INQ 111S 06: Inquiry  
Fall, 2017 MWF 9:20AM-10:20AM, Patterson 107  
Syllabus version 1.0

Instructor: 
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Office Hours  MWF 10:30-11:20, by appointment, and when you can find me

Textbooks:  
• People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks  
• The Westminster College Fall 2017 Inquiry Reader

Course Overview  
What is Inquiry? The dictionary definition is seeking information by asking questions. The Westminster College Catalog says that this course introduces students “to the philosophy and practice of a liberal arts education”. What does all of this mean?

The real purpose of this course is to introduce you to the college mode of academic study, as we understand it at Westminster College. Depending on your high school experience, this may or may not represent a serious change in how you go about learning things for your classes. Indeed, you will find that what you do is very different in different sorts of classes. One way of thinking about this course is suggested by it’s title: how do you go about addressing questions in an academic manner? For that matter, how do you go about asking questions, and figuring out what are the right questions to ask? In this day and age, when presented with a question, most people will go their favorite Internet search engine (often Google), type in some keywords, and find somebody somewhere who has an answer to that question. Although this represents casual research of a sort, it is not academic research. In Inquiry, we will begin to learn that mastering the process of addressing a question is as important, or indeed more important, than simply having the answer.

Unlike many courses, Inquiry is oriented more around a mode of learning than it is around any particular topic. The subject material for this course will be diverse, but will focus on three general areas. First, the nature of a liberal arts education; why get a college education at an institution such as Westminster? What are the “liberal arts”, and why is it worth studying them rather than just focusing narrowly on what you will be doing in the job you want to get after graduation? Second, we will be discussing The People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks, and topics and other readings that arise from that book. Finally, we will look at how intellectual understanding is not all one thing, about how there are different “ways of knowing”, and how the nature of academic inquiry depends on the field in which you are studying, and the type of question you are asking.
Course Goals

On page vii of the Inquiry Reader you can find a description of the Inquiry Course as a whole, including the outcomes and objectives of the course.

Assignments and Grading

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<td>Spec Sheets</td>
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<td>Library Week Research Paper</td>
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<td>Two Readings/Research Papers</td>
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<td>Programming Project</td>
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<td>Personal Presentation</td>
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<td>Co-Curricular Reports</td>
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<td>Class Participation</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous Assignments</td>
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Spec Sheets: Every Friday you will turn in a 1-page paper. The topic is your choice. In this paper, you should respond to something that we’ve done during the week. You could do a small amount of research to extend on something that bothered you from a reading. Or, you could give a reaction to something that you found particularly striking. You might write a short creative piece that extends upon or replies to something we’ve read. Half of your grade on spec sheets comes simply from doing them; if you turn one in, you automatically get half credit for it. The rest will be graded on two criteria: first, is the topic you address appropriate for what we’ve been doing in class, and second, grammar, usage, and punctuation. Unlike the other papers in this class, you will not be graded on the quality of your research or your argument. The goal of the spec sheets is to get you writing all the time, so that you get used to it and develop some practice with it.

Library Week Paper: The week of September 25, the class will be in the library. The librarians will lead the class, and will introduce you to the practice of academic research. (Hint: it’s not just searching Google for a bunch of appropriate keywords.) The product at the end of this week will be a 3–5 page paper on a topic that you will develop in the first few days of the week. More information will be given about this paper as Library Week approaches.

Two Readings Papers: You will also write two additional 3–5 page papers on topics that you choose arising from the readings we’ve done in class. In these papers, you will address an issue or a question, developing a thesis and making an argument for that thesis. The argument you choose to make should be supported by the text of the reading (or other readings). A good argument can be supported, but also won’t be trivial or obvious; an interesting argument is one that somebody could reasonably disagree with. As we come closer to the due dates for these papers, we will discuss further in class what they entail.

Programming Project: For two weeks in the class we’ll have a very quick introduction to computer programming, using a graphic interface designed to make it very approachable. You will come up with a project of our own to create with what we’ve learned.
Personal Presentation: Fairly early in the class you will give a short oral presentation to the class about something that you are personally passionate about. The primary purpose of this is for me to give you feedback about your presentation style.

Book Presentation: I am going to ask all of you to pick a book that you think would be fun to read. I will have numerous suggestions. You will tell us about this book, further practicing your presentation skills.

Co-Curricular Reports: Three times during the semester, you must attend a “co-curricular event”. This means attending a concert, a lecture, a play, or something along those lines. You will write a half-page response to each event you attend. Early in the semester, you will be provided with a suggested list of events. Note that the author of People of the Book will be visiting and giving a talk during the semester. This will not count as one of your co-curriculars; every Inquiry student will be required to attend this event.

Class Participation is more than just attendance, although of course you can’t participate if you aren’t present. Not very much of this class will operate in a “lecture” mode, where the instructor talks and you take notes. Rather, there will be individual and group activities, and a lot of class discussion. Your class participation grade reflects how engaged you are with the class. Are you contributing to class discussions and to in-class group work? Are your contributions thoughtful and appropriate?

Pop Quizzes will happen at surprising times. They will be quizzes on the reading that as assigned for the current day. Each will just have two or three quick questions, and will take only 10–15 minutes.

Miscellaneous Assignments: There will be other assignments in addition to reading assignments where you will need to bring something to class or turn something in. You will receive more information about each of them as they are assigned.

Attendance

You are expected to come to every class meeting; indeed, class participation is a significant part of your grade. That being said, we’re all adults here. If you are unwell, or even just excessively tired and know you won’t get anything out of the lecture, make the decision that is best for you. However, if you do miss any meetings of the course, you are still responsible for everything that happened during that course meeting, including any announcements about changes in due dates for assignments. While changes of these sorts of things will generally be announced on the course website, you should speak with a friend after any missed course meeting to make sure that you are up to date with the course. In any event, I will not rehash or summarize what happened in class for you if you miss class.

Academic Integrity

(This section was borrowed and modified from a syllabus written by Jamie McMinn.)

You are expected to comply with Westminster College’s policy on Academic Integrity, as described in the College Catalog. If you are suspected of violating this obligation, then you will be required to participate in the procedural process at the instructor level.
Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to: plagiarizing another person’s published work or ideas; cheating or receiving unauthorized help on assignments; damaging, destroying, or stealing material from library resources; using unauthorized materials during a midterm or final exam; falsifying data for laboratory experiments.

**Special Accommodations**

(By borrowed from a syllabus written by Jamie McMinn.)

If you have special needs that may affect your academic life during this semester, you should speak to a member of Disability Resources at x7192. Accommodations that are consistent with college policy will be considered. If you need additional assistance with your coursework and study habits, then you should contact the Learning Center at x6700. For issues that may affect your personal life this semester, please contact the counseling center at x7340.

**Course Schedule**

This schedule is subject to change! This is just a basic outline of what I expect we’ll be doing each week of the course. The detailed schedule of topics, including due dates for reading and homework assignments, can be found on the course website. (See the top of this syllabus for the address.)

- **Week 1–2** Introduction to the Liberal Arts
- **Week 3–4** *People of the Book*
- **Week 5** Library Week
- **Week 6** The Siege of Sarajevo
- **Week 7** Personal Presentations
- **Week 8** Stories & Poetry
- **Week 9** Mid-Break; Faculty Scholarship Panels; Logic
- **Week 10–11** Logic; Computer Programming
- **Week 11** Learning to See
- **Week 12–13** Listening to Music; Thanksgiving break
- **Week 14** The Veils of Maya; Quantum Physics
- **Week 15** Science & Religion

During the final examination period for the class (Thursday Dec 14, 8:00-10:30AM) most of you will be giving your Book Presentations.