

## Enduring Questions Pilot Course Grant

**Comment [MN1]:** The following application was submitted in response to the Enduring Questions CFP. This proposal originally had no title or heading as per the form.

Note: Due to budget cuts, the Enduring Questions Pilot Course Grant was not funded.

### 1) NARRATIVE

**Comment [MN2]:** How well does this narrative fit the criteria listed in the Program Description? How many of the bullet points does it meet?

#### *Lost: How do we know where we are?*

##### 1. Intellectual Rationale

We seldom ask such questions as “How do we know where we are?” unless prompted by a simultaneous and often catastrophic disconnect from both reality and identity. The question, “How do we know where we are?” thus suggests, even as it supersedes, two traditional epistemological questions, “How do we know reality?” and “How do we know ourselves?” Paradoxically, these two questions are often asked in order to answer the other, as for instance, in the Cartesian use of *cogito* as the starting point to uncover reality. However, asking “How do we know where we are?” forces us to carefully examine the complex relationship between environment, (natural, cultural, and historical,) and identity, and the tension created when both moorings are lost. This course will encourage students to explore possible ways of answering the question, “How do we know where we are?” by framing that question, first in the dilemma faced by the characters in the ABC television series, *Lost*, and then, in a series of historical moments that have displaced conventional ways of answering enduring questions and fomenting new and alternative answers.

**Comment [MN3]:** Does the style of this proposal fit the situation and audience? What changes might you revise for style for a different audience, for instance, the projected audience of a business proposal?

##### 2. Teaching Value

The University of Texas Pan American and the Rio Grande Valley are ideal places within which to ask enduring questions that explore the connection between environment and

**Comment [MN4]:** The RFP lists specific questions the selection committee will use for reviewing applications. (See VI. Application Review) How does this application answer those questions?

identity. The students who enter this university, predominantly Hispanic, working class, and first generation college students, often feel disconnected from both the environment they have just left and the environment they are entering—often because the change in environment is accompanied by demands that identities change as well. The question, “How do we know where we are?” is not limited to the esoteric or theoretical for students who, when they leave this university, no longer find themselves fitting comfortably back into the environment they left to come here. This course would provide a space within which to explore that question, not so much in order to come up with a definitive answer so much as to learn how to ask questions and weigh answers.

### 3. Envisioned Course Design

Rather than studying *Lost*, this course will use the show as a starting point for discussion

and a metaphor for the catastrophic that often forces us to question. In turn, four

historical trials will serve as a starting point and a metaphor for class readings, lectures, and discussion. Just as the course will not be about *Lost* so much as the enduring question that *Lost* raises, the course will not be about the trials so much as use the trials to explore the tensions, philosophical and political, for which that the trial serves as a metaphor. As such, readings will of necessity, not be restricted to the time or topic of the trial, but are selected to exemplify possible answers to the enduring question that trial pushes to the fore. Historically, each trial will be treated, not as an attempt to answer the question, but an attempt to close off debate, often leaving the question unexamined, and thus inviting new answers. The course will be organized around the following units

**Preliminary Lecture: Opening the Dialogue:** Sigmund Freud “Civilization and its Discontents” Ch. 1

**Comment [MN5]:** One weakness of this proposal is that it does not provide access to the public, something that is mentioned several times in the RFP. If you were revising this proposal, how might you add that component given the budget available?

**Comment [M6]:** This proposal and the class itself have two different audiences. How do those audiences differ and how does this proposal address each audience?

**Unit One: The Trial of Socrates and the Search for Authority;** this unit will explore the classical attempt to reconcile myth, reason, the community, and language, as sources for authority that might answer the enduring question definitively. The three myths in the readings provide the opening gambit for discussion, followed by the two threads of thought Western civilization inherited from the Greeks, Platonic realism and Gorgias's relativism.

*Epic of Gilgamesh*

*Genesis*

*The Odyssey* Homer

*Theaetetus* and *Sophist* Plato

*Encomium to Helene* Gorgias

**Unit Two: The Trial of Joan of Arc and the Search for Certainty;** this unit will use the Hundred Years War and its legacy in order to explore the intense need to find an answer to the enduring question in the face of European civilization's inability to solve its own violent tendencies. The readings in this unit provide insight into the loss of the certainty previously provided by scholasticism and the search for alternative answers. *Henry V* serves as the opening context for this search; Descartes and Montaigne as alternative answers. *Benito Cerano* provides insight into the way uncertainty spans the early modern era into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Henry V* William Shakespeare

*Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* Rene Descartes

*The Essays of Montaigne* (selections)

*Benito Cerano* Herman Melville

**Unit Three: The Trial of Galileo and the Search for Understanding;** this unit will explore the growing disconnect between science and faith as explanatory discourses that seek alternative answers to the enduring question. The readings in this unit, though from different eras and perspectives, are particularly useful at exploring the science/faith dichotomy because their authors write from within that dichotomy rather than argue dogmatically from a single position.

*Flatland*

*The Notebooks of Leonardo De Vinci* (selections)

*Walden Pond* Thoreau

**Unit Four: The Nuremburg Trials and the Search for Meaning;** this unit will explore the post-modern disenchantment with all previous answers, and ongoing attempts to change the question itself. The readings in this unit represent various attempts to find meaning in a world where meaning has fragmented, and the growing post-modern acceptance that an answer may not be found.

*Maus* Art Spiegelman

*The Transcendence of the Ego* Jean-Paul Sartre

*Notes from the Underground*, Dostoyevsky

*The Post-Modern Condition* Jean Francois Lyotard

**Field Trip: Holocaust Museum, Houston, Texas.**

**Closing Lecture: Continuing the Dialogue:** “The Will to Believe” William James and “On Truth and Lying in an Extra Moral Sense.” Friedrich Nietzsche

The course would include a field trip to the Holocaust Museum in Houston, Texas. The visit to the Holocaust Museum would function as a capstone for the course by placing students in an environment where their own comfortable conception of where they are and the implications for their conceptions of reality and identity would be challenged. The goal would of this trip would be to experience the disruption and consequent questioning that they had been studying and discussing theoretically.

The course will use the core readings as the springboard for discussion, with emphasis on analysis and engagement with the texts. While reading quizzes have become the norm for assessing student reading in reading intensive courses, this course will use reading notes, which are more productive because they require students to engage texts, first in writing, and then in discussion. Since the focus will be on engagement with ideas rather than acquisition of information, short, and thus intense, analytic papers will be required periodically throughout the semester, with a take-home final in which students will answer the enduring question from a personal as well as a theoretical position.

### **3. Project Director**

The very nature of the question, “How do we know where we are?” when asked in the context of the catastrophic precludes convenient answers, encouraging, often demanding, an ongoing dialogue. As a rhetorician my interest is less in the answer to question than in how cultures, societies, and individuals, frame the question itself, possible answers, and the implications of those answers. Rhetoric has long suffered (or perhaps benefited) from being conceptualized as a discipline without a clear object of study of its own.

Rhetoricians are often accused of trespassing into philosophy, ethnography, linguistics, history, and even on occasion, literary criticism. For a pre-disciplinary course such as this

one, the rhetorical stance is an ideal one from which to explore possible answers to this enduring question without the disciplinary need to argue for any single answer.

## 2) BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Unit One: The Trial of Socrates and the Search for Authority

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Willard R. Trask, trans. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- McCoy, Marina. *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Barbara Johnson, trans. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Alan Bass, trans. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.
- Kraut, Richard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- McComiskey, Bruce. *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric*. Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002.
- Stone, I. F. *The Trial of Socrates*. Norwall MA: Anchor, 1987.
- Walker, Steven F., ed. *Jung and Jungians on Myth*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

### Unit Two: The Trial of Joan of Arc and the Search for Certainty

- Almand, Christopher, ed. *Society at War: The Experience of England and France during the Hundred Years War*. Suffolk UK: Boydell P, 1998.
- Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Thomas Williams, trans. Columbus OH: Hackett, 1993.
- Hobbins, Daniel, trans. *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. Cambridge MASS: Harvard UP, 2007
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford UK: Oxford World Classics, 2007.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, trans. New Haven CT: Yale UP, 2000.
- Toulmin, Stephen. *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Luft, Sanda Rudnick. *Vico's Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science Between Modern and post Modern*. Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2003.

### Unit Three: The Trial of Galileo and the Search for Understanding

- Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Berkely CA: U of California P, 1970.
- James, William. *The Will to Believe*. Needham MA: Dover, 1956.
- Kemp, Martin. *Leonardo de Vinci: Experience, Experiment, and Design*. Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Ratzinger, Joseph and Jurgen Habermas *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007.
- Robinson, David M. *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism*. Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2004.
- Shorto, Russell. *Descartes' Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict Between Faith and Reason*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Toulmin, Stephen. *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning*. Berkely CA: U of California P, 1990.

**Comment [MN7]:** According to the RFP, the bibliography is not composed of works students will read in the course, but works the project director will read and consult in designing the course. How do you think the selection committee will use this information? What questions might this information answer?

#### **Unit Four: The Nuremberg Trials and the Search for Meaning**

- Horkheimer, Max, Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Gunzelin Schid Noerer, ed. Edmund Jephcott, trans. Palo Alto CA: Stanford UP, 2002.
- Karyn, Ball. *Disciplining the Holocaust*. Albany NY: State University of New York P, 2008.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard*. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, eds. Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 2000.
- Langer, Lawrence L., ed. *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*. Oxford UK: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Marrus, Michael R. *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945-46: A Documentary History*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997.
- Schmidt, James, ed. *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*. Berkely CA: U of California P, 1996.

#### **General:**

- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*. Norwall MA: Anchor, 1967.
- Certau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkely CA: U of California P, 2002
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Louis Menand, trans. Norton VA: Norton, 2005
- Fuller, Steve. *Kuhn vs. Popper: the Struggle for the Soul of Science*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004.
- Grassi, Ernesto *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*. Timothy W. Crusius, trans. Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2001.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vols. 1 and 2* Thomas McCarthy, trans. Boston MA: Beacon, 1985
- Knight, Margaret and Jim Herrick, eds. *Humanist Anthology: From Confucius to Attenborough*. Amherst NY: Prometheus, 1995.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge for Western Thought*. Paisley PA: Basic Books, 1999.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Against the Self-Images of the Age*. Notre Dame IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1978.
- Rorty, Richard. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Vol. 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.



### 3) BUDGET

(PDF attached)

#### Budget Narrative:

In addition to the project director stipend, the budget will include a trip the Holocaust Museum, Houston TX.

The distance from Edinburg to Houston is miles. The current cost of a charter bus to Houston is \$3,000. The charter bus company estimates that this cost will increase by 10% per year, resulting in the \$3,300 budget line per semester. Duration of the field trip will be one day: 6:00 AM departure from McAllen; 8 hour layover in Houston state requirement for commercial charter buses; arrival back in McAllen 2:00 AM the following day.

The Holocaust Museum in Houston does not have an admission fee. In addition, the museum will conduct tours for groups who visit the museum as well as provide preliminary materials for student prior to their visit free of charge.

Advertising is a zero budget item; advertising will be done through articles about the course in the UTPA student newspaper, *The Panamerican*, and several local papers, including *The Monitor*.

### 4) RESUME

(attached)

### 5) LETTER OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

(attached)

### 6) ABSTRACT

*“Lost: How do we know where we are?”* uses the television series, *Lost*, as a starting point for exploring how crises affect concepts of reality and identity. We don’t ask “Where are we?” unless we are lost; we don’t ask the more troubling question, “How do we know where we are?” unless our map is missing and our GPS is on the blink. Rather than teaching the television series, this course will quickly focus on four historical trials, four historical moments, when Western culture “crashed,” that is, was forced to conclude that conventional questions and answers were no longer sufficient. The course design and readings are intended to create a classroom environment that is itself a crisis of thought, thus encouraging students to ask the enduring question even as they study how others have approached it. Since disciplinary answers often assume an answer to reality or identity, the course will focus on the humanistic tradition itself, as well as how those

**Comment [M8]:** Several critical parts of this proposal are attachments. They are not included in the actual proposal. Why do you think the RFP asked for the budget, resume, and letter of institutional commitment as attachments?

**Comment [MN9]:** With a 15K stipend and 3.3K field trip, this proposal has 6.7K available. Given the information in the RFP, what additional activities could be funded by this grant?

**Comment [MN10]:** Most proposals include the abstract in the introduction. Why do you think the RFP asks for the abstract at the end of this application? What use do you think the selection committee will make of this abstract?

crises changed that tradition. The course is not designed to provide an answer, nor even to assist students in finding their own answer, but to provide a starting point for a life-long exploration of the question itself.