

Vocational Discernment

Department of Mathematical, Information and Computer Sciences

Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA

Vocation

Definition from *Wishful Thinking*,
by Frederick Beuchner

[The word *vocation* comes] from the Latin *vocare*,
to call, and means the work a person is called to by
God.

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to
all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find
out which is the voice of God rather than of Society,
say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The
kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of
work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the
world most needs to have done.

The place God calls you to is the place where your
deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

What we are doing

- Chapel
- Sophomore level course work
- Career dinners
- Integrative experiences
- Vocation in senior seminar

Chapel

Each semester the University sets aside two chapel
periods for department use. These department
chapels are a time of fellowship and worship
between the faculty and students.

In the last few years we have used the theme
“Follow us as we follow Christ.” We have invited
faculty or alumni from our department to present
their life story with particular focus on the
influences and choices about vocation that led
them to this place in their lives. We hope to give
students a sense that discerning one's vocation is a
journey.

The opportunity for students to hear our stories has
led to interesting one-on-one conversations with
them during office hours and advising sessions. We
talk with them about discerning the next step, which
starts them on their own journey of vocation.

Sophomore level course work

In each of the three majors, there is a second
semester sophomore level course that exposes
students to the essence of their discipline. This is
presented in an attempt to dispel myths such as
“mathematics is calculus” or “computer science is
programming.”

We emphasize that these classes are giving
students a clear indication of the coming years of
study in their chosen discipline, and gently ask if
they are still sure that this is the discipline for them.
This has greatly reduced the number of students
that discover in their junior year that they want to
change majors.

Career dinners

Long experience has taught us that our students
are not ready to give serious consideration to the
question “What am I going to do when I graduate?”
until their junior year. Junior and senior students
are invited to a series of career dinners to help
answer that question.

We host four dinners per year that are held in
faculty homes with a simple meal of take-out food.
At each event, two or three alumni and other
professionals present career information in this
informal setting.

Each speaker is asked to address the following
questions:

- What is a typical day like in the profession?
- What are essential gifts/skills needed for the profession?
- What important experiences and/or post-bachelor's education are needed for the profession (graduate school/internship/exams)?
- Tips for gaining entry level jobs
- An estimate of the starting salary

Some examples of the professions discussed
include: software engineer, systems analyst, FBI
agent, NSA cryptographer, financial planner,
defense industry work, middle and secondary
school teacher, actuary, IT management for a large
retail chain and missionary service in IT.

Integrative experiences

Each student in our department is required to have
an integrative experience in their junior or senior
year. Feedback from alumni pointed out that these
experiences gave them an edge in seeking a job
and helped them to identify the kinds of projects
and work environments that they enjoy.

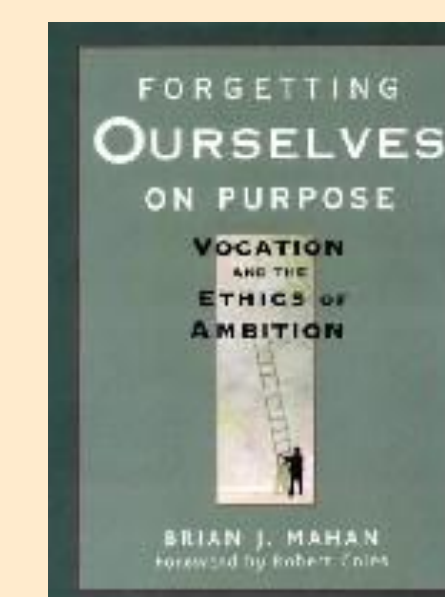
Each spring we invite juniors to a dinner with
faculty members. At that time we discuss the
options for a senior year integrative experience and
we answer questions.

We define an integrative experience as one of the
following:

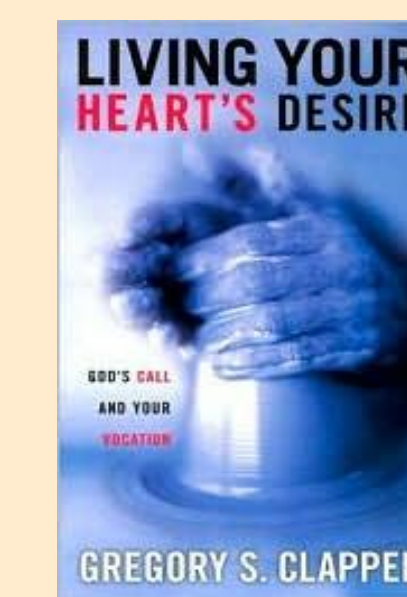
- An internship
- A year-long senior research project under the supervision of a faculty member
- A year-long service learning group project

Senior seminar

Every spring, seniors in our department participate
in a weekly senior seminar on vocation. Each
week the students are required to read one chapter
from one of the course texts (below) and respond
to a series of three to four questions about the
reading.



Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose
by Brian Mahan



Living Your Heart's Desire
by Gregory Clapper

The course discussions are built around a
collection of themes. We return to each theme
multiple times and look at them from different
angles and through the lenses of both text books
as the discussions progress. The core themes are:

- What does it mean to be called?
- Fear when discerning vocation
- There are many “scripts” for our lives
- Making use of many types of information in discerning vocation

What students are saying

At the end of senior seminar, students are asked to
describe one lesson about vocation that they do not
want to forget. Below are some responses from
the 2009 graduating class:

“It is comforting to be reminded that vocation is a
winding but exciting path, and that no one has it all
figured out from the start.”

“Even when we are pursuing our calling, there will
be bumpy spots along the way... I too often think
that if I have chosen the right path, it will not require
me to adapt my plans in the future.”

“I need to keep reminding myself that all I can do is
put one foot in front of the other to the best of my
ability.”

“It is possible for us to learn the most about our
vocational calling at times that we might consider to
be failures or disappointments.”

“Clapper says ‘sometimes our vocational choices
are not between good and bad options.’ Whenever
I have a choice of direction to make, I do not have
to think one is right and one is wrong or bad. That
is a much more freeing way to look at things.”

How alumni can help

The Department encourages alumni to participate
in the growth of current students in a variety of
ways.

Consider sharing your life's journey at a
department chapel. Chapels are held on two
Mondays mornings during the semester.

Attend one of our career dinners as an informative
insider in the fields of Mathematics, Computer
Science or Computer Information Systems.
Answer questions and offer insight into the working
world.

Join the senior seminar students in discussions of
fear, calling, and discernment. Speak on your
journey of vocation from college to now.

To participate in these forums, contact Dr. Maria
Zack at mzack@pointloma.edu.