The Nature of Solitude:  
Sacred & Secular, Voluntary & Involuntary  
FYSE 138-01  
Course Term – Spring 2017

**Instructor:**  
Dr. Burke  
86 Wentworth Street, Office #318  
burkeqq@cofc.edu  
843-953-7433 (office)  
215-990-8879 (cell)

**Meeting Times:**  
• Tues & Thu 9:25 – 10:40 AM

**Office Hours:**  
• Tuesday 1:00 – 4:00 PM  
• Thursday 1:00 – 4:00 PM  
(or by Appointment)

**Location:** ECTR #213

**Course Overview:**

“Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god.”  
- Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

Aristotle’s sentiment here fittingly captures the divisive nature of solitude, which has long had a polarizing existence within the public perception. While some people recoil just at the thought of being alone and view solitude as inherently anti-social, others bask in its possibilities as an opportune time for reflection and deeper, more productive thinking. So, is solitude an elevating or denigrating existence and what kind of solitudes—voluntary and involuntary—exist in this life? These fundamental questions represent the course’s starting point. After initially examining the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of solitude on the American front with Thoreau’s *Walden*, the course will turn to a series of specific themes such as the relationship of solitude to creativity and to Romantic ideals as well as its darker turn as potentially promoting aloofness and encouraging inactivity. The course will also examine the relationship between solitude and technology as many media theorists argue that despite the 24/7 “connectivity” characteristic of modern life, humans find themselves more isolated from each other than ever before.

In terms of course assignments, in addition to a series of shorter reflections based on the weekly readings, the course will also have students maintain a log in which they reflect upon the interactivity (with friends, instructors, peers) of their daily lives and how such interactivity is typically carried out (in person, over the phone, over the web). What trends do they notice? Are some interactions more “social” than others and where do they find their own moments of solitude during the day? Less an academic exercise than the opportunity to develop a better sense of their own “habitus”, this journal will later serve as a way for all students to develop both an individual interview and survey questions about that nature of socialization and isolation at the College which they will then administer to friends and/ or peers via an online survey tool. Students will take these anonymized responses to present their own informal “action research” presentations on socialization, socialability—and even the nature of solitude—as evident at the College.
In addition to the assignments and class attendance, I would like to include a “social” at the end of the course. We will meet either over an on-campus dinner or lunch that centers on a specific text and/or topic. Depending on what is going on in terms of theatre/dance/lecture at the College, this meeting could correspond with going to a performance on campus as a group. I am also planning a visit to the actual “working” monastery of Mepkin Abby just 40 minutes north of us in Monck’s Corner. Having been to the Abby twice, I know they run regular tours and I think this event would make an excellent capstone for the course and giving the students the opportunity to see “solitude in action” through the Trappist Monks who live in and run the monastery. Neither of these events would be mandated but I would strongly encourage all students to attend if they are able.

Finally, the course will inherently be multi-disciplinary. Obviously reading and writing as well as class discussion figure prominently throughout the course and to this end, I expect students to read critically and carefully and produce writing (both formal and informal) that mixes personal perspective with direct quotes and summaries from the assigned readings. But students will also create at least two presentations over the length of the course—first, the findings of their informal “action research” surveys/interviews (see above) and second a summary presentation of their final paper in which they present their argument (thesis) and what texts/articles support such a claim.

Ultimately the goal is for the course to not only make students sharper readers, writers, and thinkers, but also make them more reflective about the nature of college as a place of study and sharing, a place of retreat to make life plans, and yes, even a place of solitude in the best possible way!

Course Outcomes:

• By the completion of the FYE course, students will have read and viewed a variety of media sources related to this theme of solitude and be able to not only appreciate such resources individually but as they relate to each other in “discussion” as a wider dialectic

• By the completion of the FYE course, students will have honed their ability to read and write critically and not only refine their capacity to articulate their thoughts and opinions but to also ask relevant questions and listen carefully to the thoughts and opinions of their peers

First Year Experience Learning Outcomes:

• By the completion of the First-Year Experience (FYE), one of the leading goals is for students to be able to identify and use the appropriate academic resources and student support services at College of Charleston. These would include the Addlestone library, information technology, the Center for Student Learning, the Career Center, and other appropriate academic resources, student support services, and cultural resources.

• By the completion of the FYE, students will be able to use appropriate tools and search strategies for identifying particular types of information specific to the discipline; evaluate the relevance, quality, and appropriateness of different sources of information; recognize and classify the information contained within a bibliographic citation; access and use information ethically and legally

• By the completion of the FYE, a student will be able to use appropriate critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques in appropriate disciplinary contexts and make connections across disciplines and/or relevant experiences
Grades:
Below is the grading scale for the course:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A=93-100</td>
<td>90-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-=91-92</td>
<td>90-80</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+=89-90</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10-0</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-=70-71</td>
<td>0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F &lt; 70</td>
<td>0%</td>
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Grading Breakdown:

- **Writing Reflections** total (20%)
  - Reflection #1: 10%
  - Reflection #2: 10%
- **Encounter Log** (15%)
- **Course Discussion Leader** (20%)
- **Final Paper** (30%)
- **Participation & Involvement** (15%)
  - Including unannounced Short Quizzes

*Detailed overview (& rubrics, in some cases) for each of the these assignments will be made available at least a week+ prior to the deadline & reviewed together in-class*

Required Texts:
Most readings will be available as PDF handouts—however a few texts are necessary to purchase:


Attendance Policies:
Class attendance and participation is expected behavior. Examples presented in class will serve to extend and clarify material presented in the text. Students are responsible for all content and assignments for each class. If, for medical or serious personal reasons, you will miss several classes in a row, please inform me as soon as possible.

Please also keep in mind that one of the crucial goals of this course is to improve our capacity to thoughtfully discuss the various texts in relation to each other and our own personal experiences—the success of the course relies heavily on your contributions to this wider discussion and so reading and showing up are essential.

Excused absences require documentation (note from Health Services, the doctor or hospital on letterhead; obituary notice from newspaper). Note: A student may be dropped from the course with a grade of WA for excessive unexcused absences (more than 15% of the scheduled classes). Late assignments lose 10 points per school day unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.
**College of Charleston Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to a misunderstanding will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the X to be expunged. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others’ exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance.

Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at [http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php](http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php)
# The Nature of Solitude: Sacred & Secular, Voluntary & Involuntary
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Note: This syllabus WILL adjust/ change over the course of the semester & updated versions will be posted at OAKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Touchstone of the American Experience: Thoreau’s Walden</strong></td>
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| January 12th | • Course Overview  
• Getting to Know Each Other                                    | ✅ Read Barbour, “Thoreau at Walden” (pp.105-128 - handout)                  |
| January 17th | • Introduction to Walden & Thoreau’s America                           | ✅ Read Walden, chapters. #1-3                                              |
| January 19th | • The Romanticism of Walden  
• Clips from Thoreau’s Walden (film, 2006)                      | ✅ For Tuesday, read Walden, chapters. #4-6, #16-18 (conclusion)             |
| January 24th | • Wrapping up Walden  
• Clips from Thoreau’s Walden (film, 2006)                      | ✅ For Thursday, read Walden, chapters #16-18 (conclusion)                   |
| January 26th | • Thoreau’s influences—Romantic Poets & Emerson  
• Thoreau’s influence on Frost & other poets                        | ✅ For Tuesday, read Emerson’s “Nature” (handout)  
✅ Edward Abbey’s Desert Solitaire  
✅ Complete Reflection #1                                              |
| January 31st | • Abbey as the new American anti-hero  
Clips from Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness (film, 2006) | ✅ For Tuesday 2/7, read Joyce Carol Oates “Nature” (handout)  
✅ Read London “To Build a Fire” (handout)                            |
| February 2nd | • No Class  
**SC Business Educators Annual Meeting**  
• Myrtle Beach, SC                                                     | ✅ Read Alone Together (Part I, chapters #1-3)                               |
| February 7th | • Thoreau post-Darwin & today                                         |                                                                          |
| **The New American Experience? Saturation & Consumption**         |                                                                        |
| February 9th | • Discussing chapters #1-3 of Turkle & the nature of machines as “creatures” | ✅ Read Turkle, Alone Together (Part II, chapters #4 -7)                     |
| February 14th | • Discussing chapters #4-7 of Turkle                                    | ✅ Read Turkle, Alone Together (Part II, chapters #8 -11)                     |
| February 16th | • Alone Together Part II & Assigning Reflection #2                      | ✅ For Tuesday, read Turkle, Alone Together (Part II, chapters #12 -Epilogue)  
✅ Start drafting Reflection #2 for 2/23                              |
| February 21st | • Alone Together Part II (2)                                          | ✅ For Thursday, read Slow is Beautiful, chapters #1-4 & complete Reflection #2 |
| February 23rd | • Slow is Beautiful & discussing Encounter Log Assignment (due post-Spring Break) | ✅ For Tuesday, read Slow is Beautiful, chapters. #5-9                      |
| February 28th | • Slow is Beautiful & signing up for being Discussion Leaders (post-break) | ✅ For TU 3/14, read excerpt of You are Not a Gadget (handout) & Carr “Is Google Making Us Stupid” (handout), plus excerpts from Republic of Noise (Senechal, 2014); discussion log assignment due post break |
| March 2nd   | No Class – National Science Foundation Meeting, Arlington, VA           | ✅                                                                           |
**SPRING BREAK March 5th – March 11th**

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| March 14th | • Wrapping up Media/Consumption  
• Collecting Encounter Logs                                  | ✓ For Thursday, read excerpt of Morris Berman, *The Twilight of American Culture* |
| March 16th | • The Monastic Experience—potential solution?                        | ✓ For next Tuesday, read Barbour Chapter #1 “Christian Solitude” and Chapter #2 “Augustine’s Confessions” |
| March 21st | • The Christian Tradition and Augustine                              | ✓ For Thursday, read Barbour Chapter #7 on Merton, plus Chapter #1 of *The Seven Storey Mountain* |
| March 23rd | • Thomas Merton’s Monasticism and the Buddhist Tradition              | ✓ For Tuesday, read selections from Thomas Merton                      |
| March 28th | • Thomas Merton’s Monasticism II  
• *Into the Great Silence* (film)                                      | ✓ For Thursday, read Long and Averill “Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone” (handout) |
| March 30th | • Long and Averill’s argument  
• Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow  
• remainder of *Into the Great Silence* (film)                         | ✓ Read William Deresiewicz’s article “Solitude and Leadership” plus other readings (TBD) |
| April 4th  | • Deresiewicz’s argument & the nature of leadership  
• Clips of *Moon* (film)                                                | ✓ For Thursday, read Nilsson “Loneliness as a Psychological Disorder” & Kernion “Difference between Loneliness & Solitude” (OAKS pdfs) |

**Solitude as Isolation/Imprisonment & Wrapping Up**

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| April 6th | • Nilsson et al. Kernion  
• Remainder of *Moon* (film, 2002)                                       | ✓ Read Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” (handout)                              |
| April 11th | • Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” & the body as imprisonment  
• Film *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (film, 2007)                     | ✓ Read Cheever’ “The Swimmer” & Capote’s “Miriam” & Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”(handouts) |
| April 13th | • Part II of the Film *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (film, 2007)  
• Environmental roles (city, suburbs, country)                             | ✓ Draft topics for Final Paper & outlines for final paper               |
| April 18th | • Remainder of the Film *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (film, 2007)  
• Discuss Final Paper and Presentations                                      |                                                                      |
| April 20th | • Trip to Mepkin Abbey (times TBD)                                        | ✓ Readings TBD                                                      |
| April 25th | • Lunch Out ➔ Wrapping Up—Putting It All Together                        |                                                                      |
| April 27th | • No Class                                                                 |                                                                      |

**Spring 2017 Academic Calendar:**

**Spring 2017 Exam Schedule:**