Description of the Dana Forum

The Dana Forum is a senior year experience designed to provide an opportunity for Dana scholars to engage in shared interdisciplinary dialogue, enriching both your own education and the intellectual climate on campus. My expectation is that this capstone experience should reflect the College’s Mission Statement that speaks to your development as scholars, leaders, and citizens: “Muhlenberg College aims to develop independent critical thinkers who are...committed to life-long learning, equipped with ethical and civic values, and prepared for lives of leadership and service.”

Each year the Forum helps Dana seniors develop and execute collaborative research projects centered on issues of public concern and interest that are tied to the Center for Ethics annual theme. This year’s programming is entitled MarketValues (more information can be found below and at http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/cfe/current_programs/MarketValues.html). My hope is that our experience this year challenges all of us, regardless of our disciplinary backgrounds, to think critically and deeply about how issues related to market values intersect with our own academic interests and issues that impact society at large. In the Fall semester, we will explore a variety of ideas related to the Center for Ethics theme by way of reading the literature, visits from guest lecturers and most importantly through well thought out discussion. You will use this exploration as a context and starting point in the development of your research projects. The research component of the Dana Forum will be completed in the Spring semester and presented to the campus community in April.

Center for Ethics Fall 2012-2013 Program Description

Program Director: Dr. Sue Curry Jansen

MarketValues

Markets have been celebrated by many as a positive force for democratizing a standard of living previously accessible primarily to those of noble birth. However, with progress comes a dependence on markets that risks limiting our ability to constrain them through the social and political institutions that govern economic exchange. Indeed, Adam Smith, the “father” of modern capitalism, advanced the cause of free and open markets while simultaneously warning that unfettered economic activity might hinder human moral development. The observation that markets are embedded in economic, political, social, and cultural contexts begs the question of whether markets are “free” or “natural.” The interplay of markets and morality is at the heart of the program. We will examine historical and contemporary questions about markets and accompanying moral issues they raise in regard to intellectual property, environmental sustainability, health and education, identity issues such as race and gender, and interactive media as labor. What sorts of markets create incentives for morally problematic behavior? And what markets promote virtues that bring about a harmony of interests? Does market organization of economic activity have an ethical basis, and, if
so, how can that basis be used to evaluate the moral legitimacy of particular markets and market outcomes? Does the distribution of wealth that results from market activity derive its justification from the moral legitimacy of the exchange process, or is market wealth distribution a valid object of ethical inquiry in its own right? In what ways do market structures mediate political discourse, cultural evolution, and national and post-national identity?

**Forum coursework**
During the Fall semester, we will meet weekly on Tuesdays from 6-8pm in the Hoffman House. Your attendance and participation in class are very important and will account for a percentage of your final grade. Tardiness and absenteeism will not be well tolerated. If you must miss class or arrive late for a legitimate reason, you should discuss this with me ahead of time (please understand that only a limited number of excused absences will be permitted. This Course actually spans two semesters and your grade will be determined from work throughout the entire year. You will receive an IP (In Progress) for the course in the fall. This will be converted to a grade at the end of the academic year.

The fall schedule is designed to engage us in general discussion of the Center for Ethics theme in order to prepare you for forming research groups, identifying a topic and a faculty mentor, and developing a proposal. In the first half of the semester, we will focus our conversations on topical areas that relate to the Center for Ethics theme, Market/Values. Assigned readings to be completed in advance of these discussions will be provided to you at least a week in advance. Please also note that on most nights another faculty member will be joining us for each of these conversations acting as a guest discussion leader and providing us with a valuable perspective.

As part of the course, you are required to attend a minimum of four Center for Ethics events and reflect on those experiences in our class in two ways, written reflections and discussion. Because Center for Ethics programming is in both the fall and in the spring you will be asked to attend a minimum of two events in the fall (in addition to what we do as a class) and two in the spring. You should submit your written reflections within a week of each event. These should be 2-3 pages typed double-spaced and should be submitted as a hard copy to me at my office or in class. Please note that submission of a reflection indicates that you attended the entire event, including any question & answer session; failing to disclose arriving late/leaving early, etc. will constitute a violation of the AIC. In many weeks, I will also encourage us to direct our conversation over dinner at the beginning of class to the recent event(s), so that those who attended can share thoughts with others in the group (see course schedule for more detail).

By mid-semester, you will form working groups of three or four students, and begin to develop your project proposal. Each group will also identify a faculty mentor for their research work and submit both an initial project description and preliminary proposal. Groups will be asked to provide oral updates on their project development and the class is expected to provide feedback. Finally, each group will present its proposal to the rest of the cohort in the final two class meetings this Fall. Please see course schedule for timeline and due dates. More information about each of these objectives will be provided throughout the Fall semester.

**Collaborative research projects**
The design of the Forum mandates that the collaborative research project be tied to the Center for Ethics annual theme. In order to facilitate both collaborative and individual contributions and to promote interdisciplinary conversations, working groups must be composed of three or four students who have majors that represent multiple and distinct academic disciplines at the College and there can be no more than two students with majors from the same disciplinary divisions (sciences, social sciences, and humanities). Your
proposals will be evaluated by myself in consultation with Dr. Mohsin Hashim, Director of the Dana Scholars program, and your faculty mentor and may require revision before the research can be conducted in the Spring semester.

During the Spring semester, it is expected that each working group will meet at least weekly to share research and discuss progress. Every other week, these meetings should include your faculty mentor. Additional meetings of the entire cohort or individual working groups with me will also be scheduled. A group log must be kept that details each weekly meeting and documents weekly progress; this will be factored in as part of your final project grade. The written portion of the final project (which will include both collaborative sections and individually-written chapters) as well as the presentation will be evaluated by Drs. Niesenbaum and Hashim and your faculty mentor.

Requirements and evaluation
Grades for the Forum will be determined on the basis of several components described above. Percentage contributions to the final grade are detailed on the following page.

- Attendance and participation (Fall course) 15%
- Written reflections on Center for Ethics events (Fall & Spring) 10%
- Group research proposals (Fall) 10%
- Group proposal presentation (Fall course) 10%
- Project meeting log (Spring) 5%
- Final Project and Presentation (Spring) 40%
- Peer Evaluations (Fall and Spring) 10%

The grading scale for the determination of final letter grades is as follows: A, 90% and above; B, 80-89%; C, 70-79%; and D/F, below 70%. In addition, pluses (+) and minuses (-) may be used to denote the higher and lower end of each range. Students will receive a final grade upon completion of the research project and presentation at the end of the Spring 2012 semester.

All Forum requirements are to be performed under the bounds of the Academic Integrity Code. Please familiarize yourself with this document and understand that a student who violates the Code may receive a failing grade for the course.

Any student with documented disabilities or special needs who requires accommodations in this work should let me know as soon as possible. Students with disabilities requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a multi-faceted application process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of an Accommodation Plan. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed with the directors or staff of the following departments, as appropriate: Academic Resource Center, Office of Counseling Services, Student Health Services, and the Office of Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the appropriate department to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.
Expectations for discussion and class participation*

It is important to maintain a relaxed and accepting atmosphere, in order that all members of the group can feel free to participate—that is, to state ideas, ask questions, and respond to others in meaningful ways. Individuals should feel free to express their beliefs, opinions, ideas, and thoughts freely, even if they are unsure about them, and all members of the group should realize that people’s views change over time. Be as receptive and sympathetic to other people’s views as you can, and if you disagree, say so, but avoid doing so in a belligerent or threatening way. Encourage non-participants tactfully in such a way that they realize the sincerity of your interest in their views. Be careful to take time to complement each other for especially good ideas, helpful explanations, or other positive contributions.

Listening is an essential part of successful communication and is often neglected in everyday life. You can practice this by trying to formulate in your own mind or stating out loud the gist of what a previous speaker has said before adding your own contribution. This is what is involved in responding to other people—and what is lost when each person simply waits his/her turn to speak his/her own mind. It is also the difference between simply participating and interacting.

I will use the descriptive rubric† below in evaluating your class participation:

- **9-10** = Speaks often, voluntarily contributing pertinent information and answering questions. Displays courtesy and conducts him/herself in a mature manner. In addition, this person is an effective listener, responding to others’ ideas instead of focusing only on his/her own opinions.
- **7-8** = Speaks occasionally in class, and answers some questions. Alternatively, this person may participate frequently but show him/herself to be an ineffective listener at times, disrespecting colleagues by interrupting or monopolizing the floor.
- **5-6** = Speaks infrequently in class, and struggles to answer posed questions. This person may also be an ineffective listener.
- **1-4** = Unprepared and/or not engaged with the course material.
- **0** = Unexcused absence.

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* Adapted from Evolution and Physiological Ecology handouts, Biology Department, Kalamazoo College.
† Adapted from Dr. Elizabeth McCain, Biology Department, Muhlenberg College.
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