Short Assignment for
Music in Contemporary American Culture
Core Curriculum 372

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Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

This assignment is for GST 372OL (soon to be COR 372), an Interdisciplinary Capstone Seminar titled "Music in Contemporary American Culture." This course is offered online during the summer session, which is about four weeks long. Each week, the students are required to write on one of the fundamental principles the Elon Core Curriculum; that is, "ethical reasoning must guide the pursuit and use of knowledge." For the purposes of this assignment, I've adapted the AAC&U definition of and rubric for evaluating ethical reasoning (http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/ethicalreasoning.pdf).

My goal for the assignment is for students to be able to articulate multiple ethical perspectives on a specific ethical dilemma scenario, then evaluate their own beliefs and clearly state and reasonably defend a position. An important feature of this assignment is that the students will write this every week, reacting to the course content. So they will develop their ethical reasoning over a period of time, and effective feedback becomes a critical part of that process.

This assignment has been modified from a similar previous assignment that only asked student to broadly reflect on the course content. It lacked the ethical reasoning component and often resulted in vague or unfocused writing.

The Assignment I Distribute to Students

COR 372 – Music in Contemporary American Culture
Weekly Writing Assignment

Assignment as I will give it to students
One of the goals of every GST Capstone Seminar at Elon is to develop students’ ethical reasoning; that is, reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires us as humans to be able to assess our own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be
applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Specifically for this course, we have a learning goal “to articulate a clear concept of personal responsibility and ethical reasoning”. In order to accomplish this learning outcome, each week you will write a short essay in the form of a personal journal entry about your own sense of ethical responsibility on a specific social, cultural, or political issue covered in the course content.

First select an interesting ethical dilemma that struck you from the reading, listening, weekly project fieldwork, or discussion. For example, you might examine the conflict between first amendment rights and censorship of explicit lyrics, or the complex role of blackface and the minstrel show in the development of race relations in America. Next, imagine yourself in a scenario in which that dilemma presents itself to you, and describe how you would act in a way that’s consistent with your own ethical values. While this will likely mean role-playing or even metaphorical time travel, it could also be an actual experience from your past. Create a concept cloud, rough outline, or bubble map of your thoughts. Reflect on this visual representation, and then write a first draft of the paper. What was ethically right and wrong about the situation? Given the dilemma, how did you choose to act, and why? What were the implications of acting another way, or not at all? You should try to see all sides of the issue, and defend a position or stance on why you acted appropriately from an ethical standpoint. After your first draft is complete, re-read it and consider if it’s clear, concise and to the point, and holds true to your own ethical values. Also check for spelling, grammar, and syntax issues. Revise and re-write a second draft, which might look much different. Last, cut and paste from your document into Moodle and submit, being careful to check that the final submitted version is complete and formatted appropriately.

Minimum threshold for acceptance of the weekly writing assignments:
- At least 500 words in length
- Submitted via the Moodle submission link
- Submitted by the appropriate deadline

Due Dates for Weekly Writing Assignments (due every Friday by 11:59 PM):

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<tr>
<th>WWA#1</th>
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<tr>
<td>WWA#2</td>
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<td>WWA#3</td>
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<td>WWA#4</td>
<td>6/27</td>
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For each 24-hour period the assignment is late, 20% will be deducted from the total possible. After 5 days, you will receive a zero for the assignment.
Rubric

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Points (20 total)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Issue Recognition</td>
<td>Choice of the ethical issue is complex in nature and presented in a multilayered context. Ethical dilemma clearly stems from course content.</td>
<td>/10 possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Detailed discussion and analysis of core ethical beliefs and the origin of those beliefs is clearly presented in a personally meaningful manner.</td>
<td>/10 possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application of Ethical Perspective</td>
<td>The full implications of the ethical dilemma are considered, and the solution presented is supported with clear rationale and purpose. Defense of your position is logical and well supported.</td>
<td>/15 possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelling/Grammar</td>
<td>There are no spelling, grammar, or syntax errors. Slang and curse words are avoided.</td>
<td>/5 possible</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>/40 possible</strong></td>
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Model Paper from a Previous Student

*(Dr. B’s note: This paper received a 38/40 for its solid depth and logical support of the position. All sides of the issue were considered respectfully, and the defense of the position was well supported and appropriate.)*

I’ve never thought of myself as much of a music critic. I just like the music I like to listen to, and there’s not much more to it than that. But as a devout Christian, of course music is a big part of my church and my youth group friends. I have bands like Switchfoot, Ashes Remain, and Newsboys in my shuffle mix, and sometimes I’ll find myself humming or even singing out loud when they come on. I was doing this today to “God’s Not Dead” when something unexpected happened.

I was riding the train into the City for my internship, and as usual had my headphones on listening to music while I looked over some spreadsheets I needed to work on when I got in the office. I must have been singing the lyrics more clearly than I realized, because suddenly I felt a strong tap on my shoulder that abruptly jerked me out of my concentration. I was startled, and looked up to an angry man saying something to me—although I couldn’t hear what he was saying. I paused my music, said “Sorry, I couldn’t hear you,” and he shot me a withering glare and said, “I bet you couldn’t. But we can all hear your offensive music, so stop singing it.” I was so shocked that I just stared and mumbled “sorry” again, and sat there in silence until my stop.
came up a few minutes later. As I got out of my seat and left the train, I heard the man saying something to the person next to him about inconsiderate Christians.

This incident shook me more than I even realized at the time. I was ashamed right away, but really only because I thought I was singing loudly. But after hearing his parting comment, I realized it wasn’t the volume he was objecting to, it was the lyrics. The particular part of the song I was singing was: My God’s not dead/He's surely alive/He's living on the inside/roaring like a lion. After I realized this, my shame turned to anger. I hear people singing or just playing offensive lyrics all the time, but I never say anything or see anyone talking to them about it. Why should those lyrics be offensive to anyone when there are so many others that are so much more so? I wondered what music that man listened to, or if he even believed in Jesus or was going to Hell.

It was this last thought that made me stop in my tracks (right in the middle of the City, as a matter of fact, out for my lunch break). I realized that I was judging that man for his actions no less harshly than he had judged me for mine. My ethical beliefs are based on Jesus’ teaching to turn the other cheek, and I wasn’t doing that. What’s more, as I thought more about it, I realized I’d acted inconsistently with my ethical values. In the moment, I was so shocked and ashamed that I neglected an opportunity to ask him why he was offended. Was it the lyrics themselves, my admittedly pitchy singing voice, or his past experiences with Christians? Or some combination of the three? This man appeared to be Indian, and very possibly had different religious beliefs that I unknowingly might have been degrading. If I would have acted with humility and kindness, I feel sure it would have led to a more positive result for both of us.

In his article “The Gifted Listener,” Copland asks if we are morally better people for having heard a great work of art, and answers his own question by stating he’s never seen it demonstrated. While Newsboys may not fit his definition of a great work of art, they do for me as a gifted listener. Copland goes on to say that “a concert is not a sermon. It is a performance—a reincarnation of a series of ideas implicit in the work of art” (p.26). For my impromptu performance, I would defend it as a series of ideas that might have a purpose to make people morally better. But we must act appropriately to frame it for other gifted listeners through honest and respectful discussion for it to be effective.