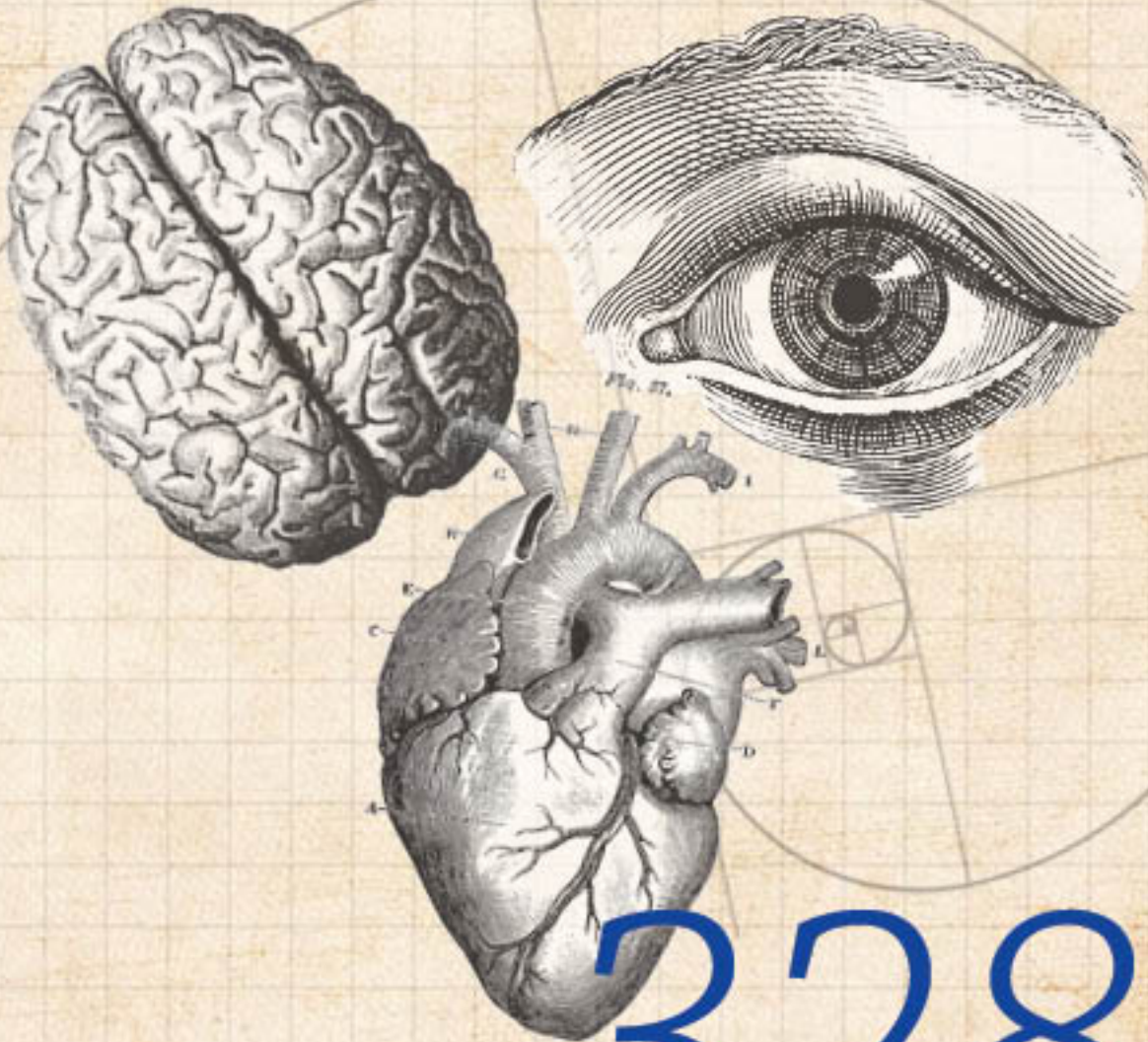


KAIROS



328



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“A theology should be like poetry, which takes us to the end of what words and thoughts can do.”

- Karen Armstrong

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**AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

issue

328

Inside: Tips for incoming students, MFM's new Lunch & Learns and Faith & Finance Course, and an autobiographical essay.

*Field notes from a second-year seminarian

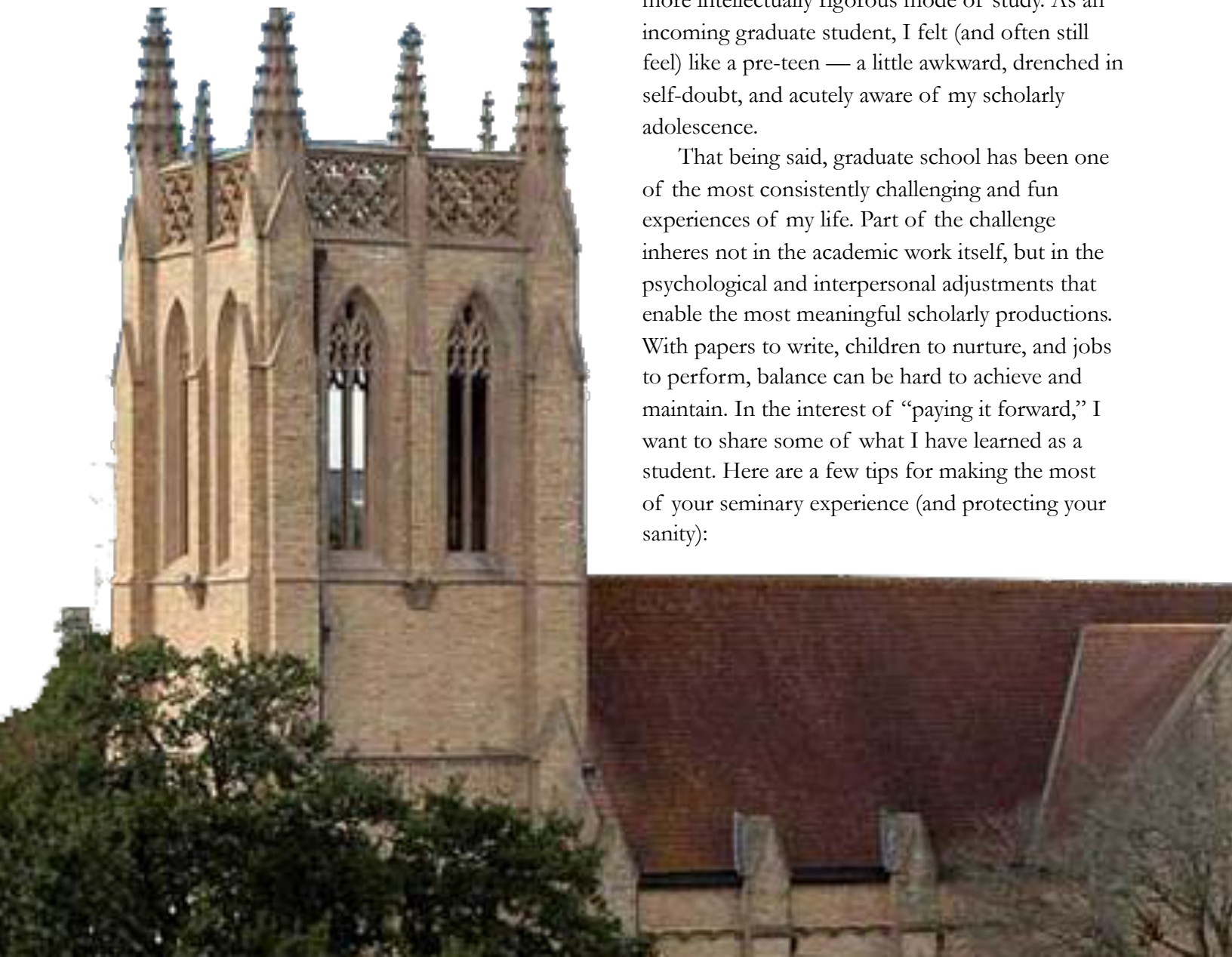
Madison Andrews

I recently had a dream in which my seminary colleagues and I were working frantically on some sort of writing-intensive take-home exam. We shared notes, read each other's work, commiserated, and, most importantly, administered reciprocal emotional

support. The funny thing is that we were not graduate but *middle* school students. I burst out laughing when I recalled the dream.

It seemed to beautifully encapsulate some of the characteristic aspects of seminary life — the emotional warmth and collaborative spirit among like-minded (which is to say, curious and hard-working) peers, the stress of meeting academic expectations, and the anxiety of embarking upon a more intellectually rigorous mode of study. As an incoming graduate student, I felt (and often still feel) like a pre-teen — a little awkward, drenched in self-doubt, and acutely aware of my scholarly adolescence.

That being said, graduate school has been one of the most consistently challenging and fun experiences of my life. Part of the challenge inheres not in the academic work itself, but in the psychological and interpersonal adjustments that enable the most meaningful scholarly productions. With papers to write, children to nurture, and jobs to perform, balance can be hard to achieve and maintain. In the interest of “paying it forward,” I want to share some of what I have learned as a student. Here are a few tips for making the most of your seminary experience (and protecting your sanity):

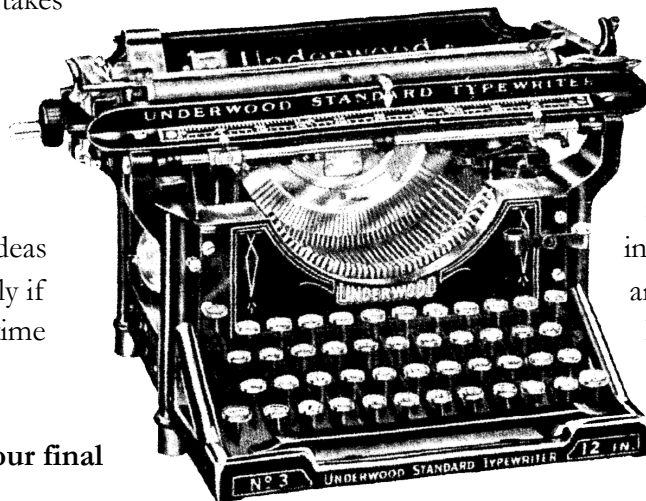


1. Make time for socializing.

This comes naturally to most of us early on in the semester, but in the midst of midterm and finals seasons, interacting with others in a purely social capacity can feel like an irresponsible luxury. While it is neither possible nor wise to spend the majority of your free time with friends, I have found that play is essential to the cultivation of a healthy mind. When you hit a wall in your writing, or feel that reading another sentence poses a serious threat to the integrity of your eye muscles, take time to chat with a friend over coffee or a walk. Like meditation, it takes discipline to detach the mind from tasks that directly affect long-term goals, but it is worth it. Your ability to absorb and manipulate ideas will increase exponentially if you remember to make time for non-school-related interactions.

2. Start planning your final papers early.

One way to ensure that you have enough time for socializing during the most stressful periods of the semester is to start work on your final projects early. Even if you're not entirely sure what exegesis entails, pick a pericope and commit. Even small amounts of regular reading and note-taking will give you a huge head-start by allowing the ideas to marinate and evolve over time. I'm convinced that a large part of my creativity gestates subconsciously — in sleep and in dreams, in class discussion, and in conversation with friends. If you have some familiarity with the constellation of ideas surrounding your project, you will be far better prepared to perform last-minute miracles come finals season.



3. Know when to skim and when to read closely.

As a close-reading apologist, I was a little scandalized when I first entered graduate school as a student of American literature. My mentor explained to me (and I have already passed this wisdom onto a few of you!) that it is simply impossible to read every assigned text in painstaking detail. Instead, he advised, you have to learn what to skim and what to interrogate on a deeper level. If, for example, you are assigned a handful of readings for the purposes of class discussion, then skimming makes the most sense. Read for thesis statements, or the writer's main argument, which is usually most clearly articulated in the introduction and conclusion to any given article. If, on the other hand, the material constitutes preparation for an essay, then the text in question merits closer engagement. In what philosophical, theological, and/or exegetical traditions and methods is the writer invested? How does she contribute to or complicate the ongoing conversation underlying the text or topic? What do you like or dislike about the writer's rhetorical style, i.e. the tone and structure of the argument? In what ways can you make your own contribution to the conversation?

At this point I should probably make clear that I myself am still learning to implement the aforementioned advice. But, as my mentor also liked to say, the work of scholarship is not about mastery; it is about producing knowledge. The only requirement for this task is the continual willingness to practice the skills required to thrive as a seminarian. ♦

*Ministry Finance & Mindfulness Launches New Programs

Madison Andrews



Dr. Steven Tomlinson discusses “Finance as Theology” at the first-ever Lunch & Learn event. *Photo credit: Madison Andrews*

Ministry Finance & Mindfulness (MFM) has unveiled two new didactic series that reimagine the purpose and parameters of the organization. Formerly known as “Ministers Facing Money,” MFM now seeks to move beyond debt-centered financial mentoring toward educational events that address the personal, theoretical, and practical aspects of financial mindfulness for students entering the ministry or non-profit sectors. Lunch & Learn lectures therefore address topics as diverse as “Scholarships: Minding the Debt Gap” (Wednesday, November 15th); “Taxes: Give unto Caesar What Belongs to Caesar” (Friday, February 23); “Negotiating Your Call” (Friday, March 9); and “Financial Leadership: Congregations and Non-Profits” (Friday, April 13). During their first Lunch & Learn event of the semester, pictured above, Dr. Steven Tomlinson explored how to think about finance abstractly, as a theology.

“I felt that was such an important one to start off with,” said Heather Zdanciewics, “because he helped frame a theology so that you could be thinking about the way finances and money affect the way you think. As he said early on in his talk, who is your God? Is money your God? And if money was your God, how would you know?”

Such engagement in wider philosophical conversations about money rests on the idea that in order to serve populations suffering from a dearth of economic skills and knowledge, leaders in ministry and social work require awareness of their own financial experience and ethos.

“Unless you deal with your own views on money and finance,” said Zdanciewics, “you can’t help other people.”

Dealing with your own views involves, of course, maintaining a healthy relationship with the economy(ies) in which we are intractably embedded. MFM’s new Faith & Finance course — which will replace Financial Peace University (FPU) for one experimental year — provides an opportunity for students to learn how to embrace gratitude for their existing resources and feel empowered to leverage them effectively. Course objectives include, “experie[n]c[ing] a new sense of freedom and joy in your relationship with money; discover[ing] wholesome ways to earn, save, spend, invest, and contribute;” and “appreciat[ing] the power and presence of your existing resources; com[ing] to know your own sufficiency and natural prosperity.”

MFM coordinators encourage students not to be deterred by the course fee: \$50/person and \$75/couple. At \$7.14 or \$10.71 per class, it’s well worth it. ♦



MINISTRY

FINANCE & MINDFULNESS

AT AUSTIN SEMINARY

Faith & Finance Course

7-week course
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
McCord 201
Fee: \$50/person, \$75/couple

Deadline to register: October 20, 2017

Wednesday Class Dates:
October 25, 2017
November 15, 2017
November 29, 2017
February 21, 2018
March 7, 2018
April 4, 2018
April 18, 2018

Attend a Lunch & Learn and your name will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$25 HEB gift card at the end of every event. Every Lunch & Learn you attend gets you an entry into the grand raffle — a \$250 Amazon gift card, drawn at the end of the school year.

For more details and info on how to register, contact Sarah Gomez, MFM Coordinator at sgomez@austinseminary.edu



Course instructors Cindy Mikel and Sonja Miller.

Lunch & Learns

Finding Your Financial Path

Friday, October 6, 2017

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Presented by: Stuart Vick Smith
McCord 203

Getting in Shape Fiscally

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

2:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Presented by: Board of Pensions

Scholarships: Minding the Debt Gap

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Presented by: Glenna Balch
McCord 203

Taxes: Give unto Caesar What Belongs to Caesar

Friday, February 23, 2018

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Presented by: Local CPA

Negotiating Your Call

Friday, March 9, 2018

12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Presented by: Heather Zdancewics
McCord 203

Funding Future Ministries: Planned Giving

Friday, April 6, 2018

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Presented by: TBD

Financial Leadership: Congregations and Non-Profits

Friday, April 13, 2018

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Presented by: Joshua Robinson