



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 program 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.

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 Friendship?"

Institution: Hofstra University

Project Director: Simon Doubleday

Grant Program: Enduring Questions

**What is friendship? The history of a question, from ancient Mesopotamia to *The Social Network***

*Simon R. Doubleday, Hofstra University*

**INTELLECTUAL RATIONALE:** Four millennia ago, a Babylonian king wrote a letter to the Egyptian pharaoh, stating: “From the time my ancestors and your ancestors made a mutual declaration of friendship, they sent beautiful greeting gifts to each other, and refused no request for anything beautiful”. Fast-forwarding to a film that explores the most distinctive mode of interpersonal communication in the early twenty-first century, *The Social Network*, we find the main character—Mark, representing a generation whose social lives often unfold in cyberspace—being told that his ‘best friend’ is suing him for 600 million dollars: “Tell me more”, he responds, sardonically. So, is friendship history? What light can the history of societies from the recent and distant past shed on the very nature of friendship, its value, and its potential? This course will ask how people have questioned, understood, and experienced friendship in a diverse variety of other times and places—including ancient China, Greco-Roman antiquity, Enlightenment France, and twentieth-century Chile—and how we might correspondingly rethink our own experiences. It will also ask how historical evidence—as well as literature and philosophy—may prove fruitful in addressing these seemingly universal concerns. Linking the core readings will be a wide range of personal correspondence, real and occasionally fictional, from ancient Cuneiform tablets and the letters of Seneca to the exchanges between two modern Latin American writers in exile and the contemporary epistolary novel.

This course, which will be entirely new, will be offered in the History Department at Hofstra University. The department has an established record of offering courses that address fundamental long-term questions (notably History 20, “The Present in Historical Perspective”, a university distribution course which is also a requirement for the History major). *What is friendship?* will be open to undergraduates from every major on campus, in the belief that the issues at stake matter deeply to all of our students. The history of friendship—like the history of emotions more generally—may be an academic field that has experienced a ‘boom’ in the last ten years, but as an emotional experience and as an intellectual puzzle it is perennial. This is a critical juncture for the teaching of the humanities and social sciences at Hofstra. Offerings have begun to shrink as a new medical school and engineering school begin to attract valuable resources, but student interest in learning from the historical past—and applying history to contemporary concerns—remains unabated. The NEH grant would be a valuable means of catalyzing our ability to address the enthusiasm of students across campus—including those in medicine and engineering—to learn about the some of the most enduring questions of all.

**COURSE DESIGN:** This will be a 15-week, 4-credit course, which—after an introductory week—will be divided into six modules, organized thematically rather than chronologically. We will meet twice a week for approximately 1.5 hours, and will schedule an additional time slot, on alternating weeks, for a film series; this will be open to all undergraduate students, as a means of generating community—and friendship. Typically, classes will be oriented towards discussion rather than lecture, since I will be prioritizing active learning. Students will prepare for key discussions by contributing

audio and video comments to pages I will set up through Voicethread.com; they will be encouraged to listen closely and respond to each other's remarks. This, too, will help to generate a sense of intellectual community beyond the classroom. To give richness and cohesion to the core readings, there will be special attention to personal correspondence, and compelling works of scholarship based on this correspondence; these readings will be outlined in detail below. Students will read about 120 pages a week, and write three 5- to 7-page papers, with topics responding to intellectual and historical debates that emerge organically in discussion. One paper may be replaced with a creative alternative: a web page, a video, a painting, a poem, a musical recording, etc., accompanied by a short explanation of the advantages/ disadvantages of this medium over the conventional essay. This is an idea that I have begun to develop since becoming affiliated with Hofstra's Center for Teaching and Scholarly Excellence. The university's Learning Support team has written to express their willingness to help students in this proposed course who might wish to develop web pages as part of their coursework. There will be a final exam, and also an informal exit essay will invite students to reflect on how the course has led them to rethink their understanding of friendship.

**INTRODUCTION: *IS THERE A CRISIS OF FRIENDSHIP?*** The aim will be to begin questioning the nature of friendship, rather than to force a definition. Has friendship been undercut by email and Facebook? What virtues or dangers does social networking bring to personal relationships, and what deep-rooted ideas about friendship might undergird critiques of Facebook? Students will read essays including William Deresiewicz's "Faux Friendship," excerpts from Zeldin's *Intimate History of Humanity*, and selected chapters

from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. First in the film series will be *The Social Network*.

**MODULE 1: WHAT IS A “TRUE” FRIEND?** Is the relationship defined by shared emotion, or by mutual obligation? How was friendship theorized in the ancient world? How compatible, and how different, is the Christian notion of “spiritual friendship” which emerges in the medieval period? Which mental structures from the past continue to shape our own notions of the “true friend” in the twenty-first century? Students will read Seneca’s *Letters from a Stoic*, brief excerpts from Plato’s early dialogue *Lysis*, and Confucius’s *Analects*, and selected chapters from Mark Vernon’s *The Meaning of Friendship*. The second film to be screened will be *Mon meilleur ami [My Best Friend]*.

**MODULE 2: HOW DOES FRIENDSHIP INTERSECT WITH POWER?** When does it maintain existing structures of political and social authority, and when does it challenge them? Is friendship compatible with self-interest? Can we transcend differences of wealth and status through friendship? Is “bromance” a means to gain or maintain social status and power? Students will read Amanda Podany’s *Brotherhood of Kings* (a book using ancient Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Egyptian correspondence to bring this world to life), supplemented by excerpts from *Gilgamesh* and a study of similar issues in the U.S. context such as Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*. The film for this module will be the recent feature *The Intouchables*.

**MODULE 3: DO WOMEN UNDERSTAND FRIENDSHIP IN THE SAME WAY?**

Historically, have networks of female friends been parallel to relationships among male friends? Why have women’s friendships gained greater notice since the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, and even—perhaps--taken on greater cultural importance than male friendship? Can women and men really be friends? I will assign the correspondence of the Chilean writers and activists Marjorie Agosín and Emma Sepúlveda, *Amigas: Letters of Friendship and Exile*, and the film *Mrs. Brown* (about Queen Victoria’s friendship with a servant) in conjunction with Victoria’s diaries, available online in digital format.

**MODULE 4: WHAT’S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND SEX?** Is

there a fine line, a wide borderland, or a world of difference? What happens if friendship clashes with sexual self-interest? The principal readings will be selected from the 60,000 letters in the “Electronic Enlightenment” project, supplemented with a provocative essay on St. Augustine as inventor of the Christian ‘closet’, brief excerpts from Augustine’s *Confessions*, and a scene from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* on the competing forces of friendship and sexual desire. Students will watch *Dangerous Liaisons*.

**MODULE 5: CAN THERE BE FRIENDSHIP IN THE FAMILY?** Can a husband and wife be friends? What about parents and children? Has the family ordinarily been a pragmatic economic unit? Is the ‘companionate marriage’ a modern invention? I will assign Steven Ozment’s *Magdalena and Balthasar. An Intimate Portrait of Life in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe*, and will screen *Shadowlands* in conjunction with selected letters of C.S. Lewis.

**MODULE 6: CAN FRIENDSHIP RESOLVE CULTURAL, RACIAL AND POLITICAL**

**TENSIONS?** Can friendship be sustained between individuals whose nations are in conflict, or who live on opposite sides of a divided society? Students will read *We Just Want to Live Here. A Palestinian Teenager-an Israeli Teenager*, a chapter from Roman

Krznaric's *The Wonderbox* (on the value of empathy), and—nuancing idealistic claims for the power of friendship—excerpts from David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock*. We will also consider the 'doll-exchange' program between Japan and the United States during World War II. The film series will conclude with *Promises*.

**FACULTY PREPARATION AND PLAN OF WORK:** The theme of friendship has surfaced briefly in courses I have taught in my field of specialization (medieval and early modern Europe): the nature of St Augustine's relationship with his 'close friend' in his *Confessions*, and Michel de Montaigne's love for Étienne de la Boétie, has given rise to lively classroom debate. The theme has also emerged in my research on a medieval Spanish king, Alfonso X of Castile, whose advice books for princes address the importance of friendship and loyalty. I'd now like to weave something richer out of these different threads. This wholly new course will respond to my long-standing interest in why the past might matter for our understanding of contemporary problems (a subject on which I have co-edited two recent books as well as teaching our existing course "The Present in Historical Perspective"), but it will take me far beyond my area of expertise. Between Sept. 2013 and Jan. 2014, I will read extensively. During this phase, I would like to organize a 'brainstorming' workshop at Hofstra, inviting faculty from across multiple disciplines: in preparing this proposal, I have already had excellent input from colleagues, and to ensure the long-term success of the course I'd like to build on this collective spirit. In spring and summer 2014, I will re-read the core reading list, and prepare the syllabus. I hope to teach two sections of the course in 2014-2015: most likely, depending on department needs, one section in fall 2014, and one in the spring of 2015.

## CORE READING LIST

\* Readings marked with an asterisk are the principal texts. Students will read brief excerpts of the other books listed below.

### INTRODUCTION

Theodore Zeldin, *Intimate History of Humanity* (NY: Harper Collins, 1994)  
Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999).  
William Deresiewicz, "Faux Friendship", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec 6, 2009.

### MODULE 1:

\* Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)  
Plato, *Lysis*. Trans. David Bolotin (Ithaca, NY: 1979).  
Confucius, *Analects*, Trans. Arthur Waley (NY: Viking, 1989)  
Mark Vernon, *The Meaning of Friendship* (New York: Palgrave, 2010)

### MODULE 2:

\* Amanda Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).  
Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh. A New English Version* (NY: Free Press, 2004).  
Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

### MODULE 3:

\* Marjorie Agosin and Emma Sepulveda, *Amigas: Letters of Friendship and Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).  
Queen Victoria's journals (online digital resource, [www.queenvictoriasjournals.org](http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org))

### MODULE 4:

\* Electronic Enlightenment (online digital resource, [www.e-enlightenment.com](http://www.e-enlightenment.com))  
Mathew Kuefler, "Homosexuality: Augustine and the Christian Closet", in *Why the Middle Ages Matter: Medieval Light on Modern Injustice*, ed. Celia Chazelle, Simon Doubleday, Felice Lifshitz and Amy Remensnyder (NY: Routledge, 2011).  
St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).  
William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004)

### MODULE 5:

\* Steven Ozment, *Magdalena and Balthasar. An Intimate Portrait of Life in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1986).  
C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters* (NY: Harper Collins, 2004).

### MODULE 6:

Amal Rifa'i and Odelia Ainbinder, *We Just Want to Live Here. A Palestinian Teenager-an Israeli Teenager – an Unlikely Friendship* (NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003).  
Roman Krznaric, *The Wonderbox*. (London: Profile, 2011).  
David Margolick, *Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

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