

Stony Brook

MEMORANDUM

To NTR Faculty
From Patrick J. Hill, Chairman, FLC
Subject Core Course of "Human Nature" (NTR 325)
Date February 11, 1982

Attached is a copy of the memorandum I sent to NTR students about the first meeting of the Core Course. The Lippman "micro-dialogue" is something you haven't seen before. Elof and I thought it would be interesting to include.

I am sure we will talk further about the Core Course before the 24th, but for the moment may I remind you of the extraordinary importance of this activity of the FLC structure. It is here that the students expect to get to know the faculty somewhat informally. It is here that they expect to see an exciting exchange of ideas. It is here that they expect an opportunity to try out ideas and to get uncommon feedback from the faculty.

PJH:ee

Enc.

Stony Brook

MEMORANDUM

To Students of "Human Nature"
From Patrick J. Hill, Chairman, FLC
Subject Core Course of "Human Nature" (NTR 325)
Date February 11, 1982

The first meeting of the Core Course of the "Human Nature" program is scheduled for February 24th from 7:00 to 10:00 P.M. The attached material should answer most of your questions about the Core Course and help you to prepare for the first meeting. Attached are:

1. A detailed explanation of the structure, rationale and requirements of the Core Course. The Core Course is unique to all of higher education and can be tremendously rewarding. Please take time to read the rationale carefully so that you will be able to benefit from the opportunities throughout the whole semester.
2. One page statement prepared by Elof Carlson concerning the agenda for the February 24th meeting. Between now and February 24th, please think about the four questions listed at the bottom of this sheet. Small discussion groups will concentrate on these questions.
3. A one page "micro-play" authored by Walter Lippman.

For discussion purposes, the Core Course will break down for roughly one hour into four discussion groups. To allow faculty and students to know each other and "also to make grading possible", the sub-groups will remain constant for the five meetings of this semester. As always in FLC, we will be trying to have as much diversity (of both faculty and students) in each group as possible. However, we do wish to allow all of you the opportunity to choose those faculty in whose small group you would most like to be. Below is a list of the faculty who will be in each of the groups:

Group A - Elof Carlson
Herman Lebovics
Janice McLane

Group B - Edward Casey
Theodore Kennedy
Paulette Chase

Group C - Brett Silverstein
Robert Neville
Burton Bradley

Group D - Norman Goodman
Rose Zimbardo
Marvin Levine

If you have a preference for which group you would like to be in, please communicate your first, second and third choices on a sheet of paper to Eileen McSherry on or before February 19th. If we have not heard from you by the 19th, we will assume that you do not have a strong preference or that you will trust us to place you in a stimulatingly diverse group. As always, we will be doing our best to accommodate your preferences.

One last thing: we will begin each meeting of the Core Course promptly at 7:00 P.M. Bob Neville who will be teaching two of the courses of the Fall '82 semester (including one in Tai Chi) will begin each session with brief introductions to the discipline of Tai Chi. All of the faculty will be learning this for the first time and we invite you to join us.

PJH:ee

NTR 325 & 326

CORE COURSE

in

"Human Nature"

ELOF CARLSON

GENE LEBOVICS

ED CASEY

BOB NEVILLE

NORM GOODMAN

BRETT SILVERSTEIN

TED KENNEDY

ROSE ZIMBARDO

The Core Course is the academic center of an FLC program. Only in the Core Course are all members of the "Human Nature" (NTR) community assembled. And therein is focused the demanding and elusive task of forging a shared understanding of issues and assumptions often unaddressed elsewhere in the atomistic structure of the university. Since this common language and shared understanding cannot be announced or prescribed in advance, the academic emphasis of the Core Course is upon the process through which intelligent people formulate responses to the complex and pressing issues of our times. The Core Course is "the kitchen of the intellect", an experience in communal inquiry in a radically pluralistic society.

Objectives

1. To exhibit by means of the free interchange of diversely trained faculty the nature and interrelationship of disciplines as tools of inquiry for real persons.
2. To provide a flexible structure wherein the unique contributions of each of the federated disciplines and all the members

of the community to the understanding of the program's thematic focus will be repeatedly sought out.

3. To provide for students the opportunity to witness and participate in the sometimes exciting, sometimes discouraging and sometimes tedious and difficult process by which ideas are generated, developed, tested, refined, discarded or embraced.

4. To effect a shared understanding and a progressive refinement of the community's understanding (s) of the central issues of the program's academic focus. We are not promising a definitive integration or a final synthesis - we are hoping to clarify issues and explicate the consequences of adopting one or another assumption about human nature.

Structure & Rationale

1. In most courses in the university, the faculty presents to students the results of previous or ongoing inquiries of the specialized disciplines. Such a procedure, while appropriate to the federated courses of FLC, is not appropriate to the Core Course because (1) the topics which FLC focuses on are too controversial and too contemporary for consensus to have yet emerged amongst the experts; (2) the FLC faculty, while having legitimate claims to expertise and accomplishment within and sometimes beyond their specialized disciplines, have themselves only recently begun to focus on the subject matter and the interdisciplinary approach of the NTR program; and (3) the different explanatory priorities or paradigms of each discipline, which can only emerge after very sustained dialogue, will result in differing definitions of what is core or central. Hence the need for a communal and processive inquiry.

2. As in FLC's Program Seminar, students are encouraged as time passes to assume more and more responsibility for the conduct of the Core Course. In the first semester (NTR 325), the

NTR faculty will conduct the Core Course. Early in the second-semester (Fall 1982), joint faculty-student committees will conduct the course. Towards the middle of the Core Course and surely for the four or five concluding sessions, it is expected that the NTR students themselves, in consultation with the faculty, will be the primary determinants of the content and the procedures of the Core Course. Several considerations dictate this unprecedented course structure:

(a) It makes sense for the NTR faculty to initiate the inquiry of the Core Course, and to exercise leadership in exhibiting intelligent responses to the complex and controversial issues of the program. The NTR faculty does possess collective expertise in disciplined inquiry and a considerable amount of accumulated knowledge. Additionally, they have been meeting weekly since September of 1981 to familiarize themselves with the material of the federated courses and the issues of the NTR program.

(b) Over the course of two-three semesters, NTR students will have a much greater exposure to the subject matter of the program than will any of the federated faculty. Despite efforts on their part to keep informed about the content of the federated courses, the NTR faculty (other than Master Learners, Mumford Fellows and Teaching Intern) will not have the benefits of full-time immersion in the federated courses, the Program Seminar, and the NTR student community. Those NTR students who take all the federated courses thus have the opportunity to become resources for the interdisciplinary re-education of the federated faculty in the community.

(c) The unique "open-spaces" in the FLC structure (i.e., Program Seminar, Core Course and Interdisciplinary Independent Study Projects) seek to discourage passivity and unnecessarily prolonged dependency on the part of the student body. Even if the learning opportunities in FLC are not fully exploited, gradual assumption of responsibility for the Core Course yet suggests itself. For if students are not permitted to assume such responsibility and if they are not assisted in both initiating and evaluating their own inquiries into the pressing issues of our time, when will they ever become self-critical learners? And if students are not ready after a one-year, 22+ credit interdisciplinary immersion in a single subject matter to say something worth listening to, when will they ever be so ready?

3. The Core Course meets infrequently, just five times in the Spring 1982 semester and just ten times in the Fall 1982 semester. For the usual autonomous or unfederated course, such a schedule of meetings would be too infrequent to provide continuity. But the Core Course is not an autonomous course. It is dependent upon the federated courses and addresses issues which emerge as important or central over the two-three semesters of federation. It would not make sense to meet more frequently or to bunch the meetings all in the first semester.*

Strategies

It would not be wise to develop an inflexible strategy or method for approaching the objectives of the Core Course. Neither the paths nor the destination of the inquiry can be specified in advance. Nevertheless, past experience with the Core Course in previous FLC programs suggest a general format to follow.

Designated leaders of each Core Course meeting will choose material or formulate assignments appropriate to the goals of the course (and to its one-credit character). These assignments

* The Program Seminar and the Core Course, two unique innovations of FLC, frequently appear similar to the eyes of students and faculty as they enter FLC. The Program Seminar and the Core Course are indeed similar in several respects: (1) they are both interdisciplinary; (2) they are both structured to promote active responsibility on the part of students for their own education; and (3) both draw (but in different ways) upon material from the federated courses. But the Seminar and the Core Course are also different in several respects: (1) the Seminar is "taught" by Master Learners and Mumford Fellows who possess no specialized expertise in the program's thematic focus, whereas the Core Course is jointly taught by the eight federated faculty who are therein pooling their disciplinary expertise; (2) the Seminar is bound by the material and assignments of the federated courses and introduces no new material or assignments additional to that of the federated courses, but the Core Course, while mindful of the federated courses,

will be communicated to all members of the community at least one week in advance. The assignments and the meetings will always be of such a character as to draw upon the multi-perspectival resources available in the community.

After opening presentations or discussions, the Core Course will usually break down into three or four groups (which might themselves subdivide further), each led by two faculty members. The faculty leaders will solicit student responses to the presentations, assist students in understanding the issues, in utilizing and integrating the diverse perspectives of the plenary session and the smaller groups, and will eventually report back to a plenary session. Following these reports and a brief plenary discussion, a few faculty and students will be asked to reflect aloud on how the evening's presentation/discussion has influenced their understanding of the issues and the central themes of the program.

Content

To initiate our inquiry into "Human Nature", the federated faculty has chosen the sub-theme of "Human Identification". The five topics which they will utilize to explore this sub-theme are as follows:

1. Creationism, Evolutionism and Family Rights. Elof Carlson and Bob Neville will be organizing this session.
2. Work and Alienation. Gene Lebovics and Joni Grieff will be organizing this session.

3. Ethnicity and Law. Ted Kennedy and Rose Zimbardo are the organizers of this session.

4. Madness. Edward Casey and Norman Goodman and Rose Zimbardo will collaborate on this session.

5. Changing Human Identity. Bob Neville and Brett Silverstein will conduct this summary session. They will focus on how various beliefs about human identity either limit or empower us.

The content-focus of the 6th, 7th and 8th meetings of the Core Course will be specified at a later date. The federated faculty is open to suggestions. And groups of students may begin planning now for those meetings in the Fall 1983 semester for which they will have responsibility.

Requirements

NTR is a one-credit course with a unique purpose. As a function of the unique purpose and its one-credit status, the requirements of the course are quite different from those of the usual Stony Brook curriculum. There are, for example, no exams or term papers, but in view of the nature and the infrequency of the meetings of NTR 32/326 faithfulness to the requirements specified below is more necessary than in the usual Stony Brook courses where most classes or assignments can readily be made up on one's own. The meetings of NTR 325/326 cannot be "made up".

There are basically five requirements in NTR 325/326. They apply equally to faculty and students:

1. Preparation for each meeting. A brief article or sometimes a video tape will be chosen as a focus for each meeting. Roughly two weeks prior to each meeting of NTR 325, the faculty in charge of that particular meeting will circulate a question or problem for the consideration of all participants in NTR 325.

2. Attendance.

3. Participation. In NTR 325, participation will take the form of joining in discussions. Increasingly in NTR 326, participation will take the form of co-planning and conducting meetings.

4. Follow-up Reflections on the Core Course Meetings.

These reflections may take any of the following forms:

(a) A 325 "Mini-Journal" in which there would be entries prior to and following each meeting of the Core Course. Both faculty leaders of the discussion sub-group would read the journal and provide feed-back. Those NTR faculty who are themselves choosing this option will be called upon to share their journal entries with all those enrolled in the Core Course.

(b) A one to two page "process paper" following at least three of the meetings. Topics to be chosen by the student in response to the discussion of the Core Course. These "process papers" would provide the opportunity to get feedback from the faculty on points/issues of particular interest to the students.

(c) Any discussion group or sub-group may propose to its two federated faculty a project which will substitute for (a) or (b) above. The projects are limited only in the sense that they must relate to the themes and discussions of the Core Course meetings.

5. End-of-the-semester evaluation of the Core Course and of one's own performance in the course (less than a single page will be sufficient).

Grading

To earn a grade of "B" in NTR 325 students should fulfill the five requirements in a manner acceptable to the two faculty leading your sub-group. High quality performance in all or most of the five requirements will merit a grade of "A". The opportunity for frequent feedback from the faculty should enable each student to have a good sense of how he/she is doing before the final grade is entered.

Because attendance is a necessary condition of participation and of the "follow-up reflections" which are central to the Core Course, it will be impossible to attain a high grade without regular attendance. Students who miss two of the five scheduled sessions should expect a grade of "C". If three of the five sessions are missed, it will be impossible to pass the course.

Time and Place

The Core Course meets in the Federated Learning Communities Lounge, Room 132 of the Old Physics Building from 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. The dates for the meetings for the Spring 1982 semester are as follows:

February 24

March 10

March 24

April 21

May 5.


February 24, 1982

Human Nature Core Program
Coordinator: Elof Axel Carlson
Theme: Creationism and Evolution

Part I: Courtroom scene from Inherit the Wind, a play based on the Scopes Evolution Trial.
Time required: 20 minutes

Cast:

Narrator: Rose Zimbardo
Drummond (who in reality was Clarence Darrow): Marvin Levine
Brady (who in reality was William Jennings Bryan): Elof Carlson
Judge: Norman Goodman
Bailiff (who in reality was named Meeker): Gene Lebovics
Asst. Prosecutor: Brett Silverstein
Mrs. Krebs: Burt Bradley
Cates (who in reality was Scopes): Ed Casey
Jury: Remaining FLC Faculty

Part II: The historical Scopes vs. the fictional play. How artistic license was used. 

Part III: Panel discussion on these themes:

- (a) How can we abide constitutional separation of church and state and yet educate our children about values? *OR, who is responsible for moral education?*
- (b) What are the lessons from Scopes to the present scientific-creationism controversy?
- (c) Is religion part of human nature (the need to believe in purpose, an ultimate destiny, or a creator).

Part IV: Seminar sessions

- Group 1. If science is in conflict with religion should that science be omitted from public school instruction? Should teachers teach (fairly) the religious view as if it were equally plausible?
- Group 2. Does secular (non-religious) education lead to nihilism, moral relativism, and loss of personal and national purpose.
- Group 3. Must legislated morality inevitably lead to authoritarian abuse?
- Group 4. Is it possible to believe in God, enjoy reading the Bible, attend one's church or synagogue and accept neo-Darwinism (the synthesis of natural selection and modern genetics) without making evolution God-directed?

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e might be that scientists will postulate a
dictive incorporation of a distinct, ener-
lds of matter that produce a higher or-
iousness'—a view distinctly different
f life." (Letter, 16 June 1972.)

d Facts, June 1975.

III TEXTBOOK DISPUTES

Socrates: Did you say you believe in the separation of church and state?

Bryan: I did. It is a fundamental principle.

Socrates: Is the right of the majority to rule a fundamental principle?

Bryan: It is.

Socrates: Is freedom of thought a fundamental principle, Mr. Jefferson?

Jefferson: It is.

Socrates: Well, how would you gentlemen compose your fundamental principles, if a majority, exercising its fundamental right to rule, ordained that only Buddhism should be taught in public schools?

Bryan: I'd move to a Christian country.

Jefferson: I'd exercise the sacred right of revolution. What would you do, Socrates?

Socrates: I'd re-examine my fundamental principles.

—Walter Lippmann, *Four Dialogues*