

UNCP4609-01: Gather, Connect, Empower: Cultivating Community in a Changing World

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Course Overview:

As college seniors prepare to transition into the next phase of their lives, one of the most crucial aspects of their post-graduate journey is the ability to engage in meaningful connections and gatherings. This course explores the importance of building community after college by examining the ways in which intentional gatherings can enrich personal, professional, and societal life. Through a combination of theory and practice, students will explore the dynamics of creating impactful events, whether informal meetups, social gatherings, or organized professional spaces, and how these interactions shape long-term relationships.

Central to this course is the study of historical gatherings across a wide range of contexts—political, social, and cultural. From pivotal moments in history like political protests, grassroots movements, and social justice campaigns, to the powerful role of sports gatherings, community festivals, and social clubs, students will analyze how different types of events have influenced collective action and progress. By understanding these historical gatherings, students will gain insight into how modern communities can be shaped and mobilized in similar ways.

Throughout the course, students will reflect on their own experiences with community in college, assess the role of belonging in their personal development, and learn strategies for cultivating spaces that encourage connection in a rapidly changing world. Emphasizing communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, students will gain practical tools for facilitating gatherings that foster meaningful engagement—whether in social, professional, or civic contexts.

Course Objectives:

1. To learn about what makes gatherings meaningful and analyze interdisciplinary concepts to understand how these gatherings make the most impact on a micro and macro level.
2. To reflect on how students' BC experiences, identities, and formative influences have shaped their understanding of personal transformative gatherings.
3. To develop competencies and practices to construct similar opportunities for themselves and others at BC and beyond.

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Expectations:

1. Attendance and Participation

In this class, we will work to build a strong community where we can thoughtfully engage in dynamic discussions. These conversations will not always be easy, we may make mistakes but we will need to approach them with patience, grace, and courage. As a result, attendance, preparation, and readiness to share in the class are very important. It is our hope that all students will be present each week, but if there are circumstances that will prevent you from fully participating in a particular session, please email either of us as soon as possible (daltonka@bc.edu or Victoria.garcia.2@bc.edu).

2. APA Style

All formal work should utilize APA style as described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition.

3. Ethical Practices

Students are expected to abide by the university's academic honesty policy.

Boston College is committed to upholding standards that promote respect and human dignity in an environment that fosters academic excellence and professionalism. Sexual misconduct and relationship violence in any form are antithetical to the university's mission and core values, violate university policies, and may also violate federal and state law. Faculty members are considered "Responsible Employees" and are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct and relationship violence. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, stalking or sexual exploitation, please visit <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/womens-center/programs/sexual-assault-network.html> to access information about university support and resources.

4. Special Needs

We are committed to supporting the learning of all students in this class. Students seeking accommodations, please contact the Disability Services Office at 617-552-3470 or visit <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/student-outreach-and-support-services/disability-services.html>

Course materials:

Book: Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018.

This course will also utilize articles, book excerpts, and online media that will be available via Canvas.

Assignments:

1. Class Participation: 20%

Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions and group work in a manner that demonstrates thoughtful reflection and understanding of subject matter.

Class participation grade will be determined by the following: attendance, demonstration of completion and understanding of the readings/class materials, and thorough and thoughtful contributions to class discussions and group work.

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2. PechaKucha: A Meaningful Gathering: 20%

PechaKucha is a storytelling format that focuses on imagery rather than text, typically 20 photos with a 20 second description of each. For the purposes of this class, each student will present up to 10 images/photos and provide a description of each for no longer than 20 seconds (10x20 for a total of 3 minutes and 20 seconds) that provides a personal ethnography of a memorable gathering. Tell the story of that gathering, be specific.

To begin this assignment, we invite you to consider some key questions:

- What are your familial rituals?
 - What are they focused around? (Example: Food, Location, Services, Remembrance, Celebration, etc.)
- Consider one that is particularly memorable – Who was there? How did you feel? What made it different from any other gathering? What went well? What, if anything, would you change? What do you seek to replicate in future gatherings?

While you are encouraged to think deeply about all these questions, you need not answer them all. Please, no references or outside research for this assignment. The purpose of this assignment is to further your own development by reflecting upon a personal gathering.

PechaKucha grade will be determined by the following: formulation of a visual presentation that represents an important gathering as well as clear and succinct presentation skills.

3. 15 Toasts: 10%

Rationale: To use Parker's exercise, "15 Toasts" to understand the power of storytelling for group connection. Parker notes, "A simple story, told in less than four minutes, provides an opening that is relevant and interesting for everybody else around the table."

Guidelines: At the beginning of each class throughout the semester, a student will introduce a theme, which should be a bit edgy and complex, and invite classmates to share a story or experience from their life related to that theme and what it taught them. [Check out the Moth's Storytelling School site for ideas.](#)

4. Reflection Paper (500 words): 20%

Attend or host a new-to-you club meeting, lecture, retreat, or event on campus and submit a reflection exploring its strengths and weaknesses as well as practices that you might have implemented to add more meaning and community building.

5. Final Project and Presentation: 30%

In assigned groups, plan, execute, and host a meaningful gathering for our classroom community. Be creative and think outside the box. The gathering does not have to be for a group of students at Boston College; if you tell us that we are a team of vice presidents for a Fortune 500 company on our annual retreat, then we will be that for you. Obviously, there will be limitations that we will discuss. Write a group reflection paper about what each member contributed and which principles from Parker's book and our readings you incorporated and why you think they make it meaningful.

Projects will be evaluated on content, clarity, and quality of research to inform the gathering.

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Schedule:

Session 1: The Invitation

Readings:

Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018. Chapters 1-3.

Audio: Freakonomics, What makes a good gathering? Podcast: <https://youtu.be/4korr5laBGk>

Audio: The Loneliness Epidemic with Vivek Murthy (Everything Happens Podcast with Kate Bowler)

<https://omny.fm/shows/everything-happens-with-kate-bowler/vivek-murthy-the-loneliness-epidemic>

Session 2: The Dinner Table (Culture and Family)

Readings:

Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018. Chapters 4 & 5.

Malaquias, S., Crespo, C., & Francisco, R. (2015). How do adolescents benefit from family rituals? Links to social connectedness, depression and anxiety. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(10), 3009–3017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-0104-4>

Cardoso, É. A. de O., da Silva, B. C. de A., Dos Santos, J. H., Lotério, L. D. S., Accoroni, A. G., & Dos Santos, M. A. (2020). The effect of suppressing funeral rituals during the covid-19 pandemic on bereaved families. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 28, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1518-8345.4519.3361>

Holtzman, Mellisa. (2008). Defining Family: Young Adults' Perceptions of the Parent-Child Bond. *Journal of Family Communication*. 8. 167-185. 10.1080/15267430701856887.

Session 3: The Classroom (Schooling and Education)

Readings:

Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018. Chapters 6 & 7.

Kim, Catherine & Losen, Daniel & Hewitt, Damon. (2010). The School-To-Prison Pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform. *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform*. Introduction and The Right to Education.

The importance of building classroom community - Retallick, S.

How to Build a Strong Foundation for the Year - Collier, K.

Audio clip: Stopping the school-to-prison pipeline: NPR story:

<https://www.npr.org/2014/07/25/335378359/stopping-the-school-to-prison-pipeline>

Session 4: The Pew (Religion and Spirituality)

Readings:

Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018. Chapter 8. Morello, G. (2021). *Lived religion in Latin America an enchanted modernity*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197579626.001.0001>

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Boorstein, M. (2021). Peloton makes toning your glutes feel spiritual. But should Jesus be part of the experience? *The Washington Post*.

Yanagihara, H. (2023). The enduring, transformational power of pilgrimage. *The New York Times*.

Parihala, Y. (2021). Making mega-space for others: Towards theology of mega-friendship from the table fellowship story according to Luke 5:27–32. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 42(1), e1–e7.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2292>

Session 5: The Board Meeting (Professional and Career)

Readings:

Parker, Priya, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. New York, Riverhead Books, 2018. Chapter 8.

Liang, B., & Klein, T. (2022). *How to navigate life : the new science of finding your way in school, career, and beyond* (First edition.). St. Martin's Press.

Session 6: PechaKucha Presentations

Assignment: Presentation Due

No readings

Session 7: The Birthday Party (Friendships)

Readings:

Bronkema, R. H., & Bowman, N. A. (2019). Close Campus Friendships and College Student Success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 21(3), 270-285.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025117704200>

Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (2023). *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. US Department of Health and Human Services.

Audio story: <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/02/1173418268/loneliness-connection-mental-health-dementia-surgeon-general>

Session 8: The Protest (Social Movements)

Readings:

King, M. L. (1964). *Why we can't wait*. Penguin.

Bellows, K. (2024). Campus protests are coming back. Students and administrators are digging in. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Lakein, M. (2021). On Gathering. *Political Theology*, 23(1–2), 141–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.1899706>

Altman, M. Tufekci, Z.: *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. *Voluntas* 29, 884–885 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9927-0>

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Session 9: The “For You” Page (Social Media and the Internet)

Readings:

Salem, Fadi & Mourtada, Racha. (2011). Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter. Arab Social Media Report. 1.

Audio story: His Job Was to Make Instagram Safe for Teens. His 14-Year-Old Showed Him What the App Was Really Like. <https://www.wsj.com/tech/instagram-facebook-teens-harassment-safety-5d991be1>

McClain, C., Vogels, E., Perrin, A., Sechopoulos, S., & Rainie, L. (2021). *How the internet and technology shaped American’s personal experiences amid COVID-19*. Pew Research Center.

Parigi, P., State, B. (2014). Disenchanted the World: The Impact of Technology on Relationships. In: Aiello, L.M., McFarland, D. (eds) Social Informatics. SocInfo 2014. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 8851. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13734-6_12

Session 10: The Festival (Arts and Entertainment)

Readings:

Audio clip: The Year of Taylor Swift: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-year-of-taylor-swift/id1200361736?i=1000638671718>

Brownnett, T. and Evans, O. (2020). Finding common ground: The conception of community arts festivals as spaces for placemaking. *Health & Place*, 61, p.102254.

Sharpe, E. K. (2008). Festivals and Social Change: Intersections of Pleasure and Politics at a Community Music Festival. *Leisure Sciences*, 30(3), 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400802017324>

Session 11: The Big Game (Sports and Exercise)

Readings:

Kolt G. S. (2013). The impact of global sporting events. *Journal of science and medicine in sport*, 16(6), 487. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2013.09.009>

Knott, B., & Tinaz, C. (2022). The legacy of sport events for emerging nations. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 4, 926334.

Nike: You Can’t Stop Us (2020): <https://youtu.be/pcXTnyCmQbg?si=LAiwR7kLlyhdQfvR>

Nike: Write the Future Ad: <https://youtu.be/DBrA6LNx0cE>

Ted Lasso: Believe: https://youtu.be/jhrqhHtaUJs?si=x8KnTn8iQ4Te1_we

Session 12: The Professionals (Guest “gatherers”)

Session 13: PRESENTATIONS

Session 14: PRESENTATIONS