I am trying something new. For more than 30 years I taught courses on law. This semester I am teaching a course on the virtues to a group of (mostly freshman) honors students. We already offer many courses on the virtues in theology and philosophy, and students often get an introduction to the virtues through their First-Year Experience courses. But I wanted to take a different approach. My course uses texts from a broad range of subjects — American and British literature, philosophy, theology, film, art, television, and sociology — to explore the virtues.

There are a couple of things I really like about this approach. First, it encourages students to consider the virtues through a number of lenses, each with its own advantages. Reading examples of prudence in literature might highlight aspects of the virtue that may not come up in a philosophy text. The reverse is true, too. A philosophical account of charity may underscore problems and inconsistencies in a fiction writer’s conception of the virtue. An interdisciplinary approach also discourages an overly circumscribed view of academics. Students learn to look for truth in literature and art as well as in theology and philosophy. They learn to think across disciplines, to put Caravaggio in conversation with Aquinas, and Josef Pieper in conversation with Evelyn Waugh. Perhaps most important, the presentations of virtue in art, literature, and film make a greater emotional appeal to students than a dry philosophical account might. Part of my aim is to make the students fall in love with the virtues we study — to change the way they act as well as the way they think.

My course is not the first of its kind to draw on material from a number of disciplines. Catholic University is home to an increasing number of such interdisciplinary efforts. Last spring a faculty member from our School of Music teamed up with a faculty member from the Department of Art to teach The Mortal and Divine in Art and Music, an honors course exploring the expression of sacred themes in music and art. (The course was featured in the Summer 2013 issue of the magazine.) We have a center devoted to the interdisciplinary study of the medieval world. Our Center for Medieval and Byzantine Studies draws faculty from the departments of English, history, modern languages and literatures, Greek and Latin, Semitic and Egyptian languages and literatures, and art, and from various schools: canon law, theology and religious studies, philosophy, and music.

A few years ago we introduced a new Certificate in European Studies (featured on page 7), which allows students to earn a concentration in the study of the history, politics, and culture of Europe and the European Union by taking courses in these topics across a number of disciplines. We have recently introduced two other interdisciplinary initiatives: a Certificate in Islamic World Studies, and a minor in Asian studies. Our Department of Modern Languages and Literatures has teamed with our School of Nursing to offer students a Certificate in Spanish for Health Care, which teaches nurses to speak Spanish and prepares them for cross-cultural communication in their health care careers. Our Columbus School of Law offers an interdisciplinary Program in Law and Religion. Last spring we began offering a postgraduate certificate in geriatric care that utilizes resources from our Department of Psychology and our schools of nursing and social work.

These intersections between disciplines in the classroom are also reflected in the research projects of many of our faculty. An interdisciplinary team from the fields of education, social work, sociology, nursing, and law are working on Catholic Community Partnerships for Better Early Childhood Development. The project will perform an in-depth exploration of early childhood programs.

These are only a few of the impressive interdisciplinary initiatives under way at Catholic University. These collaborations enrich the academic environment. They are valuable for our students. We are going to continue to look for new opportunities to make connections like these across the disciplines.