

**Ambition and the Vocation of Leadership**  
MWF 2-2:55pm RNS 390  
Office hours: W 3-4:30, TH 8-9:30am

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## **Course Description**

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This course explores the ethics of ambition and leadership from a variety of normative perspectives. By studying historical examples and theoretical approaches from Plato to the present day, students will learn to reflect on ambition as an irrepressible human passion and an unavoidable element of civic leadership. They will also learn to assess the moral and practical hazards that ambition poses for individuals and communities. Finally students will consider the way in which their own ambitions might relate to their vocation.

## **Course Objectives**

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This course fulfills the [Ethical Issues and Normative Perspectives \(EIN\)](#) requirement for General Education at St. Olaf. The course is designed to aid students in

- A. understanding several normative perspectives relating to ambition and leadership,
- B. developing the ability to consider moral issues from multiple ethical frameworks, and
- C. expanding independent critical capacities, both in analyzing moral perspectives on their own merits and in relating those perspectives to their lives.

## **Course Expectations**

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**Integrity.** One of the great goals of education is to learn to conduct oneself honorably in intellectual affairs. To this end, the faculty has recently passed a new policy on academic integrity. Please pay special attention to policies involving fabrication, plagiarism, and multiple submission. It is your responsibility to know and follow this policy. It is located at [www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/integrity.html](http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/integrity.html).

**Care.** Approach all of your class work with care and thoughtfulness, especially your assignments. All projects should be turned in on time. All written work should exhibit a clear and coherent argument, adequate textual support, impeccable grammar, and precise sentence structure. Specific instructions about the assignments will be provided.

**Engagement.** Come to class ready to discuss readings and engage in discussion. Since good discussions require a variety of voices, I expect all participants to be present both physically and mentally. Regular and active participation may nudge your grade upwards (at my discretion) and repeated absences will propel your grade downwards.

## **Documented Disabilities**

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From the Academic Support Center: "If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact Connie Ford ([ford@stolaf.edu](mailto:ford@stolaf.edu)) or Erin Larson ([larsonee@stolaf.edu](mailto:larsonee@stolaf.edu)) in the Academic Support Center (507-786-3288) as soon as possible to arrange accommodations. If you have already presented your documentation and/or arranged accommodations through Student Disability Services, please present your accommodation letter to the instructor within the first two weeks of class."

## Books to be Purchased

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- Fuller, Timothy, ed. *Leading and Leadership*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000. ISBN-13: 978-0268013271 (L&L)
- Schwahn, Mark and Bass, Dorothy, eds. *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0802829313 (LLM)
- Keohane, Nannerl, *Thinking about Leadership*. Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 2010. ISBN-13 978-0691142074 (TAL)

## Assignments

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**Participation** [10% of course grade] Each of you will be expected to contribute to the success of class discussions. For some of you, constructive participation will mean speaking more than you are naturally inclined to do. For others constructive participation will mean speaking less than usual and encouraging others to contribute. Participation in class might involve any of these things:

- trying to make a point that is difficult to articulate
- synthesizing or distinguishing claims that others have made
- elaborating or clarifying arguments that have been made by other
- explaining why you disagree with something one of us has said
- offering textual evidence for or against a claim
- asking another person to further explain his or her views

The purpose of a good discussion is not personal victory, but understanding. You should use our conversation to speculate, refine, qualify, and even change your mind! Class is not a time for you to sit passively, waiting for a brilliant comment to spring into your mind. Treat discussion as group work on a rough draft—get all the ideas out and see where they lead us.

**Response Papers** [15% of course grade] To facilitate discussion and reflection, each student will be expected to read the assigned texts carefully before each class and **write a very brief response**. I have provided some very broad questions to help define the sections of the syllabus. I would like you to provide a more specific question that could shape our discussion each day. Your questions should not simply be focused on reading comprehension; they should be evocative and debatable. They should be questions that require *comprehension* as well as *analysis*.

**Do not ask:** What does Tolstoy say about Russian bureaucrats and judges? **or even** Does Ivan Ilych experience redemption?

**Instead you might ask:** What does Tolstoy communicate about Ilych's ambition when he focuses on his co-workers in the first scene? **or:** What specifically does Gerasim signify and why is he important to the story?

After you have posed your question, leave a space and then answer your question with a clear thesis and well-supported argument. The response can be organized in bullet points or paragraphs and should be no longer than a single page.

Please bring your papers to class. We will use them to start discussion. They will be collected each day at the end of class. If you cannot make it to class, please email me your response paper by the end of the day. No late response papers will be accepted. The papers will be graded as either unsatisfactory or satisfactory (check minus or check).

**Original Contribution:** [25% of course grade] For this assignment you will offer an interesting, informative, and imaginative account of the themes of the course. Your project could take the shape of an obituary, a dialogue, or some other format of your choosing. (If you choose to be different, please run your idea by me first). Any contribution should include a seven to ten-page written component.

**Obituary.** A good obituary not only provides a summary of a life, but also offers an assessment (which is always contestable) of what makes that life significant. In this assignment you will be asked to offer a graveside assessment of a person of your choosing. The assessment can be in the form of an obituary, a personal reflection, an argumentative essay, a song, a video, or some other work of art. (Any artistic creation, however, must also include a detailed explanation of how the artwork offers an assessment of the life under examination). The subject of the assignment may be anyone - living or dead - including yourself. (Some suggestions: Che Guevara, Bill Wilson, Emmeline Pankhurst, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mohandas Gandhi, Pope John Paul II, Leo Burnett, Sam Walton, Mao Tse-Tung, David Ben-Gurion, Edward Kennedy, Emily Post, Margaret Sanger, Everett McKinley Dirksen, William McKinley). Some projects might necessitate research into a historical figure while others will call for imaginative or prophetic construction of a life not yet lived. The crucial requirement for every project is that you assess the significance of this life according to *all three moral vocabularies* we discussed (authenticity, virtue, vocation). Your project should make reference to the moral vocabularies while providing enough evidence from the life to support your assessment of the individual.

**OR**

**Dialogue.** Produce a dialogue in which at least three characters discuss the problem of leadership in contemporary America. You may simply submit the dialogue or you may produce a video or play. Each character should consistently argue from the perspective of one of the authors (or figures) we have encountered. Be creative with choosing your characters and setting, but take care to demonstrate how each character identifies with a particular author we have encountered in class, and be sure to present the particular approach as accurately as possible. You will be graded on how well the dialogue raises issues of lasting importance and how well your characters express the position of an author.

A good dialogue will

1. address crucial difficulties concerning leadership in modern society and have some sort of narrative direction or synthesizing argument.
2. present at least three distinct views with clarity, precision, and explicit reference to our readings.
3. demonstrate how these multiple views overlap at points and how they might conflict.

**The assignment is due on Monday, December 5.**

**Midterm** [25% of course grade] and **Final Exam** [25% of course grade] A midterm and final exam will be given over the readings and discussions in class. The exams will be given on the assigned days, as per college policy in the Academic Catalog: "Student requests for an exam change must be made in writing [to the department chair]. The decision rests with the chair or director. Chairs and directors will exclude from consideration rescheduling requests involving rides home, early family vacations, early summer employment, pre/purchased airline tickets, and the like." Please mark exam dates on your calendars now, and arrange any travel accordingly.

## Course Schedule (Fall 2011)

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### What is Ambition?

What does it mean to be driven by ambition? Why are many uncomfortable with the term? In what way does ambition relate to worldly success? How can we tell the difference between beneficial and destructive ambition? Is there a difference between a good life and a significant life? How might ambition relate to vocation?

- 9/9 Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych" (LLM 487-539)
- 9/12 Prologue (LLM 9-13)  
James, "What Makes a Life Significant?" (LLM 14-28)  
Schweitzer, "I Resolve to Become a Jungle Doctor" (LLM 29-36)

### How Do We Talk About Ambition?

What moral vocabularies do we have to discuss ambition and leadership? What difference does our choice of vocabulary make? Are some vocabularies more illuminating than others? So some vocabularies obscure important aspects of ambition and leadership?

- 9/14 **The Vocabulary of Authenticity**  
Introduction to Part I (LLM 39-46)  
Taylor, Excerpt from *The Ethics of Authenticity* (LLM 49-59)  
Stanton, "Solitude of Self" (LLM 59-62)
- 9/16 **The Vocabulary of Virtue**  
Aristotle, Excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics* (LLM 65-83)  
Roosevelt, "The Vigor of Life" (LLM 83-86)
- 9/19 **The Vocabulary of Vocation**  
Matthew 20:20-28 (LLM 89-90)  
Hardy, "Making the Match: Career Choice" (LLM 90-100)  
Badcock, "Choosing" (LLM 101-107)  
Bonhoeffer, "The Place of Responsibility" (LLM 107-111)  
Buechner, "Vocation" (LLM 111-112)  
Campbell, "Vocation as Grace" (LLM 112-113)

### What is Leadership?

What makes a good leader? Why do some leaders succeed where others fail? What role does ambition play in good leadership? Why is it so difficult to find good leaders? What types of compromises do leaders have to make? Are such compromises morally defensible?

- 9/21 Weber, "Politics as Vocation" (Weber.pdf)  
Wills, "What Makes a Good Leader?" (Wills.pdf)
- 9/23 Keohane, *Thinking about Leadership* (TAL 1-47)
- 9/26 Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership* (TAL 48-82)

### **Extraordinary Ambitions and Ordinary Lives**

How should we understand people of great ambition? Are heroic lives somehow more choice-worthy? Are these lives more significant than others? How are we to determine this? What type of life should we seek?

- 9/28 Aristotle, Short Excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics* (LLM 129-130)  
Homer, Excerpt from *Iliad* (LLM 130-144)  
*The Martyrdom of Perpetua* (LLM 144-153)
- 9/30 Aquinas, "On Princely Government" (L&L 83-87)  
Machiavelli, Excerpts from *The Prince* (L&L 88-92)  
Hegel, *Reason and History* (L&L 93-99)  
Burckhardt, Excerpts from *Force and Freedom* (L&L 100-104)
- 10/3 Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership* (TAL 83-120)
- 10/5 Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership* (TAL 194-223)
- 10/7 Introduction to Part II, Section 1 (LLM 117-123)  
Lewis "Learning in War-Time" (LLM 124-128)  
Day, Excerpt from *Therese* (LLM 153-166)  
Three Biographical Sketches (LLM 166-175)

### **The Limits of Ambition**

How can we grasp the proper limits of human ambition? Is the conflict between the world and our aspirations a necessarily tragic one? Is leadership itself tragic?

- 10/10 Confucius, Excerpts from *Analects* (L&L 14-17)  
Lao-Tzu, Excerpts from *Tao-te Ching* (L&L 18-22)  
Plato, "Epistles" (L&L 23-25)  
Cicero, Excerpts from *De Officiis* (L&L 26-30)  
Plutarch, Excerpts from *Moralia* (L&L 31-35)
- 10/12 Shelley, Selected Poems (L&L 36-37)  
Keats, "On Fame" (L&L 38)  
*The Wisdom of Baltasar Gracian* (L&L 54-62)  
Morgenthau, Excerpts from *Love and Power* (L&L 63-69)

### **10/14 MIDTERM EXAM**

10/17 No Class: Fall Break

### **Ambition, Calling, and Choice**

How are we to decide which ambitions to pursue? How can we distinguish between worthy and unworthy ambitions? Who or what shapes the kinds of ambition that drives us? Who or what should we listen to?

- 10/19 Introduction to Part II, Section 4 (LLM 313-316)  
Matthew 25:14-30 (LLM 317-318)

Milton, "On His Blindness" (LLM 318-319)  
Kant, Excerpt from *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (LLM 320)  
Gaskell, Excerpt from *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (LLM 321-322)  
Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, Excerpt from *Good Will Hunting* (LLM 322-329)  
James Baldwin "Sonny's Blues" (LLM 330-357)

- 10/21 Introduction to Part II, Section 5 (LLM 359-363)  
Weaver, "The Undeclared Major" (LLM 364-370)  
Lowry, Excerpt from *The Giver* (LLM 386-395)  
Harding, "I Hear them. . . Calling" (LLM 395-403)  
Cather, "The Ancient People" (LLM 404-412)  
Garret Keizer, "A Dresser of Sycamore Trees" (LLM 413-425)

### **Ambition and Liberal Democracy**

Why does liberal democracy pose a special challenge for men and women of ambition? In what way does the ethos of modern society work against those who are driven by unique and extraordinary ambitions?

- 10/24 Constant, "Liberty of the Ancients Compared. . ." (L&L 110-119)  
Tocqueville, Excerpt from *Democracy in America* (L&L 120-125)  
Kierkegaard, Excerpts from *The Present Age* (L&L 126-134)

- 10/26 Lincoln, "On the Perpetuation of our Institutions"  
Jefferson, "On the Natural Aristocracy"  
Rousseau, "On Self-Love and Selfishness"  
Excerpts from "Patton" and "All the King's Men"  
([LincolnJeffersonRousseauFilms.pdf](#))

### **Charismatic Authority and Challenge of Modern Bureaucracy**

What is charisma? Why should it matter for leaders? What is the difference between a leader and a celebrity? What is the danger of charismatic leadership? Why is our need of good leadership so pressing? Why is the prospect of having it so uncertain?

- 10/28 Weber, "Charismatic Authority" (L&L 204-208)  
Glassman, "Manufactured Charisma" (L&L 209-214)  
Zaleznik, "Managers and Leaders" (L&L 215-225)  
Jouvenel, "The Chairman's Problem" (L&L 226-233)  
MacGregor Burns, "Conflict and Consciousness" (L&L 234-237)  
Gardner, Various Selections (L&L 238-246)

- 10/31 Catch Up Day

### **The Art of Leadership in a Democratic Age**

What does it mean to be a leader in modern society? How do successful leaders negotiate between their ambitions and the desires of those whom they lead? To what extent is democracy susceptible to tyranny? How do we distinguish the tyrant from the good leader? How does a great democratic leader nudge his followers toward their own liberty?

- 11/2 Washington, "Farewell Address" (L&L 140-147)  
Douglass, "Fourth of July Oration" (L&L 148-159)

- 11/4 Lincoln, Excerpts from Speeches (L&L 160-170)  
Wilson, Selections (L&L 185-197)
- 11/7 MLK, Jr., Selections (L&L 171-184)
- 11/9 Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership* (TAL 155-193)
- 11/11 Keohane, *Thinking About Leadership* (TAL 121-154, 224-236)

### **Ambition and the Demands of Work**

This is all well and good, but what about our practical, personal decisions? For example, what does our choice of work have to do with ambition? To what extent does work define us? To what extent should it define us? What does work have to do with living a significant life? What does it have to do with living a good one? Is it preferable to choose a balanced life over a life dedicated to work?

- 11/14 Introduction to Part II, Section 2 (LLM 181-187)  
Muirhead, Excerpt from *Just Work* (LLM 188-191)  
Sayers, "Why Work?" (LLM 191-195)  
Frost, "Two Tramps in Mud Time" (LLM 196-199)  
Piercy, "To Be of Use" (LLM 199-200)
- 11/16 Wells, "The Door in the Wall" (LLM 201-215)  
Heschel, "The Sabbath" (LLM 216-221)  
Wordsworth, Selection of Poems (LLM 222-228)  
Meilander, "Friendship and Vocation" (LLM 229-243)
- 11/18 Introduction to Part II, Section 3 (LLM 245-254)  
Wuthnow, "The Changing Nature of Work" (LLM 255-263)  
Hochschild, "There's No Place like Work" (LLM 272-277)  
Berry, "An Invisible Web" (LLM 283-294)  
Two Eulogies for Yitzhak Rabin (LLM 294-297)
- 11/21 Dillard, "Living Like Weasels" (LLM 298-301)  
Yeats, "The Choice" (LLM 302)  
Addams, "Filial Relations" (LLM 303-308)  
Martha Nussbaum interviewed by Bill Moyers (LLM 308-312)
- 11/23 No Class: Thanksgiving Break
- 11/25 No Class: Thanksgiving Break

### **Ambition and Control**

Do we really control what we become? Are the decisions we make really free? Who or what shapes the kinds of ambition that drives us?

- 11/28 Introduction to Part II, Section 6 (LLM 427-433)  
Henley, "Invictus" (LLM 434-435)  
Lynch, "Passed On" (LLM 435-437)  
Dunn "The Last Hours" (LLM 438-439)  
The Book of Jonah (LLM 440-443)

- 11/30 Ballou, "Letter to his Wife, 1861" (LLM 444-446)  
Yevtushenko "Weddings" (LLM 447-449)  
Merton, "Thoughts in Solitude" (LLM 449-450)  
Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (LLM 175-180)

**Ambition and the Long View**

How might one's life be seen as a work of art or composition? What difference does it make how we tell the story of our lives (e.g. continuous, discontinuous, conversion narrative, redemptive narrative, pilgrimage, comedy, tragedy)?

- 12/2 Introduction to Part II, Section 7 (LLM 451-457)  
Frost, "The Road Not Taken" (LLM 458-459)  
Bateson, "Composing a Life Story" (LLM 459-467)  
Berry, Excerpt from *Jayber Crow* (LLM 467-468)  
Steinbeck, Excerpt from *East of Eden* (LLM 468-471)  
McAdams, "An American Life Story" (LLM 471-480)  
Kaufman, "Robert McG. Thomas" (LLM 481-485)
- 12/5 Presentations **ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION DUE**
- 12/7 Presentations
- 12/9 Presentations
- 12/12 A Return to the Beginning: The Ambition of Ivan Ilych
- 12/17 **FINAL EXAM** 2-4pm