CORE 100-43 Technology, Transhumanism, and Transcendence

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Course Description

This seminar explores ethical, philosophical, and religious themes in relation to emerging biotechnologies – including the reality of God/the Transcendent, the meaning of human existence, and the nature of the human condition (e.g., embodiment, life, death, sickness, disease, finitude, moral perfection) – and poses the question of whether it is morally acceptable, or indeed obligatory, to employ such technologies to overcome human limitations. Through an extended interdisciplinary engagement with contemporary perspectives in religion/theology, philosophy, and neuroscience, students will consider the issue of “human enhancement” via an exploration of fundamental questions concerning the reality of God/the Transcendent, the meaning and purposes of human existence, the human condition (e.g., embodiment, life, death, sickness, disease, finitude, moral imperfection), and human creativity and self-creation. Students will be introduced to the philosophy and science of “transhumanism” (as well as to various philosophical and theological critiques of the transhumanist project) and to the various dimensions of human enhancement (physical enhancement and enhancement in sport, psychological enhancement (including cognitive enhancement and mood enhancement), lifespan enhancement, and moral enhancement). A focal point of conversation will be that of whether the greater (human) good is increased or undermined by the adoption and employment of various technologies of human enhancement.

CORE 100, the First-Year Seminar, is a central component of the First-Year Experience at Xavier University. As a foundational element in the Xavier Core Curriculum on which later Core courses will build, CORE 100 seeks to address the whole person – intellectually, morally, and spiritually – and to shape students “by deepening their understanding, developing their abilities, and promoting openness and respect.” In addition to presenting you with intellectually challenging and stimulating questions which will serve to develop your critical interpretive and logical capacities, CORE 100 will provide you with a sustained opportunity to reflect more deeply concerning your own sense of personal vocation, and to discern prospects for contributing to the global common good.

The invitation to work in generous excellence and to contribute to fostering the global common good is a cornerstone of the Jesuit and Catholic tradition, and this commitment serves as a unifying thread for all sections of CORE 100. In this section of CORE 100 we will engage the issue of the Greater Good as we explore the focal theme of “Technology, Transhumanism, and Transcendence” and we consider how various emerging biotechnologies might contribute to promoting the global common good.

Credit Hours: 3 Credits
Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

Course Objectives – in this course, Students will:

1. Become engaged in **intellectually challenging and interesting** questions and problems.
2. Develop strong **mentoring relationships** with faculty in and out of the classroom.
3. Join the **community of scholars** at Xavier University.
4. Establish a solid foundation on which subsequent **Core Curriculum** courses will build.
5. Engage with a **common theme** across all semesters: **The Greater Good**.

Student Learning Outcomes – in this course, Students will:

1. Apply the approaches of **multiple disciplines** to a significant issue.
2. Identify and critically assess multiple dimensions of an **ethical issue** in an attempt to reach a conclusion. In FYS, this includes: a) Interpreting challenging **readings**; b) Employing effective **library research and information literacy skills**; and c) Constructing **arguments supported with evidence**.
3. Articulate the evolution of their **vocation** and aspirations to contribute to the world.

Course Texts

All course readings will be made available on Canvas (http://canvas.xavier.edu) or by E-mail.

Course Requirements/Methodology and Grading

Course Medium: The course will run in a twice weekly seminar (i.e., discussion-intensive) style format, and will integrate the reading, analysis, and discussion of texts, films, and other media.

Course Assignments and Responsibilities:

1/ Class Attendance

**Class Attendance:** As this is a discussion-intensive course (please see below under “Class Participation”) regular and punctual attendance is required and you will be expected to have prepared for class discussions through a careful consideration of the assigned readings. In order to be recorded as present for any particular class day, you must arrive punctually and be prepared to begin at the scheduled class start time. Tardiness without a reasonable excuse will constitute an unjustified class absence.

If you are unable to attend a scheduled class meeting for any reason, please notify me by e-mail in advance, whenever possible. If the absence is necessitated by personal illness, death in the immediate family, or duties performed for the University, you should seek an excused absence through the appropriate office and designated procedure as specified in the Student Handbook (http://www.xavier.edu/handbook/). Upon consultation with the instructor, you may be permitted to make up any course work missed as the result of the excused absence. **Unexcused absences for more than two classes will automatically result in a lowering of your grade by one (numerical) point per subsequent missed class, and more than three unexcused absences may result in automatic failure of the course.** I will notify you in writing (i.e. by e-mail) once you have two unexcused absences.

→ Regular Class Attendance will comprise 10% of your overall grade.
2/Class Preparation, and Class Participation

Class Preparation: What does it meant to be “prepared” for this class? Carefully complete all of the assigned readings prior to coming to class, and take notes on the readings. The purpose of these notes is to allow you to participate fully in class discussion and to provide you with a study resource. Whatever you read for a given day should be brought to class on that day. Successful class preparation depends on practicing good study habits. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Schedule a fixed period of time for class preparation.
2. Do your readings in an environment where you will be least distracted (e.g., in the library). Lack of distractions will help you to focus better, and to work more efficiently overall.
3. Preparation includes both reading and note-taking. Try to summarize that day’s readings in your own words, as though you were explaining the thesis of the reading selection to a friend who is not in the course. Your summary should include questions that you can raise during class discussion.
4. Discuss each day’s reading assignment with a friend in the class. After completing steps one through three, get together with a friend (at Starbucks or elsewhere) and compare your individual notes.

Readings: This is a reading-intensive course, so you should schedule your time to allow you to complete all of the assigned readings carefully. Diligent completion of assigned reading is an essential foundation for participating in class discussion, and for completing writing assignments. If you do not understand some part of the reading, please do not hesitate to e-mail me or to come to see me with questions.

When you read, keep the following questions in mind:

1. What are the most important points in the text? Why are they important?
2. Do you agree with the claims that the author is making? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything in the reading that you do not understand?

Class Participation: This is a discussion-intensive course. Given the nature of the class, participation in class discussion is essential. The goal of these discussions is to help you better understand the readings and lectures, and also to provide you with practice in engaging these challenging issues with others. Intensive class discussion provides you with ongoing opportunities to develop your abilities to think critically and to articulate and defend your particular point of view. This in turn requires an environment where participants are willing to listen to and to rationally consider arguments that they may disagree with so that everyone feels comfortable to communicate their own views. Even though there are divergent and even opposing opinions on different issues covered by the course, it is essential that you develop the intellectual and dialogical virtues to engage and to discuss such issues in a receptive and fruitful way. Other informal in-seminar assignments will count towards class participation.

→ Class preparation and class participation will comprise 36% of your overall grade.

3/Weekly Response Papers or FLAME Presentation

3a/Weekly Response Papers: Each student will prepare a one page response paper (single-spaced, twelve point font, 1 inch margins, with the class information (“CORE 100-01”) and your name included in a header at the top of the page) for each Tuesday class meeting to be submitted via Canvas by the beginning of that particular class day. The response paper is to be formulated in response to a discussion question (“the prompt”) distributed in advance (typically by 5PM the Friday prior to the following Tuesday’s class) and the paper should engage critically with the main argument of the text under consideration for that day, and raise questions in response to the main claims being advanced in the text.
Each paper will be graded pass or fail, and the minimum quality needed for a passing paper is a B. Each paper will count for 2% of your overall final grade. Barring exceptional circumstances, the failure to submit a required response paper by the required time (i.e., the beginning of the class period on the class day that the paper is due) will result in a loss of credit for that particular response paper.

3b/FLAME Presentation

Alternatively, in place of the Weekly Response Papers, you may do an individual or group presentation at FLAME, the FYS Celebration of Student Learning. The FLAME presentation assignment consists in: a) the selection (in consultation with the course instructor) of an issue or topic that is related to the course content (the ethics of emerging biotechnologies) and to the overarching FYS theme of “the Greater Good”; b) which you (as an individual or as a group) conduct library research on; c) and then develop into a presentation format (in the form of a poster board or alternative format); d) about which you are able to provide a brief (3-5 minute) overview presentation; e) at the FLAME event scheduled for later this fall. FLAME is a kind of science/career fair event where visitors (Xavier students, faculty, and staff, external visitors) view the presentation posters and discuss the presentations with the presenters. The FLAME event runs for approximately 2 hours, and participants will be expected to be in attendance for the entire event. This semester FLAME is scheduled for Wednesday, November 30th @ 7PM at the Cintas Center. More details concerning the FLAME event can be found at http://www.xavier.edu/core/Flame-FAQ.cfm and further instructions concerning this assignment will be provided before the fall break.

⇒ The Weekly Response Papers or FLAME Presentation will comprise 24% of your overall grade.

4/Final Take-Home Examination/Synthesis Paper: There will be a final take-home written examination/synthesis paper in the course, which will cover the material that is treated over the entire course and will comprise 30% of your overall grade. The examination will be due by 5PM on Friday, December 16th, 2016 (submitted via Canvas). The examination/synthesis paper will cover all of the assigned reading as well and will require you to synthesize and apply what you have learned through class lectures and discussions. According to University policy, an unexcused absence (i.e., failure to electronically submit the examination by the submission deadline) for either the midterm or final examination will result in a student receiving a grade of no credit. The instructor and the student’s Dean will determine whether the cause of the absence is sufficient to permit a later re-administration of the examination.

⇒ The Final Examination/Synthesis Paper will comprise 30% of your overall grade.

Course Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Preparation and Class Participation</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Response Papers or FLAME Presentation</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Examination/Synthesis Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My expectation is that you will observe the basic requirements of grammar and syntax in all of your written work. Aside from the basics of correct grammar and syntax, your overall performance will be assessed in relation to: 1) your overall comprehension of the material (apprehension and understanding of the facts, terms and concepts in the readings and class discussions); 2) your analysis of the material (the ability to understand the structure of and relationship between the parts of a given text); 3) your synthesis of the material (the ability to relate items of a given text or idea to other texts and ideas, creating new ideas in the process); 4) your overall contribution to class discussion; and 5) your clarity and charity of communication (your ability to communicate what you have
comprehended, analyzed, and synthesized to others in a way that is respectful of differences in moral viewpoint or perspective. (For more on grading see, [http://www.xavier.edu/theology-department/Grading-Policy.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/theology-department/Grading-Policy.cfm))

In accordance with Academic Regulations, the following grading scale will be used:

### Undergraduate Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quality Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF</td>
<td>Failure to officially withdraw</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Official withdraw</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>Audit, no credit, no effect on GPA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Satisfactory, credit earned, no effect on GPA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory, no credit earned, GPA is effected</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>No credit earned, non-graded</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Incomplete Work - Undergraduates

Course assignments are due at the time specified by the instructor. Extension is time beyond the termination of the course is rarely granted and only for a serious reason. If an extension of time is granted, the grade of "I" (Undergraduate Incomplete) will be assigned and calculated as an "F" in the grade point average. Unless the work is completed and submitted by the fifteenth calendar day of the academic semester following the course, the student will fail the course and the "I" will be permanently changed to an "F" (summer term is excluded). Exceptions to this policy must be approved in writing by the appropriate dean prior to that date. The faculty member initiates the grade change process once the student has made up the incomplete work.

If the student is deferred for graduation due to a grade of "I" (Incomplete), he or she may be eligible for the original date of graduation. Work must be completed, graded and recorded within thirty days of that term's graduation date.

Extra-Credit Opportunities

There will be ample “Extra-Credit” opportunities throughout the course, and these will typically involve attending a campus event (e.g., the various E/RS lectures that are scheduled throughout the semester) and submitting a written response (minimum1 single-spaced page, 12 point font, 1-inch margins) which engages thoughtfully with the content of the event (interview, lecture, panel, film).

Mentoring and Vocational Discernment

Because the development of strong mentoring relationships in and out of the classroom is one of the designated objectives of First-Year Seminar, we will be scheduling a couple of one to one meetings to discuss your learning experiences and performance in the course throughout the semester, and we will also plan to share several meals together in the Campus Cafeteria. Similarly, because one of the course Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) pertains specifically to vocational discernment, a number of the course readings/written assignments will relate to this issue. We will also discuss issues relating to discernment when we have our one to one meetings this semester.

University Library Prize for FYS

There are three University Library Prizes for the best research paper in Core 100. For more details, please see http://www.xavier.edu/library/students/University-Library-Prize-for-First-Year-Seminar-Students.cfm.

Students with Special Needs

Students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations as needed in accordance with general academic regulations. If you need accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. Accommodations will not be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity Policy

Please cite your sources on all assignments prepared outside of class (both papers and case studies). Quoting or paraphrasing work without properly citing it constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism on an assignment will result in a failing grade for that assignment and possibly a failing grade for the semester. Cheating on an examination will likewise result in a failing grade for that assignment and possibly a failing grade for the semester.
**Grade Disclosure Policy**

It is a violation of federal law for me to communicate with you about your grades by e-mail or over the telephone; this constitutes a breach of privacy because these media are not fully secured. Grades will be provided in the report of academic achievement that is sent at the end of each term. Should you have questions about your grades, I would be pleased to speak with you personally after class or to make an appointment to meet with you at another time.

**Classroom Technology Policy**

We live in an age where technology is an integral part of many people’s lives. And while the educational use of technology brings with it many benefits, extensive studies have also shown that the recreational use of certain forms of technology (e.g., social networking tools) in the classroom setting can constitute a significant distraction and a hindrance to deep learning. **Accordingly, while our class will incorporate a variety of forms of learning media (written texts, film, video clips, music, art), our classroom will also be a “technology free zone” where the personal/recreational use of technology (cell/smart phones, I-Pads/tablets, laptop computers) in the classroom is not permitted.** Given how “plugged in” many of us are, this may prove a challenge to some, but I would encourage you to consider our class time as an opportunity for you to “unplug” from your everyday habits involving technology and to enter into a more reflective space.