Cross Currents seminar: Thinking about Economic Inequality
UNAS332.01
Fall 2022

Location: Devlin Hall 112
Day and time: Thursdays from 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Instructor:
Mr. Burt Howell
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Office hours:
By appointment through e-mail or phone call.
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 on Library Course Reserves through the library web home page under UNAS3332.01.

*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. Therefore, there is more emphasis on the following:*

**Attendance:**
Learning in this seminar is dependent on class discussion. Attendance is important. 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 extensive notes. All smart phones and laptops need to 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)
- Writing assignment: 50 points

Writing assignment:
The writing assignment will be a five-page paper in the form of a letter to a mentor you met prior to college.

The letter will have five parts. Please write on these prompts:

1) a “home poem” based on opening of George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From.” See below for details ***

2) a book and a professor that has profoundly influenced your education

3) a loss from your education or a proposal for reform at BC or in the United States

4) a mentor or friend or extracurricular experience that changed your path for the better

5) a contribution to the BC community you have made because of a talent or strength despite the obstacles and challenges of being Montserrat here

You are required to read the five-page paper to the class. Some may prefer not to present their papers. This is not a problem. However, to be fair, if you prefer not to read the paper, you must write eight pages instead of five pages and it must include a fifth section:

6) 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)

***A “home poem” based on opening of George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From”

- You must write 3 lines of at least 25 words and no more than 40 words in the spirit of Lyon.
- “Where I’m From” begins:

  I am from clothespins,
  from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
  I am from the dirt under the back porch.
  I am from the forsythia bush,
  the Dutch elm.

  Sample from instructor:
I am from grandma’s trailer park, 
from wood paneling and gravel roads.
I am from Sunday church among towering boulders, 
from scorpions, rattlesnakes, and singing around a 
Ponderosa pine bonfire.

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
* Write a Take Home Minute Paper: earn up to 40 points
  --Any student who misses two classes before mid-November is automatically 
  required to write the extra credit take home minute paper (regardless of their 
  current point total).

Extra credit instructions for: Take Home Minute Paper
* 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.

* Write a Take Home Minute Paper about your good deeds. Your paper must be at least 3 pages 
  and no more than 5 pages.

* 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?

* You may read this paper to the class instead of your writing assignment. You cannot read both.

* Earn up to 40 points.

* Under special circumstances and with instructor permission, you can turn in a longer paper (8 
  pages) after classes have ended.
**Classroom exercises led by instructors:**
1) *Best Guess:* warm up before class begins. Only for preparation for discussion. No points.
2) *Say More:* invitation to comment on minute papers. No points.
3) *Definitions:* sociological terms unpacked.
4) *Staying out of the way:* instructor listening to student voices.
5) *Sentences:* select a sentence from readings to explain to class.

**Reading assignments and topics:**

**Week 1 (September 8):** Introductions

**Week 2 (September 15):** 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 22):** Family
**Trigger warning: alcoholism. If necessary, you may skip Walls pp 116-125.**
Rodriguez, pp. 45-73
Ung, pp. 185-191
Walls, pp. 39-41; 54-57; 116-125 (alcoholism); and 168-170

**Week 4 (September 29):** Yvonne McBarnett, Program Director, Montserrat Coalition

**Week 5 (October 6):** Roommates
McDonald, pp. 57-66
Kirn, pp. 75-99
Week 6 (October 13):  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 20):  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 27):  Jeremiah Jefferson, Assistant Program Director, Montserrat Coalition and Victoria Garcia, Assistant Director, Intersections

Week 9 (November 3):  Service
Golinkin, pp. 168-172 and 275-303
Ung, pp. 246-265

Week 10 (November 10):  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

November 15 by 5 p.m.: Writing assignment due to howellbu@bc.edu

Week 11 (November 17):  Paper presentations
November 29 by 5 p.m.: Extra credit assignment due to howellbu@bc.edu

Week 12 (December 1): Paper presentations; Yvonne McBarnett and Jeremiah Jefferson returns to discuss Montserrat Coalition office

Week 13 (December 8): Paper presentations and final exercise