

# BOSTON COLLEGE

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# *the jesuit mission*

The early Jesuits struggled to describe what they called “our way of proceeding.” Their distinctive spirituality can be seen as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on its meaning, and ends in deciding how to act. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: being attentive, being reflective, and being loving. It results in the kind of good decision-making that St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, called “discernment.” One of the many goals of Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.

We can think of discernment as the lifelong process of exploring our experience, reflecting upon its meaning, and living in a way that translates this meaning into action that creates a harmonious community for us all. We can also think of this process as something that we focus on with special intensity at particular moments in our lives—during the four years of college or when we have to make important decisions. When we discern, we want to do so freely and with a sense of what God is calling us to do.

Through the practice of discerning, we grow in our ability to imagine how we are going to live our lives and discover vocations. The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” When we arrive at this place and understand the fit between who we are and what the world needs of us, St. Ignatius urges us to be unafraid to live with the consequences of this realization and to respond with generosity and magnanimity, because this is the way that we can love as God loves.

We are not solitary creatures. From the womb, we live in relationships with others, growing up in cultural, social, and political institutions that others have created for us. To be human is to find our place in these relationships and these institutions, to take responsibility for them, to contribute to nurturing and improving them, and to give something back to them. Jesuit tradition uses the Latin word *magis* or “more” to sum up this ideal, a life lived in response to the question: How can I be more, do more, give more?

It is certainly the hope of Boston College, as a Jesuit University, that students will feel welcome here no matter what their background and beliefs, and will know they have a place here. From the multitude of experiences over the next four years, it is our hope that students will grow in expanding their minds, deepening their souls, and developing their talents, so they will grow in intellect, wisdom, faith, and love.



## *a history*

The First Year Academic Convocation began as a call for a new ritual called First Flight; whereby, members of the Boston College community might best welcome each incoming class into the academic conversation already resounding throughout the Heights. Begun as an effort of student and faculty collaboration, the event has grown from a commissioning of first year students to a bracketing procession—seniors now follow the same route as you will follow in September on their day of graduation as they too are welcomed into the greater community of graduates, professionals, and alumni.

It is our hope that in the four years that pass between the Convocation and Graduation, our young men and women will, with a thoughtful, informed, and loving gaze, look more closely at the world around them. Ultimately, we hope that they will have begun to ask, as developmental psychologist Erik Erikson did, “Who am I, and how do I fit into this world?” The best way to get to that point of g t

might close the “empathy gap” present in American society today particularly surrounding questions of race and identity. Senator John McCain addressed students on the topic of service and leadership in both the public and private sphere through Robert Coles’s *Lives of Moral Leadership*. Jeannette Walls shared her astonishing memoir *The Glass Castle*, detailing her nomadic childhood. In this remarkable book, Jeannette Walls illustrated the power of love and redemption. Through the memoir *The Tender Bar*, J.R. Moehringer exemplified the Jesuit ideals of discernment through his reflective, loving, and honest depiction of his life and his search for self-understanding.

As a class, each of you will have the opportunity this year to prepare for this conversation by reading the acclaimed book *Run*. Author Ann Patchett weaves together a story of family that asks each of us to think about love, our vocational calling, our duty to others, and our larger society as a whole.

It is our hope that this guide will help to ignite your passion and curiosity. Make no mistake; Boston College expects a great deal from you, its newest students. You will bring your intelligence, energy, imagination, and compassion to create an even greater Boston College community and realize the fruits of your education to your life and work. You are vital to the mission of this uni-



ily, friends, talents, and gifts. By reflecting on what we have, we are better able to find and retain a perspective that helps us to shape and model our lives. In many ways, a Jesuit education helps to direct each of us to listen to our own heart. This understanding and response to our heart is how we become transformed and grow into people who we want to be and who we are meant to be.

As first year students, we are embarking on a pilgrimage that has no set route or map. The roads and possibilities are endless, and we need to be open to the new possibilities that abound. While there is no set way to travel, there is, however, a way to proceed. Our flexibility, adaptability, and ability to reflect upon our daily experiences enable us to discern the correct direction to pursue. We make good decisions when we examine and attend to the relationships within our lives. This discernment needs to be at the heart of our decision-making.

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# *before you read: questions to consider*

Before you read the book, examine your self-understanding by reflecting on yourself and how you relate to others. Here are some questions to help you get started.

What events, experiences, or people have influenced or shaped who you are today and who you want to be?

Can you think of someone whose life you have impacted, for better or worse? How do you think you have impacted others?

How do you define family, and how has your relationship with your family changed since you were young? How do you envision this notion of family changing over your four years at Boston College?

How do you begin to search for your identity? How do you think you will search for your identity during your time at BC?

How have you found a community outside of your family? How does one feel connected to a community? Can you become lost in this search for connection?

How has the search for connection affected your development? What are the expectations that groups have for you?

How would you describe your identity now? How are you open to changing yourself in your time at BC?

When in your life have you felt superficially judged by others? When have you judged others, perhaps prematurely? How have issues of class affected your growing up?



## *a way to approach the text:*

Escaping into a novel's landscape and travelling along with fictional characters can often provide us with a critical stance and a better understanding of our own lives and the world in which we live. This journey into one's self and our subsequent search for self-understanding are key effects of great literature. Great literature has a probing quality that affects our whole being while making us think outside of ourselves.

This self-directed pursuit requires a close examination of our past and present to understand our desired future. This ability to know one's true self is at the heart of our own discernment. While reading this novel, it will be important to think about the motivations behind each character's choices and how those decisions connect each of the characters in a unique way. Understanding how, as people, we are all connected in ways that we cannot truly understand or fathom is important to consider as you embark on this new journey into college.

Arthur Blaustein in *The Novel as Moral Conscience* states: "When we read socially conscious novels, we learn about who we are as individuals and as a nation. They inform us, as no other medium does, about the state of our nation."



follow? Given the nature of choice,  
how much is nature/nurture?

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How does Sullivan attempt to provide his father with understanding in regard to his sons? Does Doyle ever understand? Where are our blind spots? What can't we see or don't want to see?

distractions that constantly interject into the characters' lives, the world that is created has a mythical or fairy tale quality to it. A fairy tale always ends with: "They lived happily ever after." Is this possible outside of the context of a fictional world? To what

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What role does Father Sullivan play in the family? What role does he play in the overall plot structure of the novel? How does Father Sullivan in a Dickens-like way, which means that there is no such thing as coincidence, connect all the characters and unite this family?

Do you know what it feels like to be in the minority? If so what is it like? What are the pressures that one feels? Those times that you were in the majority,

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what freedoms and liberties did you take for granted? How can we grow and develop from our individual encounters with those who are different? XBT

This novel is set within a very short time period in the midst of a snow-

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MEN AND WOMEN FOR  
AND WITH OTHERS

cident? Why can't we truly see others?  
If Teddy could not see his mother and  
Kenya, what else could he not see? Who  
are the people that we don't see? How  
can we open our eyes? How does com-  
passion and empathy help us to see?

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When we slow down, we are able to  
understand and see patterns within  
our lives. What are those patterns  
telling us and where are they lead-  
ing us? How can we be 0 0

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As you finish the novel and enter into your first year of college, it will be important to examine the decisions that you make while here at BC. Taking time to reflect upon your motivations, your desires and your fears will give you a much better perspective on your life—where you came from, where you are presently, and where you are heading. Boston College hopes to partner with you during this journey through the careful discernment of the intellectual, spiritual, and social components that affect you during your undergraduate journey.



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