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Memorandum

To: Core Curriculum Advisory Committee

From: Dr. Anthony F. LoPresti

Date: December 13, 2005

Re: Including "The Diabolical and the Divine" as a Core Complement Course

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During the 2004 Summer Session, I offered "The Diabolical and the Divine" as a special topics course that compared popular presentations of God, Satan and the intersection of good and evil, with contemporary Christian theological understandings of the relevant material. I would like to offer this course again in a format that substantively engages some of the goals and objectives of the SRU core curriculum. To that end, I am submitting the information requested for the approval of the course as a core complement course.

1. ***Course Title:*** "The Diabolical and the Divine"

2. ***Course Description:*** Working from the Judeo-Christian tradition, this course will examine contemporary theological understandings of God, Satan and free will against the backdrop of natural and human evil. Using literary, cinematic, biblical and theological sources, students will critique popular images of God and Satan, inquire into the nature and meaning of "God's will," and attempt to form some understanding of how a good and loving God might co-exist with the harsh and inescapable reality of evil.

3. ***Credits:*** Three

4. ***Rationale for the Educational Experience:*** In the Portal Course students will have made an initial examination into themes particular to his course, asking perennial questions such as: Why is there evil and suffering? How might we respond to it? How might we think about the divine? In "The Diabolical and the Divine" students will take their inquiry to the next level, probing the aforementioned questions more deeply and questioning how a supposedly good and loving deity can tolerate the existence of such widespread evil. Because images of God and the devil are so prevalent in popular culture, most students are likely to have had their imaginations formed by secular sources which may or may not coalesce with the Christian theological tradition. It will therefore be instructive—both as consumers of pop culture and as stewards of our spiritual welfare—to carefully analyze the secular images and understandings to see what they presume and imply and to compare this with the Christian religious heritage.

5. ***Objectives of the Course:***

   a. To create an atmosphere of sustained, communal, and thoughtful reflection on images of the diabolical and the divine through engagement and dialogue with pertinent secular and theological texts and films
   b. To raise critical questions about the nature of divine providence, human freedom, God's goodness & power, "God's will," prayer and discernment, the nature of evil, and the Christian response to suffering and evil
   c. To examine in depth the life and teachings of Jesus as both the Christian personification of the divine and a human model of compassion
   d. To develop a critical and informed perspective on contemporary American films and culture, with an eye to developing the necessary acumen to distinguish between what theologians are claiming about the Christian tradition and what is being presented by Hollywood, often under the guise of Christian teaching
   e. To further develop skills essential for lifelong learning: listening that is respectful and discerning, reading that is efficient and critical, writing that is well-organized and persuasive, speech that is concise and insightful, and work habits that support both independent and cooperative learning
   f. To enhance the student's ability to engage in *critical* theological reflection, i.e., theological reflection which is more and more aware of its presuppositions, strengths, limitations, and biases
   g. To encourage personal, creative, faith-filled, and life-long reflection on the ways human beings experience, interpret, and respond to the presence of both the diabolical and the divine in their lives

6. ***Basic Outline of the Course:*** As the course objectives imply, through readings and discussions we will examine pertinent images and ideas—of God, divine power and goodness, human freedom and sin, suffering and evil, Satan—and the interrelationship of them all. Concurrently, we will take a close look at what the culture says (and implies) about the same, which in turn will prompt some critical self-inquiry, ultimately asking "How should I *respond* to the suffering and evil in the world?"

7. ***Suggested Pedagogical Styles:*** Since individuals have different learning styles, the class will offer a variety of ways to explore and understand the subject matter. In general, the class will rely more on discussion than lecture, with ongoing efforts made to connect the course material to the students' life experiences. Writing will be an integral part of the course (10+ pages) and students will also be encouraged to meet outside of class in study groups. News media reports and movies which take up the course themes will also be utilized. Because it is sometimes advantageous to show and discuss extended movie clips in class, the summer session, with its long course periods, is a particularly advantageous time to offer this course.

8. ***Rationale for Suggested Year of Offering the Course:*** This course could be taken anytime after completion of RST 210 Christianity in Dialogue with World Religions. In most cases, students will have completed their sophomore year by the time they would enroll in the course.

9. ***Identification of Relevant Core Goals and Objectives Being Met:*** Listed below are the goals and objectives which will be emphasized in the course. I can commit to assessing, within the course, those goals marked with an asterisk (*).

Goal 1: An Education with a Catholic Identity:

- **1.1** Demonstrate an awareness of the Catholic intellectual tradition and its distinctive contribution to liberal education at this university.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a, b, c, f)
- ***1.4** Understand the enduring influence of the Bible and Jewish, Christian, and specifically Catholic, symbols, stories, ideas, values and practices.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a ,b, c)
- ***1.7** Understand the teachings of Jesus that give this university its compelling vision of a realm of peace and justice.
  (Corresponding Course Objective: c)

Goal 2: Liberal Education:

- **2.3** Engage in critical self-inquiry that promotes self-knowledge in order to develop (1) the ability to evaluate different opinions and beliefs, (2) a willingness to test one's point of view against others, (3) a willingness to recognize faulty thinking and seek other rational alternatives, and (4) a sense of collaboration by learning in community.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a, b, e, g)
- **2.4** Apply their studies in the Liberal Arts and Sciences to contemporary issues and situations.
  (Corresponding Course Objective: g)

Goal 3: Developing Responsible Citizens of the World:

- ***3.1** Develop an understanding of their own culture, since this culture will be the base for cross-cultural reference.
  (Corresponding Course Objective: d)

Goal 4: Developing Lifelong Learners:

- ***4.2** Demonstrate the ability to persuade through the organization of ideas (in writing, speaking, and discussion) and through the art of rhetoric.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a, e)
- **4.7** Apply skills related to critical reading, critical thinking, and problem solving.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: e, f)
- ***4.8** Integrate and synthesize information and ideas.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a, d, g)
- **4.9** Develop the creative, critical and imaginative skills needed to recognize the beauty, the goodness and the breadth of human experiences.
  (Corresponding Course Objectives: a, g)

10. ***Exemptions:*** n.a.

11. ***Concerns of Professional Departments:*** None.

12. ***Unusual Support:*** None required.