

COR 107: The Great Conversation
COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES
Course Overview

The Great Conversation is Gordon's first-year writing course. Students are introduced to the basic principles of college writing through an orientation to the writing process, instruction in a variety of writing genres, including a research paper, and giving and receiving feedback. Learning to write well is integrally connected to thinking and speaking clearly. In The Great Conversation, students receive writing instruction in the context of reading and discussing the works of important writers and thinkers.

This course initiates Gordon students into the "great conversation" that constitutes the Christian liberal arts tradition. The question that will connect the themes studied is that asked by great thinkers and writers throughout the centuries: "What is the good life?" It's a question we will ask throughout our lives, but it is especially one that students should ask as they begin their academic studies, pursue lives of Christian character, decide on a vocation and strive to integrate their faith into their studies and into their lives in order to make a difference in today's culture. Within this overarching theme of the good life, we will explore the related themes of love, Christian character, vocation, community, and shalom/justice.

Students will examine the academic life through the lens of faith, gain confidence and skill in expressing themselves orally and in writing, read a variety of texts that explore these interrelated themes, and write in a variety of genres in order to articulate their values and beliefs. This course enables students to learn the joy of the disciplines of listening and reading, speaking and writing in the context of a small seminar-style class.

Course Objectives

1. Students will enter into The Great Conversation by engaging in spirited discussion of the issues and ideas addressed in the assigned texts.
2. Students will grow and mature as writers through formal and informal writing, producing multiple drafts, and giving and receiving critical feedback.
3. Students will learn to listen and speak to their peers thoughtfully and respectfully.
4. Students will cultivate virtues essential for a Christian academic community: curiosity, honesty, fairness, tolerance, empathy, civility in disagreement, humility.
5. Students will develop habits of careful reading, viewing, and thoughtful interaction with a variety of written texts and other media, and service experience.
6. Students will build relationships with professor, peer mentor, and other students, which allow them to express themselves freely through writing and speaking.
7. Students will receive instruction and feedback in oral presentation through observation and practice.
8. Students will learn through engaging in service in the Lynn community.

COURSE READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS

Course Readings

Wendell Berry, Fidelity
Diane Hacker, Writer's Reference (7th edition)
C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity
Alan Paton, Cry, The Beloved Country
Pope Benedict XVI, God Is Love
Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
The Great Conversation Course Reader 2012-2013 (available from the Gordon College Bookstore).
Students will also be expected to bring a Bible to class on the dates indicated.
Course Requirements

You are expected to complete all assignments on time and as directed. Your professor will be looking for evidence of growth over the semester in the areas of writing, speaking, and thinking about the course topics. There are no formal examinations in this course.

Attendance: Your attendance is required at all class sessions. If you accumulate more than one unexcused absence (not covered by a written excuse from the Health Center or CSD), each additional absence will result in a 2% deduction from your final grade. Ensure you communicate with your professor about attendance issues. Because we only meet once per week, attendance is critical.

Participation: Since this is a seminar course, you should expect to participate regularly in discussions and other seminar activities. You should come to class prepared, having completed the reading and writing due. Quizzes will be used at the beginning of each class to provide accountability for your reading and a springboard into our learning for that evening. Thoughtful comments that demonstrate insight or analysis matter more than frequency of contribution. Responses on blog posts (because they are public) may be discussed in class. Throughout the semester, you should anticipate receiving feedback from your professor and teaching fellow on your participation in this course. You will learn and practice techniques in listening, questioning, expressing opinions, making connections, working in conversation with others, and referencing supportive details in order to develop the analytical and communicative skills you'll use throughout your academic and professional lives.

Oral Presentation: In addition to participating productively in conversations each class period, toward the end of the semester you will share the results of your research project (Essay #3) or the thoughts generated through your reflective essay (Essay #4) with your peers, professor, and teaching fellow in a formal, graded presentation. Details for what to include and how to develop your presentation, as well as a rubric noting how your oral presentation skills will be assessed, will be provided prior to the assignment. These projects should reflect what you have learned through the course reading, viewing, and listening assignments regarding audience, voice, organization, and other rhetorical elements.

Service Learning Assignment: As part of this course, each student will be required to sign up for a weekly service placement in the city of Lynn, serving with a specific community partner that fits your interests and schedule. Sign-ups will take place in class, in conjunction with the Gordon-in-Lynn office. Your regular, faithful participation at

your service placement is a course requirement and the Gordon-in-Lynn office will keep a record of your attendance for you. You are permitted 2 absences from your service assignment. Each absence beyond these 2 will lower your Service Learning attendance grade by 10%. Your Service Learning grade will be based on your attendance at your service placement. Additionally, reflections and observations from your service activity will be integral to class writing and discussion.

Writing Assignments: For this course you will write four formal essays and four microthemes. Papers should be formatted in Word with a file extension of .doc or .docx. All papers will be graded and returned electronically via your Gordon email.

Essays: You will complete four formal essay assignments for this course. Each essay will have different goals to help you develop your critical thinking skills, understand rhetorical contexts, and cultivate your academic writing ability. These essays will be completed in drafts, and you will receive feedback from your peers, peer mentor, and instructor. The end result should be a thoughtful, clearly expressed, and polished final essay.

Microthemes: Each of the microthemes will address a particular component of writing as related to the essay assignments and will enable you to be more successful writers as you complete the essays.

Summary Journal: You will keep an online Summary Journal of the noted texts for this course. You will write a brief 150-word summary of these texts in the journal link of Blackboard by class time on the due date. You will receive separate instructions on this, including instructions on writing summaries.

Blogs: You will participate in 10 blog discussions of some of the texts and/or themes on the blog link in Bb. You will address the question on the text and offer your personal response. In addition, you are responsible for reading the blog entries of your peers before class time on the date they will be discussed.

Readings: Unless otherwise noted, books should be read in their entirety for the first class session in which they are to be discussed. Reading quizzes will be given in each class meeting, and will cover both the content of the readings and/or elements of students' own reflective synthesis of the material. Reading quizzes will serve as a starting point for class discussion. Students are expected to come to each class having engaged in an active reading of the text (e.g. you may want to note down 3-4 quotes/passages that stood out to you, as well as questions or issues you would like to discuss from the readings).

Further Information about Writing Assignments

A "draft" of a college essay should be considered a "final draft" for editing purposes. For peer editing sessions and meetings with your professor/teaching fellow, you must have a completed working draft to present for review.

Do not show up to class or any meeting to discuss your paper with incomplete or ill-formed work.

Each assignment has an intended progression:

“This I Believe” – Form a complete thought using one’s own ideas and experiences.

“Using Sources To Build an Argument” – Form a complete thought using two OTHERS’ ideas and experiences.

“Research Argument” – Form a complete thought using a group of representative thinkers on a topic relevant to course themes.

“Reflective Essay” – Observe your own trajectory this semester as one on the way to becoming a “four sided” learner: reader, thinker, discussor, and writer. All essays are to be submitted online in Blackboard through Safeassign (see left menu). Unless otherwise indicated, papers are always due by 3:00 p.m. on day of class. See the weekly schedule for more details.

COURSE POLICIES

Grading Scale

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F Below 60
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66	
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62	

Course Grades

Your final grade will be the sum of the points you receive, converted to a letter grade.

The point breakdown is as follows:

Participation: 20% of semester grade (service experience included)

Oral Presentation: 5% of semester grade

Blog postings and Summary Journal: 10% of semester grade

Microthemes: 10% of semester grade

Essay 1—“This I Believe”: 10% of semester grade

Essay 2—Using Sources/Argument: 15% of semester grade

Essay 3—Researched Argument: 20% of semester grade

Essay 4—Reflective Essay: 10% of semester grade

Late Work

Assignments handed in any time after the specified due date will be penalized by 5% for each day late, including weekends. Please note that technology failure (such as a computer crash or a lost file) is never a valid excuse for a late assignment.

Each student is allotted six grace days to use at his/her discretion to extend the due date on a particular paper. Grace days cannot be used for attendance, only assignments. This includes late submissions due to sickness, life emergencies, or just needing more time to finish an assignment. Students are free to manage and use their grace days at will. The student is responsible for notifying the professor of the number of grace days he or she used by making a notation on the paper that includes a running total of days used in the semester out of three (for instance, type 2/6 in the heading of your paper--which means, two days used out of six). After using your six grace days, assignments handed in any time after the specified due date will be penalized by 5% for each day late, including weekends.

Remember, SAVE YOUR GRACE. Do not use these days early on. You may need them later in the semester.

Participation Grading Rubric

Students who earn an A for participation will:

Read the assigned material well, think about it carefully, and come to class prepared to discuss it.

Contribute consistently with insightful responses to the text.

Think “outside the box” and demonstrate intellectual risk-taking.

Respect the ideas of others, listen well, and argue with grace and patience.

Synthesize divergent viewpoints from the group or text.

Actively identify group goals and work hard to meet them.

Always attend class.

Students who earn a B for participation will:

Read the assigned material well and come prepared to discuss it.

Contribute consistently (most classes) with thoughtful responses to the text.

Respect the ideas of others, listen well, and contribute responsively.

Consistently support the group discussion by encouraging others and staying on track.

Consistently attend class.

Students who earn a C for participation will:

Read the material but offer only surface-level comments in discussion.

Contribute to the discussion occasionally, but not as consistently as his/her peers.

Respect the contributions of others but may inadequately grasp their perspectives.

Miss class occasionally.

Students who earn a D for participation will:

Read the assigned material only some of the time.

Come to class inadequately prepared for discussion.

Contribute rarely to class discussion and activities.

Demonstrate impatience with others or disrespect for their perspectives.

Miss class frequently.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Effective and responsible learning in this course will follow the practice "Appreciative Inquiry" (see What is Appreciative Inquiry):

Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' (kwir), v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

AI occurs (e.g. whether in response to readings, videos, and/or ideas presented by your professor or classmates) by first summarizing your understanding of what is being presented, then stating what you value/appreciate. Finally, rather than engaging harshly or with only statements of disagreement or critique, posing questions that you see emerging and are worth considering further. AI always seeks respect and deepened, renewed understanding.

To practice AI, deliberately follow these four steps:

Listen to what is being presented from an attitude of understanding and respect (e.g. "I value you and your perspective enough to listen without interrupting, judging, rolling my eyes, responding to you prematurely, et al...").

Summarize what is being presented ("I understand what you are saying to mean...")

Affirm what you appreciate and see value in ("What I appreciate about what you are saying is...")

Engage by posing questions, issues, or points of concern, thus inviting dialogue and discussion ("In light of this, I do feel however that...")

AI is not just about respectful learning or "tolerance," however, but deliberately inquisitive learning that seeks to be enriched and strengthened by the ideas of others. In all, AI allows you to engage others' ideas without losing your own voice/perspective in a conversation. AI allows you to learn effectively with and from those whom you may disagree with. Appreciative inquiry is a required method of learning and engagement for this course.

Students With Disabilities

Gordon College is committed to assisting students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability, it is essential that you obtain appropriate documentation and that you understand the accommodations, appropriate to the specific disability, to which you are entitled. Students with disabilities are asked to speak with the professor within the first two weeks of class. Students are also responsible for making sure documentation of the disability is on file in the Academic Support Center. See Ann Seavey, Jenks 412, x4746.

Failure to register in time with the professor and the ASC may compromise our ability to provide the accommodation.

Academic Dishonesty Statement (adapted from the Gordon College Student Handbook)

You should always use appropriate and accurate documentation when using outside sources (including assigned readings) for your essays and research paper. Your documentation system for TGC is MLA. Diane Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* contains MLA citation information and additional tips for avoiding plagiarism.

Academic dishonesty is regarded as a major violation of both the academic and spiritual principles of this community and may result in a failing grade or suspension. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating (whether in or out of the classroom) and abuse or misuse of library materials when such abuse or misuse can be related to course requirements. In the event of academic dishonesty, the faculty member will:

Determine the nature and extent of the offense;

Always assign an "F" for the assignment in which the dishonesty occurred and, depending on the severity of the offense, may assign an "F" for the entire course;

Contact the dean of student development, who, after consultation with the faculty member, will determine if disciplinary action is necessary. Disciplinary action may

include suspension from the College. Plagiarism occurs when a sequence of ideas is transferred from a source to a paper without the process of digestion, integration and reorganization in the writer's mind, and without acknowledgment in the paper.

Plagiarism is committed if students submit as their own work:

Part or all of a written or spoken assignment copied from another person's manuscript or notes;

Part or all of an assignment copied or paraphrased from a source such as a book, magazine or pamphlet;

The sequence of ideas, arrangement of material or pattern of thought of someone else, even though they are expressed in one's own words.

A student is an accomplice in plagiarism and equally guilty if:

One's paper, in outline or finished form, is allowed to be copied and submitted as the work of another;

One prepares a written assignment for another student;

One keeps or contributes to a file of papers or speeches with the clear intent that these papers or speeches be copied and submitted as the work of anyone other than the author.

Technology/Computer Policy (in class)

Students are permitted in some cases to use technology in the classroom for learning/TGC related purposes only (e.g. taking notes when appropriate, accessing Blackboard, or if directed by your professor for other learning related purposes).

However, during class discussions or exercises (or when otherwise directed), you are not permitted to use technology. For instance, when we are discussing a reading or film clip, laptops must be closed at all times during the discussion. This also applies to reading quizzes, which must be taken on paper.

In general, your laptop/iPad/etc cannot pose a distraction for you or others around you. Your professor may request to speak with you about this if your use of technology poses a problem during class.

Cell phone use is never permitted in class, including texting. Please silence your cell phones at the start of each class.

Library Resources Statement

Students are responsible to obtain any library resources assigned for this course. Questions about library resources should be directed to librarians in the Jenks Library. Librarians are available to assist you from the library reference desk, by e-mail at library@gordon.edu, or by phone (978) 867-4878.