

## General Education Submission Form

Electronic submissions are required.

A. GE component for which course is being proposed: Philosophical Reflections

B. Submitted by Bruce Wydick, Director WSF

C. Ideally, submissions should be discussed by the entire department prior to submittal.

~~Chair has reviewed and approved the course.~~ \_\_\_\_\_

(WSF Director)

D. Course being proposed (please attach syllabus):

21st Century Technology, Christian Faith, and the Meaning of Life

E. This course

- Has not been modified, but is being submitted to check its suitability
- Has had its syllabus rewritten to communicate the course's contribution to GE
- Has had its contents modified to address the relevant GE issues
- Is a new course designed to fulfill the GE requirement

F. This course is being submitted as

~~**A Template.** Applicable to courses with multiple sections which require only general training in the discipline. The submission should come from the department chair and should clearly identify what course content and what elements of the syllabus the department has agreed will common to all sections. Upon approval by the GE Committee, any course whose syllabus is determined by the department to meet the specifications of the template is approved to satisfy this area requirement. A copy of each syllabus should be forwarded to the GE Committee for record keeping purposes.~~

~~**An Individual Course.** Applicable to courses requiring specialized training in the discipline or are typically offered by a particular instructor. The course should be resubmitted and reassessed in the event of a change in staffing or syllabus.~~

G. Statement of rationale:

(Include a list of the area certification criteria (former called GE objectives) and GE Student Learning Outcomes (if applicable). These certification criteria and GE SLOs are listed in the [GE Committee Combined](#) document. After each certification criterion and GE SLO, list several course activities (lectures, readings, assignments, etc.) that address it. If it is not completely obvious, explain how the activities relate to the certification criterion or outcome. Please attach a copy of the syllabus which has been annotated to identify the corresponding activities. Electronic annotations are required. Please use the *comment* feature in Word to annotate electronic copies).



**To:** General Education Curriculum Committee

**From:** Bruce Wydick, Professor of Economics and Director of Westmont in San Francisco

**Subject:** New GE Course Proposal: “21st Century Technology, Christian Faith, and the Meaning of Life” for Philosophical Reflections GE

**Date:** September 14, 2019

The new course that will be offered at Westmont in San Francisco, “21st Century Technology, Christian Faith, and the Meaning of Life” we believe will be an exceedingly popular course with students at Westmont who choose to come for a semester to the SF campus. The 3-unit Interdisciplinary Studies course combines a theological and philosophical reflection on technological change with a cogent examinations of its impacts on individual lives and on society. It is an exceptionally timely course, with mounting evidence of the vast impacts of digital technology on society and on each of our personal everyday lives. Some of these impacts are positive, but others are negative, including economic (increasing inequality), social (impacts on relationships via texting, Instagram, and social media), political (increased polarization), psychological (increased depression reported in young adults), and perhaps even spiritual. We believe in the importance of students having a metaphysical and theological basic for understanding the myriad impacts of digital technology as they begin their adult lives where digital technology will affect most facets of their work, personal lives, and relationship to society. The following describes how the course will meet the GE criteria for the Philosophical Reflections on Reality, Knowledge, and Value:

### **Certification Criteria for Understanding Society:**

Students will be able to

#### **Certification Criteria**

Courses satisfying this requirement give significant attention to the nature of reality, our prospects for knowledge, and ethical or aesthetic values. Students in such courses will

1. understand / be able to explain the importance the bearing of metaphysical assumptions on more specific matters;  
**This course has a strong underlying basis in philosophy (the department where Prof. Moritz teaches at the University of San Francisco). It sets students up to ask the larger metaphysical questions such as “are improvements in digital technology an unquestioned good” for individuals and for society, and about learning how to question and critique these assumptions.**
2. recognize /discuss how assumptions about knowledge affect such pursuits as science,



mathematics, theology, and self-understanding;

**The course will have much to say about how digital phenomena such as social media and gaming affect the meaning of our lives (see title!), what is real, and what is not real. The first few weeks of the class will be strongly rooted in biblical theology as it interfaces with these larger questions of how digital technology affects the meaning of our lives. Society, and especially big digital media corporations, try to convince us of its unabated good—this class will help students to challenge these assumptions.**

3. recognize / discuss the import of competing value claims;  
**An extremely strong component of the course. The class will place a heavy emphasis on the value claims of the digital technology industry on the effect of digital technology on human flourishing versus what good science and Christian reflection say on its impact on human flourishing. It will also look at issues such as the introduction of “virtual” companionship that is growing through interaction with AI tools such as Siri and Alexa and the accompanying philosophical questions—what does it mean to be in relationship?**
4. practice identifying and assessing arguments when a thesis is proposed;  
**The course will hinge strongly around evaluating the claims of digital technology on our lives, specifically the claim that “life is better” with unbridled incorporation of digital technology into our lives.**
5. emerge with a sense of how to think Christianly about various worldviews.  
**One could make the case that an understanding of how to engage with digital culture and the worldview of digital corporate marketing (what Apple, Amazon, and Google say that one’s life needs to be about) is one of the most important philosophical and theological questions facing young adults today. This course will provide a framework for trying to answer those questions.**

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Students will apply appropriate foundational theories to analyze social, political, economic, and/or cultural phenomena.

**These are given in the syllabus below and they are the following:**

**Learning Outcomes:** This course aims to educate and equip students as Christian leaders by providing the resources and tools for a continued engagement with philosophical, ethical, and theological questions raised by the proliferation of digital technologies. By the end of this course, the successful student will

- Gain an understanding of the key areas of conversation between society’s increasing use and dependence on digital technology and its relationship to Christian faith and practice, human flourishing broadly defined, and key transformations that are taking place in society from technological change.



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- Develop and use critical methodologies to construct interdisciplinary philosophical dialogue, constructively use methods in interdisciplinary study and research to explore issues of the impacts of digital technology on society.
- Learn the tools of philosophical and theological reasoning about how to effectively and relevantly engage digital technologies within the context of their vocations and lives in ways that promote their own well-being and those of others in society.



## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Technology, Christian Faith, and the Meaning of Life** **Dr. Joshua M. Moritz**

**Description:** According to theologian Brent Waters, technology, “is the way we live and move and have our being in today’s age.” How does our deep immersion in technology impact our Christian faith? What ways of wisdom and righteousness should guide our daily engagement with multi-media? How can we navigate a course so that the devices that we possess do not in turn come to possess us? How can we use the gifts and blessings of technology to nurture and transform deeper Christ-centered community while avoiding the deepest pitfalls of technologies temptations? In this 3-unit Interdisciplinary Studies class we will explore how our immersion within digital technologies impacts the meaning of our own lives and how we live out our Christian faith. We will examine various theories regarding the nature of technology and how those theories contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human. Considering a number of theological perspectives and themes as they relate to digital technologies we will also examine the ethical challenges that various technologies raise as they hinder or enrich human flourishing. This course is intended to fulfill the Understanding Society component of at Westmont’s General Education Curriculum.

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- Gain an understanding of the key areas of conversation between society’s increasing use and dependence on digital technology and its relationship to Christian faith and practice, human flourishing broadly defined, and key transformations that are taking place in society from technological change.
- Develop and use critical methodologies to construct interdisciplinary philosophical dialogue, constructively use methods in interdisciplinary study and research to explore issues of the impacts of digital technology on society.
- Learn the tools of philosophical and theological reasoning about how to effectively and relevantly engage digital technologies within the context of their vocations and lives in ways that promote their own well-being and those of others in society.

### **Texts:**

1. John Dyer, 2011. *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*, (Kregel Publications, 2011)
2. Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion* (Zondervan, 2011)
3. Alan Lightman, *In Praise of Wasting Time* (Simon and Schuster, 2018)
4. Other Readings: provided by Professor Moritz

### **Grading/Evaluation:**

**Class Participation (25%):** All students taking the course for a letter grade or pass/fail must demonstrate their in-depth reading of the assignments through class participation.

**Weekly Reflections and Questions on Readings (25%):** In order to better facilitate discussion and preparation, students will be expected to e-mail me either (1) a short (about 1 or 2 paragraphs) reflection on some aspect of the readings for that week, or (2) a series of a few questions pertaining to the readings.



These must be e-mailed to me 24 hours before class. To adequately satisfy this criteria you must respond to at least 10 class sessions.

**Three Reflection Papers (50%):** Each paper should be 2000-3000 words in length (not counting references and notes).

**Paper 1: Your Digital Autobiography:** In this paper you will reflect on your own journey with digital technology and the role it has played in your life. What was your first computer and what do you remember about it? What role did it play in your life? What was the first interactive computer or robotic companion that responded to you through either talk or play? Did it know your name? How did this make you feel? What computers came after that? What was the first computer technology that you bought for yourself? Why did you want this technology, what did you want it for? (curiosity, education, because no pets were allowed, etc.); What are the most recent computers and AI entities in your life (Alexa, Siri)?

**Paper 2: Considering Your Struggles with Technology:** In what ways have digital technologies made your walk with God more difficult?

**Paper 3: Envisioning and Redeeming Your Future with Technology:**

## Course Reading Schedule

**Class 1:** Introduction and Overview:

Readings: “New Technology and Christianity” Michael J. Sleasman

### Part I: Technology and Creation

**Class 2:** Human nature and technology

Readings: Genesis Ch 1 and 2; Joshua Moritz “Animals and the Image of God in the Bible and Beyond”; Moritz S&R, Ch 7 “From Consciousness to New Creation: The Nature and Destiny of Humanity”

**Class 3:** God as Technologist and the Goodness of Technology

Readings: Genesis 3:21; Revelation 21-22

**Class 4:** Technology, community, and knowledge. How does technology affect economic and social relationships?

Readings:

**Class 5:** Christian Views of Technology: A Historical Perspective

Readings: Brian Patrick Green, “The Church and Technological Progress: Past, Present, and Future”

### Part II: Technology and Fall

**Class 6:** The Works of the Flesh: Digital technology as an amplifier of sin

Readings: Galatians; Digital entertainment, gaming, violence, desensitizing addiction; Chapter from Flickr

**Class 7:** Techno-Idolatry and The Tower of Babel

Readings: Psalm 115; Ted Peters, “Should CRISPR Scientists Play God?”; Brian Patrick Green, “Ethical Reflections on Artificial Intelligence”;

**Class 8:** Estrangement, Broken Relationships, and Isolation

Readings: Robots as partners Turkle;

Michael Spezio, “Human or Vulcan? Theological Consideration of Emotional Control Enhancement”



**Class 9: Mindless Slaves of Technology**

Readings: Carr and Lightman (In Praise of Wasting Time) less time

**Class 10: False Messiahs (technological messianism, and techno-utopians)**

Readings: Matthew 7:15; Ted Peters “Progress and Provolution: Will Transhumanism Leave Sin Behind?”

**Part III: Technology and Redemption**

**Class 11: Renewing Our Minds**

Readings: Romans ; The value of unstructured thought

**Class 12: The restorative power of created nature**

Readings: George MacDonald “On nature”

**Class 13: The Value of Prayerful Solitude (vs Loneliness)**

Readings: “Solitude: A Return to the Self”

**Class 14: The Fruits of the Spirit**

Readings:

**Class 15: The Kingdom of God**

Readings: