

## Seaver College Chapel/Convocation Program

### Vision for Academic Year 2023-2024

#### Draft 2.4

The Seaver College Chapel/Convocation<sup>1</sup> program is shaped by the spiritual life vision of Pepperdine University. Consistent with the institution's rich heritage in the Churches of Christ and the theological convictions of this tradition, the program seeks to bear witness to the majesty and love of God by focusing on the nature and character of God, who loves each human being and has created each person in the image of God. The program seeks to express the radical hospitality of Jesus, so that all students feel welcomed into our community, and to explore central ideas of the Christian faith as revealed in scripture and enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The Chapel/Convocation program is designed to welcome first- and second-year students, introduce them to the mission and Christian community of Pepperdine, and connect them with faculty, staff, and programs. We hope this program will inspire spiritual growth and set students on a path to pursuing the good life, that is, a life grounded in the love of God, neighbor, and self, devoted to the service of others, and enlivened by the continual pursuit of wisdom and human flourishing. The program is dedicated to character formation in the context of students' spiritual journeys, presenting some of life's most essential questions and equipping students with tools to discover the answers. Ultimately, the program will offer a winsome invitation to deepen or initiate faith while never pressuring students to do so.

#### Vision

The program provides students the opportunity to hear and experience God's love for them in dialogue with selected "big ideas" of the Christian faith: it facilitates reflection on how each person is beloved by God, who is truth, beauty, and goodness, and who is the source of truth, beauty, and goodness in our world. In Christian theology, three of these themes (truth, goodness, beauty) correspond with three human capacities (*logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*), and they relate to the quintessential Christian virtue love (*agape*), as follows:

Truth	What is real?	<i>Logos</i> (reason)
Goodness	What is right?	<i>Ethos</i> (morality/character)
Beauty	What is lovely?	<i>Pathos</i> (emotion/aesthetic)
Love	How much does God love me? How do I love God and neighbor?	<i>Agape</i> (selfless love)

These big ideas ask such questions as: What are the sources of truth and how do we know truth? How can we understand and desire the good, for ourselves and for others? How can we

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<sup>1</sup> We plan to use a new name for the program. For now, we refer to it as chapel/convocation.

develop attention so that we see and love beauty in the good, created world and in the beautiful creations of human beings (art, music, literature, etc.) and develop imagination and creativity to participate with God in creating beauty? How are humans changed when we come to know and accept that God loves us? How does love flowing from God empower us to love others? And what does all of this look like “on the ground,” in our messy, complex, broken, and beautiful world today?

This four-part focus is informed by centuries of reflection on Christian theology, drawing from the whole of scripture. In particular, a foundational verse for the program is Philippians 4:8: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Centering on four themes (love, truth, goodness, beauty) will contribute to a sense of cohesiveness across the program and provide numerous possibilities for integration with the core curriculum, particularly the Foundations of Reasoning course and the religion general education sequence. In this way, it contributes to Seaver College’s mission to integrate faith and learning.

The program also seeks to lay out in clear fashion Pepperdine’s Christian identity and ethos, inviting students into it; introduce students to resources available for their spiritual journeys; inspire their involvement in co-curricular spiritual life at Pepperdine, including the programs of the Hub for Spiritual Life; and foster community and a sense of belonging, particularly among first- and second- year students. Drawing on institutional visions for faith, learning, and spiritual life<sup>2</sup>, the program will model Christian faith that is hospitable, thoughtful, transformative, and respectful of others’ beliefs. Students will be invited into a Christian community that is ecumenical, diverse, and international.

The following are a working course description and student-learning outcomes (adapted from the Seaver 200 description and outcomes below):

Chapel/convocation welcomes first- and second-year undergraduate students into the Pepperdine community through gatherings that explore four big ideas within the Christian faith: love, truth, goodness, and beauty. It gives students an intentional space to reflect on meaning and purpose, discuss Pepperdine’s mission, grow in their spiritual journeys and faith practices, meet mentors, and develop friendships. The program seeks to model vibrant and mindful faith as students prepare to become leaders in the world, as George Pepperdine envisioned.

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<sup>2</sup> These documents include: “Dedicatory Address” (George Pepperdine), “Pepperdine University and Churches of Christ” (Rick Marrs), “Revisiting ‘The Idea of a Christian University’: Reflections on the Pepperdine Experiment for a Time of Transition” (John Barton), “Ascend Together” (Jim Gash), and the 2030 Seaver College Strategic Plan.

Upon completing the chapel/convocation program, students should be able to:

1. Articulate how Christian ideas about love, truth, goodness, and beauty contribute to human flourishing in a diverse world.
2. Reflect on how spiritual development and faith practices contribute to the development of personal well-being, resilience, and care for others.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of Pepperdine's Christian heritage, mission, and identity.
4. Identify and recall Pepperdine's spiritual life resources.

We will develop an assessment plan for these outcomes, guided by past assessment efforts at Pepperdine and research from organizations such as the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities.

### Format and Content

For 2023-2024, the format of the program will be four foundation events and nine breakout group sessions each semester. We will consider making changes to this format in future years.

For the eight large-format sessions (four in fall and four in spring), we hope to feature faculty speakers as much as possible, providing them with professional training for speaking to a large audience. One of the large-format sessions will be devoted to Founder's Day and the final session of the spring semester will provide a culminating experience for all students. The remaining six large-format sessions will integrate one or more of the four themes, provide an introduction to Seaver College, and/or reflect on personal development/human flourishing. Storytelling and testimony will be prioritized. The large sessions could explore such questions as:

- Do you want to live a beautiful life (introduction to the four themes)?
- What does it mean to be a Christian university (drawing from the former Heritage lecture series)?
- How do we connect faith and reason together?
- What is the pursuit of truth and why does it matter?
- What is love and goodness in society?
- What is vocation, and why should you care?
- How does my (speaker's) faith align with my vocation (and how do others in my field/discipline find vocational fulfillment)?
- Are faith and science friends or enemies?
- Why is my (speaker's) art/music/poetry/fiction important to my faith?
- Why is balance crucial for a beautiful life?

Integration of worship in large group sessions will be carefully considered, keeping in mind the needs and sensibilities of students of diverse backgrounds in a curricular (required) context. There is a historic relationship between convocation and Won by One, and we will keep that in mind when considering worship at foundation events. We will also consider having opportunities at foundation events for students to sign up for programs and receive information offered by the

HUB for Spiritual Life such as spiritual mentoring, small groups, worship opportunities, and spiritual care.

For breakout sessions, we will partner with RISE for four sessions each fall and spring semester for first-year students while providing an intentional focus to integrate RISE more fully into the program as a whole. We will work directly with the RISE program to integrate the themes of love, truth, goodness, and beauty into the RISE curriculum, as needed, to increase integration of RISE with the larger vision of the program.

For the five other breakout groups, we will recruit faculty and staff as leaders, perhaps paired with student leaders. We will seek to have as many division-based groups as possible, following the model of the Business Division in 2021-2023. We may look into creating IP location-based breakout groups for students planning to go abroad the following fall. To foster cohesiveness, each breakout leader will be asked to determine and communicate repeatedly to students how their content relates to at least one of the four themes of love, truth, beauty, and goodness and to the learning outcomes of the program. We will provide group leaders with curricular resources for this purpose and follow-up material from the large sessions for breakout groups that wish to discuss the presentations. We will also integrate the W. David Baird Lecture Series into the program, as appropriate. Consistent with the previous two years, faculty and staff who lead breakout groups will receive stipends.

### Leadership and Collaboration

A program director will manage the program, reporting to the Dean of Seaver College and working in close collaboration with the associate dean for student and faculty development and the associate dean of curriculum and general education. This program director will oversee other staff. To facilitate college-wide involvement with the chapel/convo program, Seaver will create an advisory committee to function as a sounding board, offer guidance, and support the operation of the program. This committee will be made up of faculty, staff, and one student. Collaboration with the religion program and the Hub for Spiritual Life will be a priority.

### Marketing and Student Engagement

We will work with faculty and students in Seaver's marketing program to rebrand and promote the program, including a new name. In the spring, Seaver College will facilitate (perhaps with the student marketing team) student focus groups and surveys to gain feedback from students to inform the program in 2023-2024. A student will serve on the program's advisory committee.

We would like marketing efforts, in part, to focus on helping students understand and appreciate the "why" of this program. Why is it important and potentially valuable to them? We would also like branding to suggest the big ideas and/or outcomes of the programs. For example, the four themes could be a tagline for the program, such as "love • truth • goodness • beauty" or "agape • logos • ethos • pathos." A list of words spelling out WAVES could suggest student outcomes for the program: Wisdom • Attention • Veracity • Empathy • Service.

In addition to communication (social media, campus signage, etc.), other ideas for student engagement include:

- Establishment of fun rituals that create a sense of moving through the program and graduating from it.
- Providing students with t-shirts (or other swag) with branding.
- Creating well-designed stickers corresponding to each theme or outcome.
- Raffles or giveaways to celebrate attendance (e.g., a small giveaway for students who complete eight sessions; something larger for those who complete nine sessions).
- Providing food for smaller breakout groups, to encourage community.
- Special breakfast foods or fun programming in the Waves Cafe immediately following the foundation events. (We do not plan to continue to provide food at Firestone Fieldhouse).

The possibilities described above represent brainstorming at this point. We are excited to hear ideas that will be generated by the student marketing team.

### Faculty/Staff Involvement

Historically, faculty and staff involvement in Seaver's for-credit spiritual life programs has been highly valued by students. The Seaver 200 proposal indicated that faculty and staff would continue to be involved as RISE group leaders (some leading in languages other than English), coaches for student leaders, speaking at foundation events, and leading small group offerings for sophomores. For 2022-2023, beyond faculty involvement in the advisory committee, we plan to involve faculty and staff as much as possible. Ideally, faculty would serve as speakers for foundation events, focused on storytelling and testimony, as indicated above. Faculty and staff will also be invited to serve as facilitators for gatherings, small groups/club convos, spiritual mentoring, etc. We will prioritize regular communication and smooth processes.

### Juniors/Seniors

The pilot program for Seaver 200 eliminated the chapel/convocation requirement for juniors and seniors. The intent behind this change was to "increase the amount of [co-curricular] worship events, ministry events, leadership opportunities, etc." and provide students "time and space to feel they have the ability to choose to attend these robust offerings without sacrificing attendance at the graded programs." As the pilot program aimed not to reduce involvement of juniors and seniors in spiritual life but provide them with more options, it will be important for Seaver College to collaborate closely with the Hub to offer many diverse experiences to meet the needs of junior and senior students of a variety of backgrounds and interests. It will also be important for the chapel/convocation program to inspire students, especially rising juniors, to engage in co-curricular spiritual life activities. In addition, the chapel/convocation program will provide leadership opportunities for junior and seniors to help with foundation events and breakout groups.

## International Programs

The pilot program for Seaver 200 did not impact the overseas campuses, other than reducing the required meetings from 14 to 10. Sophomores abroad will continue to experience Seaver chapel/convocation within their IP programs, overseen by IP and the site directors. The original Seaver 200 proposal stated a long-term goal of providing content support to IP. Seaver College has no immediate plans to provide chapel/convocation content to IP in the 2023-2024 academic year. However, the vision for the convocation/chapel program will be shared with the IP Office and IP Directors will be encouraged to use this material in shaping their respective programs. In future years, Seaver will explore a higher level of integration between Malibu campus programming and the IP programs.

## Academic Policies

The program is mandatory for students who are required to live on campus, as determined by campus housing. Transfer students required to live on campus will complete only the second year of the program. A small number of exemptions will be granted to ROTC students and to students granted a full or partial exemption from the Office of Student Accessibility or the Student Care Team. Credits required will vary depending on student circumstances. For example, a second year student who spent her first year participating in convocation but in her second year received a housing exemption and/or other exemption would only be required to complete 1.0 units of convocation.

Grading is based on attendance. To earn an A grade, a student must attend all but one of the required number of convocation programs each semester. For each additional absence after the first, a student's grade will be lowered by one letter grade per absence from an A- (2 absences) to a C- (8 absences). Students missing nine (9) or more convocation programs in a semester will receive a grade of F. A scale indicating the required number of programs that must be attended to earn specific letter grades will be posted on the convocation website each semester.

## **Historical Background**

Since the early 2000s, the convocation/chapel program at Seaver College operated according to a student-selected model. Students could choose among a weekly large-format offering in Firestone Fieldhouse and a variety of smaller events, including lectures, worship/devotional gatherings, language chapels, club convos, and spiritual mentoring. Grades were determined based on attendance at 14 sessions. While this format offered choice and variety, it lacked cohesiveness and created scheduling stress for students, resulting in both difficulties and dissatisfaction. A “new” Seaver 200 program was proposed and piloted in 2021-2022 to reinvigorate the program and address prior challenges.

## Seaver 200 (2021-2023)

Based on research related to emerging adults, the pilot program for Seaver 200 sought to provide different experiences for first-year and sophomore students. The program focused on nurturing first-year students (normalizing their experiences and providing relationships and community, including community with God). For sophomores, the program sought to give students more choice within the program and invite exploration of hard questions, such as: Who am I? What do I believe? How do I live out my faith? Where can I find spiritual support? What is my calling? Rising juniors were to be encouraged to “opt in” to co-curricular spiritual life on campus. These goals resulted in the following course description and learning outcomes:

Seaver 200 exists to create gatherings for first- and second-year undergraduate students to explore their faith and feel welcomed into the community. This required programming provides a model of vibrant faith practice for students as they become leaders in the world, just as George Pepperdine envisioned.

Upon completing Seaver 200, students should be able to:

1. Identify and recall Pepperdine’s spiritual life resources.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of Pepperdine’s Christian heritage and identity, the Christian faith, and the love of God.
3. Describe the spiritual significance of story/testimony, belonging, community, and diversity.
4. Articulate the importance of resilience within the realms of wellness and faith practice.
5. Articulate the importance of the intersection of faith and action and ask good questions about faith practice.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the unique ways in which one can live out and practice one’s faith in the world.

The format of the program involves four large foundation events and six small-group experiences during ten weeks of the semester. Students are required to attend one session each week, for a total of ten sessions. The four large gatherings were originally intended to be two separate events—one for first-year students and another for sophomores—but ultimately, all first-year and sophomore students participate together in four large foundation events. Small groups for first-year students consist of RISE groups (fall) and student-led small groups (spring).