

“Teaching with Hope in an Unjust World”

Help the next generation learn what they need to learn, and feel empowered in these troubling times – several faculty members will speak about how they accomplish this goal in their classrooms.

[Faculty members take a moment to introduce themselves]

Bob Bies:

“Living a Life of Moral Leadership”

Leadership and learning are indispensable. What we’ve learned about moral leadership is the importance of moral awareness. When my students go out into the community, I want them to look at the reality of what’s around them and learn to empathize: “you can’t have vision until you have sight”.

Expands upon 6 different roles of moral leadership:

1. Needler: speaks Truth to Power
2. Inspirer: Visionary and Motivational Speaker
3. Advocator: Persuader, Persister, and Pragmatist
4. Organizer: Connector, Convener, and Community-Builder
5. Volunteer: Steps up and finds the “Doable”
6. Martyr: Suffers for the sake of principle

In his Management and Organizational Behavior class, students have to design and implement a community service project and invest at least 35 hours.

In his other classes, he brings the community into the classroom.

“CBL really works from a learning perspective. Once you humanize it, you can really see the change that you want to create.” At some point, the class is no longer about getting the A, it’s really about effecting change in the community.

Joe M:

“I’m a historian, so much of my work focuses on the study of dead people.” Deeply embedded in my intellectual formation is this identity that comes from a scholarly approach to things that is removed from the world that we live in. We can see the past sometimes more clearly than the present – perhaps our ability to see the past clearly will improve our vision of the present.

CBL has enabled me to make the tension between my scholarly concerns and the concerns of the world we live in a more creative tension (and draw the students into this tension). Some of his students worked with the DC Labor Commission, which in some way is helping to unearth something of the labor history of this area.

Katie Leonhardy:

International Health Dept. – The CBL class that she teaches serves as one of the three internships that these students need to fulfill. In their junior year, these students must go abroad and complete an international internship (this year there were 28 students abroad in several different places over the globe). The first portion of the internship involves an analysis of the health system in their country, the second portion deals with a self-guided research topic.

There are handfuls of students who leave her class (Introduction to International Health) without hope (given that much of the material deals with the sad state of international health). However, there are topics that I can touch upon in the context of the “hopelessness” of international health issues that can provide hope (such as the development of rehydration salts to combat diarrhea-related deaths). Every week I have students go around and share their experiences with the class (these can prove hopeful for the rest of the class). To be working in the community for the first time is eye-opening for these students, and a symbol of hope.

English Professor: I’m a literature scholar and I teach US Latino literature (representing the immigrant experience for Latin Americans coming to America). Students in the class work with communities that are similar to the ones represented by the literature studied in the class.

The class was devoted to writers from Dominican Republic, Haiti, El Salvador, and Guatemala and often their accounts of dictatorial violence and the legacy of this violence. I approach the class nervously because I’m a generally cheerful person; sometimes I was afraid I was a little too lighthearted with the material because in reality it is horribly depressing. However, it seemed to work, most students who took the class had prior experience with the material or were already personally invested in the topic. A lot of what we read is fictional, so we necessarily must discuss what kind of ethical responsibility fiction can take on in responding to an ethically painful history. Fiction can serve as a kind of hope in the midst of a depressing history – fiction can propose or create a world that somehow improves upon history, a different world.

Q&A:

Anna: I teach a class about the Ethnography of Communication, and I want to be able to guide students towards communities they can work with but I don’t want the work to be entirely analytical (i.e. I don’t want the students to be too tied into analyzing the community); I want a balance between analysis and engagement. Linguistics seems a natural tie-in with community work because as we understand language, we understand how people interact in a community; how power is communicated, how stereotypes and injustice is perpetuated.

Bob: I would require students to go off campus; it’s what I do in my class. I learned a buzzword recently: “the Georgetown bubble”. You need to get students out of the Georgetown bubble. I want my students to think more critically; and I think that you have at your disposal analytical knowledge that can get your students to think more critically about different communities in DC.

For the students, there is a degree of anxiety (especially in the Business School) because not all of them grew up in diverse environments, but you need to push them past this – it can prove incredibly eye-opening.

Close to 50% of Georgetown undergrads come from the top 3% of the economic strata in the world.

The CSJ gives tours for close to 47 students at a time and introduces the different wards in DC and discusses the different resources of these wards (tour guides instruct students to count the number of grocery stores along the way, etc.). Essentially, students are taken out of the “bubble” in a safe way and are given a chance to reflect on what they see and experience. It’s an attempt to feel “wow, there’s something outside of the gates.”

John: My sense is that many if not most Georgetown students see this as “teaching with expectation in an unjust world” not “teaching with hope...” that is, these students think ‘if I work hard enough, I can change the world.’ How can we temper that expectation? Because not everything is going to change or work out. There are some days for me where I think as though there is no hope, so I don’t want students to think consistently that they can get what they want as long as they work for it. I want students to see how bad things are, but still feel as though there is still some hope.

If we don’t work, the status quo is what we have.

Bob: One of my mantras is “stand up but never stand alone.” Everything is about alliances. Who am I going to rely on?
“Do not depend on the hope of results.”

Georgetown is the biggest client of Teach for America, so what does that say? Are students hoping for change?

Bob: What makes Georgetown different from other institutions are the questions that we ask. “What does success mean?” “What is the meaning of life?” I think that makes Georgetown unique.

John: So many students come in from a position of privilege, and they think that with work they can change everything.