your success in this course. You should know that I love teaching students at BSC—it’s why I am here and why I have purpose in this life. So, there it is. Please help me to know what you need from me to get the most out of our collective experience.

My approach to teaching is highly democratic. I think of all of us as co-learners in this class and that we all have something to contribute to class each day. This means, fundamentally, that we are all prepared to participate in class discussion each day. No exceptions. Educational theorists might call this approach to teaching “constructivist”—I prefer the terms democratic or generative. We all share responsibilities for what we learn together, and I will be open to hearing from you on how we might improve this course as the semester unfolds.

**Invitation:** Birmingham-Southern states as its mission to prepare students “for lives of significance.” As an institution, we assert that, “The College fosters intellectual and personal development…by challenging students to engage their community and the greater world, to examine diverse perspectives, and to live with integrity.” No specific definition or prescription for living a life of significance is provided—thus inviting exploration and discussion about how the mission translates to one’s specific situation. What exactly does it mean to live a life of significance? How does one craft such a life? By what criteria does one assess the achievement of significance? How and in what ways does one engage the community, examine diverse views, or live with integrity? How do the learning experiences and choices in college relate to crafting and living a life of significance? These questions—about the meaning, purpose, and aims of schooling and life—are age old questions, confronted by each generation, each person, and each community. This course takes up these questions as a way of exploring the implications of joining a community of learners at Birmingham-Southern who prioritize living a life of significance. By the end of this course, you will have articulated for yourself what it means to live a life of significance and identified specific strategies for creating that life.

**Learning Outcomes:**

*In this course, we will:*

1. Frame useful questions about learning and living a life of significance
2. Draw inferences based on experiences and observations
3. Compare, analyze, and synthesize across different examples and cases
4. Evaluate and critique situations based on justifiable criteria
5. Make short-term and long-term plans for effective learning and living a life of significance, including how to:
   1. read, study, and manage time effectively
   2. reflect on curricular and co-curricular engagement choices
   3. identify and access mentors and mentoring relationships
   4. engage responsibly, respectfully, and critically with a community of learners
   5. articulate the relationships between learning in college and subsequent career and professional achievements and civic contributions

**Overview:** The course is divided into three units, each of which adds to and builds on what it means to live a life of significance. Unit 1 explores what living a life of significance means to you based on your own experiences and your analysis of interviews, podcasts, and other materials. Unit 2 further investigates how others have lived their lives and by implication how they have defined living a life of significance. In the third unit, we evaluate the extent to which specific communities support or constrain the possibility of living a life of significance. As part of this unit, you craft a flexible curricular and co-curricular plan for your time at BSC and living a life of significance.

One of touchstones for this course will be the work of writer and war correspondent Sebastian Junger. His podcasts (noted in the syllabus) and his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (2016) will be works we return to time and again. My choice of Junger’s work is, of course, somewhat arbitrary. But I have found his podcasts and books to have profited my thinking about meaning and significance in life in new and unexpected ways. I hope you will agree. However, I am also keenly interested in having you contribute ideas on sources we might consider throughout the class.

**Celebrations of Learning:** As the course proceeds, you will have the opportunity to celebrate what you have learned via the following required activities. More details on each of these celebrations will follow on a separate handout/document for this class. My advice is to review these projects well in advance, put them on your academic calendar, and begin to plot your workload in each class you are taking across the semester.

Celebration 1: Defining the Life of Significance 12%

Celebration 2: Interview Project 15%

Celebration 3: Group Synthesis Presentation 12%

Celebration 4: Significance in Community 15%

Celebration 5: Curricular and Co-Curricular Plan 15%

Celebration 6: Mini-Assignments for Formative Feedback on Main Assignments 15%

Celebration 7: Attendance, Participation, & Engagement 16%

**NOTE AGAIN: Details on all Celebrations will be forthcoming in another document!**

**A Word about These Words:**

The following statements about inclusion, equity, resources, the Honor Code, accessibility, and Title XI are not merely bureaucratic window-dressing on this syllabus. Rather, they articulate different dimensions of the democratic process that we will follow at all times as we learn together.

**Statement of Inclusion & Equity:**

IDS 142 supports an inclusive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized and respected. As outlined in the Birmingham-Southern mission, the College challenges students to engage in their community and the greater world, to examine diverse perspectives, and to live with integrity. Assignments (Celebrations) outlined in the course syllabus will address diversity consideration for communities, why those communities exist, who they serve, and how their practices reflect their values.

**College Resources for Success:**

*Successful students are aware of, and use, resources available to them. Here are some resources both on- and off- campus that are available to you.*

BSC [Writing Center,](https://www.bsc.edu/academics/arc/centers.html) [Math Lab](https://www.bsc.edu/academics/arc/tutoring.html), and [Academic Resource Center](https://www.bsc.edu/academics/arc/index.html)

BSC Counseling Services 205-226-4717

[Crisis Center of Birmingham](https://www.crisiscenterbham.org/) 205-323-7777

* Crisis line, rape response, and recovery resources

[Magic City Acceptance Center](https://www.magiccityacceptancecenter.org/)

* Great space for LGBTQIA2S+ adolescents that provide lots of resources

[YWCA](https://www.ywcabham.org/programs) 205-322-4878

* Homelessness aid
* Domestic violence aid

**Honor Code:**

Much of the work in this class will be collaborative in nature so it is expected that you will discuss assignments with your classmates. However, when you turn in work as your own, you need to be sure that what you have written is your understanding of the concept and not simply copied from another source. You must properly cite and reference all sources. If you are unsure how to do this properly, please reach out to me. If you are found in violation of the Honor Code by the Honor Council, you will receive no credit for the assignment, test, or quiz in question.

*Please note that because our course is discussion-based, your contributions are vital to the learning process. Simply coasting or averring that you are “just shy” does not absolve you from the duty to contribute your thoughts. Of course, there are multiple and many ways to contribute to class—good listening, attentive notetaking, asking questions, offering encouragement, etc. Find your stride and contribute! I’m here to help you find the way(s) that work best for you.*

**Accessibility Statement:**

Students with a disability that qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and require accommodations should be registered with BSC’s Accessibility Office. If you are registered for academic accommodation, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any accommodation that may be necessary. During this discussion you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability though you may do so at your discretion. If you have a disability but have not yet registered, please contact Dr. Sandra Foster, Assistant Director of Accessibility Services and Resources, at 205-226-7909 or [smfoster@bsc.edu](mailto:smfoster@bsc.edu), or visit Olin 210. Keep in mind that no accommodation will be made unless and until the instructor receives official notification from the College.

**Title IX:**

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the campus community. The College forbids any type of sexual or gender-based misconduct among its students, faculty, and staff. The College encourages all members of the academic community to report suspected sexual and gender-based misconduct to the appropriate authorities so that it can be investigated, remedied, and eliminated. BSC forbids retaliation against any person who has opposed, reported, or participated in an investigation concerning sexual or gender-based misconduct. See the BSC Title IX website (www.bsc.edu/titleix) for more information, including an online report form. If you or a peer have experienced such misconduct, there are faculty and staff members who are trained in supporting students by answering questions and helping them navigate this process. The list of advocates can be found along with other helpful resources on the Title IX website.

And last, but not least, the **Cell Phone Moratorium.** The scientific data are now in, and they now make clear that smart phones are making us dumb. They impede our ability to think deeply and coherently, they disrupt our attention spans, and they destroy the sense of wonder in life. So, in the spirit of this course, I would ask you to turn off your cell phone the minute you enter our classroom. This will be a challenge! Think of our classroom as sacred space, which I really think it is. This change in mindset will mean that rather than checking your Instagram account or the latest from TikTok, you will need to stow your phone and engage in behaviors as prosaic as:

* sitting quietly and reflecting
* settling down emotionally
* talking to your classmates
* enjoying a laugh
* reviewing the assignment for class
* any and all of the above.

If, as a class, we decide to investigate something on the all-knowing internet, we may decide to unleash a Google search or two. But until that day, if I glimpse a cell phone in your hands or on your desk when I walk into Humanities 317, I will ask you to deposit it in the “Cell Phone Parking Lot” (a box) until class is over. There, your phone will repose comfortably, save its tiny battery power, and then be returned to you unharmed.

**COURSE CALENDAR, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS, ETC.**

*Please Note: This schedule may be subject to revision and to editing as the course progresses. Students are responsible for keeping up with any changes that we make. Please ask me if you have any questions.*

UNIT ONE: WHAT IS A LIFE OF SIGNIFICANCE?

August 24 – First Day of Class. Getting to know you… Norm Building.

What do good students do?

What do good professors do?

What do good classmates do?

Your homework after class: Watch the three Sebastian Junger podcasts on the links below:

<https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_junger_our_lonely_society_makes_it_hard_to_come_home_from_war>

<https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_junger_why_veterans_miss_war?language=en>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sebastian-junger-the-quest-for-a-tribe/id1264843400?i=1000397197871> This one is with Oprah Winfrey, so you are obliged to listen to it.

Please also begin to read Junger’s book *Tribe*, chapter one.

August 29 - Discussion of Junger Ted Talk podcasts and Oprah podcast, and *Tribe,* chapterone*.* In class “free write” of 7-10 minutes on what a life of significance means to you. Not graded but required.

August 31- Thinking more about a life of significance. Read Junger, *Tribe*, chapter two and “Chalk Talk” exercise in class.

Over the Labor Day weekend, read chapter three of Junger’s book, *Tribe*, and contribute to the Open Forum on the class Moodle site. Your post should include a solid paragraph of analysis, not merely description. We’ll talk about what this means. The posts should be made to the Moodle site by September 6.

September 7 - Discussion of Moodle posts and consideration of chapter four of Junger’s book *Tribe*.

September 12 – Summative Discussion of Junger’s book Tribe and review of the first Celebration of Learning Activity.

September 13—Outside of Class Individual Meetings with Dr. Schantz on the first Celebration of Learning Activity. About 15 minutes for each “check-up” appointment.

September 14 - Exploring the rubric for the first Celebration of Learning Activity.

September 19- Drafts of Essays to be read aloud in class.

September 21 – Open Day for Essay Review.

September 23 - Essays Due on Moodle in Word format (no PDF’s please) by 5:00 p.m.

UNIT TWO: HOW DO OTHERS LIVE A LIFE OF SIGNIFICANCE?

September 26—Prelude to the question. Read Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter From A Birmingham Jail” over the weekend and be read to discuss in class. This document can be found on the Stanford University website that makes the MLK Papers available to the public.

See <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/letterfrombirmingham_wwcw_0.pdf>

There is also an audio version with subtitles on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATPSht6318o> (about 56 minutes in length—perhaps a listening in class activity.)

Stop/Start/Continue Feedback from students about this time?

September 28—Discussion of MLK’s Letter

October 3—More Discussion of MLK’s Letter—Free Write Exercise 7-10 minutes.

October 5- Begin to Draft Interview Guide (with on-line resources) and “The Flow Exercise”

OCTOBER 6—FALL BREAK. NO CLASS MEETING. \*\*\*Your assignment over Fall Break will be to identify a feature piece or interview in a major non-fiction publication to read and report on when we return. We will talk more about this in class, but feature essays in magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Harper’s Weekly*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New York Times Magazine,* and the *New Yorker* will provide you with excellent models of how to present the fruits of an interview in an essay format.

This is a warm-up for the interview essay that will constitute Celebration of Learning No. 2.

October 10- In class we will conduct a “METIC” exercise—that means a “midterm evaluation to improve class.” You will also share what you have learned from your feature piece or interview and will have selected an individual to interview for this assignment. Conduct your interview ASAP.

October 12—Interview Essays Due at 5:00 p.m. We’ll use class time for you to plan your group reflection and presentation.

October 17—Celebration of Learning, No.2, Group Project Presentations, start.

October 19—Celebration of Learning, No.2, Group Project Presentations, continued.

UNIT THREE: HOW DOES COMMUNITY SHAPE LIVING A LIFE OF SIGNIFICANCE?

October 24—Concepts of Community. Possible readings:

Review key passages from Junger’s book, *Tribe.* Is the tribal identity he longs for in this book a real possibility for us?

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (excerpts)

Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, “Speech at Davidson College, February 12, 2013”, pages 111-127.

John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630) (brief excerpts)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beloved Community” reading excerpt

October 26—Fractured Communities

Legal Segregation in The United States:

<https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/reconstruction/mississippi-black-code-1865/>

<https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/misclink/examples.htm>

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Forethought and Chapter 1.

Excerpts from the German Nuremberg Laws (1935):

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/winter/nuremberg.html>

<https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/English32.pdf>

Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020), pages 78-88. See also these resources at https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/nazism-and-the-jim-crow-south

October 31: A few pages from legendary Harvard historian Oscar Handlin’s 1957 essay, “The Horror” from *Race and Nationality in American Life.*

November 2: Discussion of the “Significant Communities” Celebration of Learning

November 7: Thinking about the community that you wish to investigate. Time to schedule individual meetings with me to talk about your “Significant Communities” project and its focus.

November 9: Free-write exercise to prompt your thinking about “Significant Communities.”

November 14: Class time to work on your Celebration of Learning Project.

November 16: Celebration of Learning Project on “Significant Communities” due at time of class. Those presenting or showing films or performing will have an opportunity to share.

November 21: Planning your own life of significance. Free-write exercise in class.

November 28: The Big College Catalog Quiz Bowl\*\*\* (Details forthcoming)

November 30: Last Day of Class: Final Reflections and Ruminations and Redirections

DECEMBER 8: FINAL EXAM PERIOD. CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR CELEBRATIONS DUE. WE WILL MEET DURING THE EXAM PERIOD TO SHARE OUR PLANS AND TO CELEBRATE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED TOGETHER DURING THE SEMESTER!