

PERSONALITY AND THE LIFE STORY

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Spring, 2022
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Office hours: T 2-3:30; F 9-10:30; and by appointment



This course begins by exploring fundamental questions about the origin and nature of personality as well as the various approaches psychologists have used to study and conceptualize it. This portion of the course is largely theoretical and will be oriented to the relevant literature in personality psychology. The course then moves beyond this more theoretical dimension by going on to ask: How might we best understand and explain other people as well as ourselves? Supplementing more “standard” approaches to these questions are those that seek a more interpretive, person-based perspective and that see the life story—as manifested in interviews, memoirs, and beyond—as a valuable inroad into studying personality. But there is still more! And that’s because the life story, the story of a given individual life, is inseparable from those larger social and cultural structures—regarding race, gender, class, and more—within which lives inevitably take place.

Course requirements consist of two fixed-time “essay explorations”—one on March 3 and one on April 12—and a 10-15 page narrative self-analysis, assigned the final week of class and due on May 12th. Each of these requirements will be worth approximately a third of your grade. Participation in class discussion can also work on your behalf depending on your level of participation. The main aims of the course: reading for meaning, a willingness to enter the thick of ideas, and a desire to *think* for yourself about the nature of personality, including your own.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Coates, T-N. *Between the World and Me*

Frankl, V. *Man's Search for Meaning*

McAdams, D.P. *The Art and Science of Personality Development*

Slater, L. *Lying*

Solnit, R. *Recollections of My Nonexistence*

Wright, L. *Twins*

PART I: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS AND APPROACHES

Introduction: Who is s/he? Who am I? (And how might we have gotten that way?)

1/25 Introduction(s)

1/27 Barenbaum & Winter, "History of modern personality theory and research"

McAdams, "What do we know when we know a person?"

Freeman, "The mystery of identity"

2/1 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Part I (Part II optional)

2/3 Harris, selections from *Free Will*

PART II: EXPLORING PERSONS AND LIVES

What are the foundations of personality?

Big theories, traits, and beyond

2/8 Freud, "Origin and development of psychoanalysis"

2/10 Maslow, selections from *Toward a Psychology of Being*

2/15 Mischel, "Toward a social cognitive learning reconceptualization of personality"

2/17 McCrae & Costa, "Five factor theory of personality"

**What are we destined to be (if anything)?
Nature, nurture, and beyond**

- 2/22 Wright, *Twins—and What They Tell Us about Who We Are*, Chs. 1-5
- 2/24 Wright, *Twins—and What They Tell Us about Who We Are*, Chs. 2-6
- 3/1 Discussion of “Three Identical Strangers” (to be viewed beforehand)
- 3/3 Essay Exploration I
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PART III: UNDERSTANDING PERSONS, UNDERSTANDING LIVES

**How does personality develop?
From traits to stories**

- 3/15 McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, Part I
- 3/17 McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, Part II
- 3/22 McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, Part III
- 3/24 Singer, “Domain 3—Narrative identity: Life stories and self-defining memories”
- 3/29 Singer, “Person-based psychology and psychotherapy”
- 3/31 Singer, “Case study of a person-based therapy”

**What is the “good life”?
From personality to character**

- 4/5 Brooks, “Introduction: Adam II,” “The Shift”
- 4/7 Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
- Freeman, “The Good Life”
- 4/12 Essay Exploration II

**What are the boundaries of personality?
Race, gender, and the politics of self-realization**

4/19 Coates, *Between the World and Me*

4/21 Freeman, “Open wounds”

4/26 Solnit, *Recollections of My Nonexistence*

4/28 Freeman, “Discerning the history inscribed within”

**Can we discern and speak the truth of who we are?
Self-discovery and self-creation through narrative**

5/3 Karr, selections from *The Art of Memoir*

5/5 Slater, *Lying*

A COUPLE OF IMPORTANT NOTES:

I consider this to be a working syllabus. This means at least two things: that I’ll be sticking to it whenever that’s appropriate and veering from it whenever it seems necessary. If this semester is at all like past semesters, it also means that I may need to give you a revised syllabus sometime during the semester. None of this means that the course is destined to be chaotic! But there’s a fair amount of “improv” in this course, on my part as well as on the part of students. This means that we need to go where our thinking leads.

One other thing: **Depending on circumstances, classes may be recorded via Zoom.** And I’m supposed to add: “Duplication or redistribution of video capture recordings by any other party without the consent of the course instructor is prohibited.” (So, don’t do that!) Finally, given the fact that we’re still living in COVID-world, we all need to be prepared to make adjustments—including Zooming—if needed.

REGARDING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Here is what I want to say, in the simplest of terms: *the work you do for this course must be your own*. This doesn't mean that you can't draw on others' work or be influenced by it. What it means is that the product you create must reflect *your* efforts, *your* efforts, *your* imagination. It will also involve a moral promise on your part—a promise that you must uphold and enact as you go about your work. Please familiarize yourself with the College's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). You are responsible for knowing the policy and abiding by it. Academic integrity is not only about honesty, however. It is about preparedness for class, intellectual commitment, openness to new ideas, the capacity to listen to others, and much more. Let's work together to create the best possible learning environment.

REGARDING ATTENDANCE AND EXCUSED ABSENCES:

We expect you to attend class regularly and to fulfill all obligations of the course as outlined on this syllabus and discussed during class. Also, please read and abide by the College's [Student Attendance at Class and Excused Absence Policy](#).

SOME IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Regarding Accessibility Resources and Requests for Reasonable

Accommodations: For the College policy, please check out [Requests for Reasonable Accommodations](#). For information regarding accessibility resources, you can do so through the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) as a link.

Textbook Affordability:

It is expected that you will have textbooks and other required class materials in order to achieve academic success. If you are unable to purchase course materials, please go to the [Financial Aid Office website](#) to contact a staff member, who will be happy to provide you with information and assistance. There are several options available for providing course materials to students at no or low cost, and we'll be glad to help in whatever way we can.

Holy Cross Academic Resources:

[Academic Services and Learning Resources](#)

[Center for Writing](#)

[Writer's Workshop](#)

[Class Deans](#)

[Library](#)

Holy Cross Student Support Resources:

[Counseling Center](#)

[Office of the College Chaplains](#)

[Health Services](#)

A comprehensive list of on-campus and online wellness resources is available [here](#).

Other sources of support include:

[Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)

[Office of Multicultural Education](#)

Regarding confidentiality and mandatory reporting:

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as your professor. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep the information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, any information that you disclose that addresses sexual misconduct or relates to a prior suicide attempt or an intention to attempt suicide requires my sharing that information with those on campus who are able to provide you with necessary resources.

Following the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy, I will share information about sexual misconduct with the College's Office of Title IX Initiatives. If you would like to talk to Title IX directly, they can be reached at 508-793-3336 or via [email](#). For more information, please visit the [Sexual Respect and Title IX](#) website. If you would like to discuss the matter confidentially, you can contact the [Chaplains' Office](#), 508-793-2448; [Counseling Center](#), 508-793-3363; and/or [Health Services](#), 508-793-2276. Following the College's Suicide Protocol, if you disclose a prior suicide attempt or an intention or plan to attempt suicide, we will share that information with the Chair of our student CARE Team, who will engage in appropriate outreach.