

A University Personal Growth Course Syllabus: For Your Possible Use  
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In the summer of 2013, I submitted a proposal to the administration of the college in which I teach for a three academic credit course I would instruct dealing with personal growth and fulfillment. I see the course as a special topics course, as it is called, a one-time offering, and that it would be open to any student in the university, not just those in my home college, as an elective (not part of their major or minor concentration), and that there would be no prerequisites, no courses students would have to have taken prior to enrollment in this course.

The course is grounded in the human potential movement of the 1970s, which had significant merit but which has been discarded down the intellectual memory hole; nobody talks about it now. I believe students and those in academic work in our time would do well to revisit the human potential movement. It can be enlightening to students and the starting-off point for productive scholarship and research. (A good background reading on the human potential movement and my involvement with it is a thought on this site, August, 2011, "On est and the Human Potential Movement.")

My proposal was turned down. The rationale for the turn-down was that it is too personalized, too much centered around my own orientation and study and writing, and not grounded enough in the current thinking and scholarship and published literature in this area of concern. Indeed, this course is personalized: it is the outcome of decades of my own experience, investigation, and reflection, and it draws almost exclusively on material--including prominently, writings by me contained in this site--not published in the established professional literature. I believe colleges and the universities would do well, selectively to be sure, to provide the opportunity for students to encounter the work of individual faculty, even if it is outside the frame of the accepted scholarship and research at a particular time--everything of worth is not contained in the traditional academic journals or within the pages of mainline books. It can expand students' thinking and open up new possibilities for them, and it can put their other studies better in perspective for them. Too, the existence of personalized courses,

call them that, can enrich and diversify an academic context and encourage dialogue and debate and point the way to new scholarly emphases and activities. But that is not how my institution sees it, at least with regard to this particular course and me; the course won't be offered.

I make the course syllabus, or outline, available here for you to review. Look it over to see whether you can make any use of it personally or professionally. Three uses I see as possible for you:

- If you are a student somewhere that will give you credit for this course, I'm willing to consider serving as your instructor for the course. Contact information is on this site.

- You could use this course outline informally to expand yourself. Read some or all of this material. You could, in effect, take the course over a period of three months or so. Read over the syllabus to get oriented, and do the weekly reading. Keep a learnings journal in which you record your insights, how things apply to you, and personal goals and actions that grow out of your study. I'm available to correspond with anyone who is seriously into this kind of investigation.

- If you teach in a high school or college or some kind of community education center, something like that, and your context is friendlier than mine, you could use some or all of this curriculum in your work. I'll correspond with you about doing that, answer questions, offer counsel, etc.

The syllabus is set up for one three-hour class session a week for fifteen weeks and could be modified for other time arrangements. I've excised the particulars of my circumstance; you can fill those spaces in with your own information. The readings by me are available on this site; the two books can be purchased from Amazon. Here it is:

[the course number] Personal Growth & Fulfillment

[day and time of the course]

[instructor name]

[instructor contact information]

Course Goals

The course title and this description give a sense of the learning opportunity this course provides for students:

An exploration of the process of an individual becoming the best possible version of the unique person he or she is, and then being that, doing that, honestly, purely, autonomously, decently, powerfully, effectively, and gratifyingly in both the private and public realms of life.

Nothing is more central to life as it is actually lived, in both the private and public domains, than the process of becoming the best possible version of the unique person one is. People can lead good lives by conventional standards and yet not realize what was possible for them, and they can live nominally good lives that aren't truly their lives, and in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that costs them. Someone can know a great deal, and be skillful, and his or her heart is in the right place, but just not be the kind of person that gets good things done. And someone can have many accomplishments and accolades in their life and still not find their existence rewarding or satisfying.

This course provides students with the opportunity to begin the investigation of personal and professional development and effectiveness. This course is not a self-contained package; rather, it is to get you oriented for continued study up the line if you choose. The focus here is on learning, acquiring scholarly understanding and perspective. It is not on your changing yourself in any particular way. Indeed, you may decide to do that in these next four months, but that it not the concern of this course. I won't ask you what you are becoming or intend to become; I'll ask you what you are learning about living a true and productive and satisfying life.

Every course reflects the experience and frame of reference of the instructor, and this one is no exception. In large measure, it grounded in what was called the human potential movement of the 1970s, which I believe was very important in intellectual history but which has been dropped down the memory hole of scholarship. [you will want to modify, or perhaps delete, the rest of this paragraph] I studied with the psychologist Carl Rogers and worked with writer

George Leonard, both central figures in this movement. My doctoral dissertation was grounded in the work of University of Chicago psychologist Eugene Gendlin, who keyed off of Roger's formulations. All along at this university, I have integrated a developmentalist, potential-realization perspective into my teaching and writing. The last six years, I've written pieces for a personal/professional web site that deal more directly with these topics, some of which you'll read in these next week. This course will be the first time in a course context that I will have dealt with these career-long interests head on, as it were.

[if you delete the personal material in the last paragraph, you could include this material as part of the paragraph] While this course reflects a particular orientation toward personal and professional growth and development and expression, it doesn't presume that it is the only valid one. I hope that it raises the question of what it means to live a life worthy of a human being, and that, over the next years, you resolve that question for yourself and do something about it.

### Readings

We'll be reading portions of two books and a number of short pieces by me.

--Jack Canfield, *The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (William Morrow, 2005). Canfield, who has a Ph.D in education, wrote prominently about education back in the 1970s, which is how I first knew about him. [you could delete the personal references in this section] I met him in the 1970s in California when I lived there for a year. He had by that time become involved in the human potential movement and was conducting personal growth workshops. Since that time, he has written and taught in this area, to education and corporate audiences especially, and become very prominent, Oprah appearances and so on. He is the co-creator of the bestselling Chicken Soup of the Soul series. Canfield isn't an original thinker, but he is good at recognizing good ideas and putting them together in accessible form. The book we'll be reading is an example of that. It's lengthy—450 pages. We'll be reading the first section of the

book, *The Fundamentals of Success*, the first 190 pages, during the first half of the course.

--Anthony Robbins, *Awake The Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical, and Financial Destiny* (Simon & Schuster, 1991). There are many reasons on the face of it to dismiss this book. It's got a hokey title. Robbins doesn't have academic credentials; he's a high school graduate. He's known as an infomercial huckster, and he's had problems in his personal life and professional dealings. Plus this is an old book and we've become conditioned to believe that in whatever area of life the latest is best. My view is that we ought to read books based on their content, and you can't beat the content of this book. As with Canfield, Robbins isn't an original thinker, but he has studied widely, is a good evaluator, he knows good concepts when he sees them, and, makes ideas accessible and useable. A prime example, his adaptation of the theory of two university scholars, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, which they call neuro-linguistic programming, has brought their ideas to a wide audience, something Bandler and Grinder were never able to do. The second half of the course, we'll read selected chapters of the Robbins book that sketch out his basic concepts of personal and professional growth and effectiveness.

--[you could re-word this to make it more impersonal] My writings. In 2007, I began a personal/professional web site, [www.robertsgriffin.com](http://www.robertsgriffin.com). Since that time, the predominance of my professional writing has been for the site. The site is divided into what I call writings and thoughts. Many of the thoughts deal with the content area of this course. The thoughts all begin "On" and then whatever the subject, a person or topic. I've selected 35 of them for this course and we'll be reading two a week, in a couple of instances three, over the span of the semester. The titles often don't indicate what they are about, but it will become clear quickly when you get into them.

As we go along in the course, I'll recommend other readings, and as you discover potentially useful reading, let the rest of us know.

You can get the Canfield and Robbins books from the bookstore.

You can read my writings on the web site.

The first challenge with the required reading is to understand the writer's argument from his perspective. And then go deeper into it: analyze it, gain perspective on it, extrapolate from it, give meaning to it, assess it. Every assignment in the course will involve your doing this. Stay with the writer; don't use the readings as a prompt to talk about yourself and engage in opinion pronouncement relative to the topic. Learn to understand other people on their terms, and then intellectually work with it; that is the primary task of scholarship. If you don't develop the ability to do that, you'll end up, without realizing it, reiterating what's already inside your head, however it got there, philosophically and intellectually spinning your wheels, and living in accordance with whatever happens to be the current convention at any point in time.

## Class Sessions and Assignments

### Class Sessions

Class sessions will be focused on the exploration of the readings for that week and will include four kinds of activities.

--*Scholarly exchange.* Every week, we all, me included, bring a sheet of paper with the three most important issues/questions that grew out of the study of that week's reading listed in order of importance (importance defined as most likely to result in significant learning). As a class, we'll choose ones from the lists to discuss. I'll write you an email response to your list, whether or not we deal with any of its items in class.

--*Insight writing.* Every week, you'll do a twenty-minute or so writing grounded in the week's reading on a topic I choose at the time—so you won't know it ahead of time. Whatever the topic, it will ask you to explore what you have learned, not offer your own opinions and thoughts prompted on by the reading.

--*"Best thinking" presentations.* Ten minutes of your freshest, more perceptive, understandings, analyses, and creative ideas that grew out of the week's study of the readings.

--*Twenty-minute talks*. My elaboration or extension of one of more of the week's readings, followed by your scholarly response verbally or in writing.

### Learning Journal

A notebook that records your learning progress over the semester. I'm thinking of two or three entries for each reading (these aren't notes)—key learnings, analyses, insights, connections, contradictions, questions, meanings. Hand in your pages for the week at the class session. I'll send you an email the next day with my reactions.

### Email Forum

We can stay in contact as a group by email during the week, sharing ideas, learning problems, observations, assessments, etc. The expectation is that we all—I'm included—make at least one contribution to the forum and give one response what someone else has contributed.

### Readings Schedule

Study the readings prior the session, and be prepared to use the class session as to move yourself forward in your learning and support the rest of us in doing the same.

[I put dates on all the class sessions in the proposed curriculum--here, I label them session one, session two, and so on, for sixteen sessions]

--Class session one.

Griffin: "On est and the Human Potential Movement."

Griffin: "On Being a Good Student in My Course."

--Class session two.

Canfield: chapters, 1-3.

Griffin: "On Becoming Who You Are."

Griffin: "On Michel Faucault."

--Class session three.

Canfield: chapters 4-5.

Griffin: "On Personal Health III."

Griffin: "On Self-Abuse."

--Class session four.

Canfield: chapters 6-7.

Griffin: "On Dick W C Anderson . . . And Me."

Griffin: "On the Barber."

Griffin: "On the Beans Story."

--Class session five.

Canfield: chapters 8-11.

Griffin: "On Living the Artist's Way."

Griffin: "On Agreements and Pictures."

--Class session six.

Canfield: chapters 12-14.

Griffin: "On Living the Martial Way."

Griffin: "On Priorities and Next Steps."

--Class session seven.

--Canfield: chapters 15-17.

Griffin: "On Phillippe Petit."

Griffin, "On Cocoons and Butterflies."

--Class session eight.

Canfield: chapters 18-20.

Griffin: "On Steve Ditko."

Griffin: "On Playing One Game at a Time and Putting Numbers on the Board."



--Class session nine.

Canfield: chapters 21-24.

Griffin: "On David Foster Wallace."

Griffin: "On Gorgeous George."

Griffin: "On the Death of Eddie Waitkus."

--Class session ten.

Robbins: chapter 1.

Griffin: "On John Lennon."

Griffin: "On Michele Houlebecq."

--Class session eleven.

Robbins: Chapter 2.

Griffin: "On Dog Shows."

Griffin: "On Being a Modern Day Spinoza."

--Class session twelve.

Robbins: chapter 6.

Griffin: "On Jerry Lewis' Socks."

Griffin: "On Pseudo-Self-Effacement."

--Class session thirteen.

Robbins: chapter 12.

Griffin: "On Victoria's Dogs."

Griffin: "On Scaredy Squirrel."

--Class session fourteen.

Robbins: chapter 15.

Griffin: "On Trying to Charm the Uninterested."

Griffin: "On Twyla Tharp."

--Class session fifteen.

Robbins: chapter 18.

Griffin: "On Unimpressives."

Griffin: "On The Woman in the Fifth."

--Class session sixteen.

Robbins: chapter 23.

Griffin: "On Sartre."

Griffin: "On the Death of Jean-Paul Sarte."

Griffin: "On the Sparrow."

[time and place for the final examination]

### Academic Freedom

I'm deeply committed to academic freedom, both yours and mine. I want you to know what is in this course, but I am not insisting you believe in it or give testimony to it. Seek the truth; express the outcomes of that search, candidly, freely. Support the other students and me as we do the same.

### Evaluation

I'll evaluate every dimension of the course:

--The insight journals. Did they reflect serious, university level investigation? In my feedback to you each week, I'll include a number from 1-5: 3 satisfactory; 4 good; 5 excellent; 2s and 1s I'm seeing a problem. I'll add up the numbers over the span of the course and assign a grade to that total, and that will be your insight journal grade for the course.

--Email forum. The same 1-5 system as with the insight journals.

--Class participation. 5 points a week possible. 2 for attendance (don't miss a class); above that, 3, 4, and 5, based on the quality of your participation (was it informed, did you demonstrably support your own achievement during the session as well as the work of the rest of us, which includes me). Again a cumulated score for the semester as the basis for a grade.

--Insight writings. Again, 5 points possible. Did the writings reflect serious study and scholarly accomplishment? No make-ups on these writings

--Quizzes. Two or three times randomly during the semester. Fifteen or twenty minutes. Essentially a reading check—how well do you understand the writers on their terms. Again, 5 points possible. No make-ups on the quizzes.

--Final exam writing. A hypothetical look into the future: If you were to use ten ideas in this course to develop and empower yourself—*if*, I'm not insisting that you do—what are the ten, and specifically how would you employ them. I'm thinking of a list—1,2, 3 . . . 10. You can bring notes to the final, but write the list those three hours.

As for weighting the various components of the course, I'd rather not weight them. They all matter to me. In most situations in your life, people don't have percentages they go by, 20% for this and 15% percent for that, and so on. Rather, they—I'm thinking of employers and friends and love interests-- check you out and make an overall judgment and go by that. That's what I'll be doing, making a call relative to how hard you worked and how well you did with this course from week one to the last week. Every week counts for me. I'll look over the grades and decide which of the letter grades best reflects your accomplishment in the course: A, B, C, D, or F. That said, this is not a course you phone in. Be here on the days we meet and make good things happen for yourself and the rest of us. If the in-class work isn't good, you aren't getting a good grade for the course, no matter how well you do on the other elements of the course.

