

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.

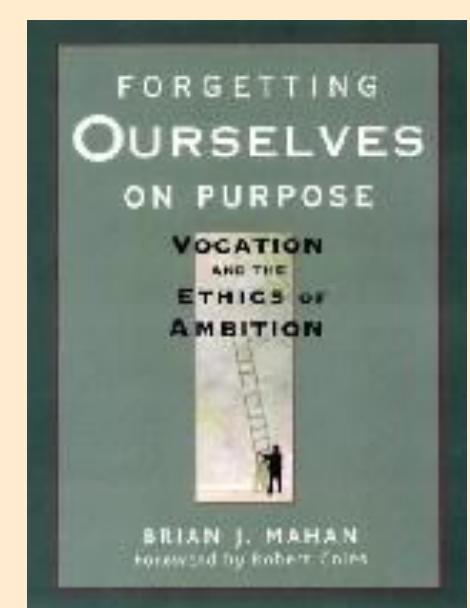
Each spring we invite juniors to a dinner with faculty members. At that time we discuss the options for a senior year integrative experience and we answer questions.

We define an integrative experience as one of the following:

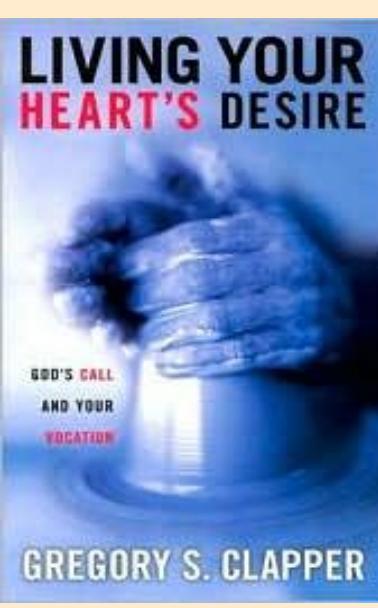
- An internship
- A year-long senior research project under the supervision of a faculty member
- A year-long service learning group project

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.