

HON 520C: WESTMINSTER COLLEGE SPRING PROGRAM IN GREECE

May 14-28, 2019

THE ATHENS CENTRE

48 Archimidous Street

116 36 Athens, Greece

"To awaken quite alone in a strange town is one of the pleasantest sensations in the world.... You have no idea of what is in store for you, but you will, if you are wise and know the art of travel, let yourself go on the stream of the unknown and accept whatever comes in the spirit in which the gods may offer it."

~Freya Stark, *Baghdad Sketches* (1932)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The Westminster Spring Program in Greece offers honors students an onsite introduction to ancient Greek philosophy and history. This is a pass/fail course, in which students read an assortment of travel writing just prior to travel. During the trip, students keep a travel journal informed by assigned readings as well as past (HON 201C) course material. They revise and submit this journal to program professors upon their return to the states.

As the partner course in the cluster with HON 201C, the outcomes for this course are as follows:

COURSE OUTCOMES:

By the end of this travel course, students should be able to

1. understand how various forces (political, geographical, and historical) have shaped the development of different cultures in Greece and beyond;
2. synthesize knowledge from readings of Ancient Greece with knowledge gained from present travel to ancient sites;
3. think creatively, and appreciate aesthetic expression;
4. produce travel writing that shows an awareness of language, freedom from cliché, and an understanding of genre, style, and topic;
5. understand that the world is a system of interconnected countries and cultures;
6. develop an appreciation of global diversity and a critically informed perspective of the points of view of others;
7. compare and contrast different countries, cultures, and societies;
8. recognize the interdependence of countries, cultures, and societies;
9. understand oneself and one's own culture through contact with ideas from other countries/cultures/societies; and
10. gain new proficiencies and skills to navigate unfamiliar cultures and situations.

These outcomes will be assessed by the travel writing assignment detailed below, as well as onsite discussions of the readings listed below. The grading for the course is Pass/Fail.

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS

Readings:

1. Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel." Bishop was an American poet who spent a significant part of her career in Brazil. "Questions of Travel" originally

appeared in *The New Yorker* on January 21, 1956. See pp. 3-4 of this syllabus for the poem's text. As you read, consider: what questions does Bishop ask, and how do they relate to our trip? More importantly, what are *your* questions of travel? Come up with a few—and write them down!—before we leave.

2. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), Preface, plus chapters I & XXXII. In 1867, Mark Twain embarked on a tour of Europe with a group of fellow Americans. He documented the journey in this classic, beautifully (and wittily!) written book. As you read, pay attention to Twain's style—in particular, note his use of the techniques listed under the "Travel Journal Instructions" below. How can you emulate some of these in your own travel writing?
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3176/3176-h/3176-h.htm#ch32>
3. Jamaica Kincaid, "The Ugly Tourist." What is the difference between a tourist and a traveler, and why is Kincaid so angry with tourists? Note her style, as well. How does it enhance her essay's content? Kincaid's short essay is available here, copied from the textbook *50 Essays* (Ed. Samuel Cohen, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003):
<https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/garciaeng1101sp18/files/2018/01/The-Ugly-Tourist.pdf>
4. On D2L: Read your peers' write-ups on Greece in the 21st century; also re-read the creative piece on war that we co-wrote while reading *The Iliad*.
5. Browse <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/greece/athens/travel-tips-and-articles> You might also skim Marissa Tejada's "How to Live Like A Local in Athens," which offers some tips regarding food and language (note that it also offers tips for some sites and excursions we won't have time to do):
<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/greece/athens/travel-tips-and-articles/how-to-live-like-a-local-in-athens/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d27695bd>

TRAVEL JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS

In Greece: Take notes! Every day! Some information to include in daily note-taking:

- Detail: Day of week, time of day, weather
- Perspective: what can you see from where you are standing?
- Sensory awareness: the more colors, descriptive images, sensations, smells, and tastes you can jot down, the better
- Comparison: how does one city compare to the next?
- Narrative: we began HON 201C by establishing that the human species is a storytelling species. What new stories do you learn during your trip, and which old stories bear new meaning?
- Place: In what site(s) do the history and literature we studied feel most alive to you, and why?

We will have an opportunity to sit and work through some writing exercises together during our time on Samos. Otherwise, we expect that you will jot down enough notes daily so that you will have a collection of thoughts and observations to revisit upon your return to the states.

Post-Travel:

Upon our return home, Dr. Martin and I ask that you re-read your travel notes and craft them into something meaningful. "Something meaningful" means 2-3 typed pages of your choice of genre—an essay, a creative nonfiction narrative, a poem or series of poems, a traditional diary, or some combination thereof. We ask that you submit your completed assignment no later than **Tuesday, June 4 at midnight**. You may upload it to the dropbox at D2L. The assignment will not be issued a letter grade, since this is a pass/fail course. But we will reward your good work by selecting the strongest piece in the class and featuring it in *The New Wilmingtonian*, the English Department's recently launched journal, which was designed to attract readers near and far while highlighting the finest work produced by students in ENG and WRI courses at Westminster. Check it out: <https://thenewwilmingtonian.wordpress.com>

We will feature the winning piece on the Honors page of the College website, as well.

"Questions of Travel"

by Elizabeth Bishop

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

—For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,
aren't waterfalls yet,
in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
they probably will be.

But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,
the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?

Where should we be today?

Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres?

What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
in our bodies, we are determined to rush
to see the sun the other way around?

The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?

To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
inexplicable and impenetrable,
at any view,

instantly seen and always, always delightful?

Oh, must we dream our dreams
and have them, too?

And have we room

for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity
not to have seen the trees along this road,
really exaggerated in their beauty,
not to have seen them gesturing
like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
—Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
of disparate wooden clogs
carelessly clacking over
a grease-stained filling-station floor.
(In another country the clogs would all be tested.
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
—A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.
—Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for centuries
between the crudest wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.
—Never to have studied history in
the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.
— And never to have had to listen to rain
so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory
and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right
about just sitting quietly in one's room?"

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?"