



COM 3337: Digital Identity, Influence, & Vocation

Instructor Information

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The easiest way to get a hold of me is via email.

Course Information

Catalog Description: COM 3337 examines the relationship between personal identity, public influence, and meaningful work in the digital age by exploring the intersection of Christian vocational discernment and the construction of (digital) identity. Central to the course is the recognition that vocational discernment requires honest self-examination: we cannot determine what we should do without grappling with who we are and who we might become. Students will investigate how digital identity formation shapes and reveals character, how online personas both reflect and reshape our sense of self, and how the amplification of influence through digital media raises the ethical stakes of digital interactions. This course welcomes students of all faith backgrounds to evaluate influence not only by reach or impact, but by responsibility and purpose. Students gain marketable skills in digital self-presentation, intercultural sensitivity, and ethical engagement in the digital sphere.

Pre-requisites and/or Co-requisites: none

Class Times: 11-12:15 pm

Class Location: C-120

Textbooks and Other Required Learning Materials

Schwehn, M., & Bass, D. (Eds.). (2020). *Leading lives that matter: What we should do and who we should be* (2nd ed.). Eerdmans.

Objectives of the Course

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Engage diverse perspectives on vocation and purpose by exploring how different philosophical and faith traditions approach questions of meaningful work, public responsibility, and the good life.
2. Analyze the relationship between personal identity and Christian vocational discernment, identifying how internal values influence external career paths.
3. Evaluate how online platforms both reveal and distort one's character and sense of purpose.
4. Assess the formation of digital identity by critically examining how online personas reflect, shape, and sometimes distort authentic selfhood and character development.
5. Critique the societal and psychological impacts of digital identity formation on individual character and communal well-being.
6. Navigate the digital sphere with increased intercultural sensibility, recognizing how diverse faith backgrounds and cultural contexts shape online interactions.
7. Articulate a personal philosophy of "meaningful work" and vocational purpose that balances professional ambition with ethical stewardship of one's digital presence.
8. Construct a professional digital identity that aligns with personal vocational goals and demonstrates high-level digital self-presentation skills.

Topics Covered in the Course

This course is a required component of the B.A. in Digital Marketing & Influence at Concordia University Texas. It is designed to develop communicators who lead with character, serve with integrity, and exercise influence as a form of vocation. We'll ask questions such as: What does it mean to pursue a significant life rather than merely a successful one? How do we cultivate the kind of person capable of wielding influence responsibly? And how might our digital presence either serve or undermine our deepest commitments about the life we want to live and the world we hope to build?

This course serves as a foundational bridge between personal formation and professional practice in digital marketing and influence. It addresses the critical question that underlies all strategic communication work: ***Who am I, and what should I do with the influence I have?*** By grounding digital practice in vocational discernment and identity formation, the course provides the ethical and psychological foundation that students need before they can responsibly execute the technical and strategic skills developed elsewhere in the program.

Nature of Course Meetings and Learning Experiences

This course is built around conversation, not content delivery. Each class session assumes you have read the assigned text carefully and come prepared to think with it. There will be very little lecture. Instead, class time is structured around questions: questions raised by the readings, questions raised by your

own experience, and questions that resist easy answers. You should not expect the instructor to resolve the tensions these texts create. The goal is not to arrive at conclusions but to sit with a question long enough that it begins to change how you see yourself and your work. This means your preparation and your presence are not incidental to the course; **they are the course.**

Course Schedule

Unit 1: The Interior Landscape – Vocational Discernment & the Self

Week 1: What kind of life do I actually want to live?

- Tuesday, Aug. 25:
 - Class intro, no reading
- Thursday Aug. 27:
 - Reading: *Frederick Buechner, from Wishful Thinking* (p. 180)
 - *William James, "What Makes a Life Significant?"* (p. 16)

Week 2: Who am I, and how did I come to believe that?

- Tuesday, Sept 1:
 - Reading: *Charles Taylor, from The Ethics of Authenticity* (p. 59)
 - Blackboard Reading: *Identity in the Age of Connectivity*
- Thursday, Sept 3:
 - Reading: *Parker Palmer, from A Hidden Wholeness* (p. 65)

Week 3: What does a good life look like — and who gets to decide?

- Tuesday, Sept 8:
 - Reading: *David Brooks, The Moral Bucket List* (p. 102)
- Thursday, Sept 10:
 - Reading: *Lee Hardy, from The Fabric of This World* (p. 153)
 - **Assignment: Digital Self-Audit due**

Week 4: What kind of person am I becoming?

- Tuesday, Sept 15:
 - Reading: *Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, from Glittering Vices* (p. 86)
- Thursday, Sept 17:
 - Reading: *Natalia Ginzburg, from The Little Virtues* (p. 97)
 - **Assignment: Journal Check-In #1 due**

Unit 2: The Digital Mirror — How Platforms Shape Identity

Week 5: How does the world around me shape who I think I am?

- Tuesday, Sept 22:
 - Reading: *Jhumpa Lahiri, "My Two Lives"* (p. 350)
- Thursday, Sept 24:
 - Reading: *Dan McAdams, "An American Life Story"* (p. 549)

Week 6: What does my digital presence actually reveal about me?

- Tuesday, Sept 29:
 - Reading: *Mary Catherine Bateson, from Composing a Life (p.529)*
- Thursday, Oct. 1:
 - Reading: *Gordon Marino, "The Greatest" (p. 138)* & Blackboard Reading: *I saw something new in San Francisco*

Week 7: Do the roles and labels I wear online define me, or confine me?

- Tuesday, Oct. 6: **NO CLASS – FALL BREAK**
- Thursday, Oct. 8:
 - Reading: *Kazuo Ishiguro, from The Remains of the Day (p. 218)*
 - **Assignment: Journal Check-In #2 due | Participation Self-Assessment due**

Week 8: How do I know what I know about myself — especially online?

- Tuesday, Oct. 13:
 - Reading: *Linda Zagzebski, from Exemplarist Moral Theory (p. 119)*
- Thursday, Oct. 15:
 - Reading: *Hsun Tzu, from Improving Yourself (p. 110)*
 - **Assignment: Persuasion Teardown due**

Unit 3: Ethical Influence & Stewardship — The Responsibility of Reach

Week 9: Must my work be my calling — or can I separate them?

- Tuesday, Oct. 20:
 - Reading: *Dorothy L. Sayers, "Why Work?" (p. 199)*
- Thursday, Oct. 22:
 - Reading: *Toni Morrison, "The Work You Do, the Person You Are" (p. 353)*

Week 10: Whose voice should I listen to when deciding what to do?

- Tuesday, Oct. 27:
 - Reading: *Albert Schweitzer, "I Resolve to Become a Jungle Doctor" (p.277)*
- Thursday, Oct. 29:
 - Reading: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from Ethics (p. 176)*
 - **Assignment: Launch Plan due**

Week 11: What do I owe the people my influence reaches?

- Tuesday, Nov. 3:
 - Reading: *Malcolm Gladwell, "The Roseto Mystery" (p. 338)*
- Thursday, Nov. 5:
 - Reading: *Martin Luther King Jr., from "The World House" (p. 388)*
 - Blackboard Reading: *A Poverty of Soul in Technological Abundance*
 - **Assignment: Journal Check-In #3 due**

Week 12: Is a meaningful life compatible with an ambitious career?

- Tuesday, Nov. 10:
 - Reading: *Matt Bloom, "The Illusive Search for Balance" (p. 427)*
- Thursday, Nov. 12:
 - Reading: *Abraham Joshua Heschel, from The Sabbath (p. 435)*
 - **Assignment: Meaningful Work Statement due**

Unit 4: Narrative & Presentation — Constructing a Professional Persona

Week 13: What obligations do I have to people I will never meet?

- Tuesday, Nov. 17:
 - Reading: *Wangari Maathai, from "Nobel Peace Prize Lecture" (p. 489)*
- Thursday, Nov. 19:
 - Reading: *Larry Rasmussen, "A Love Letter from the Holocene to the Anthropocene" (p. 451)*
 - **Assignment: Launch Log & Closing Memo due**

Week 14: : NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

Week 15: What does a life of meaningful digital work actually look like?

- Tuesday, Dec 1:
 - Reading: *Michael T. Kaufman, "Robert McG. Thomas, 60, Chronicler of Unsung Lives" (p. 558)*
 - Reading: *Wendell Berry, from Jayber Crow (p. 541)*
- Thursday, Dec. 3:
 - **Assignments: Final Presentations & Journal Check-In #4 due**

Course Policies

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

Overview

AI tools, when used responsibly and transparently, can support your learning. This policy outlines what is permitted, what requires disclosure, and what is not allowed. This includes emerging AI-enabled devices.

Permitted uses

- Word processing tools for spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- Citation generators for source formatting
- AI chatbots for brainstorming, outlining, exploratory research, and similar preparatory tasks

Disclosure requirements

All AI use in submitted work must be disclosed. Text directly generated by AI must be treated as a direct quote and cited accordingly. All other AI assistance, regardless of tool or device, must be described in a brief note at the end of your assignment. Undisclosed AI use may be treated as an academic integrity violation.

AI-enabled wearable devices

Wearable devices capable of real-time AI assistance, audio or video recording, or live data capture, including but not limited to smart glasses and earbuds, are not permitted during exams or in-class assessments, regardless of outward appearance.

Accommodations

Students who require a wearable or AI-enabled device to meet an approved accommodation (e.g., transcription, live captioning, low-vision support) must register the device with the Office of Accessibility Services prior to using it in class. The use of these devices during assessments will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the assessment and the individual's access needs. Approval is feature-specific; a device authorized for captioning, for example, is thereby not authorized for AI chat or web search. Students or faculty members with questions about wearable or AI-enabled devices for accommodation purposes should contact the Office of Accessibility Services early in the semester.

Privacy

Recording of class sessions, instructor materials, or fellow students via any device (including wearables) without explicit permission is prohibited. Violations may implicate both this policy and applicable state privacy law.

Policy review

Given the pace of change in AI technology, this policy is reviewed each semester. Students are encouraged to raise questions or concerns directly with the Dean of Teaching & Learning or me.

My AI Philosophy

My goal is to help you use AI in a responsible, ethical, and academically honest way. The guiding question of this course: *Who am I, and what kind of life do I want to live?* is not a question you can outsource. AI cannot do the interior work the assignments in this class require. AI has no access to your formation, your convictions, or your vocational discernment. **Submitting AI-generated content is not just academically dishonest; it is a way of missing the entire point of the course.**

Late Work

All assignments must be turned in on time. Late work will result in a 10% grade reduction for each day it is late. Please note that I don't accept emailed assignments. I will use the timestamp on the Blackboard server to determine whether the assignment was handed in on time. Please note that you are responsible for uploading the correct file to Blackboard and making sure the upload was successful. I do not accept work more than 7 days late.

Transparency and mutual expectations

I try to be transparent about my expectations and grading practices. Below you will find a list of my expectations for both you & me:

I will provide you with all deadlines, grading rubrics and assignment descriptions on the first day of class.

From day 1, you will know:

- How many assignments there are
- When each of your assignments is due
- What exactly each of your assignments entails (you'll find a detailed assignment description on the back of your syllabus)
- What you need to do to succeed for each assignment (you'll find the grading criteria for each assignment listed on the back of your syllabus). I will use those exact criteria to grade your work.

In turn, I expect you to:

- Turn in your assignments in class on the exact day they are due
- Carefully read the assignment description and ask questions well BEFORE the due date
- Check to ensure that your assignments follow all grading criteria listed on the assignment description

I will come to every class well prepared.

In turn, I expect you to:

- Have completed all readings before class
- Be ready to ask questions about the readings when you come to class
- Pay attention in class. No texting, or playing on the computer.

Courtesy

Cell phones: As a courtesy to your teacher and to your classmates, please make sure at the beginning of each class period that your cell phones are silenced. Any texting during class will result in you being counted absent for the day.

Laptops: Laptops and tablets may only be used in class to take notes or work on course-related activities and exercises. I personally recommend that you to take notes by hand. Studies show¹ that students who take notes by hand remember more and have a deeper understanding of the material than students who use a computer to take notes.

Participation and Professionalism: In most professional situations, as in class, you will likely find yourself working with a variety of people coming from different experiences: socio-economic, geographical locations, and/or having different religious, ethnic, age, gender, or sexual orientations. Since participation is crucial to learning, it is important that everyone feel free to participate in class by contributing their perspectives openly and regularly. There may be times you will find shared interests with others regardless of differing experiences and there may be occasions when you do not. Regardless, it is expected that you will treat your class colleagues and instructor with respect and maturity even when your interests and opinions differ.

Email Policy

I respond to email once per day, usually in the afternoon, and I will get back with you as soon as possible. Please note that I do not return email over the weekend.

Grades

My hope is that you will focus on learning rather than grades in this class. If you are not doing as well as you had anticipated, please don't hesitate to come talk to me so that we can discuss how you might improve your performance on the remaining assignments. I am happy to discuss study tips, explain assignments and grading criteria, or simply help you understand key course concepts. In order to make the grading process transparent, I share my grading criteria for each assignment with you. If you feel you met all the criteria and received too low a grade, I'll be happy to meet with you to discuss your grade. My goal is to be fair to everyone in the class, which means I will hold everyone to the same standards. But what I would like to do in that case is discuss what you can do to meet those criteria on your next assignment. So please come see me!

¹ Psychological Science, June 2014, 25(6), 1159-1168

Grading Scale

A+ = 100 (97-100)	A = 95 (94-96.9)	A- = 92 (90-93.9)
B+ = 88 (87-89.9)	B = 85 (84-86.9)	B- = 82 (80-83.9)
C+ = 78 (77-79.9)	C = 75 (74-76.9)	C- = 72 (70-73.9)
D+ = 68 (67-69.9)	D = 65 (64-66.9)	D- = 62 (60-63.9)
F = 50 (0-59.9)		

Academic Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity stands at the heart of intellectual life and is a core principle that underpins how we live and learn in a community of inquiry. Concordia University Texas is committed to the development of each student to become a productive and responsible citizen who embraces the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. The community at Concordia University strives to instill values that uphold academic integrity and promotes an ethical standard that does not condone academic misconduct.

Attendance

Concordia University Texas expects students to attend class regularly in order to maximize their educational experience. Individual programs and/or instructors establish an attendance policy for courses and that policy is communicated to the student. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this policy at the beginning of each course. Students receiving any form of financial assistance (including VA benefits) must maintain regular attendance to be eligible for assistance. Below is my attendance policy for this class:

Number of absences. Attendance at each class is required. Each time you are absent from class counts as one absence. If you arrive more than 10 minutes late to class, you will be marked absent for that day. After your second absence, your final grade will be reduced by three (3) percentage points for each additional absence.

Excused absences. If you have a valid and unavoidable reason for missing class (i.e. you are involved in athletics or another school-sanctioned activity that requires you to miss this class) you may submit a completed Excused Absence Request along with a two page (at least 500 words) chapter summary / discussion for the material you missed. Your excused absence request and chapter summary must be turned in within a week after your return to class. The request form is available on Blackboard. A separate request form and additional chapter summary / discussion must be submitted for each absence. You will also need to provide me with proper documentation for your absence (such as a

doctor's note, a hospitalization record, a university excuse, or an athletic excuse). All documentation must be turned in by the last day of class for the excuses to be considered. After review of your request I will determine whether the excuse will be granted.

Accommodation requests. If you have an accommodation letter which calls for flexibility with attendance, you will need to follow the instructions listed under the excused absence section, except that you do not need to provide documentation each time you miss class for a 504-related disability.

Special Needs / Accommodations

Concordia University Texas provides accommodations and other services to students with disabilities who have been approved to receive them. Visit [the Services for Students with Disabilities webpage](#) for more information on receiving accommodations.

Title IX

Concordia University Texas is committed to maintaining a working and learning environment that is free from inappropriate conduct based on gender. As required by Title IX, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex/gender in its programs and activities, and it encourages any student who thinks that he or she has been subjected to sexual misconduct (i.e. sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking) by another student, member of the faculty or staff, campus visitor or contractor, to immediately report the incident to [the Title IX Coordinator](#).

Student Success Resources

Success Center

When you need support whether it be for academic coaching, personal counseling or academic accommodations, the [Success Center](#) is available to help you. The Success Center helps you reach your academic goals by providing resources such as the Writing Center, the Speaking Center, Peer Tutoring, and numerous other resources.

Vocation & Professional Development

Find more information and make an appointment with a career advisor regarding career planning, majors to careers advising, internship programs, and job searches on our [website](#).

Personal Support Center – encountering a technical challenge?

Make sure to enroll in the [Student Password Reset](#) service while your account is working so you can reset it when needed.

You can get support by:

- Phone 24/7 Support: 512.313.4357
- Email the PSC: CTXhelp@personalsupportcenter.com (may be delayed until next business day)

Important Websites

[Concordia University Texas Main Website](#)

[CTX Course Calendar, Schedules, and Catalog](#)

[MyInfo Login Page](#)

[CTX Webmail \(also use this to access your Microsoft Office 365 apps\)](#)

Speaking Center

Find out more about CTX's speaking center at:

<https://www.concordia.edu/resources/success-center/the-speaking-center.html>

Assignments

All of the following assignments, projects, exams and activities have been developed to help you accomplish the learning outcomes listed on your syllabus. Some directly address one of the learning objectives, others address several of them. Together, they assure that at the end of the semester you will have completed all learning objectives I set for this course. In order to do well in this class, please read the assignment instructions and grading criteria carefully. **Since the assignments are deeply reflective and personal, no AI use is allowed.**

Assignment	Weight
Reflection Journal	20%
Class Participation & Self-Assessment	20%
Persuasion Teardown	10%
Digital Vocation Project 1. Digital Self-Audit (10%) 2. Launch Plan (5%) 3. Launch Log (10%) 4. Closing Memo (5%) 5. Final Presentation (10%)	40%
Meaningful Work Statement	10%
TOTAL:	100%

Reflection Journal

This is the heart of the course. The Reflection Journal is a private, running document you maintain throughout the entire semester. It is not a reading log, a summary assignment, or a response paper. It is a disciplined practice of honest self-examination, the kind of interior work that must precede any genuinely ethical exercise of influence. You cannot lead others well if you do not know yourself. This journal is how you come to know yourself.

The core question of this course — *Who am I, and what kind of life do I actually want to live?* — is not a question you can answer once and move on. It is a question you return to, again and again, as you read, as you discuss, and as you observe your own reactions and assumptions. The journal is where that returning happens.

What the Journal Is

- It is **not** a summary of the readings. Do not spend your journal entries explaining what the authors said.
- It is **not** a formal essay. Write in first person.
- It **is** a record of your honest thinking, including uncertainty, contradiction, and discomfort.
- It **is** a conversation between you and the questions the course is raising.
- It **is** a place where you let the texts examine you, not just the other way around.

Format & Length

There is no required format for the journal itself. You may write it in a Word document, a paper notebook, a notes app, or any format that works for you. Entries should be substantive: aim for at least 200–300 words per entry, though some will naturally be longer. You should write an entry after every class meeting, or as close to it as possible, while the discussion is still fresh. **Please date each entry!**

Check-In Submissions

Four times during the semester, you will submit a 400–600 word excerpt from your journal. You choose which entries to share. This is an act of editorial judgment as well as self-disclosure. The instructor will read your submission and provide written feedback. These check-ins are graded on the criteria below, not on having the “right” answers.

Check-In	What to Reflect On
#1	Who do I believe myself to be — and where did that belief come from? What have the first four weeks revealed about assumptions I carry that I did not examine before?
#2	Midpoint audit: How has my understanding of identity, self-knowledge, and digital presence shifted since Week 1? What have I been most reluctant to look at honestly?

Check-In	What to Reflect On
#3	Influence and responsibility: What is my actual relationship to the people I reach or hope to reach online? What do I owe them — and am I currently giving it?
#4	Integration: What do I now believe about meaningful work and digital vocation? How has my thinking changed, and what am I still uncertain about?

Here are some prompts to help you reflect. Use them if you feel stuck.

Unit 1 — The Interior Landscape

- What do you actually believe about yourself — and where did that belief come from?
- When you look at your life honestly, what are you optimizing for? Is that what you want to be optimizing for?
- What virtue do you most want to cultivate? What vice do you most recognize in yourself?

Unit 2 — The Digital Mirror

- When you scroll your own social feeds, whose version of you do you see?
- If your digital presence were your only legacy, what would it say about what you valued?
- What role have you taken on online — and does it fit you, or has it started to define you?

Unit 3 — Ethical Influence & Stewardship

- Who has shaped your sense of what work is for? Did they get it right?
- What voice are you most tempted to obey when making decisions about your career?
- What would it mean to use your influence as a steward rather than a self-promoter?

Unit 4 — Narrative & Presentation

- What is the story you are telling about your life — and is it true?
- What would you need to change, stop, or start to live more consistently with your stated values?
- If you met the person your digital presence implies you are, would you recognize them?

What strong journal writing looks like:

Strong entries are specific. They name a real moment, a real assumption, a real tension. They do not describe 'people in general' or 'society.' They say: I noticed that I... or I have always assumed that... or Reading this made me uncomfortable because... They are written in a voice that sounds like a person, not a student performing reflection. They end somewhere different from where they started.

Grading Rubric:

Criterion	Excellent	Proficient	Developing	Insufficient
Depth of Reflection	Goes beyond surface reaction; interrogates assumptions; sits with complexity	Engages meaningfully with questions; some genuine self-examination	Stays mostly descriptive; limited self-examination	Summary of readings or superficial observations only
Honest Engagement	Demonstrates courage to examine uncomfortable truths about the self	Generally honest; occasional retreat into safe generalities	Some honesty but avoids difficult self-confrontation	Evasive or primarily performative
Connection to Course	Richly integrates readings, discussions, and personal experience	Connects to readings or class discussion in meaningful ways	Loose or forced connection to course material	Little connection to course texts or discussions
Development Across Semester	(Assessed cumulatively) Clear growth, shift, or deepening visible across check-ins	Some evidence of evolving thinking	Thinking remains largely static from check-in to check-in	No discernible development

Class Participation & Self-Assessments

This course lives in conversation. The questions we are asking about identity, calling, and the responsible use of digital influence cannot be answered alone, from a textbook. They require the friction of other minds, the challenge of perspectives different from your own, and the discipline of speaking honestly in the presence of others. Participation is not measured by how much you talk. It is measured by the quality of your presence and the seriousness of your contribution to the shared inquiry.

What Participation Looks Like

Because this is a discussion-based course with no lecture and no single right answer, participation requires a particular kind of intellectual generosity and courage. The following behaviors constitute strong participation:

- **Preparation:** You arrive having read the assigned text carefully and thought about it before class. You come with a question, an observation, or a point of genuine confusion, not a blank mind waiting to be filled.
- **Substantive contribution:** You say things that move the conversation forward: a specific observation from the text, a connection to your own experience, a question that opens new territory rather than closing it down.
- **Active listening:** You respond to what others actually say, not to a version of their argument you find easier to engage. You build on, extend, complicate, or respectfully challenge what your peers offer.

- Intellectual honesty: You are willing to say when you are confused, when you disagree, when your thinking has shifted, or when a text has disturbed something you thought you believed.
- Respect: You treat your classmates' contributions and the authors we read with genuine curiosity, even when you disagree strongly.
- Presence: You are on time and mentally present. Absences and chronic distraction directly affect your participation grade.

Participation Self-Assessment

Before the midterm you will submit a brief self-assessment of your own participation. This is a 200–300 word reflection which should address:

- How you have contributed to class discussions. Be specific! Provide concrete examples.
- Where you have held back, and what has kept you from contributing more fully.
- What you are doing to prepare for class, and whether it is working.
- One goal for your participation in the remaining weeks of the course.

Grading Rubric:

Criterion	Excellent	Proficient	Developing	Insufficient
Preparation	Always prepared; cites specific textual evidence	Usually prepared; occasionally vague	Inconsistent preparation; general comments	Rarely prepared; unable to engage with text
Quality of Contributions	Advances conversation; opens new directions	Solid contributions; mostly responsive	Participates minimally; surface-level	Rarely participates or contributions are disruptive
Listening & Engagement	Actively builds on peers; demonstrates attentive listening	Generally responsive to others	Mostly isolated comments; limited responsiveness	Does not engage with peers
Self-Assessments	Honest, specific, and self-aware; sets meaningful goals	Adequate self-reflection; somewhat general	Superficial or perfunctory self-assessment	Missing or shows no genuine reflection

The Persuasion Teardown

For eight weeks we have been asking what shapes you. Some of what shapes you was built on purpose, by people who were paid to build it and who tested it until it worked. This assignment asks you to take one of those things apart.

In two or three years someone will pay you to make people do things. The question here is whether you can tell the difference between influence that respects a person and influence that routes around them. You cannot make that distinction reliably if you do not understand the machinery. For this assignment,

you will write a paper containing 3 parts. Please use the 3 parts as headings in your paper.

Part 1: How it works, and why it works on people (~450 words)

Pick one specific mechanism on one named platform. Not "TikTok." Not "the algorithm." Something you could point at: engagement-weighted feed ranking, the 24-hour expiry on Stories, parasocial intimacy in creator vlogs, comment-section social proof, the notification badge, etc.

Explain how it operates (i.e. what it rewards, what it hides, what it makes easy or hard) clearly enough that someone who has never used the platform could follow you. Then explain why it works on human beings. Name the mechanisms. Note that "It's addictive" is not an explanation; variable-ratio reinforcement is. "People like validation" is not an explanation; social proof, in-group signaling, and identity performance are.

Use one source from outside our readings — a peer-reviewed article, a serious book, or reporting that does original research. Cite it in APA or MLA.

Part 2: What it does at scale (~400 words)

Address these two questions:

- **What does it do to individuals and to the public square** — the place where we argue, grieve, organize, and decide things together? Who benefits, who bears the cost, and which costs are invisible to the person paying them?
- **What would seeing through it actually require?** What would a person need to be able to see, in the moment, in order not to be governed by this thing? And what makes that hard to sustain? Not "think critically" — that advice has never helped anyone.

Bring in one course text on technology and society — "A Poverty of Soul in Technological Abundance," "Identity in the Age of Connectivity," Gladwell on Roseto, King on the world house. Use it; don't just cite it.

Part 3: Two versions (two short drafts plus ~150 words)

Write **two versions of the same short piece of content** — a caption, a hook, a subject line. Same goal, same audience. Version A uses the mechanism the way the platform rewards it. Version B pursues the same objective without exploiting it.

Then, in about 150 words: what did Version B give up? Name the cost (i.e. reach, speed, emotional pull) and say whether the trade was worth it.

Version B is not Version A with the interesting parts removed. If your responsible version is simply weaker, you have not solved the problem — you have only declined to compete. **This must be entirely your own writing.** No AI use permitted.

Grading Rubric

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
Mechanism & Human Response <i>PSLO 2</i>	Names one specific mechanism and explains its operation precisely enough for a non-user to follow; names the psychological and social factors actually at work and explains why each produces the behavior; the outside source advances the argument.	Names a specific mechanism and describes it accurately; names relevant factors and explains them correctly, if underdeveloped; source present and appropriate.	Describes a platform broadly rather than a mechanism; gestures at psychology ("addictive," "people like validation") without naming or explaining it; source thin or decorative.	No identifiable mechanism, or assertion substituted for explanation throughout.
Responsible Alternative <i>PSLO 2</i>	Both drafts are genuinely usable and pursue the same objective; Version B's restraint is real and costly; the account of what was given up is specific and honest.	Both drafts are competent and meaningfully distinct; the trade-off is described clearly, if generally.	Version B is a weakened Version A rather than a different approach, or the trade-off is asserted rather than examined.	Drafts missing, substantively identical, or no accounting of the trade-off.
Impact at Scale <i>PSLO 7</i>	Makes a claim about effects specific enough to be wrong; identifies beneficiaries and cost-bearers, including costs invisible to those paying them; avoids both boosterism and reflexive pessimism.	Identifies plausible effects on individuals and public discourse with some specificity; beneficiaries and costs named.	Effects described in general terms ("polarization," "mental health") with little connection to the specific mechanism.	No assessment of impact, or claims unconnected to the mechanism.
Seeing Through It <i>PSLO 7</i>	States precisely what a person would need to perceive in order not to be governed by the mechanism, and why that perception is hard to sustain; a course text is put to real work.	Offers a concrete response tied to the mechanism; course text engaged meaningfully.	Recommends "being aware" without specifying what would have to be seen; course text mentioned but unused.	No media-literacy argument, or no engagement with course material.
Sources & Writing <i>course criterion</i>	Outside source is credible and integrated; citation consistent; prose clear, organized, and revised.	Source requirement met; citation consistent; writing clear.	Source weak or poorly integrated; citation inconsistent; organization or clarity problems.	Source missing or fabricated; writing unrevised.

Digital Vocation Project

The Digital Vocation Project is the course's applied capstone. It asks you to do what the course has been building toward since Week 1: to examine your actual digital presence, evaluate it honestly against your developing sense of who you are and what you are called to, and construct (or reconstruct) a professional identity that is both strategically effective and authentically yours. The five components unfold across the semester in deliberate sequence: diagnosis, redesign, and presentation. The Digital Self-Audit tells you where you are. The Launch Plan moves you toward where you want to be. The Final Presentation makes sense of the journey and shares it with the community that has accompanied you through it. Each component builds on the last.

Part 1: Digital Self-Audit

The Self-Audit is an act of diagnosis, not polish. Before you can build a digital presence that reflects your values and serves your vocational goals, you need an honest picture of where you currently are. This document is not for an audience. It is for you and me. Length: 500–700 words.

What to Cover

1. **Platform inventory:** List every platform where you have an active or semi-active presence (LinkedIn, Instagram, X/Twitter, TikTok, personal website, YouTube, etc.). For each, briefly describe what kind of content you post, how frequently, and who your audience is or would be.
2. **Image assessment:** What impression does your current digital presence create? If a future employer, a mentor, or someone you deeply respect encountered your full digital footprint today, what would they conclude about your values, your character, and your professional direction?
3. **Gap analysis:** Where is there a gap between what your digital presence projects and who you actually are or want to become? Be honest. The gap is the most interesting and useful part of this document.
4. **Platform audit:** Are there things on your current profiles — posts, photos, bios, follows — that you would want to change? What, and why?
5. **Absence audit:** What is missing from your digital presence that should be there? What aspects of who you are and what you value are invisible online?

The Self-Audit is not graded on how good your digital presence already is. It is graded on the honesty and perceptiveness of your self-examination. A student with a strong digital presence who writes a superficial audit will receive a lower grade than a student with a limited presence who looks at it with genuine rigor.

Part 2: Launch Plan

This is a two part assignment. Create a document using the headers below:

Part A — Public Voice Plan (~500 words)

1. Audience: Who you are trying to reach, described specifically enough that you could recognize one of them, plus the evidence behind that description. "Recruiters" is not an audience.
2. One objective, and what success looks like: Explain what would tell you it worked, in terms that are *not* follower counts. Reach is the easiest number to get and the least connected to anything you said you cared about.
3. Platform rationale: Explain why you picked the platform you picked. Provide evidence that your audience can be reached through this platform.
4. Three ideas for posts: Identify three themes you will publish about, each traceable to something that surfaced in your journal, your Self-Audit, or class.
5. Calendar: Provide dates when each piece goes up, between Weeks 10 and 14. You will be held to these.

Part B — My Rules for the Four Weeks (~300 words, as a numbered list)

Create a numbered list of six to eight rules you commit to in advance, so the decision is already made when you are tired and it is 11:40 p.m. and the post is not performing. Your list must include:

1. When you are on, and when you are off. Clock times, not intentions.
2. One practice, tied to one of our readings — Heschel on Sabbath, Bloom on balance, Palmer on wholeness, DeYoung on vice. Name the reading. Make the practice concrete enough that someone could verify you did it.
3. What you do in the hour after a hostile comment, and what you do in the hour after a post that gets nothing at all. The second happens more often and lands harder than people expect.
4. Two warning signs that this is going badly for you — specific behaviors, not "feeling stressed" — each paired with what you will do about it.

Write rules you could be checked against, because in Week 15 you will be.

Grading Criteria

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
Audience & Objective <i>PSLO 3</i>	Audience is specific and recognizable, grounded in stated evidence; the objective is clear and success is defined in terms that genuinely follow from the	Audience defined with reasonable specificity and some evidence; objective clear; success defined beyond reach, if generally.	Audience named by category only ("employers," "Gen Z"); objective vague, or success measured chiefly by followers.	No meaningful audience definition, or no objective.

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
	student's commitments rather than from reach.			
Plan & Follow-Through <i>PSLO 3 · scored Wk 15</i>	Platform choice argued from audience and objective; three pillars traceable to real commitments; dates set; the three published pieces demonstrably follow the pillars, audience, and schedule declared here.	Platform reasoning sound; pillars and dates clear; published work largely follows the plan, with minor drift.	Platform asserted without rationale; pillars generic; published work departs substantially from the plan without explanation.	No usable plan, or the plan was not executed.
Rules That Can Be Checked <i>PSLO 6</i>	Six to eight rules, all specific and verifiable; times are stated; the practice is genuinely grounded in a named reading; criticism, silence, and warning signs each have a concrete response.	All required elements present and mostly specific; grounding in a course reading is clear.	Rules stated as intentions rather than practices ("I will use my phone less"); required elements thin or partly missing.	Required elements missing, or rules too vague to check anything against.

Part 3: The Launch Log

A LinkedIn profile tells people who you are, but posts show them how you think, what you care about, and how you engage with your field. In digital marketing, your content is your credibility: a compelling profile with no posting history is a storefront with nothing in the window. These three posts should work together to position you as the professional your revised profile claims you are, demonstrating not just your identity but your voice, your values, and your point of view in action.

For this part, you will publish three pieces of content on your declared dates, on a real professional channel (i.e. LinkedIn). You'll submit a one page launch log.

Three required pieces in 3 formats

1. a designed still graphic or image-based piece;
2. a 45–60 second video — on camera, narrated over visuals, or a narrated screen recording, your choice.
3. a written piece of at least 400 words.

The Launch Log (one page)

Fill out the table below to document each of the 3 content pieces you published:

Format	One decision I made, and why	Date posted	Screenshot of your post	Screenshot of engagement
Graphic	e.g. "Cut the headline from 12 words to 5 — it was unreadable on a phone."	Insert date you published the post.	Include a screenshot of your post.	Include a screenshot of you responding substantively to at least two comments, messages, or replies you receive. If you are building from nothing and no one replies — common, and not a failure — then start something instead: two real responses to posts by people working in your field.
Video				
Written				

Grading Criteria:

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
Format Range & Craft <i>PSLO 4</i>	All three formats delivered; text is legible,	All three formats delivered; execution is	A format is missing or weak; recurring	Format requirement unmet or work

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
	audio is clean, pacing works, captions are accurate; visual hierarchy, typography, and framing show deliberate choices; the Launch Log shows competent tool use.	solid with minor flaws; composition is sound if not distinctive; Log documents tool use adequately.	technical problems (illegible text, poor audio, no captions); templates used without adaptation; Log thin.	technically unusable; Log missing.
Message Fit Across Formats <i>PSLO 4</i>	Each format is used for what it is good at; the idea is genuinely re-thought for each medium rather than pasted across all three; every piece serves a declared pillar and audience.	Formats used appropriately; adaptation is real if uneven; pieces connect to pillars.	The same content dropped into three formats; connection to pillars loose.	Format choice arbitrary; no connection to the plan.
Showing Up in Public <i>PSLO 8</i>	All three pieces published to a real audience on the declared dates, spread across the window; claims about experience and expertise are accurate; AI use disclosed where required.	All three published to a real audience with minor schedule slippage that is acknowledged; claims accurate.	A piece unpublished or posted where no audience could see it; most work compressed into the final days; claims that overstate experience.	Little or nothing published, or undisclosed AI-generated content submitted as the student's own.
Engaging Like a Professional <i>PSLO 8</i>	Both exchanges are substantive and genuinely responsive to what the other person said; disagreement handled with candor and respect; the student adds to the conversation rather than extracting from it.	Both exchanges are real and on-topic; responses address what was said; tone is professional.	Engagement is perfunctory ("Great post!") or transactional; responses do not address the substance.	Requirement unmet, or exchanges are dismissive, purely self-promoting, or hostile.

Part 4: Closing Memo

For this closing memo, you will answer the following questions:

Question 1: What was the hardest ethical call you made? (~400 words)

During four weeks of publishing you made decisions. Some were small enough that you may not have registered them as ethical: a claim you softened, a number you did not round up, a photo you decided not to use, a hook you knew would work and didn't write. Pick the hardest one and tell me about it. Be sure to:

- Name the course material that guided you. For instance, Bonhoeffer on responsible action, Sayers on the integrity of the work, DeYoung on vice, Zagzebski on exemplars, King on obligation to people you will never meet. If the reasoning came from somewhere outside this course — your family, your church, your own hard-won rule — say that, and say where.
- Discuss what it cost you. This could be reach, speed, ease, approval. If nothing cost you anything, say so honestly and consider why: either four weeks was too short to test you, or you were not making real choices.

Question 2: Which of your rules held, and which broke? (~400 words plus evidence)

Go back to your list of 6-8 rules and discuss the following:

1. Which rules held, which broke. Review each rule separately.
2. Attach evidence — screenshots of notification or device settings, calendar blocks, time-tracking, drafts you wrote and deliberately did not post. Whatever independently shows what you did.
3. Diagnose the breaks. Not how you felt about them: what was *true* about the day, the deadline, the platform, or the rule itself that made the failure likely. A rule that fails every Thursday is telling you something about Thursdays.
4. Rewrite one rule for next semester, and say what in your evidence made you rewrite it that way.

You are not graded on how well your rules worked. You are graded on how well you wrote them, how honestly you documented them, and how sharply you diagnosed what happened.

Grading criteria

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
Ethical Judgment in Practice <i>PSLO 1</i>	Identifies a genuine ethical choice with specifics; names an ethical or theological framework that does real work in the reasoning; the cost is concrete and its acceptance is explained; the	Identifies a real choice and explains the reasoning; framework named and applied correctly; a cost is identified.	The choice described was not really contested, or the framework is mentioned decoratively and the cost asserted without substance.	No identifiable ethical reasoning, or claims that conflict with what was actually published.

Criterion	Excellent (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Insufficient (1)
	account is consistent with the published record.			
Evidence & Honest Diagnosis <i>PSLO 6</i>	Every rule is accounted for; evidence independently substantiates what is claimed; failures are documented as fully as successes; the diagnosis identifies conditions rather than feelings, and the rewritten rule follows directly from the evidence.	Most rules accounted for with adequate evidence; causes of failure identified with reasonable clarity; revision connects to findings.	Partial accounting; little corroborating evidence; reports what happened without analyzing why; revision generic.	No accounting, no evidence, or evaluation consisting only of self-report about how it felt.

Part 5: Final Presentation

The Final Presentation is a vocation story, not a sales pitch. You are not presenting a polished brand to impress an audience. You are sharing an honest account of your formation over the course of the semester with the community that has accompanied you through it.

What to Include

- Where you started. What did your digital presence look like at the beginning of the semester? What did you believe about yourself, your calling, and your work?
- What shifted. What texts, discussions, or moments of honest self-examination changed your thinking? Be specific.
- What your digital presence now says. Walk the class through your revised profile and explain what it reflects about who you are and what you are for.
- What four weeks of publishing taught you that the reading could not.
- What remains unresolved. No one finishes this course with everything figured out. What questions are you still sitting with?
- What you will carry forward. What concrete commitments will you take into your professional life from this course?

Presentation logistics:

- Length: 5-7 minutes, followed by 3-5 minutes of class Q&A.
- Slides: at the minimum include a slide or two showing your before/after digital presence.
- Delivery and demeanor: professional, as you would for a portfolio review or professional interview.

Grading Rubric:

Criterion	Excellent	Proficient	Developing	Insufficient
Honesty of Self-Examination	Unflinchingly honest across all components; gaps and contradictions examined, not hidden	Generally honest; occasional retreat to safer territory	Some genuine self-examination; partly performative	Primarily performance; avoids honest self-disclosure
Integration of Course Concepts	Richly integrates readings, discussions, and vocational framework throughout	Good integration; concepts applied meaningfully	Some integration; mostly implicit or surface-level	Little evidence of course learning in final product
Quality of Revised Digital Presence	Strategically effective and authentically expressive; clear vocational coherence	Solid professional presence with meaningful reflection	Some improvement over original; limited reflection	Minimal revision; or revision disconnected from self-examination
Presentation Clarity and Depth	Compelling, specific, and honest account of formation; engages audience genuinely	Clear and organized; reasonably specific	Adequately covers required elements; somewhat generic	Superficial or poorly organized
Presentation Professionalism	Well-paced, confident delivery; strong use of time	Competent delivery; minor pacing or clarity issues	Underprepared or over/under time	Significantly unprepared or does not present

Meaningful Work Statement

This is the course's signature statement of personal philosophy. In 1,000–1,200 words, you will articulate what you believe about meaningful work, vocation, and the responsible use of digital influence. This is not a career plan. It is not an autobiography. It is not a mission statement drafted for a job application. It is a philosophical document. Think of it as an honest account of what you believe, why you believe it, and what it demands of you.

Think of it as a personal answer to the question that has animated the entire course: What kind of life do I actually want to live, and what does that mean for how I will practice digital influence? The Meaningful Work Statement is your answer. It's not the answer you think your instructor wants to read, and not the answer you think sounds most impressive. It's simply your answer.

Four Questions to Address

Your statement must address all four of the following, though not necessarily in this order and not necessarily as separate sections. The best statements weave these together:

- **Purpose:** What does it mean, to you and in your own terms, to lead a life that matters? What would you need to be able to say about your work at the end of your life for it to have been worth doing?
- **Identity:** How do you understand the relationship between your inner character (your values, your formation, who you are becoming) and your public digital presence? What do you owe your audience in terms of authenticity?
- **Responsibility:** What obligations do you have to the people your work reaches? Think beyond clients and employers to audiences, communities, and the broader culture you are helping to shape. What will you refuse to do, regardless of whether it's legal or lucrative?
- **Commitment:** What will you concretely commit to as a digital communicator? What practices, habits, or principles will govern how you work? At least one commitment should be specific and actionable. Not "I will be ethical" but something you could actually be held to.

What This Statement Is Not

- It is not a list of values. Anyone can write "I value honesty, creativity, and service." Your statement must show what those values cost you, what they demand of you, and where they create tension with other things you want.
- It is not a personal essay about your life story. You may draw on your experience, but the statement is philosophical and forward-looking, not primarily autobiographical.
- It is not a corporate mission statement. Avoid the polished, vacuous language of LinkedIn bios and brand manifestos. Write like a person, not like a brand.

- It is not a summary of course readings. The readings should have shaped your thinking, but the statement is yours. Cite or allude to course texts where they genuinely inform your position, but this is not a literature review.

What makes a strong Meaningful Work Statement:

- It is specific. It names real tensions, real commitments, and real costs, not abstract ideals.
- It is honest. If someone who knows you well read it, they would recognize you in it.
- It is informed. The course's texts and questions have been incorporated into it.
- It makes a claim. It does not just describe what meaningful work is in general; it says what it demands of this person, in this field, at this moment in their formation.
- It is written with care. The quality of the prose reflects the seriousness with which the writer took the task.

Grading Rubric:

Criterion	Excellent	Proficient	Developing	Insufficient
Address of Four Core Questions (PSLO1)	All four questions addressed with depth, specificity, and integration	All four questions addressed; some more developed than others	Most questions addressed; one significantly underdeveloped	One or more questions missing or entirely superficial
Philosophical Depth & Originality (PSLO1)	Makes a genuine, original claim; wrestles honestly with tension and cost	Solid philosophical engagement; mostly genuine	Some depth; partly relies on generalities	Generic; could have been written by anyone
Honest Self-Disclosure	Unmistakably personal; shows genuine risk and honesty	Generally personal; some retreat to safe language	Some personal content; largely performative	Impersonal, evasive, or clearly written for approval
Integration of Course Learning (PSLO1)	Readings and course questions richly inform the argument, without dominating it	Good integration; course learning clearly present	Some integration; mostly implicit	Little evidence of course engagement
Quality of Writing	Clear, direct, and distinctive prose; well-organized and appropriately revised	Clear writing; competent organization; evidence of revision	Some clarity issues; limited evidence of revision	Unclear, unrevised, or significantly over/under length