Common Summer Reading ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Congratulations on your admission to The College of St. Scholastica and welcome to Dignitas, the College’s first-year program. Both your Dignitas professor and mentor/teaching assistant look forward to working with you to help ensure you have a great first year at St. Scholastica.

Dignitas, which is Latin for “dignity,” is a year-long course, carrying two credits each semester. The course will introduce you to key components of a St. Scholastica education: community, reflection, intellectual challenge, and social justice. Taken together, the themes of the two semesters (“The Responsible Self” in the fall; “And Dignity for All” in the spring) lay the groundwork for fulfilling the College’s mission of responsible living and meaningful work. Respect for human dignity is essential to that mission.

Though human dignity is a broad concept, its core meaning refers to the intrinsic value of being human, of being a person. As you get ready to join the CSS community this fall, start thinking seriously about the nature of that value and about its sources, asking yourself questions such as: What makes us so valuable? What does it mean to be a person? What is the dignity in being a person? How can we best respect human dignity? How has human dignity been violated in the past and how is it violated today? What can I do to promote human dignity?

Our reading begins this summer with the Dignitas common text: Acts of Faith by Eboo Patel. The main title of Patel’s book implies his approach to religion. A devout Muslim committed to religious pluralism, Patel writes, ”The middle path, the only route to collective survival really, is to identify what is common between religions but to create the space where each can articulate its distinct path to that place. I think of it as affirming particularity and achieving pluralism” (167). Patel thinks genuine pluralism consists in "affirming particularity," that is, in affirming each religion's particular path to shared human values.

In a clear, credible piece of writing, explain to your Dignitas classmates, mentor/TA, and your Dignitas professor how Patel's story does three things:

- shows you ideas, beliefs, or concepts you didn't know about before reading the book;
- helps you confirm, or puts you at odds with, beliefs you had before reading the book;
- does or doesn't fit with your understanding of St. Scholastica's Benedictine values of respect, community, hospitality, stewardship, and love of learning.

Justify your response with specific references to the text. (If quoting, be sure to include page numbers in parentheses.) In your essay of 750-1000 words (6-8 paragraphs; 2-4 pages), illustrate clearly Patel's ideas, your ideas, and how they combine, so your teacher and classmates follow what you're telling them. Make the essay long enough that your readers understand you clearly and take you seriously, but not so long they wonder why you're going on and on.

The essay will provide your professor with an idea of how you write and process information. Write your essay in WORD using 12 point Times New Roman font with 1” margins and double spacing throughout. Send the essay by email as a WORD attachment (see attached letter for email address) no later than August 30, 2012. Do not send the essay in the body of the email message itself. In addition to this email submission, please bring a hard copy of your essay to the first class meeting on Sunday, September 2. This essay is your first college assignment. Your instructor and mentor/TA will read the essay with care and attention to detail; you should write it with the same kind of care and attention to detail. Have a great summer and enjoy your first venture into the Love of Learning at The College of St. Scholastica.