

15.269: LITERATURE, ETHICS, AND AUTHORITY

Fall 2008

MW 2:30-4:00

E51-376

Instructor: Leigh Hafrey

Teaching Assistant: Miguel Valença Pires

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

We tell stories to make sense of the world. Our personal and our professional lives depend on our ability to weave many elements into a coherent whole, both for us and for our fellows. Sometimes unwittingly, we use stories and story-telling as managerial tools: properly applied, they help us motivate a workforce, define a company mission, focus our thinking in moments of crisis. Stories work with the complexity of daily life, and give us perspective on decisions we might otherwise take too casually, or challenges that at first resist our mastery; they rank among our oldest and most persistent means of achieving consensus, a leadership and management device as old as humankind. They are tacit builders of what we call our ethical standards.

In "Literature, Ethics, and Authority," we use story to address perennial questions: what do we do when people, events, or issues test our ideas of leadership, career, and proper behavior? How do we respond to concerns over diversity, gender, and family in the workplace, or cope with the reality of war, death, and ordinary human frailty? Through films, novels, plays, and short fiction—good stories—this seminar examines issues of freedom and control, group norms and individual expression, as they bear on our ambition to manage both work and personal life.

The syllabus for "Literature, Ethics, and Authority" brings together materials from a dozen national cultures, a diversity that mirrors the Sloan student body and the workplaces in which many of you will find yourselves upon graduation. The course also explores multiple professional perspectives—in medicine, law, politics, science, teaching, the military, the church, journalism, and stay-at-home parenting—in order to situate business in the larger social context. We read some non-fiction—essays, speeches, letters, memoirs—and use some daily material from the news media.

The course meets Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-4:00, September 3-December 10. Books are available for purchase at The MIT Coop; the shorter readings are available on or through the Stellar site. Students may either view the assigned films during optional showings at Sloan, at the times indicated in the syllabus, or rent them from local video stores.

II. COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

1. Introduction--The Importance of Story

- 9/3 Shaw, Brown, Bromiley, "Strategic Stories: How 3M is Rewriting Business Planning" (Harvard Business On-line link on Stellar)
Du Bose Heyward, *The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes* (book)
Frank Gilbreth and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, *Cheaper by the Dozen*
(selection/ Stellar)
- 9/8 Liam O'Flaherty, "Two Lovely Beasts" (Stellar)

2. Ethics and Authority

- 9/10 Ang Lee, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (film; optional showing Tue 9/9, 7 pm, E51-151)
- 9/15 Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (book)
- 9/17 Alain Resnais, *Mon oncle d'Amérique* (film; optional showing Tue 9/16, 7 pm, E51-151)
- 9/24 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (book)
- 9/29 Stephen Frears, *The Queen* (film; optional showing Thu 9/25, 7 pm, E51-151)
- 10/1 Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (book)
- * Team paper due on assignments in Sections 1-2 of the course: 7 pm, on-line

3. Leading from my Moral Compass

- 10/6 David Russell, *Three Kings* (film; optional showing, Thu 10/2, 7 pm, E51-151)
- 10/8 H.D. Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (book)
- 10/15 Terry George, *Hotel Rwanda* (film; optional showing, Tue 10/14, 7 pm, E51-151)
* Individual, mid-term paper due Thursday 10/16: 12 pm, hard copy to E53-413
- 10/27 Rebecca Goldstein, "The Legacy of Raizel Kaidish" (Stellar)
- 10/29 Ursula LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (Stellar)
* Team paper due on assignments in Section 3 of the course: 7 pm, on-line

4. Social Enterprise

- 11/3 Paul Rusesabagina, *An Ordinary Man: an Autobiography* (selection/Stellar)
Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: the Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (selection/ Stellar)
E.O. Wilson, *Consilience* (selection/Stellar)

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"Social Enterprise," contd.

- 11/5 Walter Salles, Dir., *The Motorcycle Diaries* (film; optional showing, Tue 11/4, 7 pm, E51-151)
11/12 James Hilton, *Lost Horizon*, chapters 4-8 (book)
11/17 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others* (film; optional showing Thu 11/13, 7 pm, E51-151)
11/19 Marleen Gorris, *Antonia's Line* (film; optional showing Tue 11/18, 7 pm, E51-151)
11/24 Masayuki Suo, *Shall We Dance?* (film; optional showing Thu 11/20, 7 pm, E51-151)
* Team paper due on assignments in Section 4 of the course: 7 pm, on-line

5. Conclusion—Leading Through Story

- 12/1 Timothy Mo, *The Monkey King* (book)
12/3 Stacy Peralta, *Riding Giants* (film; optional showing Tue 12/2, 7 pm, E51-151)
12/8 Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (book)
12/10 Joel Coen, Dir., *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (film; optional showing Tue 12/9, 7 pm, E51-151)
D. A. Ready, "How Storytelling Builds Next-Generation Leaders" (Stellar)
* Final individual paper due: in class, hard copy

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be graded on class participation (40%); on three team response papers and one team teaching exercise with the instructor (25%); and on two individual papers, five to seven pages in length, submitted at mid-term and semester's end (15% and 20%).

In all cases, students' contributions will be judged for the depth of personal and philosophical insight they bring to the seminar. Paper and discussion topics will include those listed in the course description and syllabus: story and management, ethics in society, individual values, social enterprise, leadership, diversity, and so on. The papers will invite students to focus on one or more of the texts/films covered up to that point in the semester, and to juxtapose their personal experiences with those described in the course material. All assignments encourage students to reflect on the implications of the seminar material for a definition of ethical behavior, and on the inherent ethical challenges and benefits of storytelling as a resource for leaders.