Human Sexuality

Course Description

This course is an exploration of the study of human sexuality as an all-embracing, all-pervasive gift of God to each and every human being. In order to embrace the gift of sexuality, well-educated students must consider the biological, psychological, social, moral, and cultural implications of sexual behavior when making decisions. This class will treat sexuality as it is dealt with in modern science, contemporary society, and the teachings of the Church. Emphasis will be placed on helping students develop a holistic appreciation of sexuality and stress the importance of building relationships grounded in self-respect, love, and integrity. Students will develop a sexual ethic that advocates moral responsibility for their personal sexual health, the health of their relationships with others, and with God.

This course is taught through the following lens:

The meaning of sexuality is not up for grabs; rather the meaning of sexuality is something derived from the meaning of our lives as human beings. As people of faith, moreover, we realize that we have been loved into being. We live because God loves us, and insofar as we live with his life we are enabled to love even as he has loves us first. At its deepest and truest level, Christian living is an extension of the Incarnation; in other words, it is a continuation of Christ’s embodiment of God’s love for us…. Our sexuality plays a crucial role in our ability to answer this call to love. We say this because human sexuality is ‘both the physiological and psychological grounding of our capacity to love’. It is the basic way we profess both our incompleteness and our relatedness. It is God’s ingenious way of calling us into communion with others through our need to reach out and touch and embrace—emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Our sexuality is simply essential both to our becoming fully human and to our human becoming. [Genovese]

Essential Questions

What is human sexuality?

How does American Culture inform and form my sexuality?

How do the Principals of Catholic Social teaching inform and shape my sexuality?

How do I respond to the tension created when official Church teaching and science conflict?

How do I create a sexual ethic that supports the Core Tenants of Catholic Social teaching with a focus on human dignity and reverence for human life?

How do I become an advocate for the marginalized and underrepresented in matters of sexuality, sexual health and health care?
Enduring Understandings: Students will:

- understand that God loved them into being and that God’s love is foundational to their human development
- understand the beauty of their sexuality and regard it as a “gift” from God which must be treated with reverence, respect, and a sense of responsibility
- understand and appreciate the diversity of sexuality cross-culturally
- know how to respond in a multi-cultural world with intelligence, integrity, compassion, and love
- understand sexuality within the context of American Culture
- understand how science and religion informs sexuality
- know how to discern the myriad ethical issues related to human sexuality and human sexual behavior
- understand the connection between a “Faith that does Justice” and sexuality
- understand that “God meets us in our personal experience, in our relationships, dreams, hopes, pains, and worries.” [Grogan S.J.]

By the end of the semester students will be able to:

- understand the study of sexuality as a multi-dimensional discipline that draws upon scientific research, social and cultural standards, political structures and religious and moral traditions
- identify and define the essential components of holistic health and sexuality
- understand how scripture can support their human development and spiritual growth
- understand the Official Church Teaching related to sexual behavior and sexuality
- communicate openly and honestly about their values and beliefs
- engage in intelligent conversations about sex using language that supports human dignity
- identify and explain human anatomy and psychology – including reproduction and birth
- recognize the components of sexual identity and appreciate its complexity
- research and analyze Adolescent Sexual Trends in the United States that include: STI transmission, prevention and risk reduction
- understand the AIDS pandemic
- understand the effect that media, peers, and parenting has on adolescent psychosexual development
- identify components of healthy relationships and practice communication skills that reinforce their positive growth
- formulate a sexual ethic that supports human dignity and reverence for human life
- understand their obligation to insure justice for those groups who are discriminated against, demonized, and ostracized as a result of sexual practices and sexual identity
- utilize a process of Ignatian discernment [prayer] that will assist them in forming and informing their conscience
- understand how faith informs their humanity
- identify some of the challenges that college will bring given their newfound freedom
**Unit One: Defining Sexuality- A Sacred Gift**

This unit presents an in-depth look at the early evolution of human sexuality, including how sexuality was viewed by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, and throughout ancient Asian cultures. It also traces sexuality throughout history and examines how the following eras impact our views of sexuality. These areas include: Christianity, the Middle Ages, Islam, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Victorian Era, Slavery, and the Sexual Revolution. In addition, Holistic Sexuality is introduced along with the sexuality defined by the Catholic Church.

**Outcomes: Students will:**

- understand human sexuality as defined by Genovesi in Coleman’s book, *Human Sexuality- An all-embracing gift*
- understand the term “human sexuality” defined through the lens of the holistic health model
- understand the historical evolution of human sexuality: socially, politically, religiously, and morally
- understand how historical events impact current sexual practices and attitudes
- understand the influence of race, ethnicity, and class on sexuality
- articulate core values that guide them in creating a holistic sense of self
- articulate core values and religious beliefs that form and inform their sexuality and sexual decision-making
- understand cross-cultural practices and perspectives on sexuality
- understand the complexity of sexual practices and acknowledge the “call to justice” related to Female Cutting, fundamentalist polygamy sects, and child abuse

**Unit Two: Sexual Anatomy and Physiology- The Body as Temple**

This unit presents a comprehensive overview of both male and female anatomy and physiology. Reviews of newest research on body image problems in both men and women are introduced and current issues related to disease and conditions that affect reproduction are explored.

**Outcomes: Students will:**

- know the sexual differences and similarities between male and female anatomy
- understand how language can either support or denigrate the human body and influence self-worth
- use proper terminology when referencing basic anatomy- “the man who creates the language controls the soul of the nation” [Miller] "There is a hole in the soul of the language of sexuality.” [Devincenzi]
- understand fetal development and reproduction as a “true miracle of life”
- understand the sacredness of their bodies and the importance of ongoing self-examination and regular health care visits
• explore cultural stereotypes related to anatomy and to sexual behavior
• understand hormonal forms of contraception, their affect on female reproduction, and the difference between their TUR and the AUR
• understand official church teachings related to conception control

Unit Three: Sexual Identity- Appreciation of Diversity

This unit begins with the discussion of pre-natal development and theories of gender development. This provides a spring-board for the nurture-nature debate, including the discussion of intersexed persons, John Money’s classic twin study and circumcision accident, and cross-cultural information on “third genders” in a number of societies.

Outcomes: Students will:
• understand the biological, gender, and orientation continua
• understand the complexities of sexual identity
• research and explore the challenges that children, parents, and adults face when their sexuality defies “the accepted social norms”
• to understand cultures who recognize and successfully integrate the ‘third gender’ into their social, political, and religious structures
• understand their call to “love and compassion” for those who are “social outcasts”
• be aware of the groundbreaking work and research conducted in the areas of gender – non conformity, transgenderism, transexualism, and sexual orientation
• explore their personal prejudices related to sexual identity

Unit Four: Adolescent Sexual Trends - Ethical Formation/Values Put Into Action

This unit explores physical and psychosexual development and sexual behavior from birth, through early, middle, preteen, and adolescent years. The discussion includes the role media, peers, parents, and religion play in psychosexual development and sexual behavior.

Outcomes: Students will:
• understand the cultural attitudes towards adolescent sexuality in the United States
• investigate and understand the STI trends in the United States
• organize sexually transmitted infections into 3 categories- ectoparasitic, and viral infections and understand the biology of these infections- incidence, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of STI’s
• understand Prevention and Risk Reduction related to sexual behavior
• understand the importance of Abstinence and practice saying “No”
• understand the evolution of the AIDS Pandemic
• explore and understand theories of sexual ethics
• understand their responsibility to be ethical human beings
• formalize their personal sexual ethic

Unit Five: Love and Intimacy - Dignity and Respect Lived Out

This unit explores the concepts of love and intimacy and their importance to building holistic relationships. This unit explores theories of attraction and addresses the relationship between love and sex, as well as trust, intimacy, and respect.

Objectives: Students will:

• understand the meaning of love as it is rooted in Scripture
• explore modern theories of love and attraction
• understand the relationship between love and sex
• examine the health and breakdown of intimate relationships
• be able to identify potentially dangerous sexual relationships, behaviors, and fantasies
• explore the boundaries of sexual exploitation or sexual harassment in high school/college/workplace
• to identify sexual abuse and how to prevent and deal with its results
• understand positive communication skills
• understand conflict management

Text(s): Healthy Sexuality: Richard Blonna and Jean Levitan: Additional readings are distributed by instructor.

How does this course meet the ESLRS?

Open to Growth – For the first time in many of our student’s lives they are given the opportunity to receive accurate information regarding sexuality and sexual health. The discussion of sexuality and sexual health is grossly overlooked by parents, schools and U.S. culture, in general. Students are hungry for this information. Developmentally they are ripe for the important moral and ethically discussions that are vital to their human becoming. In addition, this course helps to demystify sex and to invite them to explore and understand the diversity of the human experience. As they venture off to college, they will have the necessary skills to continue to learn and to develop in their own sexuality and, to do so, with confidence.

Intellectually Competent- This course provides students with the critical information required for sexual wholeness. Given they live in a sexually saturated culture, this course will help them to navigate with a sense of intelligence and moral integrity. Knowledge is power, and when coupled with ‘compassion and love’ it is transformational.

Loving- This course requires students to discern the meaning of what it means to be a human being- to be free, loving, social, intelligent/reasoning and forgiving. Students will understand the great responsibility that comes with ensuring that all humans reach their true potential. In addition, this course challenges students to embrace the unconventional and to understand that all people have intrinsic value and human dignity.
**Religious**- This class exposes students to the official teachings of the Church. It also reinforces the concept that life is a ‘gift from God’ to be reverenced and to be respected. As future partners, parents, and productive citizens they will understand the important role that religious formation plays in their ethical formation, sexual decision-making and overall sexuality.

**Committed to Doing Justice**- This class allows students to study the many injustices, prejudices, and abhorrent sexual practices that men, women, and children endure both in the U.S. and worldwide. In addition, students are encouraged to articulate their fears and reflect on their prejudices so they can become “men and women with, and for, others”.

**Pursuit of Leadership Growth**- This class opens both the minds and hearts of students. They are encouraged and allowed to test their ideas by engaging in open and creative dialogue on many controversial issues. They understand that what we know now might change given the advancements in science and technology. Ongoing evaluation and reflection of their beliefs is essential to holistic health and the formation of a well integrated sexuality. Students must take responsibility to inform themselves on important issues especially when making decisions that regulate human sexual behavior, human rights, and basic civil liberties. The class promotes the importance of intelligence, reflection and prayer as integral components to fair and just leadership.

**How does this course support the Department Mission Statement?**

This course allows both students and the instructor to deepen their understanding of what it means to be a sexual human being through formalized study and through prayer. This is a beautiful and compelling journey that requires we open our hearts and minds to the challenge of love. This course is designed to develop intelligent men and women who are well educated in the study of human sexuality and who understand the critical link between knowledge and their responsibility to create a more loving humanity.

**How does this course incorporate the 5 Core Dimensions of the Department?**

**Scripture and Church and Ignatius** - This course incorporates scripture and official church teaching related to sexuality. In addition, Ron Rolheiser’s, *Passion and Purity* are revisited along with O’Malley and Kavanaugh ideas on “intrinsic human dignity”. The class draws upon Catholic Social Teaching, reinforcing the junior curriculum. Ignatian principles provide foundation for the course. That being said, I do think this is an area for improvement. I can be more intentional by weaving Ignatian language [Cura Personalis, Magis and a Faith that does Justice] more clearly into the curriculum.

**Catholic Moral and Social Justice Teaching**: This course is a wonderful extension of the Junior Curriculum. Human interaction is frequently joyous and life-giving allowing individuals to thrive and to grow in their potential. At the same time, humans can be complex and challenging. Students experience tremendous tension created by a media-driven culture and a church that [in their eyes] is duplicitous in its support of human rights. Church teaching on masturbation, contraception, same-sex marriage, divorce/remarriage, and pre marital sex ignites both controversy and cynicism. Some are disillusioned by church teachings; others are angered by [their perceived] hypocrisy of the Church. I say, there is NO better place to teach this class but in the Religious Studies Department.

**Sacred Traditions and God**- I see room for improvement and can think of ways to integrate Eucharist and Reconciliation into this course.
Jesus (Discipleship) - The person of Jesus and his teachings regarding sexuality are intentionally discussed in the first unit. They love Jesus because Jesus loved those who others despised. At times, I will give students prompts that provide them opportunity to talk about the influence of scripture on their sexuality. Jesus frequently surfaces in their reflections. We speak of Jesus most frequently when we speak of tolerance, love and forgiveness. This class provides them with many opportunities to see Jesus as a role model.

Prayer and discernment - Holistic sexuality reinforces the importance of reflection, prayer, and meditation. Spiritual growth is an essential component to a healthy sexuality. Students actively engage in daily prayer. They are encouraged to connect prayer to what we are studying. I must say, this area needs more development. I really think I can be more creative with Ignatian Discernment and the Examen.

Why do you think this course is necessary?

Part of me feels this course should be mandatory for all seniors. It is shocking how little our students know about their sexuality and sexual health. They are misguided, misinformed, and naive. As parents, as educators, and as a culture, we have failed our youth in this area of their development. Needless to say, US culture is saturated with sexual messages, yet at the same time political leaders debate whether or not honest, factual information dare be presented to youth. I believe it is unethical and sinful (a word I do not use lightly) to graduate our students unprepared to deal with the freedom and diversity of college-life. Without the proper information essential for healthy psychosexual development, ethical and spiritual formation, we are simply negligent in our commitment to educate Ignatian men and women for the 21st century.