



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Proposal

The attached document contains the narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful proposal may be crafted. Every successful proposal is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Enduring Questions guidelines at www.neh.gov/grants/education/enduring-questions for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Education Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: NEH Enduring Questions Course on "What Is Memory?"

Institution: New York University

Project Directors: Martha Rust and Suzanne E. England

Grant Program: Enduring Questions

Asked “What is memory?” a busy undergraduate might first answer, “the part of my brain I use for ace-ing exams!” or, “do you mean in a computer?” On further reflection, this same undergraduate might associate memory with all things passed: whether preserved in high school yearbooks and family photo albums or embodied in a sports trophy or desiccated prom corsage. For an undergraduate embracing the exciting new worlds of college and young adulthood while simultaneously immersed in a broader culture enthralled by the latest gadget or celebrity phenomenon--not to mention the latest news of revolutionary social, technological or political change--memory might appear to be the domain of all that is dusty, dim, or embarrassingly sentimental. In the face of such associations, the teaching value of our proposed Enduring Questions course “What is Memory?” rests in its potential to awaken a self-reflective awareness of memory as the very machine of our individual and collective identities and as the reservoir from which we draw both in acting as morally astute agents in the present and in envisioning new possibilities for the future. We hope that students will come away from our course having learned a great deal about memory as an academic topic; more importantly, we hope they will have gained new insights into the workings of their own memories and that they will have developed a personal practice of memory that will serve their growth as individuals long after their memories of the course itself have dimmed.

The intellectual rationale of a course on the question “What is memory?” stems from the question’s being at once truly enduring and eminently contemporary. The written records that serve as our cultural memory show that memory has been a topic of inquiry at least since those records began; today research on memory is being conducted across the disciplinary spectrum. Together this work pursues the core questions about memory that have intrigued thinkers for millennia. Where does memory exist in the brain, and what are its connections with sensory organs? Just this year, a group of neuroscientists has shown that the enzyme PKMzeta has a tonic effect on rats’ memories, which suggests a chemical basis for the maintenance of memories in humans; another group has tracked in the brain the processes of contextual memories like those so famously evoked by the taste of Proust’s tea-soaked cookie. Why do our memories change, and how accurate are they? Psychologists’ evidence showing the unreliability of eyewitness testimony has led this August to the US Supreme Court’s announcement that it will reconsider

the use of such testimony in criminal trials. What is the connection between memory and the self--and with language and story-telling? Today's philosophers, psychologists, and literary scholars are continuing to hone the concept of the self as it was understood by John Locke, David Hume, and Ralph Waldo Emerson among others as a dynamic tension between memory and consciousness. Does the internet alter our capacity to remember? Responding to some evidence that it does, scholars recall that according to Plato, writing too was greeted as the ruination of human memory. Can a preoccupation with memories forestall beneficial growth and change? What events are best forgotten and how do we go about forgetting them? The proliferation of memorials of war and conflict today has led some cultural critics to wonder if so much remembering gums up the salve of forgetting so necessary for the healing process of forgiving.

These are just a few of the questions that the topic of memory arouses, but contemporary responses to them suggest two overarching features of the flourishing field of memory studies: first, that it is robustly interdisciplinary; and second, that it remembers its own past. These two features of the field of memory studies inform our course design, which encourages innovative, self-reflective, and interdisciplinary thinking supported at every stage by the insights of memory workers of the past. These basic characteristics of the course will fit well with its curricular position, for it will be offered as part of the honors program in New York University's College of Arts and Science, which consists of seminars (18 students maximum) on a wide variety of topics and which are meant, quoting the College bulletin, to "[i]ntroduce students to demanding and challenging standards of analysis . . . by means of intensive discussion, papers on focused topics, and reading that emphasizes critical interpretation rather than absorption of information." These fourteen-week seminars meet once a week for three hours and may be taken at any time in a student's freshman year. Given that the roughly 400-student honors population represents the full range of academic majors, we anticipate that our course will attract students with diverse interests in our topic: the perfect makings for an exciting and productive intellectual community. The course structure will consist of six units: Childhood Memories, The Idea of Memory, The Science of Memory, The Art of Memory, Cultural Memory, and Forgetting. The first three units will each be allotted three weeks, the fourth and fifth two weeks, and the last, one week.

Demonstrating the complexities of the question “What is Memory?” each of these six units will address more than one of the sub-questions listed above; accordingly, readings and student assignments begun in one unit will be continued or elaborated upon in subsequent units. In this way, we will read books 1-9 of Augustine’s *Confessions* in Unit 1, Childhood Memories, and read book 10 in Unit 4, The Art of Memory. To complement our study of this foundational work in Unit 1, students will be asked to write anecdotes taken from their own childhood memories and to analyze them in terms both of Mary Louise Pratt’s anatomy of the anecdote and of Mark Freeman’s concept of “hindsight,” his term for the capacity of memory to deepen our understanding of the moral dimension of our lives. When we return to the *Confessions* in Unit 4, students will be asked to create a visual version of an anecdote they wrote in Unit 1, perhaps in the form of a map, diagram, or graphic novella, using the software Comic Life. For these projects we plan to enlist the aid of a digital humanities consultant, who will assist not only with creating a web “gallery” for these creations but also with building a dynamic functionality for the site to allow for collaborative revision of these works during our study of Cultural Memory in Unit 5. Thus our study of Augustine’s *Confessions* in Unit 1 will invite students to develop answers to such questions as “How is memory related to our sense of self?” “How does memory nurture virtue?” and “Why do memories often take the form of stories?” while our study of the same work in Unit 4 will afford them the opportunity to reflect on the question “How do our senses--especially vision--help us retain memories?”

Students will have some beginning answers to this latter question through their study in Units 2 and 3, The Idea of Memory and The Science of Memory. In Unit 2, students will explore the long history of memory studies, focusing in particular on key metaphors for memory that reoccur across the centuries. For instance, in our readings from Plato, William Wordsworth, and Sigmund Freud, students will discover the venerable tradition of representing memory in terms of technologies of writing; written assignments accompanying these readings will ask students to reflect on their own metaphors for memory. A central question these metaphors evoke is “Why is a *mental* activity so consistently thought of in terms of material objects?” For answers to this question, we will turn first to philosophy, in the form of Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, and then to neuroscience, in Unit 3, The Science of Memory, where

we will return to a work we will have begun in Unit 1, Eric Kandel's memoir and intellectual autobiography, *In Search of Memory*. Along with supplementary material from Jamie Ward's more recent *The Student's Guide to Cognitive Neuroscience*, Kandel's work will give students a thorough introduction to the biological "matter" of memory together with a survey of its quirks and foibles, a topic that will be further explored in our viewing of the classic film *Roshomon*. One of the assignments for this unit will ask students to test the reliability of their capacity to recall details; in devising this memory experiment, we will consult with a member of Elizabeth Phelps' lab at NYU, which is devoted to the study of the neurological connections between memory and emotion.

While the first three units of the course consider memory primarily in its untrained and personal state, the last three turn towards the training of memory and its uses and abuses as such. In Unit 4 we take up the Art of Memory, beginning with classical, medieval, and renaissance store-houses, treasuries, and theatres of memory, first by reading book 10 of Augustine's *Confessions*, as mentioned above, and then Jorge Luis Borges' "Funes the Memorious" and A. R. Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist*. Assignments for this unit will ask students to devise a personal "art of memory" and to reflect on their own habits of memorizing and memorializing, asking such questions as "What life-memories do I try to hold on to--and why?" and "How do I go about keeping memories of my past?" Student work with answering these questions will lead, in Unit 5, Cultural Memory, to asking the same questions with respect to what we try to remember as a society and how we go about it. Emphasizing the links between personal and cultural memory and the moral implications of both, a core reading for this unit will be Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*, a work that will also bring forward Eric Kandel's childhood memories of Nazi Germany. *The Drowned and the Saved* is a devastating work on many levels: Levi's clear-eyed analyses both of his personal moral failures as a prisoner at Auswitch and of the self-interested caprice of cultural memory are painful enough to make a reader thirst for water from the River Lethe. This aspect of Levi's work together with the chronological distance of the Holocaust to today's undergraduates will combine to provoke questions that are central to our final unit, Forgetting, questions such as, "Are there cultural kinds of memories that should never be forgotten?" "Why or why not?" and "What is the proper balance

between realism and the aestheticism in memorials of painful events?” Near the end of the course will take two field trips: one to both the Irish Hunger Memorial and the 9/11 Memorial and the other to Metropolitan Museum of Art to view works that exemplify the arts of memory and of memorial.

As this course overview will have suggested, students will be expected to complete assignments related to our reading each week; the first purpose of these will be to aid students in interacting with and thereby taking ownership of course material. For especially difficult works, assignments will provide an implicit reading itinerary by asking students to consider specific topics and questions. To foster intellectual community building, most assignments will have a collaborative component; for instance, when we study metaphors of memory, students will be asked to post to a discussion board metaphors that they encounter both in our readings and outside of class. Then on the basis of the kinds of metaphors they tend to prefer, students will be divided into groups in class--a group for metaphors of writing, another for metaphors of photographs, another for “chain” or “thread” metaphors, and so on--and asked to consider these metaphors’ implications; for instance, if memory resembles photography, is it biased towards particular kinds of content? close-ups? landscapes? crime scenes? milestone events like birthdays, graduations, and weddings? Do these “photographs” tell stories or do they operate independently from language? In recognition of the strong interconnections in memory between image and narrative, a cross-modal element will be built into many student assignments; as already suggested above, for instance, students will be asked to consider a personal memory in both narrative and visual formats. In addition to weekly assignments, students will also complete a term project, which could take the form of a research paper, an artistic composition, or a scientific or sociological experiment, according to each student’s academic interests. To evaluate the course’s effectiveness, we will regularly ask students to write a few sentences at the end of class sessions stating a main idea they are taking away from that day’s class along with a question that class session brought to mind.

In preparing this proposal, we have already begun preparing to teach our “What is Memory?” course by reading many of the works on our bibliography. Between now and the beginning of the grant term next September, we will complete that reading, and over Fall Semester 2012, we will first make a

final selection of core and ancillary course readings and then devise our syllabus. Having completed those tasks in September, we will develop lesson plans for each class session in October. In November, we will write student assignments, consulting with the Phelps Lab as needed, and we will work with our digital humanities consultant to construct the course website and to determine its interactive functionalities. At the end of the semester, we will complete any revisions deemed necessary in the light of the vision of the course that will by then have evolved. The course will be taught first by Professor Rust Spring Semester 2013 and will be taught by Professor England in the spring of 2014. Two concurrent sessions of the course will be offered Spring Semester 2015.

As a critical gerontologist, Professor England studies literary, dramatic, autobiographical and popular representations of aging, old age, memory and aesthetics, with a particular interest in the ways moral reasoning and cultural meta-narratives shape dependency and caregiving. Collaborating on this course will expand her scholarly range to include cultural memory and memory studies as pathways to critical reflection on professional practice and the consequent culturally-mediated dependency and caregiving performances. By drawing upon her learning from this course Professor England will begin scholarly work on the aesthetics of gerontology and move forward on her recent explorations of aging as portrayed in popular media.

Professor Rust is a member of NYU's English Department, where she specializes in Medieval Studies. Her current book project examines list-making practices in late-medieval England, research on which has involved extensive study of medieval arts of memory. She also brings to the proposed course her training and experience in Nursing; in particular, her Nursing education gives her a foundation for preparing to teach the cognitive neuroscience the proposed course entails and for helping Professor England to prepare for that part of the course as well. Her learning from this course will enable her to make connections among medieval practices of memory and those of other time periods, which will in turn enable her to address her current and future scholarly work to a broad audience of readers.

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- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Trans. Robert Nesbit Bain. New York: Tribeca Books, 2011.
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Film and video

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Core Reading List

Unit 1: Childhood Memories

- Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Kandel, Eric R. *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind*. New York: Norton, 2007.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Trans. Robert Nesbit Bain. New York: Tribeca Books, 2011.

Unit 2: The Idea of Memory

- Bloch, David. *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1988.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Screen Memories." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press; 1953-1974. 3.299-322.
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- Sebald, W. G. *Vertigo*. Trans. Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions, 1999.

Unit 3: The Science of Memory

- Kandel, Eric R. *In Search of Memory*. New York: Norton, 2007.
- Ward, Jamie. *The Student's Guide to Cognitive Neuroscience*. Psychology Press, 2009.
- Film and video: Kurosawa, Akira. *Roshomon*. 1950
"Roshomama." *CSI*. Season 6, episode 21, 27 April 2006.

Unit 4: The Art of Memory

- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Funes the Memorious." *Ficciones*. Trans. Anthony Bonner. New York: Grove Books, 1962. 107-16.
- Bradwardine, Thomas. "On Acquiring a Trained Memory." Trans. Mary Carruthers. *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002. 205-214.
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Unit 5: Cultural Memory

- Calvino, Italo. "World Memory." *Numbers in the Dark*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 135-136.
- Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Summit Books, 1988.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Plume, 2003.

Unit 6: Forgetting

- Anderson, Janna Quitney. "Does Google Make Us Stupid?" Pew Research Center Publications. 19 Feb. 2010.
- Munro, Alice. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain." *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. New York: Knopf, 2001. 275-323.
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