

MEMO

To: College administrators/teachers in charge of curriculum/textbook/course selection
Re: Curriculum proposal for use of vols. 1, 2 of, and website for, "A Book About Books"

I am writing a planned 3 volume interdisciplinary book/ebook plus free website about nonfiction books. This memo is for teachers, because one of my intended audiences is college students, but to reach students, I must interest teachers in using the book. The book could be used in existing undergraduate or graduate classes. See the end of this memo for a list of possible departments, or a class could be created for it as described below. It is also possible to propose to selected students independent study using my book. I intend my book to discuss materials that students would probably never see otherwise. First is some historical background in support of the use of my text:

The first college I attended from 1972-74, Beloit College, in Wisconsin, had a history of innovative classes and programs. One such program was a field term of off-campus study. Another innovation was called Underclass Common Course (UCC), or Man in Perspective. The Beloit archives has documents, which I can provide to you at your request, about its background, purpose and how UCC worked in practice, but below are selections from one document by Professor Dennis Moore, UCC director, 1970-71:

"The impulse to interdisciplinary studies at Beloit can be traced at least as far back as 1953 and the publication of a suggestive document entitled LIBERAL EDUCATION AT BELOIT COLLEGE, the product of a long self-study project. By the following year the immediate predecessor of the Underclass Common Course had emerged ... "

"Specific themes for the content of the course have varied over the years, but in general the idea was to present incoming students with significant texts which would receive lively discussion in small classes taught by instructors ... "

"There were some real benefits, particularly at the outset ... Students found themselves stretched considerably by encounters with Plato, with the Bhagavad-Gita, with Camus, with Freud."

Before continuing with the description of UCC, please look at the attachments to this e-mail which contain 2 lists of readings (and films) actually used for UCC provided to me by the Beloit College archivist. I have several such reading lists, so these are just samples. Professor Moore continues his description of UCC by describing what can happen in practice when an innovative educational concept meets reality:

"Our catalog had built this course up so much that underclassmen arrived assuming that it would be the intellectual experience of their lives, that almost automatically there would be stimulating discussion, that they would be inspired to write well, that they would find their lives changed by the reading they would do. Instead – and here the source of the discrepancy lay almost equally in the patent unreality of student ideals and the failure of the course to come close enough to our ideals – they found

classes frequently tense and dull, writing handled arbitrarily, the reading important but somehow inaccessible and rushed in discussion.”

Professor Moore cites other causes of the discrepancy between theory and practice: the difficulty in finding teachers who were qualified and wanted to teach this type of class, the reading list itself, whether classes should be formal or informal (there was even a proposal for classes to take place in dormitory lounges or study rooms rather than classrooms), the amount of writing required, to use credit/no credit rather than a grade, and whether to limit the class to two semesters.

I have described this history in order to show that such an interdisciplinary course, or series of courses in colleges, which I propose here has been done before. Keeping the basic idea described above, and based on my own experience taking both required semesters, I would like to propose that colleges consider creating “A Course About Books”, and for teachers to have students use my book as the basis, by reading at least part of what I say about books in my book, and for students to select additional books to read from among the books discussed in my book, or on the same subjects, based on the UCC model described above with the following modifications:

- (1) I think it was a mistake to teach UCC to incoming students. I think a better choice would be no earlier than from the end of sophomore to beginning of junior year. Perhaps students who dropped out by then should be invited back for this class to encourage them to try school again or read on their own.
- (2) I think that students should be able to choose what texts they want to read from among my provided list, based on their own individual interests rather than be forced to read books or subjects they are not interested in.

There is another difference between UCC and my book: I think my book has a different mission than UCC: To question and consider changing mistaken ideas, and act on new ones. See the back covers of my books for further explanation. Is any school interested in the above? Can you find teachers and guest specialists to teach it? I am not a teacher, so I am not suggesting teaching it myself, and professional teachers could do a better job. I believe my book should be taught, with the decision of what parts and how to teach left to the teacher. My book and website could be used in the following departments: interdisciplinary studies, social sciences generally, sociology, law, education, political science, history, environmental studies, philosophy, psychology (volume 3 only), and possibly reading/writing, women’s studies, and library science.

I believe there is more than enough in each vol. of my book for one class per semester. Also check my website www.bookaboutbooks.com. The content that is on the website now can be the basis of a class, but more content will be added after vol. 3 of my book is complete. For more information and for free chapters or review copies of my books, please e-mail me at bookaboutbooks@gmail.com. You may share this presentation with other teachers you think would be interested, and if anyone does use my books and free website content in classes, please email me to let me know. Thank you.

THE UNDERCLASS COMMON COURSE 100 and 105, 1970-1971

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTFall Term

I. THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE: THE GROWTH OF THE SELF

Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, New Directions. [Summer reading]
The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Grove Press [Summer reading]

James Joyce, The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man in The Viking Portable Joyce, Viking Press.

Satyajit Ray, three films: The Apu Trilogy. Pather Panchali ("Song of the Road," Aparajito ("The Unvanquished," and Apur Sansar ("The World of Apu"))

II. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER: THE FAMILY

The four works under I., plus:

Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Washington Square (selections)

III. THE CONCEPT OF LOVE

The five works under I. and II., plus:

Plato, The Symposium, Penguin

Martin Buber, I and Thou, Scribner

Ingmar Bergman, film: Wild Strawberries

IV. INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

Selected articles on higher education today, plus some documents on Beloit College as an institution

V. LIVING TOGETHER IN A COMMUNITY

environ, Vol. 1, no. 2

B.F. Skinner, Walden Two, Macmillan

Confucius, The Sayings of Confucius, trans. James R. Ware, Mentor

Winter Term [the outline is firm, but some of the texts are tentative]

VI. MAN AND HIS COUNTRY

Plato, Apology and Crito

Sophocles, Antigone

Thoreau, Civil Disobedience

Black Elk Speaks

VII. THE FAMILY OF MAN

Resnais, La Guerre Est Fini (film and script)

LeRoy Jones, Black Music, Apollo, and music of Pharoah Sanders

VIII. MAN IN THE BIOSPHERE: THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Thoreau, Walden

Loren Eiseley, The Immense Journey

The Subversive Science (or what has best superseded it)

IX. THE OUTER REACHES OF KNOWLEDGE

The Bhagavad-Gita

Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein

100 Abo. THE WOMAN IN THE DUNES
 Berger. THE PRECARIOUS VISION
 BHAGAVAD-GITA
 Bowen. RETURN TO LAUGHTER
 Camus. THE STRANGER
 Conrad. HEART OF DARKNESS and THE SECRET SHARER
 Freud. INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOANALYSIS
 Hall. THE SILENT LANGUAGE
 Hesse. SIDDHARTHA
 Josephson. (ed.) MAN ALONE
 Plato. APOLOGY, CRITO, PHAEDO
 Sartre. NO EXIT and THE FLIES

105 Burke. "Reflections on Revolution"
 Hawthorne. SELECTED TALES AND SKETCHES
 Josephson. (ed.) MAN ALONE
 Langer. PROBLEMS OF ART
 Mills. THE MARXISTS
 Paine. "Rights of Man"
 Pick. (ed.) GERMAN STORIES AND TALES
 Piel. "Consumers of Abundance"
 Plato. THE REPUBLIC
 Portnoy. MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF MAN
 SIX CENTURIES OF GREAT POETRY
 Sophocles. ANTIGONE
 Thorson. THE LOGIC OF DEMOCRACY
 Warren. ALL THE KING'S MEN

110 Asimov. THE WELLSPRINGS OF LIFE
 Bates. THE FOREST AND THE SEA
 Dostoevsky. THE BROTHERS KARAKAZOV
 Eiseley. THE IMMENSE JOURNEY
 Eliot. THE COCKTAIL PARTY
 Hawthorne. SHORT STORIES AND TALES
 Hephurn. COLLEGE COMPOSITION
 Josephson. (ed.) MAN ALONE
 Lee. FREEDOM AND CULTURE