



What is College For? Finding Purpose at USC

FSEM 100 – Freshman Seminar

USC Fall 2024

Th 12:00-1:50, MHP 102

Professor David Albertson

dalberts@usc.edu

This Freshman Seminar provides a forum for students to reflect on the hopes, assumptions, and questions they bring with them as they begin their college experience at USC. Is college about discovering my identity? About acquiring skills and credentials for my job? About preparing to contribute as a citizen of various communities? How do these three objectives (and others) intersect? How are they in tension? Whatever answers one chooses, the goal is to choose deliberately, and to use this reflection to guide one's priorities over the next four years.

We'll consult two recent books on finding purpose in the modern university. We will also have the opportunity to interview USC staff and advanced undergraduates about similar questions—hopefully over lunch together. Students will write regular responses on our readings to prepare for discussion, and in reflection on the conversations we have with our guests. Our final work will be a two-page plan of life that each student will draft for themselves.

Reading List

1. William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite & The Way to A Meaningful Life* (Free Press, 2014). ISBN 978-1476702728
2. Meghan Sullivan and Paul Blaschko, *The Good Life Method: Reasoning Through the Big Questions of Happiness, Faith, and Meaning* (Penguin Books, 2022). ISBN 978-1984880321

Preparing for Class

One of the keys to success in this and other classes is simply setting aside adequate time to read all of the assigned texts, take notes, and formulate questions. Our class discussions will assume that you have prepared each of the assigned readings in advance.

Your absence diminishes the quality of our discussions, and our course only meets for part of the term and once per week. If you have a good reason to be absent, such as illness, please email me of your situation in advance, whenever possible. You are missed!

Assignments and Grading

Your participation grade will be determined by how well you engage your peers, both contributing to our common discussions, and attending to the contributions of others (listening). One hallmark of a good conversation is when students are each responding to each other's ideas, and not only replying to the instructor.

This course will be conducted as a seminar: classes will provide a forum for active discussion of the texts and the issues they raise, including conversations with our guests. Attendance is very important. All Freshman Seminar courses are graded Pass/Fail. To pass the class you must receive a C- (70% or higher). Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- Participation (book discussions, interviews with guests): 20%
- Weekly reflection papers (1 page via email): 60%
- Plan of life project (2 pages): 20%

Attendance, participation in discussions, and short reflection papers on our readings will be the primary requirements for the course. Reflection papers should be around 1 page long, double-spaced, and emailed as a Word document to the instructor by 12:00am midnight the night before each class meeting. These reflections should take the form of an intelligent response to the reading: some combination of commenting on a specific passage, asking a question or two about the reading, or exploring how different readings intersect or interact with each other. These reflection papers will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis: you receive credit when you hand one in and no credit when you don't.

Your final project will be a 2-page letter written mainly to yourself, but shared with the class for purposes of accountability. What will college be for you? What purposes have you chosen? What are your goals and dreams for your time at USC? What do you want to learn about the world and life? What choices will you confront and what habits will you acquire? What guides will you seek out to help you, and what communities can support you?

Class Policies

1. This syllabus is a work in progress and may be amended as we proceed through the course.
2. I am eager to accommodate any students working with USC Office of Student Accessibility Services. Please introduce yourself to me as soon in the semester as possible if you have a designated OSAS accommodation.
3. Reading assignments should be completed prior to the day when they appear on the syllabus.
4. Predetermined office hours rarely work for everyone's schedule. I am very happy to meet with you! Send me an email, and we can find a mutually agreeable time before class, after class, in my office (ACB 227), or on Zoom or phone.
5. You may not record our class in any medium without prior permission.
6. No cell phones during class; no laptops; no eating food in class.

USC Policies

Disability Accommodations

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage. The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution. For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

AI Technologies

AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

When using AI tools do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a fact, assume it is incorrect unless you either know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will

be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. If you choose to use AI in a USC assignment, you should include a paragraph explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.

Course Materials

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Support Systems

- ◇ [Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
- ◇ [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.
- ◇ [Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).
- ◇ [Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086. Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.
- ◇ [Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298. Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.
- ◇ [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776. OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.
- ◇ [USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411. Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.
- ◇ [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101. Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.
- ◇ [USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call. Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.
- ◇ [USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call. Non-emergency assistance or information.
- ◇ [Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC). A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.
- ◇ [Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu . Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support healthy habits and routines.

CLASS SCHEDULE

1. Thursday, August 29: Why is college like this?

Read: Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, Chs. 1-2

2. Thursday, September 5: Inventing your education

Read: Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, Chs. 5-6

Lunch guest: TBA

3. Thursday, September 12: Learning for life

Read: Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, Chs. 7-8

4. Thursday, September 19: Finding faculty mentors

Read: Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, Chs. 9-10

Lunch guest: TBA

5. Thursday, September 26: Truth and generosity

Read: Sullivan & Blaschko, *Good Life Method*, Chs. 1-2

6. Thursday, October 3: Responsibility and integrity

Read: Sullivan & Blaschko, *Good Life Method*, Chs. 3-4

Lunch guest: TBA

[Thursday, October 10: NO CLASS (USC Fall Break)]

[Thursday, October 17: NO CLASS (Instructor at conference)]

7. Make-up class (Week of October 14): Love and wonder

Read: Sullivan & Blaschko, *Good Life Method*, Chs. 5-6

8. Thursday, October 24: Faith and suffering

Read: Sullivan & Blaschko, *Good Life Method*, Chs. 7-8

Lunch guest: USC undergraduate panel (TBA)

9. Thursday, October 31: Purpose and death

Read: Sullivan & Blaschko, *Good Life Method*, Chs. 9-10

10. Thursday, November 7: Making a plan for yourself

Present: Plan of life