

Capstone Seminar: “Mindful Success: Integrating the past, present and future for graduating first generation college students”

UNCP551201

Dacia Gentilella

Office: 50 College Road

Stokes 121N 4:30-6:50

From Annie Dillard’s *The Writing Life*: “How we spend our days, of course, is how we spend our lives”

From Pema Chodron’s *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* - “To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest. To live fully is to be always in no-man's-land, to experience each moment as completely new and fresh.”

Premise and Purpose:

Where are we really living day to day? Are we holding onto our past? Are we planning for and overwhelmed by the future? What happened to the present? After all, this is the only place where we can truly have some influence.

These concerns are shared by many in our society, however, often first gen students have a perspective on their past, present and future that differs from students whose parents attended college. We will explore the particular challenges of first gen students including the trailblazing necessary to enter and thrive in college and the way in which their past can be seen as an accomplishment that informs their lives but doesn’t hold them back from exploring the world in a fearless and unfolding way.

Our past is a touchstone that keeps us grounded as we move forward in life. It might be nostalgic and comforting to us as we face the unknown and assist us in understanding what lies ahead. However, it might also contain difficult memories of past hurtles and moments of self-judgment when we feel we fell short. How do we come to terms with our past and see it as a time that informs who we are today, but that doesn’t pin us down to lowered expectations or unwanted baggage of perceived missteps?

In addition, American culture insists we focus our lives on what's next and knowing what will happen in the future. For many first gen students, financial hurdles and family responsibilities and pressures may sometimes prevent us from living our best lives in the present and instead, push us to spend our time preparing for the future. How can we acknowledge the financial realities and family's hopes and dreams while including ourselves in the equation?

This course will utilize spiritual, psychological, and literary texts to help us examine both our past challenges and victories as well as our hopes and intentions for the future as a way of coming to a stronger understanding of who we really are right now. We will read about the struggles of others and their outcomes and we will look at ourselves from the perspective of spiritual, emotional, and thoughtful individuality and will each develop our own technique for embracing who we are in the present moment.

Major Assignments:

1. Begin journaling and continue throughout the semester with prompts moving from looking at your experience as a first gen student in past before college, experience at Boston College, your present, thoughts on your future. Share parts of these on Canvas each week (10% of grade).
2. Weekly 2-3 page responses investigating reading, noticing comfort and discomfort with premises and concepts and new perspectives that arise. Aspects of these responses will lead to your final portfolio (20% of grade).
3. One 4-5 page paper exploring the intersection of mindfulness readings and literature from class (20% of grade).
4. Working in pairs, take one turn at beginning class discussion with starting activity for class and debriefing activity (part of 15% participation grade).
5. Final project – Taking into consideration at least 6 readings from the class, develop your “Survival Guide” for moving forward in a mindful way as you graduate from Boston College. This is your own personal blueprint that takes into consideration your own situation, struggles and strengths (10-12 pages and 30% of grade). Will include a presentation of shortened version to the class (5% of grade).

Weekly Assignments (tentative)

Week	Date	Topic	Reading/Writing Due
1	1/15	Intros, Interviews	
2	1/22	Investigating our Past	Anna Quindlen and "The Things They Carried" chapter on Canvas What I carried to BC response
3	1/29	Challenges of entering College	Koru Mindfulness with David Storey "Learning from Differences" from <i>Making the Most of College</i> by Richard Light Poor, But Privileged in Harvard Ed Magazine. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/17/05/poor-privileged
4	2/5	What have we been told?	Excerpts from <i>Taking the Leap</i> "The Secret to Raising Smart Kids" by Carol Dweck "Class and Campus Life: Managing and Experiencing Inequality at an Elite College"
5	2/12	Where am I now? Routes to discovery	Read "My Mother in Two Photographs..." on Canvas Write a response with you in two photos "Perfectionist's Script for Self Defeat" "Is That Paper Really Due Today?": Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students' Understandings of Faculty Expectations" in <i>Higher Education</i>
6	2/19	Supports so far	Excerpts from <i>Taking the Leap</i> "Sense of Belonging as a Predictor of Intentions to Persist Among African American and White First-Year College Students"
7	2/26	Obstacles so far	<i>Drown</i> by Juno Diaz <i>First Generation</i> – Documentary by Adam Fenderson, Jaye Fenderson
8	3/5	Spring Break	
9	3/12	Moving through to success and Expectations-	Excerpts from <i>The Glass Castle</i> by Jeannette Walls <u>Junot Diaz On 'Becoming American'</u> : NPR https://www.npr.org/2008/11/24/97336132/junot-diaz-on-becoming-american

		ours and others'	Excerpts from <i>First Person, First Peoples: Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories</i>
10	3/19	How others have done it – What if we couldn't fail?	Watch RBG. Excerpts from <i>A Chance in the World</i> by Steve Pemberton "First on the Fast Track"
11	3/26	What do we need?	Excerpts from <i>The Road to Character</i> <i>Giants among Us – First Generation College Graduates Who Lead</i> <i>Activist Lives</i> by Sandra Rodriguez <i>Limbo – Blue Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams</i>
12	4/2	Possibilities Everywhere	Discussion with McNair Staff on Graduate School for First-Gen Students "First-Gen College Students to First-Gen Grad Students"
13	4/9	How to pick	Discussion with Jabril Robinson of the Career Center "The best tool for a job interview is comfort with yourself"
14	4/16	Who are we now?	Excerpts from <i>Big Questions, Worthy Dreams</i>
		Easter Break 4/18-4/22	
15	4/23	Who are we right now and next?	Presentations of Survival Guides
	4/30		Presentations of Survival Guides