

Capstone: Your Future, Your Choice
Spring 2022

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UNCP5509 Capstone Seminar
Tuesdays, 6pm-8:20pm
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Office Hours: Stokes S285
T/TH 4-4:30pm, Thurs 11:30am-12pm& by appt.
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Your four years at Boston College: a time to look back, look ahead, and center yourself in your present reality, so as to process learning and relationships as you continue on your life's journey, finding yourself anew, with each choice you make.

“The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.”

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, simplified

Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live properly. All other things—to reign, to lay up treasure, to build—are at the best but little aids and additions...The man who knows how to enjoy his existence as he ought has attained to an absolute perfection, like that of the gods. **We seek other conditions because we do not understand the proper use of our own, and go out of ourselves because we do not know what is within us.**

Michel de Montaigne, “On Experience,” *Essays*, Bk 3

Living is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be.

Michalczyk's re-interpretation of Calvino's, “Reading is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be.”

Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler*, Chapter 4

Yes, it's a wearying business choosing to live life fully engaged, but it's still more wearying to refuse to live, to refuse to engage, to refuse to choose life.

Michalczyk's reinterpretation of Camus', The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention... Yes, Rieux, it's a wearying business being plague-stricken. But it's still more wearying to refuse to be it. That's why everybody in the world today looks so tired; everyone is more or less sick of plague. But that is also why some of us, those who want to get the plague out of their systems, feel such desperate weariness...

Tarrou to Rieux in Part Four of Camus' *The Plague*:

Readings and Films: (readings/films available on Canvas, except where noted)

Tara Brach, “My Beloved Child” poem from *Radical Acceptance*, Michel de Montaigne, “On Experience,” Italo Calvino, “Why Read the Classics?” and film, *Cinema Paradiso*

David McCullough, Boston College Commencement Address, David Foster Wallace, “This is Water” and film, *Finding Forrester*

Andre Dubus, “Out of the Snow,” “About Kathryn,” with film, *The Lives of Others (Das Leben der Anderen)*, “Sonata for a Good Man”)

Giacomo Leopardi, “Dialogue Between a Scientist and a Philosopher,” “Dialogue Between an Almanac Peddler and a Passer-By” (from *Operette Morali, Essays and Dialogues*) and film, *La Finestra di fronte (Facing Windows)*

Eduardo Sacheri, (translated by John Cullen), *The Secret in Their Eyes*, and film, *The Secret in Their Eyes (El secreto de sus ojos)*.

Book available at BC Bookstore.

Barack Obama’s “Eulogy for John Lewis,” John Lewis’ “Last Words” and film, *Good Trouble*

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* and film, *Shadowlands*.

Book available at BC Bookstore.

Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, and film, *Stranger than Fiction*.

Book available at BC Bookstore.

Class/Assignment:

Jan 18, 25 To begin our seminar, take some time to look back, look ahead, and consider your own journey, building upon Brach’s short poem, Montaigne’s lessons on life, and Tornatore’s film. Put together a few memorable/meaningful moments to share with the class. In developing this introductory presentation, try to connect some themes/a quote/a scene, as you reflect upon these four years.

Readings: “My Beloved Child,” “On Experience”

Film: *Cinema Paradiso*

Jan 25, Feb 1

Readings: Italo Calvino, “Why Read the Classics?”

David McCullough, Boston College Commencement Address

David Foster Wallace, “This is Water” Kenyan College Commencement Address

Film: *Finding Forrester*

Reflection #1: Due Friday, Feb 4th

Feb 8, 15

Readings: Andre Dubus, “Out of the Snow,” “About Kathryn”

Film: *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, “Sonata for a Good Man”)

Feb 22, Mar 1

Readings: Giacomo Leopardi, “Dialogue Between a Scientist and a Philosopher,” “Dialogue Between an Almanac Peddler and a Passer-By” (from *Operette Morali, Essays and Dialogues*)

Film: *La Finestra di fronte* (*Facing Windows*)

(Mar 7-12 Spring Break)

Reflection #2: Due Friday, March 18th

Mar 15, 22

Reading: Eduardo Sacheri, (translated by John Cullen), *The Secret in Their Eyes*

Film: *The Secret in Their Eyes* (*El secreto de sus ojos*)

Mar 29

Readings: Barack Obama’s “Eulogy for John Lewis,” John Lewis’ “Last Words”

Film: *Good Trouble*

Apr 5

Reading: C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Film: *Shadowlands*

Reflection #3: Due Friday, April 9th

Apr 12, 26

Reading: Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*

Film: *Stranger than Fiction*

May 3 As Commencement approaches: your reflections on your college experience, choices made, and choices to make, as you consider your future.

Final Project Due: final exam date

Course Requirements:

For clarification, please keep in mind that it is entirely appropriate to read *more than* what is assigned, but *never less*, to see additional films, and most importantly, to think about more than the topic/theme assigned.

Attendance and close reading of all assignments, along with consistent and thoughtful participation each class. Throughout the semester, students will have opportunities to share ideas on individual final projects, as well as engage in short presentations with questions/answers. We will finalize

topics/dates/presentations at our first class meeting. The goal: meaningful conversation that includes all members of the class. Participation combines weekly class attendance/thoughtful reflection and 2 presentations (two students paired/presentation): 30%

3 Short reflections on the themes of the course, combined with specific connections based upon assigned weekly readings and films: 30%

Final project (due on final exam date): 40%

The question most often asked of seniors, no matter the major field of study, no matter the volunteer/service experiences, or internships: “what are you going to do...now that you have completed your undergraduate degree?” often followed up with “but why...?” reflects a societal view that any meaningful value for any human being, comes from what you have done, and what you will do.

After four long years of incredible opportunities, good and bad experiences, successes and failures, there is still value in considering a more profound question, and to take the time “to study” yourself, to put the experience back together (re-member), and “to find” yourself (“mi ritrovai”), recognizing the worth of choosing to live as a human being, rather than a human doing.

Our course revolves around written and visual narratives, famous works of fiction and autobiography in literature and film that offer opportunities to find connections in your college experience with so many other aspects of your life, past, present, and future. In our search for meaning and purpose, we draw strength and focus from our relationships: to self, to others, and to God, and the most profound relationships are built upon identifying the self as other, and recognizing the sacred in the profane. Choosing a life based upon mutual respect and reciprocity, the give and take philosophy that understands the purpose in living out the adage: “today is my day, tomorrow, yours” defines the human condition at its best.

What have you given over this time, and what have you received? What have you learned, as you plan for your career and future, and how will you find and define your place within an ever-changing and ever-more challenging world? We have much in common with authors and filmmakers seeking the meaning of existence, examining the essence of the human soul. Similar ideas, expressed differently, the remarkable and varied qualities of the human spirit, in all its greatness, and in all its wretchedness, to use Pascal’s favorite reminder of life’s unpredictability and our vulnerability.

Commencement, your graduation day, comes with endless opportunities for you, as you continue along your path, defining your future, as well as a thoughtful and thought-provoking question: in remembering your own college experience, will you also reflect more deeply, and re-member and re-connect our world?

Additional Quotes for your Consideration:

The power of the memory is great, O Lord. It is awe-inspiring in its profound and incalculable complexity. Yet it is my mind: it is my self. What, then, am I, my God? What is my nature? A life that is ever varying, full of change, and of immense power. The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond compute of countless things of all kinds. Material things are there by means of their images; knowledge is there of itself; emotions are there in the form of ideas or impressions of some kind, for the memory retains them even while the mind does not experience them, although whatever is in the memory must also be in the mind. My mind has the freedom of them all. I can glide from one to the other. I can probe deep into them and never find the end of them. This is the power of memory! This is the great force of life in living man, mortal though he is!

Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk X, 17

We are great fools. 'He has spent his life in idleness,' we say, and 'I have done nothing today.' What! have you not lived? That is not only the fundamental, but the most noble of your occupations. 'If I had been put in charge of some great affair, I might have shown what I could do.' Have you been able to reflect on your life and control it? Then you have performed the greatest work of all...Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live properly. All other things—to reign, to lay up treasure, to build—are at the best but little aids and additions... **The man who knows how to enjoy his existence as he ought has attained to an absolute perfection, like that of the gods. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the proper use of our own, and go out of ourselves because we do not know what is within us.**

Michel de Montaigne, "On Experience," *Essays*, Bk 3

"Do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end? In ancient times a story could end only in two ways: having passed all the tests, the hero and heroine married, or else they died. The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death."

Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, Chapter 11

We never keep to the present. We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is. The fact is the present usually hurts. We thrust it out of sight because it distresses us, and if we find it enjoyable, we are sorry to see it slip away. We try to give it the support of the future, and think how we are going to arrange things over which we have no control for a time we can never be sure of reaching.

Let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. **We almost never think of the present...the present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus we never actually live, but hope**

to live, and since we are always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.”

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (47)

“**One must learn to endure what one cannot avoid.** Our life, like the harmony of the world, is composed of contrarities, also of varying tones, sweet and hard, sharp and flat, soft and loud. If a musician liked one sort only, what effect would he make? He must be able to employ them together and blend them. **And we too must accept the good and evil that are consubstantial with our life. Our existence is impossible without this mixture, and one side is no less necessary to us than the other.**”

Michel de Montaigne, “On Experience”

... “the beauty of the world which is soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder. **Life for both sexes - is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength.** More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion as we are, it calls for confidence in oneself. Without self-confidence we are as babes in the cradle.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

“**Why love, if losing hurts so much?** I have no answers anymore: only the life I have lived. Twice in that life I've been given the choice: as a boy and as a man. **The boy chose safety, the man chooses suffering.** The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal.”

C.S. “*Jack*” Lewis (spoken by Anthony Hopkins at end of film)

“We can't have the happiness of yesterday without the pain of today.”

Joy Gresham (spoken by Debra Winger to C.S. Lewis (played by Anthony Hopkins))

And through re-finding/re-connecting with yourself, may you continue your life's journey...

“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.”

“In the middle of the journey of our life,
I came to my senses within a dark wood
where the straight way was lost.”

Dante, *L'Inferno*