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Memorandum

To: Core Curriculum Advisory Committee
From: Dr. Anthony F. LoPresti
Date: December 13, 2005
Re: Including “Christianity and the Erotic” as a Core Complement Course

During the Fall 2004 semester, I offered “Christianity and the Erotic” as a special topics course that served as an exploration into Christian—mostly Catholic—sexual ethics. 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:** “Christianity and the Erotic”
2. **Course Description:** For most of its history, Christianity has had an uneasy relationship with human sexuality. In recent years, however, the encounter between passion and grace has won more positive evaluations. This course is designed to help students become acquainted with some of the ethical issues associated with the erotic life. Drawing from biblical, historical, and more recent theological and secular sources, students will develop a Christian moral vision for human sexuality which, in turn, will enable them to critically examine a variety of contemporary sexual issues and practices. The goal will be to articulate a Christian vision of human eroticism that can be successfully integrated into a contemporary Christian spirituality.
3. **Credits:** Three
4. **Rationale for the Educational Experience:** In their freshman year, students take both ENG 150 What It Means to Be Human and GST 150 The Portal Course, the latter of which begins with a unit titled “Imagining the Human: Women and Men.” Sexuality is clearly an important aspect of human experience, but one which students do not often have a chance to study and intelligently discuss, at least not at any great length. “Christianity and the Erotic” would take its cue from one of the core themes of the freshman year curriculum and explore human sexuality from a consciously Christian perspective. While not neglecting traditional Christian warnings about the dangers of sexual passion, this course will try to provide students with a more positive appreciation of sexuality as an occasion of grace. From within this nuanced and balanced framework, students can begin to “do the work” that Christian sexual ethics requires.

5. Objectives of the Course:

- a. To create an atmosphere of sustained, communal, and thoughtful reflection on Christian ethical thinking and human sexuality through engagement and dialogue with pertinent secular and theological texts and films
- b. To develop a Christian moral vision for human sexuality that flows from and is supported by a broader vision of human flourishing and Christian discipleship
- c. To understand, appreciate, and critique the religious understanding of sexuality as transmitted through the Bible and the Christian tradition
- d. To investigate the connections between eros and grace, between sexuality and spirituality
- e. To develop the ability to make an informed Christian evaluation of sexual practices which are common (and sometimes not-so-common) in contemporary times
- f. To cultivate attitudes and practices that reflect an abiding respect for the dignity of all persons and a commitment to social justice
- g. To foster a student-centered, active learning environment that asks students to be conscious, intentional and self-directed, while working in partnership with the professor
- h. 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
- i. 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
- j. To encourage personal, creative, faith-filled, and life-long reflection on the ways human beings experience, interpret, and respond to their own and others' sexuality

6. Basic Outline of the Course: Drawing from biblical and theological sources, the first half of the course will be devoted to developing a Christian vision of human sexuality that is informed by scientific and social scientific research. The second half of the course will provide students with an opportunity to analyze specific issues in light of the vision articulated. Potential topics for consideration would include: men's and women's sexual experience, sexuality and adolescents, contraception, homosexuality, pornography, sexual trafficking, sexual abuse, unusual sexual practices.

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 in-class videos and outside-of-class movies used to supplement. Because of the nature of the material and the need to build class trust and rapport, a request will be made to the Dean to limit the class size to 20 (this was approved when the course was last offered). Writing will also be an integral part of the course, including a 10-15 page research paper on an approved topic of the student's choice.

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, d, e, h)
- **1.3** Cultivate attitudes and practices that reflect an abiding respect for the dignity of all persons and a commitment to social justice.
(Corresponding Course Objectives: a, d, e, 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: b, c, e)
- ***1.6** Evaluate learning and actions from the perspective of Christian ethics
(Corresponding Course Objectives: a, b, c, e, f, j)
- **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, g, i, j)
- **2.4** Apply their studies in the Liberal Arts and Sciences to contemporary issues and situations.
(Corresponding Course Objective: a, e, f)
- **2.5** Develop a knowledge and understanding of religious studies, the humanities, mathematics, science, and the social sciences and an awareness of the interconnectedness of the various disciplines in the Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum.
(Corresponding Course Objectives: a, b, e)

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 Objectives: e, j)

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, h, i)
- ***4.3** Use research as a means of finding and communicating the truth
(Corresponding Course Objectives: e, g, i) Note: students will make specific progress on this objective especially in light of the class requirement to produce a 10-15 page research paper.
- **4.7** Apply skills related to critical reading, critical thinking, and problem solving.
(Corresponding Course Objectives: e, h, I, j)
- ***4.8** Integrate and synthesize information and ideas.
(Corresponding Course Objectives: a, b, d)
- **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, b, d, e, j)

10. Exemptions: n.a.

11. Concerns of Professional Departments: None.

12. Unusual Support: None required.