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Office Hours: Thurs 11:30 – 1:15

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Thursday 1:30 – 3:50
Stokes 217N

Capstone: The Vision Quest: A Multicultural Approach to Self Discovery

A Vision Quest is a Native American ritual to help young men (or, less frequently, young women) search for their connections to the spirit world in order to find themselves and their missions in life in relation to the people in their lives, past and present, and to their community. The ritual is a means of achieving personal growth and is a gateway to the status and responsibilities of adulthood. The ritual typically takes four days, during which participants go to solitary places, away from what is familiar to them, to commune with their inner selves and to make contact with their spiritual guides. A Lakota proverb states: "To go on a vision quest is to go into the presence of the great mystery." At 18 Harley Windsoldier from *The Grass Dancer* felt isolated from his community, confused about who he was and where he was going, and lacked self confidence. "What good are you?" he taunted himself. Harley didn't think he was particularly interesting or talented." After he completed his vision quest, he joined his community in song and felt comforted by the united voices. "But a powerful new voice that was unfamiliar to Harley disturbed his ears.....it was only as the song neared its end that he realized the truth: What he heard was the music of his own voice, rising above the rest."

Purpose of the Course

In this course we will view the Vision Quest as a metaphor for your four years at Boston College. Using readings from a variety of cultures as discussion points, you will be asked to reflect on the various influences during your college years that have affected you and helped you to come closer to understanding yourselves. Relating your lives to the lives of the characters in the literature, who have all gone on some variation of a quest, you will explore your own educational quest and the way your experiences at Boston College have influenced you in four ways: (1) your ideas about **community**, (2) your **spirituality**, (3) your attitudes toward **work**, and (4) your **relationships** -- to help you face the great mystery of life ahead of you. You will look at your past, who you were before you came to college and your four years at Boston College, in order to make sense of who you are at the present time and to anticipate your future. Native Americans believe that the past, present and future all exist at once; there is no separation in time. We can apply this to ourselves by understanding that we need to know where we have come from in order to know who we are and where we are going. Harley in *The Grass Dancer* needed to commune with the spirits of his ancestors from the past before he could understand who he was in the present and what the future held in store for him.

Methods and Requirements

This Capstone course is mostly about you. It is designed to help you discover who you are at this important stage of your life, how you arrived at this place, and where you are going. It is predicated on your introspection and participation. You should expect to reflect on your experiences and attitudes, both orally and in writing, and share them openly in the classroom. By looking at your four years at Boston College as a kind of Vision Quest and understanding the impact on you, you should be able to come closer to clarifying for yourselves your goals and values for the future. Talking and writing about these issues will help you to do that. To Native Americans, stories are essential. They are necessary for their survival. Stories preserve their traditions and provide them with an understanding of their relationship to the world they live in. We, too, will look to stories, the stories in the works we will be studying and our own stories, for this same understanding.

While this is a Capstone course, it is also an English course, which fulfills an English requirement for some of you. Others may have chosen this course because they were excited about the reading material. For these reasons we will be spending some time analyzing the books we read and the films we see. We will treat them as literature in addition to devices for self exploration. Along with personal reflections, there will be oral presentations and written assignments about the texts. Small groups will be assigned topics and questions to prepare and research in order to lead classroom discussions. The papers you write will vary depending on the focus of our discussions. For the most part, they will be personal responses to the assignments.

This course also satisfies the Cultural Diversity requirement. Some of your reports will include background material about the different cultures we will be reading about to stimulate our discussions about these cultures. The focus on the various cultures should provide an added dimension of exploration for some students and a familiarity for others.

While this Capstone course is different from others, no student is allowed to take more than one Capstone course at Boston College, whether listed as a UN course or cross-listed in a department

Attendance

You are expected to attend **all** classes and to fulfill **all** your oral and written assignments **on time**. If, for some critical reason, you cannot, you need to contact me to discuss your problem **in advance of the class or the due date**. It is your responsibility to find out what work you missed and to consult with me on ways to make up the work. Be advised that two absences or more can affect your grade. In this class we are all responsible for helping each other learn and grow. Your absence not only undermines your own chance to learn, but also the opportunity of your classmates.

Grades

Your course grade will be based on **all** the work done during the semester: group reports, class discussions and participation, papers, assignments, etc. Your writing assignments may be rewritten and will be handed in again at the end of the semester in the form of a portfolio. In addition, there will be a long final paper due with the portfolio, in which you sum up your discoveries about yourself and relate your self understanding to the works you have read during the course and the papers you have written about them. There will be a midterm evaluation of your participation in the course and your writing assignments up to that time.

The quality and frequency of your class participation, including your reports on the assigned readings, will be 35% of your grade, which includes your attendance of course. Your written work during the semester and your final paper and portfolio will be 65% of your final grade. The final paper itself is 20% of your grade.

Integrity

You are expected to have high standards of integrity in this classroom. That relates to the personal information you will discover about each other, the way you treat each other, and the written work you do. Submitting work that is not your own is plagiarism. It is a violation of the nature of this course and the requirements of the University. Suspected cases of academic integrity violations will be reported to your class dean and investigated by the Academic Integrity Committee. BC's policy on academic integrity can be found at: www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/stserv/academic/univcat/undergrad_catalog/policies_procedures.html#integrity.

Requests for Accommodations

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Dr. Kathy Duggan dugganka@bc.edu (617 552-8093) at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Dean Paulette Durrett paulette.durrett@bc.edu (617 552-3470) regarding all other types of disabilities.

Texts

Film : *Thunderheart*

The Grass Dancer by Susan Power ISBN 9780425149621

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Nora Zeale Hurston ISBN 9780061120060

Film: *The Whale Rider*

Life of Pi by Yann Martel ISBN 9780156030205

The Bonesetter's Daughter by Amy Tan ISBN 9780345457370

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros ISBN 9780345807199

Wherever You Go there You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn ISBN 9781401307783

Knowdell Card Sorts. Career Values. Richard Knowdell. ISBN 9788520215692

While the various aspects of the course will be discussed in all the assigned works, certain works will have a more specific focus. The film *Thunderheart* introduces the concept of The Vision Quest. *The Grass Dancer* will focus on community and its relationship to self fulfillment. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* explores ways of learning and the choices one makes along the way to finding oneself. We will look at *Life of Pi* and the film *The Whale Rider* for ideas about spirituality. *The House on Mango Street* shows how the work we choose to do relates to who we are. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* deals with relationships with family, spouses, significant others, and friends.

Class Schedule

The following schedule may be adjusted as the semester progresses depending on the needs of the class and the individual students. Specific oral and written assignments will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to make sure you know them and any changes that may take place.

Aug 31 Introduction

Sept 7 *Thunderheart* and the Vision Quest. (On movies.bc.edu streaming site)
Paper due.

14 *The Grass Dancer*

21 *The Grass Dancer* and community. Paper due.

28 *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Oct 5 *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and education. Paper due.

12 *The Whale Rider* (Watch in class).

19 *Life of Pi*

26 *Life of Pi* and spirituality. Paper due

Nov 2 *The House on Mango Street*

9 *The House on Mango Street* and work. Paper due.

16 *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov 30 *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and relationships Paper due.

Dec 7 Conclusion. Paper due.

Dec 11 & 12 Study Days

Portfolio and Final Paper due Sat. Dec 16, 9:00