Ministry & Theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
Boston College School of Theology & Ministry TMPS 8006
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Fall Semester 2014
Class: Section 01: Thursdays 3:15-6:00 PM; Section 02 Fridays 1-4 PM.

Office Hours Procedures: Wednesdays 1:30—3:30 PM: contact the Service Center at 617-552-6501 to sign up for a slot on these days; OR e-mail the professor at Bretzke@bc.edu for other times outside of the Wednesday slots. Please do not contact the professor for a Wednesday appointment, as the Service Center keeps this schedule and this will only delay getting an appointment)
Phone: 617-552-6514;
Fr. Bretzke’s Moral Theology Web-page: https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/BretzkeWebIndex.pdf

N.B. All hyperlinks tested on June 10, 2014; please e-mail if you discover a broken or inaccurate link

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

N.B. This course will use the BC LMS Canvas for all ordinary course activities and communication, so it is essential that all students consult the Canvas course web-page regularly and have their BC and personal e-mail set up to forward from the Canvas site.

This course will consider the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation from its historical, theological, moral, pastoral, liturgical, and canonical perspectives. The course’s emphasis will be on an ongoing practicum on confessional counseling, utilizing role playing of a variety of confessional cases and issues. The course will also involve an in-depth discussion of moral, liturgical, and systematic theology as it relates to the Sacrament. Additional attention will be paid to spiritual direction and pastoral counseling in the context of sacramental confession, as well as a number of pastoral, moral, and canonical issues which often surface in the celebration of the Rite of Reconciliation.

For each class students will be expected to do the assigned reading carefully and to participate actively in the class. Pre-lection and/or discussion questions will be available for most of the principal course articles. Canvas discussion of these readings will be available, but will be optional. Every two weeks (for a total of 6 for the semester) students are asked to submit electronically on Canvas a confidential journal reflection on any issues, further questions, reflections, etc. that arise for them personally on the material and/or class practicum. These reflections are required, but will not be individually graded as such. In certain weeks a particular theme for the journal reflection may be suggested.

For the practicum sessions the students will be asked to submit a total of five (5) one-page confessional scenarios, detailing different pastoral situations in which an individual presents to the priest in the confessional. These will be exchanged with other class members, role playing will be used, and a written response to an assigned case will also be due in each succeeding class (responses can be made to other cases which will be given out by the instructor at the beginning of the course). The student will be asked to
make a total of six (6) responses to individual cases, of which one will be a special (common) canonical case.

Each student will be expected to **lead the class discussion on one of the assigned readings** (chosen by lottery in the first class) that are designated in the Weekly Schedule of Classes by a *. All students must do the readings, but will take turns leading the discussion of the key “starred” readings.

Students will also be asked either to **critique two (2) communal services** for the Rite of Reconciliation prepared by students previously taught in a similar course or to construct their own communal rite of reconciliation. If the critique option is chosen it should discuss both positive aspects as well as aspects that might be missing and/or problematic in a Communal Reconciliation in the designated particular pastoral setting (e.g., parish Lenten service, children's penance service, etc.). Extensive directions for this assignment are found in the “Communal Reconciliation” folder on Canvas as well as in the Canvas “Assignments” folder. If the option for the construction of a new Communal Rite of Reconciliation is chosen it should include all of the elements to be used, including either a detailed outline of the homily, or the homily itself.

Students will be asked to view substantial parts of one movie together (*Priest*) and to discuss aspects of the issues of secrecy of the confessional which arise in this film. Two (2) times, once towards the middle and once toward the end of the course students will also be asked to submit a set of penances that would be given to five (5) of the cases presented throughout the semester. A **Mid-Term Exam** will consist of a one-on-one confessional role-playing with the professor and discussion of the course material up to that point in the semester (including a few terms drawn in lottery fashion from the Glossary posted on Canvas), as well as a brief discussion of C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*. The **Final Exam** will have two parts one of which will have a confessional role-playing with the professor of one confessional scenario and discussion of a few terms drawn in lottery fashion from the Glossary posted on Canvas. The second part will have three (2) options which the student may choose from: 1) a written take-home essay integrating the theological input and readings assigned for the course in the form of either a sample presentation on sin and the sacrament of reconciliation suitable for an adult group (such as the RCIA or a parish adult education evening) OR 2) an extended essay in the genre of a written comprehensive exam question.

**Learning Outcomes for the Course:** By the end of the course the student will be able to

- Demonstrate familiarity in practice with all three Rites of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and identify the elements of each and the conditions in which each of the Rites may be employed.
- Identify and apply in a pastorally appropriate manner all of the requisite elements of an integral confession in the Roman Catholic tradition and their application to the normal spectrum of potential penitents.
- Demonstrate familiarity with the relevant Canons from the Code of Canon Law regarding the Sacrament of Penance, counseling regarding possible cases of nullity in matrimony, application of *latae sententiae* penalties (especially in regards to a procured abortion), reserved penalties, and granting or withholding Holy Communion in accord with CIC #915.
• Demonstrate a pastoral manner that is sensitive, prudent, and in conformity with the theology and legislation regarding the Sacrament of Penance in judging a normal range of penitential cases, giving appropriate counsel and direction, and assigning appropriate penances that are reasonable, salutary, and medicinal (rather than excessively burdensome or punitive).

• Demonstrate an ability to catechize in a manner appropriate to the normal range of penitents a basic Catholic theology of sin, forgiveness, conversion, and reconciliation and relate this to an understanding of the role of the Sacraments in the life of the Church and the faithful.

• Be able to identify, explain and use appropriately in a confessional setting the Glossary of terms and concepts related to confessional ministry posted on Canvas

STM School-Wide Grading Policy (adopted by the Faculty in Fall 2012): based on the Academic Policies of Boston College for Graduate Courses. All grading in this class is reflective of these descriptions.

A Work is exceptional in every respect. There is an active and sophisticated engagement with all aspect of the course, demonstrated through careful analysis or creative treatment of the ideas covered. Both class participation and written work indicate outstanding mastery of content, originality of thought clearly expressed, and clarity in connecting course concepts with ministerial and theological interests. All assignments turned in complete and on time.

A- Work is superior and above the average graduate level expectations. This involves mastery of the course content, recognition of the “big picture” within which course material is situated, and capacity to make cogent links with one’s ministerial and theological position. This level is reflected in the ability to express one’s thoughts effectively in writing and to contribute significantly to class conversation.

B+ Work is more than satisfactory at the graduate level. This involves mastery of the course content and the ability to draw connections across course topics and with appropriate theological and ministerial topics. Contribution to class conversation gives evidence of both active listening and thoughtful participation. Written work is clear, focused and well organized.

B Work is clearly satisfactory at the graduate level. There is consistent engagement with, and a basic mastery of, the course material with a good command of the various topics. Assignments frequently turned in late or incomplete.

B- Work is barely acceptable at the graduate level. This reflects a basic command of the course material, an adequate articulation of the connections across content areas, and a basic recognition of the implications for pastoral work.

C Work is marginally acceptable at the graduate level. This is a basic mastery of most of the course materials but not all. It represents that you have slipped below an acceptable level of work in one or two areas.
F Work is unsatisfactory and fails to meet the requirements of the course.

P/F Pass/Fail option must be arranged with the professors by the end of the first week of the semester if this grade is desired in place of a standard Letter Grade.

Course Communication Protocol:
As noted above: The normal method of communication for the course will be via the e-mail function in the Canvas course web-page. Therefore, it is very important that each student enable e-mail from their end, and to monitor either their individual BC e-mail account OR to have their BC e-mail set up to forward automatically all e-mail to their preferred e-mail account. Course announcements, addenda, corrections, will be posted to Canvas and not usually sent via e-mail, so students should also be checking the Canvas course web-page a few times a week for these possible announcements.

Attendance Policy:
Attendance is expected at all classes; there is no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences, but only between “foreseen” and “unforeseen.” If an absence is foreseen please contact the professor before the class to be missed. If an absence is foreseen in one class, please see if you might be able to attend the other class section of the course that meets on the alternative day. If an absence is unforeseen (e.g., illness or emergency) please contact the professor as soon as possible after the missed class. Excessive absences will result in lowering of the final grade.

For Students with Disabilities:
If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Kathy Duggan (Kathleen.duggan@bc.edu) Associate Director, Academic Support Services, the Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities and ADHD) or Paulette Durrett (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for Students with Disabilities (all other disabilities). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

Academic Integrity Policy:
Plagiarism is the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source, and presenting them as one’s own. Penalties at Boston College range from a grade penalty to dismissal from the University. To avoid plagiarism, any use of another’s words or ideas must be fully cited. If in the original wording, quotation marks or blocked, indented quotations must be used. For more information regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, please consult the STM website at http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/stm/acadprog/acadpol.html [link verified June 6, 2013]

Inclusive Language Policy:
All written work should reflect good academic English style. In accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style and generally accepted contemporary canons of scholarship the expectation is to use bias-free language in academic writing. The following adapted
guideline is suggested: Gender-inclusive language should be used sensibly. Referring to all people living in society the word *men* should not be used alone. However, if gender-inclusive language leads to incorrect statements it should not be used. For example, in speaking of “monks” (who are men) do not refer to them as *he or she*. Similarly in referring to the American electorate in the 19th century the same principle would hold since women were not enfranchised at that time.

**COURSE TEXTS: REQUIRED BOOKS** [545 pages]


Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Great Divorce*. ISBN 9780060652951. [To be read sometime *before the Mid-Term Exam*; it will *not* be “taught” per se] [146 pages]


**COURSE TEXTS: REQUIRED ARTICLES**

Anonymous (Letter from a former student and young Jesuit priest). “Dear Mike.” Available on the *Canvas* Course web-page. [1 page]


*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (sections on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, #1420-1498, and Sin, #1846-1876) [pp. 396-417; p. 504-511] Also available on the Internet at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

“Cleveland Catholic Diocese Ends Fees for Annulments.” *Cleveland Plain Dealer* 4 June 2014 [1 page]. Available on *Canvas*
Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, Canons 18, 915, 959-997 [25 pages]. The texts of the Code itself are available online at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM


Hill, Robert Alan. “7 Deadly Sins in a Contemporary Mode” (excerpt his “Angel Voice” 2014 Easter Homily) available on Canvas and at http://www.bu.edu/av/chapel/podcasts/sundayservices/sermon/Sermon042014.mp3


Loyola, St. Ignatius. “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” from the *Spiritual Exercises* (available on Canvas)


Martin, James, S.J. “Bless Me Father.” *America* (21 May 2007). Also available on the *Canvas* Course web-page. [4 pages]


Mieth, Dietmar. "The Ethic of Failure and Beginning Again: *A Forgotten Perspective in Theological Ethics.*" *Concilium* (5/1990): 45-57. Also available on the *Canvas* Course web-page. [Pre-lection available on Canvas] [12 pages]

Neuner, Jacob, S.J. "Second marriage: separation from community?" *The Month* (May 1995): 182-186. Also available on the *Canvas* Course web-page. [Pre-lection available on Canvas] [4 pages]


“Responsibilities of Children’s Confessors” (handout available on Canvas Course Web-page). [19 pages]

"Rite of Penance" Ch. 2 in The Rites of the Catholic Church. [228 pages]


RECOMMENDED READINGS


National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB, today the USCCB). *Post Abortion Ministry Resource Manual for Priests* (nd; available online on the *Canvas* site)


Santa, Thomas, CSsR. *Understanding Scrupulosity: Helpful Answers for Those Who Experience Nagging Questions and Doubts.* Ligouri MO: Ligouri/Triumph, 1999. (selected short chapters available on *Canvas*).

Schoenbechler, Roger, O.S.B. *Letters to a Scrupulous Person.* Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1939. [short pamphlet available on *Canvas*]
Other supplemental materials will be posted throughout the semester into the appropriate folders on Canvas.

Weekly Schedule of Classes

N.B. the readings indicated by an asterisk * will be those whose discussion is led by a student member of the class (though ALL students are expected to read all of the “required” readings).

Week 1 (September 4-5) Introduction and Methodology; Begin Role-Playing of Confessions

Read
Anonymous (a young Jesuit priest). “Dear Mike.”
Francis, Pope. “Address to Apostolic Penitentiary,” 28 March 2014
Martin, “Bless Me Father.”

Begin reading Stasiak (Introduction and Chs. 1-3); please complete the reading of C.S. Lewis’ novel The Great Divorce by the mid-term.

Read & Review Carefully: The Course Syllabus (posted on Canvas)

Recommended Reading: Bretzke, Chapters 1 from A Morally Complex World
(See Study Materials section of Canvas Course web-page for Study Questions).

Download and Review Confessional Ministry Glossary of Terms

NO Written Assignments this Week 😊

Week 2 (September 11-12) Elements of the Individual Confession

Submit first bi-weekly Journal Reflection (Suggested theme: your own experience with the Sacrament of Reconciliation)

Hand in first confessional case to the Discussion Board detailing what you would consider to be a “normal” confession (e.g., without complicated moral, canonical or pastoral issues).

Memorize prayer of absolution in English or your primary language of celebration of the Sacrament, "God, the Father of mercies..."

Read
"Rite of Penance" Ch. 2 in The Rites of the Catholic Church
*Curran, “Sin, Reconciliation, and the Manuals of Moral Theology.”

**Finish reading** Stasiak

**Recommended Reading**

Bretzke, Ch. 2, 6

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Rite One*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Penance Guidelines*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Confession Cases Group One Moral Cases*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Bible Passages for Confession*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Counseling Points*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *How To Confess*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *New Rite of Penance Explained*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Method of Confession English & Spanish* (this though was given as a handout in the first class)

**Week 3 (September 18-19) Seal of the Confessional in Practice**

**N. B. As I will be out of town for class on November 20-21, we will transfer the “class time” to a mutually agreeable time around this week, to view and discuss selected scenes of the movie “Priest.”**

**Hand in** second confessional case to the **Discussion Board**, ideally dealing with some sort of family issue or problem that involves the penitent and his/her relations with other family members.

**Read**

1983 *Code of Canon Law*, Canons 959-997 (reading a good commentary on these canons, such as that of the Canon Law Society of America, is recommended). The texts of the Code itself are available online at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM)

McNamara, Seal of Confession

Bretzke *SealHandout* on the Seal of Confession (posted to Canvas)

**Recommended Reading**
Zenit Seal of Confession 28 May 2013

**Finish Reading** Stasiak, Ch 4 and Concluding Remarks

**Download** and review *Arrupe Falling in Love*

**Download** and review Newman’s *Lead Kindly Light*

**Download** and review *Ps 139 Farrell Version*

**Download** and review *Serenity Prayer Color*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Confessional Cases Group Two: Sexual Issues*

**Week 4 (September 25-26)** *Sin, Grace, Conversion, and Historical Overview of the Practice of the Sacrament of Penance*

Submit second bi-weekly **Journal Reflection** *(suggested theme: your reflections on the nature of sin, conversion, and reconciliation)*

**Read**

*Mc Cormick, "Human Sinfulness: Models”*

Hill, 7 Deadly Sins excerpt from his Boston University Marsh Chappel April 20, 2014 Easter Homily (on Canvas)

Lensch, “Forgiving My Father.” On Canvas and at [http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/03/forgiving-father/JyYsYb8ihgwhbUWX8FBsM/story.html](http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/05/03/forgiving-father/JyYsYb8ihgwhbUWX8FBsM/story.html)

**Recommended Reading**

Bretzke, Chs. 3,4, 7


*Download* and review Bretzke’s *Confessional Cases Group 3: Particular Issues*

*Download* and review Bretzke’s *Give Absolution Unless*

*Download* and review *How to Do Confession St. Joseph's Daily Missal*

*Download* and review *Traditional Examination of Conscience & Act of Contrition*

*Download* and review *Pre-Vatican II Confession Catechesis*

*Download* and review Zenit’s *Indulgences at Point of Death* and *Indulgences Followup*

*Download* and review St. Ignatius Loyola’s “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” (1st and 2nd Week of the Spiritual Exercises)

Week 5 (October 2-3) *Contemporary Magisterial Documents on Reconciliation*

**Hand in** third confessional case to the *Discussion Board*, ideally detailing a case that you would find perplexing to handle.

**Hand in** first response to confessional case designated in previous class (to the professor only, i.e., do *not* post to the whole class)

**Read**
*John Paul II’s Reconciliatio et Paenitentia.*  Also on the Internet at:  

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (sections on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, #1420-1498, and Sin, #1846-1876 (available online in several places, including the Vatican web-site:  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM))

**Recommended Reading**: Huels, John.  *The Pastoral Companion*.  (Sections on marriage and penance)

**Presentation of Special Canonical Case of “George”** (*Initial response due by October 8th*)
Week 6 (October 9-10): *Spiritual Direction and Developing a Contemporary Theology of Sin, Grace, and Conversion*

**Hand in** your response by October 9th to the canonical “Curious Case of George” presented in the previous class detailing just the canonical and sacramental issues involved and how you would address these (this counts as a confessional response).

**Hand in** fourth confessional case to the **Discussion Board**, ideally dealing with some sort of sexual ethics sin issue.

**Submit bi-weekly Journal Reflection (whatever theme you wish)**

**Read**
*Häring, "Sin in Post-Vatican II Theology." In *Personalist Morals*, 87-107. [Pre-lection available on Canvas]*

*O’Hare, “Opening to Love: A Paradigm for Growth in Relationship with God.”*

*Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina* Apostolic Constitution on Indulgences (1967)*

**Recommended Reading**


*Whitehead, Evelyn and James. “Forgiveness, Gratitude, Generosity” and “Virtue of Self-compassion” from their *Healing Emotions* (4 pages)*

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Anger Management*

**Download** and review *Soul of Christ Prayer*

**Download** and review *Praying the Examen*

**Download** and review *First Principle and Foundation*

Week 7 (October 16-17) *Forgiveness Documentary & Mid-Term Exams*

**N. B. We will meet for the entire period in a large-class format**

**View** selected segments of Helen Whitney’s documentary *Forgiveness: A Time to Love & A Time To Hate*

**Discussion** of George canonical case (if all have successfully answered it)

**Hand in** second response to confessional case designated, which is to respond to one of your own cases (or your own choosing) that has not yet been
handled in your small-group role-playing. (to the professor only, i.e., do not post to the whole class)

Hand in fifth (and last) confessional case to the Discussion Board of whatever issue you would like to see handled in class.

Finish Reading by MidTerm Exam *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis

Download and Review Glossary of Terms in Confessional Ministry covered to date

**Recommended Reading**

Bretzke, Chapter 5

Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Chs. 5-6

**Individual Mid-Term Exams** [outside of regular class time]

**Week 8 (October 23-24) Communal Rites of Reconciliation**

**Read**

*Osborne, “The Ambiguity of Communal Penance.”* [Pre-lection available on Canvas]

*Ventura, “Old Wine in New Wineskins.”* [Pre-lection available on Canvas]

**Hand in** First Set of Penances & Pastoral Responses

**Hand in** fourth response to the professor only to one of YOUR OWN cases of your own choosing (as long the case you choose has not yet been discussed in class)

Submit bi-weekly Journal Reflection (suggested theme: your personal experience[s] with communal rites of reconciliation)

**Recommended Reading**


**Week 9 (October 30-31) Confessional Role-playing and Special Cases**

**Read**

*Code of Canon Law* #18 and #915

*Magill, “A Moral Compass for Cooperation with Wrongdoing.”*

McNamara, “Denying Communion to Someone.”

**Download** and review Bretzke’s *Scruples* and *Scruples Case via E-mail*
Download and review Bretzke’s *Understanding Addiction*

Download and review 12 Steps List from AA

Hand in fifth response to the professor only to a confessional case of your own choosing of ANOTHER student (as long the case you choose has not yet been discussed in class)

**Recommended Reading**


Schoenbechler, Roger, O.S.B. *Letters to a Scrupulous Person*. Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1939. [short pamphlet available on Canvas]

**Week 10 (November 6-7) Sexual Sins and Pastoral Approaches I**

Read
*Häring, “Sins against Chastity within Marriage.”*
Mieth, "The Ethic of Failure and Beginning Again.” [Pre-lection available on Canvas]

**Recommended Reading**


Download and review Carnes Out of the Shadows Sexual Addiction

Hand in sixth response to confessional case designated in previous class (to the professor only, i.e., do not post to the whole class)

Submit bi-weekly Journal Reflection (suggested theme: sexuality, sexual sins and the Sacrament of Reconciliation)

**Week 11 (November 13-14) Sexual Sins and Pastoral Approaches II**
**Hand in** Communal Reconciliation Project (see directions on Canvas)

**Read**
“Cleveland Catholic Diocese Ends Fees for Annulments.” Available on Canvas
Coriden “Conscience & Communion: What’s a Remarried Catholic to Do?”
Dedek “Invalid Marriages in the Internal Forum,”
Neuner, "Second marriage: separation from community?" [Pre-lection available on Canvas]
Pontifical Council for the Family. “Vade Mecum for Confessors.” Also available on the Internet:

**Download** and review Diocese of Sacramento Internal Forum

**Recommended Reading:**
McNamara, “Communion and the Divorced and Remarried” Zenit 11 February 2014 [on Canvas]

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**Week 12 (November 20-21)**

*No Physical Class Meeting due to my required participation in the AAR/SBL Convention in San Diego. The missed “class time” will have been made up by extra session devoted to the movie “Priest” held around the 3rd week of class.*

**Hand in** Second Set of Penances & Pastoral Responses

Submit *Last* bi-weekly Journal Reflection (suggested theme: final issues, cases, problems that you would still like to see discussed in class)

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**Week 13** Thanksgiving Break (No Class) (November 27-28)

**Week 14 (December 4-5)** Social Sin, Children’s Confessions Abortion and Post-Abortion Healing and Reconciliation

*N.B. We will meet as a full class for the entire session*

**Read**
Bretzke/Rodman, “After the Choice”
McAreavey, "Abortion and the Sacrament of Penance." [Pre-lection available on Canvas]
“Responsibilities of Children’s Confessors”


**Recommending Reading**

Bretzke, Ch. 5
NCCB, *Post Abortion Ministry Resource Manual for Priests*

*Download* and review *John Paul II on Abortion*

*Download* and review *Beyond Regret Post Abortion Resources*

*Download* and review *Bretzke on Children’s Confessions*

*Download* and review *Children Examination of Conscience*

*Download and Review* Glossary of Terms in Confessional Ministry covered since the MidTerm (to be used in lottery for Final Oral Exam)

*Download and Re-Review* John Paul II’s *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (sections#16-17 on social sin)

*View* & discuss (in class) the video “Beyond Regret” (35 minutes)

Week 15 (December 11-12)

**Hand in Take Home exam by December 12th at 11:59 PM**

**Final Individual Oral Exam Scheduled during This Week**