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Environmental Justice in Downtown Brooklyn

By Anthony Barone

Our section of Core Seminar, with Dr. Jessica Rosenberg, is examining issues of environmental justice in the broadest sense. Examples include not only cutting down trees and destruction of green spaces, but also housing discrimination and lower wages based on sex or race, or even lack of public services in some neighborhoods.

In Core Seminar, we immerse ourselves in our surrounding environment to observe how our environment is being impacted and how this affects us as a society. We have done this by combining readings with group discussions, field explorations and case studies.

Recently, we took a field trip to the Fulton Street Mall. While

there, we made observations of our surroundings using our five senses with the goal of understanding environmental pollution and to think about how, as indi-



Students from COS 50, Section 08 with Dr. Rosenberg during an exploration of environmental issues on the Fulton Street Mall in Downtown Brooklyn.

viduals, we can be better members of the downtown Brooklyn community.

Several weeks ago, we had a joint session to learn about and discuss different projects of the Sustainable South Bronx, such as the Green Roofs project and the “BEST” project to teach “green collar” job skills. This organization also creates jobs for residents to combat the growing poverty level.

We have also invited the director of the organization “Develop Don’t Destroy Brooklyn” to speak to us about their fight against the Atlantic Rail Yards development, which has been in the news for quite some time.

As the Buddha once said, “know well what leads you forward, and what holds you back.” Education on environmental justice is the first step to leading us forward and shaping a better community.

COS 50 Receives National Attention

Bernice Braid and Alan Grose, both of the Core Seminar Program, presented on the curriculum and faculty development program for COS at the national meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in January in Seattle, Washington.

The meeting, entitled “Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America’s Promise,” explored the ways in which college learning in the tradition of liberal education might prepare students to meet society’s current needs and future problems.

Emphasizing its strategies for integrating the core curriculum with pre-professional programs, Braid and Grose presented on the program design of COS in a session formatted to provide information on how institutions might replicate the model on their own campuses.

Journey Mandala

By Marla Del Collins

COS 50 encourages students to think beyond what they think they know—to “think outside of the box.” This semester, Constance Woo and I had our students use the mandala, representing circular wholeness and the organized structure of life itself, as a means by which to explore complex interconnections on multiple levels.

Students discovered that mandalas exist everywhere from

the round rose window in a cathedral to the circular configuration of Stonehenge. They searched for mandalas at MoMA and found them in the garden and in the artwork.

We compared the mandala with the Mandelbrot Set—the boxed-in, either/or reality made by humans with fractaling reality created by nature.

Students also discovered hidden mandalas in their own circular relationships with family, community and the

universe. They used the mandala concept to pictorially and verbally organize their research papers and answer the question “who am I?”

We ended our journey with a joint session: *The Communal Mandala Project* that honed imagination and “cooperacy” skills. Students expressed in their weekly journals that thinking outside the box through mandalas was not only fun and easy—it was awesome!



Students working on a mandala in a COS Joint Session.

“MoMA, with its focus on the art of the 20th and 21st Centuries, proved to be an interesting experience for my students in Core Seminar.”

Bernice Braid and William Burgos with the poster display



COS Students Explore MoMA

By Constance Woo

While many students at LIU have been to museums before, many of them have never visited the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). As a result, an exploration of MoMA, with its focus on the art of the 20th and 21st Centuries, proved to be an interesting experience recently for students in my Core Seminar.

As a field assignment, students in my section investigated several aspects of the museum: the building, the collections in general and even specific objects in the Architecture and Design collection as compared to objects for sale in the MoMA Design Store.

I challenged them to describe the setting and to contrast it with the symbolism of the

Cave in Plato’s famous allegory of the cave. The result was that they mused on their own experiences of learning and acquiring new perspectives and, in the process, thought about the evolution of human creativity, ingenuity and skill over the centuries. In many ways, it was a refreshing appraisal of the development of modernism in art and culture.

AAC&U Global Learning Forum

By Margaret Cuonzo

Bernice Braid, William Burgos and Margaret Cuonzo recently took part in a three-day forum, “Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility” sponsored by the AAC&U.

The Forum, held during Spring Break, included representatives from 77 different institutions, all sharing ideas about global learning in higher education today.

The central piece of the LIU team’s contribution was a poster presentation that highlighted how Core Seminar

promotes learning across disciplines, cultures and other boundaries. As an example, the poster featured the “communal mandala” learning experience (featured above).

Additionally, Bernice Braid and William Burgos both lead discussions exploring key themes of the Forum.

The Brooklyn Museum



By Jennifer Tran

The theme of my Core Seminar section in the Fall was “Place and Displacement,” and by exploring art at the Brooklyn Museum, we were able to gain a better understanding of the levels of the sense of place.

After reading an essay in the COS

Reader by John Berger entitled “The Place of Painting,” we turned to artistic depictions of place at the Brooklyn Museum. Albert Bierstadt’s famous “A Storm in the Rocky Mountains,” for instance, interpreted the American West and allowed many Americans and Europeans to see it for the first time.

Paintings have a place in museums, because the act of displaying art in a particular space gives it shelter and meaning. Museums, in turn, have their place in society, because they allow us to study art today. The

museum’s place in the world is as an educational institution, separated from—but also in conversation with—the outside world.

Visiting the Brooklyn Museum was one of the best ways to understand the multiple meanings of a “sense of place.” We can see something from the past, see how paintings fit within a museum, and why museums are so vital to the world of art. These senses of place help us to understand not only the art, but also its purpose within the context of today’s world.

“students constructed ‘alternative’ maps of neighborhoods from Fort Greene and DUMBO to Red Hook, Sunset Park and Brighton Beach”

Boundaries, Borders and Barriers

By Myriam Mompont

Professors Claire Goodman, Celia Lichtman and I are exploring the notions of boundaries, borders and barriers with our students this semester in Core Seminar. What do we mean when we talk of boundaries? How are barriers characterized and represented? What are the purposes of borders and to what end are they used?

We are pursuing these questions through a variety of texts, films, and field research activities that span three main areas of human activity: perception/imagination, knowledge/science, and relationships/society.

To explore these themes, students undertook a field exploration entitled “Brooklyn Neighborhoods: Mapping the Five Senses.” Using methods from anthropology and

cultural studies, students visited areas in an attempt to understand why and how we perceive neighborhoods the way we do. Armed with cameras, notepads, maps and other recording equipment, students constructed “alternative” maps of neighborhoods from Fort Greene and DUMBO to Red Hook, Sunset Park and Brighton Beach.

Call for Student Submissions

The Core Seminar Newsletter invites submissions from students to report on their experiences in Core Seminar.

Did you have a unique experience or make a surprising discovery in the course of your inquiries in Core Seminar? If so, please share it with the rest of the Brooklyn Campus community!

Submissions might focus on your experience in any aspect of COS 50. This could include your field activities, joint sessions, research related to your seminar papers or even creative work you did in exploring the Idea of the Human or the sub-themes investigated by your class. How did that experience shape your education here on the Brooklyn Campus?

Your submission might be anywhere from 100 to 250 words. Including images related to your experiences is highly encouraged!

Please submit them either to your Instructor or directly to the Core Seminar office in the Pratt Building, Room 510.



Try your hand at writing for The Idea of the Human!

COS 50 The Idea of the Human

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Core Seminar is a three-credit interdisciplinary course providing a common intellectual experience for undergraduate students of all disciplines. The Seminar explores what it means to be human through shared readings, discussion in the Seminar and in Joint Sessions with other sections, field explorations, and multiple forms of writing.

The Idea of the Human: Core Seminar News is edited by Alan Grose, the Administrative Coordinator for the COS Program. We welcome submissions of ideas or notes on unique COS experiences from both faculty and students from the program.

COS Participates in the “VALUE” Project

The Core Seminar Program will join as a Partner Institution in the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. This project aims to develop a general, but nationally shared set of expectations and techniques for assessing the outcomes of student learning.

The VALUE project, working with faculty in dozens of institutions around the country, has developed a set of twelve rubrics for assessing the evidence of course-embedded learning. These rubrics characterize forms of learning that might be demonstrated in a broad variety of ways, across the wide array of courses we find on campuses across the country. These rubrics are intended to identify evidence of learning across broad

samples of a student’s work, as might be found in a course portfolio or an e-portfolio. Because these rubrics are so general, they are called “metarubrics.”

As a VALUE Partner Institution, we



*Association
of American
Colleges and
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The AAC&U is a national organization that advocates for the goals and practices of liberal education.

will work with samples of student work from Core Seminar to test two of the twelve metarubrics in time to provide feedback in the next wave of the national development process.

The metarubrics Core Seminar has chosen to test are those for “Written Communication” and “Integrative Learning.” This combination reflects the nature of COS 50 as both a Writing Intensive course and a seminar that is deliberately multi-disciplinary and invoking of multiple sites and sources of student learning.

Our participation in this pilot project will also afford the Core Seminar Program an opportunity to develop strategies for assessing the evidence of student learning contained in the portfolios of work submitted by COS students at the end of each semester.