

Cross Currents seminar: Thinking about Economic Inequality
UNAS3332.01
Fall 2024

Location: Devlin Hall 112

Day and time: Thursdays from 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Instructor:

Mr. Burt Howell
Bourneuf House 204
617-552-6141
howellbu@bc.edu

Office hours:

By appointment through e-mail or phone call.

No lecture capture:

This course will not use “lecture capture” during class.

Seminar description:

This seminar will look at the consequences of economic inequality in the lives of high financial need undergraduates studying at elite universities. You will apply what you are learning in other classes to daily campus life. We will ask questions about the challenges of thriving at an affluent institution. The class will include readings from memoirs of low-income students at Princeton, Vassar, Saint Michael’s, Yale, Barnard, Stanford and Boston College. This course is recommended for Montserrat students.

Learning outcomes:

After taking this Cross Currents seminar, you will be able to:

- Describe how you are not alone.
- Recall examples of strength, hope, despair, and strategies for flourishing from Boston College peers and from the memoirs of other high financial need students at elite institutions.
- Practice regular reflection on your life and education.

Course Materials: chapters from the following memoirs under Course Resources on Canvas or Library Course Reserves through the library web home page under UNAS3332.01. **The assignment page numbers are found on the posted scanned pages; do not complete reading assignments with the full text of the online books as the page numbers do not match the assignments.**

There Will Be No Miracles Here, Casey Gerald
A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka, Lev Golinkin
Lost in the Meritocracy, Walter Kirn
Project Girl, Janet McDonald
Hunger of Memory, Richard Rodriguez
Lucky Child, Loung Ung
The Glass Castle, Jeannette Walls

Seminar requirements

Because it is a one-credit course, there is no mid-term exam; no final exam; and no research paper. Instead of these traditional ways to evaluate learning, there is more emphasis on the following.

Attendance:

Learning in this seminar is dependent on class discussion. Attendance is essential. You are expected to be prepared for the seminar and to arrive on time. **As part of Cross Currents policy, three absences will usually lead to a withdrawal from class or a failing grade. In some cases, depending on extraordinary circumstances, a student can receive an “incomplete” as a grade for the third absence. Three absences (usual circumstances) or four absences (unusual circumstances approved by instructor) means an automatic withdrawal from course or a failing grade.** Two absences (for any reason) are allowed but will require extra credit to make up the missed points.

Class Participation:

You are expected to contribute to the success of the seminar through discussion and seminar assignments. You are also expected to use the knowledge and understanding that you have gained through your other courses and experiences to contribute to the learning of your classmates.

Laptop and smart phone policy:

Since the course will be primarily discussion based, there is no need to take notes. All smart phones, laptops and AirPods/EarBuds must be put away throughout the class. Students are not permitted to record any aspect of class or distribute any recorded material from class. Failure to follow this policy will lower your class participation evaluation and may trigger academic integrity consequences.

Grades will be calculated by a point system:

250 points or greater = PASS

249 points or fewer = FAIL

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation	130 points (10 points per all 13 classes)
Warm up & connections minute papers	70 points (7 classes: 2 papers worth 5 points each)
In-class writing assignment	50 points

In-class writing assignment:

The in-class writing assignment will be a letter to **a mentor** you met prior to college. The letter will be hand-written in an examination blue book during two 75-minute class periods.

The letter will have four parts:

- 1) a book and a professor that has profoundly influenced your education
- 2) a loss from your education or a proposal for reform at BC or in the United States
- 3) a mentor or friend or extracurricular experience that changed your path for the better
- 4) a contribution to the BC community you have made because of a talent or strength despite the obstacles and challenges of being a Montserrat student here

You are required to read your letter in front of the class (during the final two class periods). Some may prefer not to read the letter. This is not a problem. However, to be fair, if you prefer not to have the conversation in class, you must meet with the instructor outside of class time and discuss your paper and the following prompt:

- 5) pick one reading (one author only) from this class and tell if you would recommend it or not (please explain why it is worth reading or why you would discourage others from reading it)

If you miss classes the days of the in-class writing assignment, you must prepare your letter in two supervised 75-minute blue book writing session at Bourneuf House on College Road.

You can get above or below the passing mark per class or paper.

Hard work and working together as a class will lead to success. Everyone will have an off day and many will most likely need to use extra credit to make up points and continue to improve and learn. It is never too late to gain ground and to grow.

Extra credit options:

- *Prepare questions & lead class discussion for up to 20 minutes: earn up to 30 points
 - *Zoom or in person meeting with instructor for 10 – 25 minutes: earn up to 20 points
 - *Take Home Presentation to instructor: earn up to 40 points
- Any student who misses two classes by October 24th is automatically required to complete the extra credit take home presentation with instructor (regardless of their current point total).**

Extra credit instructions for: Take Home Presentation to Instructor

*Read 4-page essay entitled *Good Deeds Ease College Stress: The Good Samaritan Project* by J. J. Tecce. The essay will be provided in separate instructions.

*Following Tecce's examples, perform one good deed per day for three days.

*Speak for 15-20 minutes about your good deeds with the instructor.

*Give some examples of what you did. What happened? How did others react? How did you feel about it? What did you learn? Do you agree or disagree with Tecce's conclusions?

*Earn up to 40 points.

Classroom exercises led by instructors:

- 1) *Best Guess*: warm up before class begins. Only for preparation for discussion. No points.
- 2) *Definitions*: sociological terms unpacked.
- 3) *Staying out of the way*: instructor listening to student voices.
- 4) *Sentences*: select a sentence from readings to explain to class.
- 5) *Poems*: acknowledge emotional part of this discussion

Reading assignments and topics:

Week 1 (August 29): Introductions

“The long road from hardship to Harvard Law,” Lauren Daley, *The Boston Globe*, July 22, 2020.

“T.M. Landry and the tragedy of viral success stories,” Casey Gerald, *The New York Times*, December 8, 2018.

Week 2 (September 5): Thriving

Gerald, pp. 183-187 and 341-347

Golinkin, pp. 249-262

Kirn, pp. 182-188 and 209-211

McDonald, pp. 84-97

Walls, pp. 203-205 and 231-234

Week 3 (September 12): Family

** Trigger warning: alcoholism. If necessary, you may skip Walls pp 116-125 and 168-170. **

Rodriguez, pp. 45-73

Ung, pp. 185-191

Walls, pp. 39-41; 54-57; 116-125 (alcoholism); and 168-170 (alcoholism)

Week 4 (September 19): Guests

Week 5 (September 26): Roommates

McDonald, pp. 57-66

Kirn, pp. 75-99

Week 6 (October 3): Despair

** Trigger warning: anti-Semitism, sexism, racism, suicidality, and genocide. If necessary, you may skip specific reading assignments for this week. You must read Walls. **

Gerald, pp. 165-173 and 189-199 (racism)

Golinkin, pp. 27-30 (anti-Semitism)

McDonald, pp. 67-76 (racism, sexism, and suicidality)

Ung, pp. 119-126 (genocide)

Walls, pp. 255-259 and 262-265

Week 7 (October 10): Friends

** Trigger warning: racism and sexual assault. If necessary, you may skip this specific reading assignment for this week. You must read Golinkin. **

Golinkin, pp. 269-274

Kirn, pp. 165-173 (racism and sexual assault)

Ung, pp. 201-210 (racism)

Week 8 (October 17): In class writing day #1

Week 9 (October 24): Service

Golinkin, pp. 168-172 and 275-303

Ung, pp. 246-265

Week 10 (October 31): Graduation

** Trigger warning: racism and suicidality. If necessary, you may skip Gerald. You must read McDonald, Rodriguez, and Walls. **

Gerald, pp. 249-265; 363-371 (racism and suicidality)

McDonald, pp. 214-228

Rodriguez, pp. 198-212

Walls, pp. 3-5 and 266-271

Week 11 (November 7): In-class writing day #2

November 13 by 5 p.m.: Extra credit take home presentation due

Week 12 (November 14): Letter presentations and guests

Week 13 (November 21): Letter presentations, guests, and final exercise