



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](http://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 the Nature of Dreams

Institution:            York County Technical College

Project Directors:    Seth Rogoff

Grant Program:       Enduring Questions

**Narrative: *What is a Dream?***

**Intellectual Rationale and Teaching Value:** From pre-biblical times until today poets and artists, philosophers and theologians, scientists and mystics have asked this proposed course's enduring question, "What is a dream?"

The analysis of dreams has such a rich history because dreams themselves provoke foundational, pre-disciplinary questions about the reach of knowledge, the relationship between mind and body, self and society, good and evil, the mundane and divine, memory and the future. Dream analysis occurs precisely at the point when the "knowable" breaks down, when reason seems to abandon us. As such, dreams represent the most pressing concerns of an age, as much today as when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams thousands of years ago.

The course's aim is to introduce students to different ideas about dreams across many historical periods and cultures. Through a wide multidisciplinary selection of texts and other works of art, students will investigate the following questions. Can dreams access a metaphysical realm or are they rather windows into individuals' deepest instinctual desires? Do dreams predict future events or are they reflections of the dreamer's memories? Are dreams coherent compositions of symbolic languages or simply jumbled nonsense? Are dreams products of psychodynamic mechanisms or are they purely biochemical functions? Do dreams represent, as some Enlightenment philosophers thought, the limit of reason and knowledge or are they gateways to higher knowledge and ultimately to truth itself? What, as Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu asked over 2,000 years ago, is the dividing line between reality and dream? Are dreams in fact more real than waking life – governed as the latter might be by powerful psychological circumscriptions? All of these questions remain wide open for students to discuss.

The course will be divided into four topics: 1) *Dreams and the Divine*; 2) *Dream and Knowledge*; 3) *Dreams and Selfhood*; and 4) *Dreams and Society*.

1) *Dreams and the Divine*: In this unit, students will read a diverse set of works that present dreams as the meeting place for or conduit between the human and the divine realms. The course will start with a reading of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Dreams play a critical role in this ancient Sumerian legend, appearing in nearly every extant tablet. Dreams and their interpretations spur the heroes of the tale into action, present warnings and forebodings, and reveal divine plans. Next, students will read the Hebrew Bible's books of *Genesis* and *Daniel*. We will discuss Jacob's famous dream of the ladder, Joseph's dreams, and Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. We will also consider the perplexing nighttime wrestling match between Jacob and a mysterious demigod on the banks of Jabbok River as a possible dream episode (Gen. 32). After discussing the relationship between dreams and the development of Hebrew monotheism, students will turn to the book of *Daniel* and analyze the role of dreams in later Hebrew traditions, paying special attention to the connection between dreams and notions of apocalypse. As a bridge to the next unit, students will conclude unit one by analyzing dreams in Hindu and Buddhist texts. They will read the collection of Upanishads edited and translated by Juan Mascaro and Buddhist writings on dreams from Donald Lopez's anthology *Buddhist Scriptures*.

2) *Dreams and Knowledge*: This unit will investigate notions of dreams as both the source and limit of knowledge. We will begin the unit by looking at a short vignette by the ancient Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu called "Butterfly Dream". This timeless story raises questions about how we as subjective people distinguish objective reality from the limits of our own perception. What is real? What is fantasy or dream? How do we know anything for sure?

This same radical skepticism formed the context for Rene Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. I will guide students carefully through this major philosophical text, highlighting the role of dreams in Descartes' philosophical system. Modern science, on the other hand, asserts a powerful answer to this crisis of knowing by shifting the study of dreams from the philosophical to the neurological level. Today, neurological theories claim that dreams are primarily biological brain functions. Science, however, has not always been such an exclusively materialist category. Students will survey scientific analyses of dreams from ancient and medieval times, focusing on "On Dreams" by Aristotle, "On Diagnosis in Dreams" by the ancient Greek physician Galen and on "The Interpretation of Dreams" by the medieval Muslim polymath Ibn Khaldun. They will conclude this unit by reading Harvard Psychiatry Professor J. Allan Hobson's book *Dreaming, An Introduction to the Science of Sleep*.

3) *Dreams and Selfhood*: Do dreams reveal insights about who we really are? If so, how do we understand them? What do we do with the knowledge about ourselves that we learn from dreams? These questions are among those that will animate the third unit of the course. While rationalists like Descartes preferred to think of dream and reality as two opposing states and scientists like Hobson present dreams as biological functions, philosophers, psychologists and artists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries came to understand dreams as representative of a deeper inner reality. Students will immerse themselves in the works of Sigmund Freud, reading long selections of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as well classic case studies such as "Dora" and "The Wolfman". Students will conclude unit three with Arthur Schnitzler's modernist novella *Dream Story*, which focuses on tensions between societal norms and instinctual desires.

4) *Dreams and Society*: How do environmental or broader social influences structure our sleeping minds? What do dreams tell us about the society in which we live? How do we relate to society in our dreaming state? Are we traumatized by it? Do we use the dream state as a site of refuge or dissident thinking? These are some of the key questions that students will discuss in the final unit of the course. Students will start by reading Charlotte Beradt's *The Third Reich of Dreams*, a collection of dream narratives from Nazi Germany in the 1930s. They will follow this by looking at a scholarly article by Irina Paperno about dreams in Stalinist Russia. The course will conclude by looking at the relationship between dreams and warfare, focusing on Harry Wilmer's psychological study of the nightmares of Vietnam veterans and a nytimes.com blog entry on war dreams by Iraq War veteran and poet Brian Turner.

The course will connect to the broader college community through a film series that addresses various perspectives on dreams. The film series will take place in the evening and will be open to the entire college community. This will be the first public film series in the history of the college and represents a unique chance for intellectual community building. Students will have the opportunity to introduce the films to the audience within the context of the "Enduring Questions" course. Envisioned films include *The Wizard of Oz*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *8½*, and *Mulholland Drive*. A day trip will take students to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to view its collection of European modernism and other relevant exhibitions. Students will investigate the relationship between dreams and visual art.

**Envisioned Course Design:** The course will be a discussion-based seminar open to all students (max. 24) as a humanities elective. The course will run for 15 weeks and meet for three hours of in-class instructions per week. Meetings will focus on discussions of the

assigned readings and analysis of visual and audiovisual sources. As an experienced online instructor, I plan on including innovative online pedagogy in my “Enduring Questions” course. I plan to use a course website to provide context for the readings and to support students during the reading process with online discussion. I will also provide a library of online materials for students to explore themes and ideas further on their own. Students will complete one 3-page response essay for each of the four course units. Essays will respond to prompts that emerge from our in-class discussions and that coalesce around comparative issues. One-page responses to one of the films and works of art from the museum trip will also be required. Throughout the semester, students will keep a dream journal, in which they will try to record their dreams upon waking. Each week, the class will share (on a voluntary basis) dream journal entries and try to relate their contents to the issues raised in the assigned texts. As a final project, students will perform analyses of their own dream journals using the conceptual tools gained during the semester. This final essay will be 5-8 pages and includes at least two paradigms of dream analysis. If students are not successful in keeping a dream journal, they will analyze dream narratives selected from the collection at [dreambank.net](http://dreambank.net), an online database of dream descriptions archived by G. William Domhoff and Adam Schneider of UC Santa Cruz. Students will submit two assessments of the course. The first will be responses to a detailed questionnaire I will prepare concerning the reading material, assignments, classroom discussion and the supporting website. The second will have an open format for free reflection.

**Plan of Work:** During Summer-Fall 2011, I will engage in a broad study of scholarly literature about dreams and a focused review of the core literature that I will use for the course. This process will culminate in the preparation of the final syllabus and the construction of the course’s website. In the fall of 2011 the new course will be presented to the YCCC Curriculum

Committee by the Department Chair of Humanities. Once approved it will be added to the YCCC catalog and offered for the first time in Spring 2012. In Summer-Fall 2012, I will work to revise the course based on the student assessments and my own analysis of how the course went. I will offer the course for a second time in Spring or Fall 2013.

**Faculty Preparation:** I have taught history with a multidisciplinary approach at the community college level for three years. My courses place heavy emphasis on primary source analysis. During these years of community college teaching, I have developed a set of strategies to guide community college students through very rigorous intellectual and artistic terrain. In addition to my teaching, I have published two translations of works by Franz Kafka. One of the works was his novel *The Castle*, which contains a fabulous dream scene. Since completion of the translation, I have been working on an analysis of the role of the dream scene in the structure of the novel. An “Enduring Questions” grant will provide me the unique opportunity to immerse myself in scholarly literature about dreams. It will also enable me to build my first truly multidisciplinary seminar beyond the boundaries of history. This type of multidisciplinary approach is especially important to foster at the community college level, where opportunities to engage across disciplines are very limited. The humanities department, in which the course would be based, has a strong multidisciplinary mission, but so far has pursued it in a limited fashion. An “Enduring Questions” grant would also greatly advance this very important institutional goal.

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Preliminary Course Reading List: *What is a Dream?*

Unit 1: Dreams and the Divine

*Epic of Gilgamesh*

“Genesis” and “Daniel” from *The Jewish Study Bible*

*The Upanishads*

(Excerpts) *Buddhist Scriptures*

Unit 2: Dreams and Knowledge

(Excerpts) *The Book of Chuang Tzu*

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Aristotle, “On Dreams”

Galen, “On Diagnosis in Dreams”

Ibn Khaldun, “Interpretation of Dreams,” from the *Muqaddimah*

Hobson, *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep*

Unit 3: Dreams and Selfhood

(Excerpts) Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Freud, *The Wolfman*

Freud, *Dora*

Schnitzler, *Dream Story*

Unit 4: Dreams and Society

Beradt, *The Third Reich of Dreams*

Paperno, *Dreams of Terror: Dreams from Stalinist Russia as a Historical Source*

Wilmer, “The Healing Nightmare: War Dreams of Vietnam Veterans”

Turner, “Home Fires, the Night Visitors”