

**15.269: LITERATURE, ETHICS, AND AUTHORITY**

**Fall 2004**

**MW 2:30-4:00**

**E51-372**

**Instructor: Leigh Hafrey**

**Teaching Assistant: Elena Ritchie**

**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 host a panel discussion, elements that add practitioners' insights to the mix of views represented by the stories; we also use some daily material from the news media. Finally, each student co-teaches one class with the instructor, so that student insights and experiences emerge directly in the lesson plan.

The course meets Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-4:00, September 8-December 8. Books are available for purchase at The MIT Coop; many assignments are included in a course packet. 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

- 9/8 Shaw, Brown, Bromiley, "Strategic Stories: How 3M is Rewriting Business Planning" (course packet)  
Du Bose Heyward, The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes  
Frank Gilbreth and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, Cheaper by the Dozen (selection; course packet)

### 2. Forms of Authority

- 9/13 Herman Melville, Billy Budd  
9/15 Ang Lee, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (film; optional showing Tue 9/14, 7 pm, E51-372)  
9/20 Sophocles, Antigone  
9/22 David Russell, *Three Kings* (film; optional showing Tue 9/21, 7 pm, E51-372)  
9/27 Marleen Gorris, *Antonia's Line* (film; optional showing Thu 9/23, 7 pm, E51-372)  
9/29 Alan Bennett, The Madness of George III (course packet)

### 3. Professional Standards

- 10/4 Oliver Stone, *Wall Street* (film; optional showing Thu 9/30, 7 pm, E51-372)  
\* Paper due on assignments in Sections 1-2 of the course  
10/6 Robert Bolt, A Man for All Seasons  
10/13 Costa-Gavras, *Z* (film; optional showing Tue 10/12, 7 pm, E51-372)  
10/25 Vaclav Havel, Summer Meditations (selections; course packet)  
James Madison, "Federalist 10," in Hamilton/Madison/Jay, The Federalist Papers  
Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (selections; course packet)  
10/27 Pearl Buck, "The Enemy" (course packet)

### 4. Managing Between Faith and Science

- 11/1 Bertolt Brecht, Galileo  
The Bible, Genesis 1-2 (course packet)  
11/3 Alain Resnais, *Mon oncle d'Amérique* (film; optional showing Tue 11/2, 7 pm, E51-372)  
\* Paper due on assignments in Section 3 of the course.  
11/8 Wole Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman  
11/10 Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (film; optional showing Tue 11/9, 7 pm, E51-372)

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**Module #4 contd.**

- 11/15 Panel Discussion: Science, Business, and the Good Society  
Alan Lightman, "Progress" (course packet)  
"The United Nations Global Compact" (course packet)

**5. Social Enterprise**

- 11/17 Frank Capra, *Lost Horizon* (film; optional showing Tue 11/16, 7 pm, E51-372)  
11/22 Luis Puenzo, *The Official Story* (film; optional showing Thu 11/18, 7 pm, E51-372)  
11/29 M. L. King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in Why We Can't Wait  
12/1 Masayuki Suo, *Shall We Dance?* (film; optional showing Tue 11/30, 7 pm, E51-372)  
12/6 Timothy Mo, The Monkey King

**6. Conclusion—Leading Through Story**

- 12/8 Joel Coen, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (film; optional showing Tue 12/7, 7 pm, E51-372)  
D. A. Ready, "How Storytelling Builds Next-Generation Leaders" (course packet)  
\* Final paper due.

**III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be graded on class participation (40%); on the co-teaching with the instructor of one class (10%); and on three papers, five to seven pages in length, submitted at intervals during the semester (50%).

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: leadership, diversity, professionalism, social norms, etc. 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.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**  
**LITERATURE, ETHICS, AND AUTHORITY**  
**15.269**

**Class #1: Wednesday 8 September 2004**

Read:

Shaw, Brown, Bromiley, "Strategic Stories: How 3M is Rewriting  
Business Planning" (course packet)\*

Du Bose Heyward, The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes\*\*

Frank Gilbreth and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, Cheaper by the Dozen  
(course packet)

Study Questions:

1. In "Strategic Stories," the authors comment: "A good story (and a good strategic plan) defines relationships, a sequence of events, cause and effect, and a priority among items--*and those elements are likely to be remembered as a complex whole.*" (p. 4) Can you think of examples from your work experience--whether in the planning process or as part of company culture--that confirm this assertion?
2. What is the "narrative logic" (p. 5) of your decision to attend Sloan?
3. In Du Bose Heyward's story, does the Country Bunny need or receive mentoring?
4. Do the Country Bunny's family structure and parenting style provide an appropriate model for corporate organization and management? Compare that model with the one described in Cheaper by the Dozen.

\* The course packet is available from CopyTech (basement E52) on 9/7/04.

\*\* Books are available in the basement of The MIT Coop, under "15.269."