

Pathways to Humanities Course Development

CL202E The Romans

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As part of the Pathways to Humanities project, I modified CL202, The Romans, by expanding an extant project in which students interview local veterans to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of duty in Roman culture. I had already modified this project in 2019 by starting a collaboration with Dr. Ruth Parker of the Emory Medical School in which we focused on the theme of duty to humanity from military service in ancient Rome to contemporary veterans and healthcare professionals.

Planned Additions to the Course

In 2020, I greatly expanded the application of application of course readings to the understanding of careers in the health professions and also had students interview health professionals to get a better understanding of the meaning of our texts. I added the following activities:

1. CL 202 students were to come for an evening meal at my house in Atlanta to meet practicing physicians and current Emory medical students who are studying with Dr. Ruth Parker. They will compare the data from their veteran interviews and the results of their research in ancient Roman sources on duty with the experiences of the medical professionals.
2. Dr. Robert Copeland were to host CL202 students at the West Georgia Medical Center in LaGrange, GA. Students will view the paintings of Lamar Dodd, the renowned Georgia painter, on permanent display in this hospital, to analyze the ways in which art can be used to understand and support the goals of the health professions.
3. To enhance the leadership portion of the course, I arranged for students to meet with Dr. Luca Giustiniano, Professor of Political Science at the Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali during our trip to Rome, Italy. He was to give a presentation and lead a discussion on how leadership styles translate across cultural difference. I also arranged for my students to interview 5 of Dr. Giustiniano's MBA students who had served in the Italian military in Iraq alongside US soldiers, with the goal of comparing their ideas on duty, military justice, and whistle blowing with those expressed by US veterans pursuing an MBA at Goizueta, also interviewed by CL202 students.

I modified my syllabus for CL202 by adding the following readings:

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM

ABIM. "The Physician Charter | ABIM Foundation." *Medical Professionalism*, 2018,

abimfoundation.org/what-we-do/physician-charter.

Aoun, Hacib. "From the Eye of the Storm, with the Eyes of a Physician." *Annals of Internal Medicine*, vol. 116, no. 4, 1992, pp. 335-338.

LaCombe, Michael. "Playing God." *Annals of Internal Medicine*, vol. 116, no. 4, 1992, pp. 161-162.

Markel, Howard. "'I Swear by Apollo' — On Taking the Hippocratic Oath." *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 350, no. 20, 2004, pp. 2026–2029.

Wrenn, Keith. "Lethal Cascade." *Annals of Internal Medicine*, vol. 118, no. 7, 1993, pp. 562-563.

LEADERSHIP

Goleman, Daniel. "Leadership That Gets Results." *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2000, pp. 78-90

Goleman, Daniel. "What Makes a Leader?" *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2011, pp. 1-22.

Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio Penguin, 2009.

To accommodate these additions, I cut selections from Augustus and more than half of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from the syllabus.

The Shift to Online Learning

The COVID-19 situation forced me to cancel both the two career treks in Georgia and the entire trip to Italy. I made the following changes:

- I replaced Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Art of Love* on the syllabus with *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, excerpts from *The Plague* of Albert Camus, and the description of the plague in Athens in Thucydides.
- Dr. Ruth Parker of Emory Medical School and two of her medical students joined a Zoom meeting of CL202 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on physicians' understanding of their duty to humanity.
- Dr. Parker, Dr. Don Batsky (Emory Medical School), Dr. John David Ike (Duke Medical School), Colonel Bradley Velotta (US Army), Raye Perez (US Army Rangers), Kathleen Metz (Emory medical student), and Sarah Shaver (Emory medical student) joined a Zoom meeting of CL202 to participate in a discussion of the implications of calling our response to the current health crisis a "war" on COVID-19.
- Instead of interviewing veterans in Italy, each student conducted Zoom interviews with two healthcare professionals, in addition to the veteran they had already interviewed.

- I modified the final research paper assignment. In the past, I asked students to write a paper analyzing a specific theme in Virgil's *Aeneid* using data gleaned from veteran interviews. This time, I asked them to use the data collected from their interviews to compare the meaning of duty in ancient Roman literature (plus Camus and Frankl) with the lived experience of service in the military and the health professions.

Themes of the Redesigned Online Course

We compared the sacrifices that soldiers have always made in the name of duty with the sacrifices that physicians and nurses are currently expected to make and have made during past pandemics. We discussed the rewards of both professions using Frankl's quasi-religious definition of the search for meaning in the midst of overwhelming indecency, Camus's depiction of Dr. Rieux's commitment to return to his clinic to fight the same losing battle day after day against suffering in an absurd world, and Virgil's (possible) depiction of the founding of the Roman Empire as a Pyrrhic victory. Other themes included:

- ideals of leadership
- definitions of success
- the impact on one's family and loved ones of sacrifices made to advance one's career
- professional oaths and codes of behavior
- the duty of whistleblowers
- dealing with the emotional burden of doing one's professional duty
- art as a source of meaning in response to collective trauma
- finding purpose at the beginning and the end of one's career

Despite the challenges of the abrupt shift to distance learning, students' reflective essays indicate that this course has helped them to understand the role of the humanities in making sense of the current crises we are experiencing and to examine the values implicit in career choices.

Reflection

The benefits of connecting my course content with post-graduation student pathways are consistent with my goals as a humanities teacher: inspiring students to delve deeper into the study of primary texts and to preserve these texts for use as a starting point for ethical examinations throughout their professional lives. Although the COVID-19 crisis prevented us from travelling to the worksites of healthcare professionals, interaction through Zoom meetings and one-on-one interviews allowed students to make personal connections and discuss the relevance of the themes of our primary texts in the professional lives of their interlocutors. This interaction put a human face on the ideas discussed in our readings and encouraged the students to make an emotional connection with the subject matter.

The healthcare crisis made it much easier to relate the hard decisions currently faced by physicians and nurses and the sacrifices they are being asked to make to the sacrifices made by

veterans and those described by ancient authors. This also allowed student to understand that these current extreme conditions shine a light on a part of professional life that is always present, to some degree at least. Cost-benefit analyses of a lifetime in healthcare are familiar to students who balance the cost of long years of study, even longer years of paying off student debt, and long working hours throughout their careers with the job satisfaction, wealth, and social standing that come with the title of physician. I believe this class encouraged many students to think of their future professional lives in new ways. Discussing definitions of success from Cicero, Virgil, and Epictetus to Camus and Frankl to the professionals they interviewed allowed students to explore what they really want from their careers. As much as I enjoy reading student evaluations that use superlatives to describe my own expertise and teaching skills, I find this comment from one of the students more relevant:

“I learned more from the course than I expected. I was very disappointed by the cancellation of the trip to Italy, however I definitely learned a lot about myself through the course.”

The disadvantages of this project are minor to nonexistent. Some might express concern at my elimination of an author as important as Ovid from a survey of Roman history and literature. Depth versus breadth of coverage is always a matter of debate in high-impact pedagogies. I believe that depth is more likely to support the goals of the Pathways to Humanities project. Students inspired to a profound appreciation of the classics can read Ovid in another class. Their personal response to the words of Virgil on an emotional level convinces me that many will preserve the ideas explored in this class for a long time.