

Core Legacies Conversations

1. Backgrounds

a. Core Legacies course description (emphasis added)

“This course explores ancient texts that articulate perennial issues: the nature of the human and the divine; the virtues and the good life; the true, the just and the beautiful; the difference between subjective opinion and objective knowledge. These texts exemplify basic modes of speech, literary forms, and patterns of thinking that establish the terminology of academic and intellectual discourse and critical thought: epic, rhetoric, tragedy, epistemology, science, democracy, rationality, the soul, spirit, law, grace. Such terms have shaped the patterns of life, norms, and prejudices that have been continually challenged, criticized, and refashioned throughout history. To highlight both the dialogue and conflicts between the texts and the traditions they embody, this course, taught by a multidisciplinary staff and in an interdisciplinary manner, focuses on both the historical contexts of these texts and the ongoing retellings and reinterpretations of them through time. Moreover, the course includes texts from the ancient Mediterranean world that have given rise to some of the philosophical, political, religious, and artistic traditions associated with “The West,” emphasizing that Western traditions were not formed in a vacuum but developed in dialogue and conflict with other traditions, some of which lie beyond the geographical area of “The West.” Common to all sections of this component are classic works such as Homer, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, Plato, and a Roman text. Complementary texts or visual materials from the ancient period, in and beyond the Western world, and/or response texts from the medieval or contemporary periods are added in individual sections or groups of sections. Thus, some groups of sections may have particular themes. These themes will be identified at registration every term.”

b. Core Revision

We acknowledge that conversations on what is taught in Core Legacies have continued for many years, and that critical analysis and improvements has been and continues to be made to this course.

As the Core Revision 2009 document writes:

“An additional change to the 1996 course has been to encourage faculty to move away from teaching the “western tradition” course as a monolithic and singular tradition. Faculty are now encouraged to stress the multiple traditions and cultural legacies that spring from the ancient Mediterranean and Near East and to show how separate traditions developed in relationship and conflict with each other. Faculty will also be encouraged to include texts outside of the “West” such as the Qur’an or the Bhagavad-Gita.”

c. Texts being taught

Many faculty members are including texts from different parts of the world into the course.

However, the 5 required texts for this course are: Homer, Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Plato, and a Roman text, which represent the Western civilization.

d. Colgate's mission

One of the 13 goals of Colgate's education is to allow students to "see themselves honestly and critically within a global and historical perspective". Part of Colgate's mission statement also says "Colgate is an inclusive institution with diverse students and faculty. With a mission to educate leaders who will and must come from all societal groups, Colgate is committed to educate students to virtue and encourages them to respond openly and sensitively to others who are different from themselves." This conversation could help us think about the goals and mission stated above in the context of Core Legacies course.

2. Description of this project

We understand why we are taking this course: culture is influenced. The texts covered in this class demonstrates perennial issues that are very important to think about, delve into, and challenge. But which legacies are prioritized in this class over others? Our aim for this project is to contribute to conversations on Core Legacies, and to help open more spaces for dialogue. We hope to contribute some student input to the longstanding and ongoing conversations on diversifying Core Legacies. We acknowledge that thinking critically about Core Legacies and having it represent legacies of more diverse worlds entail long conversations and limitations in implementation, and we envision this project to be an addition to the conversation, not a call to any direct action. We also acknowledge that there are a variety of faculty members teaching this course and that student inputs do not represent all of these.

This project is a student-initiated, student-led, student-run initiative composed of students who are interested in engaging in conversations about Legacies of the Ancient World. The input that we have gathered does not represent all students on this campus, but draws from various student perspectives, including many voices that are often marginalized on Colgate's campus.

a. The brown bag: Legacies of Whose Ancient World?

On Monday, April 3rd 2017, we hosted a brown bag titled "Legacies of Whose Ancient World? A conversation on Core 151". This event was key to gathering student input. About 50+ students attended the event. The brown bag was held to provide a space for students to share their thoughts on what is taught in Core Legacies. The students engaged critically with the lack of diverse texts in Core Legacies course and the key texts' focus on Western civilization.

b. Other methods of student input

Some students have volunteered to do interviews, and others have written emails expressing their thoughts.

c. Consent Forms

We gave consent forms to students that outlined overview and purpose of the project, confidentiality, and participant rights. Those who participated in the brown bag / private interview were asked to read and sign this form. The consent form is attached to this report. Students were also given info sheets highlighting key facts about the course, course description,

educational goals of this course, and the change towards allowing more diverse texts made in Core Revision 2009.

“Since government-sponsored mass education has become the norm, nation-states worldwide, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the curriculum or “official Knowledge” legitimized and disseminated through formal schooling is one of the key ways that members are incorporated as citizens or set apart as ‘others’” (Wiseman 2014)

“‘Textual communities’ - often developed through formal education have a profound effect on the development and incorporation of citizens as well as the identification and rejection of those outside the community.” (Wiseman 2014)¹

3. Student voices

Guideline question: What are your experiences in Core Legacies, specifically in regards to the texts being taught?

Text

- White-centered, western-centered: What is lost? What is prioritized?
 - We understand why it is important to learn about some of these texts; that these texts inform and influence society/culture/politics in the U.S./Europe and will assist us if we continue to work here after leaving Colgate. We understand this because we have been told this over and over as justification for why western texts are prioritized (especially POC and international students). However, we still believe that this is not enough of a reason to justify the continued prioritization of western texts and the othering/ignoring/invalidation of other legacies of other, non-western, cultures.
 - Purpose of Core Legacies is to gather background of past; we have to acknowledge that America has unique culture and society. By focusing on western society, we are catering majority of white students that come from similar backgrounds. America is a diverse place - perspectives from communities within the United States and legacies they bring should also be represented. (many students of color, for example, bring various legacies from cultures in continents such as Africa, South America, Asia, and North America (indigenous))
 - Usually the only thing we learn from the non-western texts is how the culture or text relate to western and white culture
 - The course title is ‘Legacies of the Ancient world’, so why is it constrained to legacies of white and light-skinned people? Countries such as DRC and South Africa have ancient texts, ancient stories, and epics that could be looked into and taught in this course.

¹ Wiseman, Alexander W. (2014). Representations of Islam and Arab Societies in Western Secondary Textbooks. *Digest of Middle East Studies* 23 (2): 312-44.

- Why is the “ancient world” only restricted to white civilizations? What about all the other countries that have ancient texts/stories?
 - Educational goals of this course says “see themselves honestly...through historical perspective on Western culture” - what about other perspectives/other cultures?;
 - I think there are literatures from the non-western world that could be taught in Core Legacies. We could introduce interpretations of Mesopotamian texts, and poems, etc. I think we could include texts like - in Indian literature, for example, Ramayana - I think it is taught in Core India but the book is widely applicable. It talks about human nature and human emotions, which is an important theme of Core Legacies. Bhagavad-Gita is more philosophical and less religious text. It could be a readable text for non-hindu. These texts are currently mostly only covered in Core India but students could learn important things from this text in courses like Legacies.
 - I understand if there are limitations due to insufficient knowledge of other cultures but I think we should invest in getting more representation from different parts of the world.
 - Western traditions - it is more like European traditions. Colgate prioritizes european culture as western culture - this erases other cultures that exist in US
 - Histories of non-western people are erased
 - Need to incorporate texts from other cultures because idea of colgate as an institution is to develop a global perspective//diverse american perspective;
 - We also should think about diversity WITHIN the united states. There are groups within the US whose legacies are not represented in this course.
- Text-related thoughts: space, categorization, similarities, significance of texts
 - Some professors provide texts that address various different issues, but what’s *required* for course limits what they teach; providing more space for non-western texts in the course
 - We read a misogynist text. My professor brought in some other texts written by women but we did not spend much time on them because he had to spend time on the required texts
 - Could consider broadening the mandatory text category into ‘ancient epic’ instead of limiting it to ‘Homer’. Homer is a historical epic, but not necessarily the most in depth/famous one. Other texts from non-western cultures, such as the Mahabharata, can achieve similar goals. Broadening the required text category to ‘ancient epic’ instead of ‘Homer’ could allow for more flexibility in what texts could be taught
 - My class only covered the Iliad, but I talked about Mahabharata and the similarity between the texts with the professor during office hours. How did two different people have similar stories?
 - I think it is important to acknowledge that translation can completely change how we interpret certain texts - translations come from a very specific perspective.

e.g. bible, quran. I read the bible in hebrew, and it is very different from the English translation.

- Trouble understanding why texts were chosen -- would be helpful to hear explanation from professor about **why** each text was chosen; it is often taken for granted that the texts we cover in class shaped important ways of thinking-- would appreciate specific explanation why

Lenses

- HOW the texts are taught; how are non-western texts 'othered' and 'colonized'? Could we introduce different perspectives in teaching the core texts?
 - We are reading the texts from a Western perspective. We need feminist perspectives, queer perspectives of reading these texts. These should be taken into account as we currently read Legacies texts mostly through the dominant white male lens.
 - colonialism; we are only reading the texts from a western perspective - it is important for professors to say that the way we are reading it is from ONE lens
 - Appreciate professors who bring variety, but with those who do bring non-western texts, those texts are taught to repeat the same message (e.g. colonialism - the only thing we learn about africa is colonialism? There are so many things that could be taught about Africa as a continent and its various cultures and texts); we need learn more nuance beyond a single narrative
 - Professors would teach new text and colonize those - are there better ways to signpost how professors are going to teach that class? Some professors are entrenched in the way they want to teach. We need to think together about how we can learn in decolonizing ways.
 - Sends message that non-western, non-white people were living in darkness in pre-colonialism era; teaches us that enslavement was an adventure that white men went on
 - Need to go beyond christianity and christian viewpoints - other major religions?
 - Professor focused on how the texts affected western way of thinking - didn't spend much time considering larger themes of human nature, morality, etc. Focusing on the Western way of thinking was narrow and left out other interpretations and perspectives regarding these important themes
 - We should be exposed to different lenses (this needs to be tackled and taken into account so it's not just one dominant view overtaking our knowledge)
 - We come from different backgrounds we do not bring the same level of knowledge or background. CORE could be taught in a way that draws from how Colgate students have a lot of different perspectives

Instruction

- Assumptions of background knowledge and familiarity with Western viewpoints

- How professors teach the course is critical - they are expecting a certain amount of integration of western viewpoint already, and this puts a lot of students [who do not come from those backgrounds or did not access to those viewpoints] at disadvantage
 - Some professors took for granted that the Western perspective is this this and this, and that students should already know these texts.
 - The way professors teach the course expects a certain requisite amount of knowledge already; judeo-christian text -
 - My professor breezed through characters expecting students to know them already
 - My professor said “Well come on guys, this is bible 101” - expectation that students already would’ve known what bible is about etc.
 - There should not be assumptions that students have baseline knowledge about texts such as the hebrew bible and new testament
 - Professors take for granted that students already know what the western perspective is-- ignores other non-western students/other perspectives
- Instruction in the classroom
 - Some of the texts contain explicit mentions of sexual violence - professors mentioning trigger warnings would be helpful. There are survivors on this campus to whom reading such explicit mentions may be retraumatizing / painful, and we should not put at stake people’s mental or emotional health.
 - Maybe consider bringing more professors whose expertise lies on texts not included in the ‘Western civilization’
 - Objectives of course are limited; purposes aren’t even achieved sometimes. For example, my Core Legacies exam questions were on which author said what - we had to specify authors for each phrase. Wasn’t sure if such testing would help achieve objectives of course. How does this allow students to critically learn?
 - Nuancing what is said in class might be helpful. Sometimes some problematic things that students say would be validated. .
 - Sometimes, I had different views about the texts read but did not feel comfortable sharing them because I was the only international student in the classroom. My different opinion was being essentialized to perspective of my country / ethnicity / race.
 - To get a good grade - need to stay to the text; not allowed to incorporate own opinions; challenging/questioning is not allowed - “just stay in text/don’t stray to do well” - professors don’t have desire for new opinions of the text and just to stay to the script
 - I challenged what text said by bringing relevant social contexts but I was told not to do so because I had to stay to the text
 - Professors could ask how texts make students feel+what’s wrong with them
 - How does this course affect students sitting in the class differently?

- Western tradition → White tradition, therefore it is easier for white bodies to speak up in class; white students are affirmed by what is taught in class (their white, european traditions are taught..) compared to students of color who feel that their legacies are silenced and ignored
- "This is not my legacy this is not my history. I look at the people in my class and I am frustrated with them because the legacies we learn is not my legacies. It's your legacies. My legacies are never taught in this class. Also, this course teaches A legacy of SOME ancient world not THE legacy of the ancient world"
- Mirrors things that happen on campus - the prioritization of white, western literature illustrates the sampling of students of color's experiences in a predominantly white campus; "who built the west?"
- Frustrating to read non-western texts - White students would get story wrong and mix up different stories in book/epic; they can't mess up passage in bible but can mess this up and not feel guilty
 - Blatant disrespect for non-western texts/other cultures - students in my class did not read text closely; they did not have much basis of knowledge yet act like they understand everything that happens inside of it
- For people who were raised in western culture, there is not a chance for them to expand and acknowledge that there are legacies outside of the western world

Institutional Priorities

- What is prioritized by the institution? Whose knowledges are validated? How was the course title selected and what does it reflect?
 - The very fact that legacies is mandatory shows what school's priorities are at -- tells what colgate wants us to get (indoctrinating us into western perspective and making us read these texts)
 - Institutionally how are we helping professors who need more resources to expand outside and have these conversations? We have a center for freedom and western civilization, but not much institutional resource to aid and support professors who may want to expand beyond western viewpoints / texts
 - Hoping that professors can invest some time to learning more about non-western texts and different ways of reading Western texts and include them to the course; may require stepping out of their comfort zones (colgate asks students to move out of their comfort zones, too) hope colgate will help with such endeavors
 - With the Core Revision, the title of the course has changed to 'Core Legacies of the Ancient World' from 'Western traditions'. But not changing content, selling it under something else;
 - If the syllabus does not change, then the name of the course should at least change to reflect the eurocentrism of the course. Calling a course that only requires professors to teach western texts "Legacies of the Ancient World" is miseducation, and miseducation that subsequently informs our collective memory.

- “What are we teaching and How are we teaching and Why are we teaching the texts?”

What is the history of this course?

1928

LEGACIES OF WHOSE ANCIENT WORLD

ON THE EXAM... I DIDN'T KNOW WHO SAID WHAT - SO... I WROTE JESUS FOR ALL OF THEM. BUT WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

COME ON, GUYS. THIS IS BIBLE 101

Formerly: "perspectives of the western world"



TRIGGER WARNING

WHY WERE THESE TEXTS CHOSEN?

AS A MAN OF COLOR, I READ THESE TEXTS IN A DIFFERENT WAY - THERE IS MORE THAN A WHITE, MALE, HETEROSEXUAL PERSPECTIVE

OVER 50+ PEOPLE WERE IN ATTENDANCE

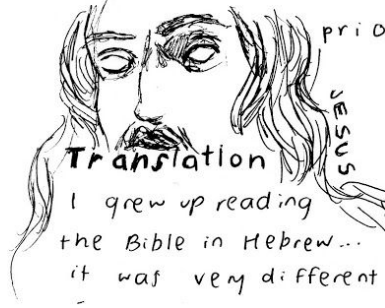
REINFORCES COLONIALISM. THE WORLD IS A WHITE MAN'S PERSI ADVENTURE -

WHERE WAS THE REST OF THE WORLD? ... IN THE DARK?

when all the texts (even texts of different countries) teach COLONIALISM

→ if all you know about AFRICA is COLONIALISM... what does that say?

That Legacies is MANDATORY shows us where Colgate's priorities are at



Translation JESUS I grew up reading the Bible in Hebrew... it was very different



PLATO The way discussions are run... white bodies have a lot of capital in the space

PRIORITIZING THE west



HOMER you GET ALL THIS WHITENESS AND SAMPLE POC

WHAT IS THE WEST? EUROPE

CATERING TO THE WHITE PERSPECTIVE

08/02/17

Certificate of Informed Consent

Overview and Purpose. “Legacies of whose ancient world? A conversation about what is taught in CORE 151” is an event organized for students to share their thoughts and experiences with what is taught in Core Legacies. This is part of a larger project that seeks to compile student input on the lack of diversity in Core Legacies curriculum. Student input gathered from this brown bag will be presented to Core Legacies faculty meeting on April 19th.

Confidentiality. The protection of your identity will be taken as first and foremost priority. Information that could reveal your identity will not be disclosed to faculty, staff, and the public in any written or verbal form. Reports and presentations we present in Core Legacies faculty meeting will not contain any identifying information. Any quotes we share will not have your names attached.

Your Rights. If you feel uncomfortable during this event, please feel free to let the moderator know publicly or privately what we can do to support you / take the space you need, etc. If you do not want us to share what you have said in this event, contact Woohee Kim anytime before April 19th.

Questions. Please contact Woohee Kim at wkim@colgate.edu if you have any questions, or want to get involved. If you are interested in doing private interviews to tell us more about your experience, please also let Woohee Kim know.

By signing below, you are agreeing 1) to participate in the brown bag and 2) that you have read and understand all of the information provided on this form.

NameSignature