

# **Place out of Time Mentor Seminar—Winter 2018 Mondays & Wednesdays 1-2:30, 2218 SEB**

*Instructors:*

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## **Overview**

This seminar revolves around Place out of Time (POOT), a web-based character-playing simulation involving college, high school, and middle school students. You will have a dual role in the simulation: you will play a character yourself, and you will also act as a project leader and mentor to the younger participants. The simulation revolves around a trial - different each time the simulation is run -- based on events and people from history. While the details are ever-changing, timeless and universal themes, such as "identity," "freedom," and "security," are the backdrop for POOT.

This class is different because you are responsible not just for your own learning, but for the learning of younger peers who are depending on you. In order to fulfill that responsibility, though, each of you will need to understand and articulate a variety of cultural and historical perspectives, as filtered through the personalities that appear in the simulation. We have chosen to utilize character-playing simulation for two reasons. First, we see great value in character playing as an exercise of the imagination. Being forced to “walk in the shoes” of another, and to consider the ideas and the perspective of someone from another time or place, can be a powerful catalyst to learning. Secondly, both you and the student participants will be asked to do this character playing in a task-oriented way. Mentors and students will learn about their character’s lives, their points-of-view, and the societal contexts in which their characters lived. You will all then be presented with a contemporary problem (our trial scenario, listed below) that you will consider from the perspective of your character. The work of being a mentor is to help the students to construct a bridge between historical times and the present day, to gain a heightened appreciation for other worldviews, and to wrestle with some interesting questions in a way that will deepen our learning about history...and about ourselves.

It is often said that the best way to learn something is to teach it. To that, one might add that the next best way to learn something is to play a game with it. This class tries to combine both of those methods.

### **Our Trial Scenario**

*The eyes of the world will be on Spain's Alhambra Palace, when the Court of All Time convenes in January to hear the appeal of a case in which Italy's Court of Cassation overturned the conviction of a homeless man from the Ukraine (Roman Ostriakov) for stealing approximately five dollars worth of food. The man acknowledged stealing the food, but the court ruled that the man's "need for nourishment" excused the theft. Genoan shopkeeper Gianna Bennato, owner of the grocery where the theft took place, is bringing the appeal. In a story published in Italy's La Repubblica, Bennato stated that she feels compassion towards people in Ostriakov's circumstance, "but if this ruling is allowed to stand, I might as well throw away my cash register and replace it with a sign that says 'aiuta te stesso' (Help yourself!)" Great figures from across human history will gather in Granada to decide a case that incorporates complex economic, legal and moral questions.*

## **Our Class Meetings in Detail**

### **January 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Today we'll look at the "big picture(s)," exploring some initial background for our trial as well as talking about your mentoring work, and the issues related to identity and justice that will be foregrounded in our work this term. By tomorrow night, you'll receive an e-mail from us telling you which character you will portray in the simulation, allowing you to begin work on **creating your Profile (see below for more details), which is due on Canvas by Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>.**

### **January 8<sup>th</sup>**

We'll look more closely at the Profile and talk about ways to approach the work. We'll also engage with the spirit of play with which this project is infused.

### **The Profile**

As part of this written "Profile" (3-5 paragraphs, **written in the first person**, and in a narrative, informal style), please tell everyone something about your background and about the kind of person you are, your passions, your limitations, etc. You might think of this as one part biography, one part personal ad—you're telling your story and doing it in a way that you think reflects your essence as a human being. *What makes you interesting, what makes you stand out from the crowd?* One of the challenges of this activity is to try and represent your character, as much as possible, from your character's own perspective, and *to do so in a way that middle school student readers can understand and relate to.* Sometimes your character will have done things you don't agree with, or that

we might question from our present-day perspective. While we encourage you to think about such issues, we ask you to do so *primarily* so that you can present your character's thoughts and motivations in as genuine and as unapologetic a manner as you can. Some of you might want to speak to where your critics were misguided, and how they failed to understand your true motivations. Be your character, and allow yourself some dramatic license. *Please do not give us a simple recitation of the significant events in your character's life—the purpose of this task is not to recreate an encyclopedia entry. (see “Sample Mentor Profiles” on our Canvas site for some helpful examples).*

## ***Crafting a compelling Profile***

The Profile should have a **distinctive voice**.

The Profile should tell a **good story** that draws in the reader.

There should be some evidence that **situates your character in place and time**.

Be **succinct**. You **can't** include everything, so think about which details are most important, or the most illustrative of your character.

Read a segment of your Profile **aloud**. Practice *speaking* it as your character, and think about how s/he would sound.

## ***January 10<sup>th</sup>***

Starting today, we'll ask each of you to introduce your character to your classmates. Here's what that means:

### ***Introducing Your Character***

**Please introduce yourself by doing the three things listed below.** You'll have **3-4 minutes**, so really think about what you want to say, and while you are welcome to bring notes, please don't read from a text. Speak in the first person, and present yourself *stylistically* in such a way that your colleagues will get a sense of the *kind of person* you are.

**1) Briefly introduce yourself, telling us when and where you lived, what work you did, and what you're best known for.**

**2) Choose three words to describe the kind of person you are (choose them carefully). Then, if you could only choose ONE as THE best representation, which would you choose, and why.**

**3) Please tell us about some event that took place during your lifetime--something you or may not have been aware of during your actual life--that shaped or reshaped the world in which you lived.**

Once you've done this, be ready to answer questions posed by your fellow guests.

They might ask about who your friends or enemies were, about events or people that shaped you, about notably wonderful or horrible experiences you had, or perhaps about accomplishments of which you are proud (or maybe not so proud). They might also ask you about things about you that are of particular interest to *their* character. We ask that you do your best to answer their questions, knowing that we'll debrief the experience and that you can always do further research to find out the answer to any questions you were asked that you didn't know how to answer in the moment.

### ***January 15<sup>th</sup>—No Class (MLK Day)***

**Profile due by Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>** on Canvas. We will offer you feedback on your profile draft by week's end.

### ***January 17<sup>th</sup>***

We'll continue with character introductions, and we'll ask all of you to bring to class five paper copies of your profile so that you can get some feedback.

### ***January 22<sup>nd</sup>***

More character introductions today.

### ***January 24<sup>th</sup>***

Once again, we ask that you **bring five paper copies of your REVISED profile to class**. We'll do final work-shopping of one another's profiles, and we'll show you how to post your profiles (profiles must be posted on the POOT simulation website by Friday).

### ***January 29<sup>th</sup>***

We'll start talking today about the issues embedded in our trial. To that end, we ask that you read the "**About the Case**" reading. Please come to class prepared to discuss the trial scenario and its intellectual and educational dimensions, and please also come with at least two "wonderings" inspired by the reading—by this, we mean two things that you were curious to know more about, or that struck you as interesting, controversial, or strange.

### ***January 31<sup>st</sup>***

As the simulation website officially opens, we'll be talking more about your role as mentor, and we'll give you a glimpse into a POOT classroom.

### ***February 5<sup>th</sup>***

We'll also continue our conversations about the case and the issues embedded in it by looking at some specific "takes" on the case by having you look at some media accounts (articles, blog postings) and come with questions and observations. We'll read the following articles (all on Canvas):

**“Hunger shouldn’t be a crime: This is what a humane response to food insecurity looks like”** by Mary Elizabeth Williams (salon.com, 5-4-16) [http://www.salon.com/2016/05/04/hunger\\_shouldnt\\_be\\_a\\_crime\\_this\\_is\\_what\\_a\\_humane\\_response\\_to\\_food\\_insecurity\\_looks\\_like/](http://www.salon.com/2016/05/04/hunger_shouldnt_be_a_crime_this_is_what_a_humane_response_to_food_insecurity_looks_like/)

**“Ethic Quiz: The Jean Valjean Rule”** by Jack Williams (Ethics Alarms Blog, 5-8-16) <https://ethicsalarms.com/2016/05/08/ethic-quiz-the-jean-valjean-rule/>

**“Can the Homeless and Hungry Steal Food? Maybe, an Italian Court Says”** by Gaia Pianigiani and Sewell Chan (New York Times, 5-3-16) <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/world/europe/food-theft-in-italy-may-not-be-a-crime-court-rules.html? r=1>

## ***February 7<sup>th</sup>***

We’ll talk more today about questions about and framings of dignity. To help us with seeing the question in all its dimensionality, we’ll read the following piece from the wikizero website:

<https://www.wikizero.com/en/Dignity>

and we’ll ask you to screen a brief video on dignity, made for use in POOT by our colleague Chloe Bakst:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB3JyikRVVDXQcDRZQ1J1bUNSc2M/view?usp=sharing>

We’ll also get a little more specific about how the project unfolds, and how it looks in the classroom.

## **POOT Journal**

We’re going to ask you to keep a term-long journal of your work this term, and of how you’re making sense of the task of being a POOT mentor, playing a character, interacting with middle school students, and thinking through the course readings. We’re not going to give you a specific response to the question of “how many posts do I need to make?” We’ll be looking for a robust engagement with the kinds of questions we’ve listed above, and others that you’ll frame along the way. In addition, because our journals will be public, we’re expecting you to respond to the reflections of your colleagues and/or to their responses to you. Know that one of the final reflection questions will ask you to speak specifically about your interactions with your colleagues and their journals have impacted your work and your thinking about that work, and to cite examples of interactions that challenged you, inspired you, or made you think differently.

***Journaling will start after class on February 7<sup>th</sup>, and we’ll provide more specific detail about the task in class that day.***

## ***February 12<sup>th</sup>/February 14<sup>th</sup>***

This week we'll have a conversation about what it means to study history and to be a historian. **Please read and be prepared to discuss Thomas Holt's "Thinking Historically" article for Monday.** As you read the article, *think about what it means to study history, and where the value comes from in so doing. Think also about the kind of inferences Holt makes about what students often think that history is. What are Holt's conclusions? What kinds of challenges and possibilities do these conclusions present us with? Please select a couple of points made in the articles that you found to be especially interesting, or problematic, or confusing, and be prepared to share those points.*

## ***February 19<sup>th</sup>***

Please prepare for our continued conversation about the work of the historian by reading **Andrews and Burke's "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?"** We'll talk in class about your reactions to the Andrews and Burke reading in general, but please come to class with ideas about how, in our work, we might be able to deepen and help our students to grasp concepts like *contingency* and *context*.

## ***February 21<sup>st</sup>***

Today we'll delve more deeply into the nature of mentoring, and we'll show you a protocol for analyzing student work and for responding to it...which questions are important to consider as we try to put ourselves into the shoes of our students? Pertaining to your mentoring work, please read the **"Advice and Suggestions for the Mentors"** piece, a compilation of mentoring strategies and collected wisdom from your predecessors.

We'll also be opening our **exhibit halls**, where we'll be examining and discussing primary source documents of a variety of types. We'll spend time in class today talking about the task at hand, and dividing up responsibilities.

## ***March 5<sup>th</sup>/March 7<sup>th</sup>***

This week we'll begin exploring some of the core questions connected with a "playful spirit of learning" and ask ourselves how we can leverage this playful spirit to help our students engage more deeply with big ideas. On Monday, we'll discuss **an interview with cognitive scientist Adele Diamond.**

In this easy-to-listen-to interview (link to the audio and to a written transcript is posted on Canvas), Dr. Diamond talks about supporting creativity in children. As you listen, think about the points that Diamond is making...what does she have to say about how we might better be able to nurture creativity in young people? Pay particular attention to her observations about the importance of creative play. What do you think about her arguments? What strikes you as particularly interesting about what she has to say, especially regarding how kids develop? Are any of the points that she makes relevant to the work that you're doing in POOT? We'll take time to talk about your impressions in class.

### ***March 12<sup>th</sup>/March 14<sup>th</sup>***

We have looked at connections between our thinking about history and the study of history, and how this connects with your approach to your mentoring, and what we're trying to support in terms of student work. This week we're going to talk more about a playful spirit of learning. For Monday, we'd like for you to have a look at a brief article that looks at improvisational acting. We'll discuss the connections you see between the ideas discussed by the noted scholar, **Tina Fey** ;-), and elements of theatricality within POOT. What connections do you see, and does what Fey talks about seem relevant to your mentoring work? We'll talk today about why you feel as you do, and where (if at all) you see connections and useful reminders in the brief excerpt we'll read from her autobiography, "**Bossypants.**"

### ***March 19<sup>th</sup>/March 21<sup>st</sup>***

Our readings for this week are about observation and about looking carefully at student work. We also hope to add complication to some central questions of our work. What does it mean to cultivate the *disposition* of observing the work of our students in a patient and non-judgmental way? How do we reconcile that stance with our sense of what it means to be a mentor, and of our responsibilities to our students, and to the simulation itself? We'll discuss these two pieces, their meaning and, of course, their relevance to your mentoring: "**Learning from Looking**" by **Steve Seidel**; "**Meditation: On Description**" by **Patricia Carini**.

### ***March 28<sup>th</sup>/March 30<sup>th</sup>***

We'll continue our conversation about close observation of work, this time looking at the question through the eyes of an art historian named **Jennifer Roberts**. Please read her "**Power of Patience**" article for Monday and come to class with your observations about the applicability of what she discusses to our mentoring work. We'll definitely be talking about what she means by deceleration, and how that idea might be relevant to our work, and we'll explore whether there are meaningful parallels between paintings and student postings.

***\*\*Readings and Assignments for our April meetings will be discussed in class\*\****

## **Evaluation**

We want you to have a sense of the criteria we use for evaluating your work in this class, so we've made an attempt to describe them here. We are aware that some of this is still rather abstract, but we want you to have a feel for the class so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not it makes sense to you...and **for** you. We will be discussing all of this in greater depth, and in fuller context, as things move along.

## **Becoming your Character and Portraying your Character**

This class is based on a simulation activity that will require you to become an actual person from the past, from the present day, or from the pages of literature. This is a challenging task, especially since we'll be asking you to spend a good deal of time researching your character for purposes of creating what we call your "Profile," and for developing an evolving sense of your character's story so that you can truly become your character. We'll be looking for evidence of your knowledge of your character's background, and of the social and historical context in which s/he lived. We'll also be looking for you to convey, both online and in class, a sense of the kind of person your character is, and what you think makes him tick. We want to encourage you, as you learn more about your character, to allow yourself to play a bit. What do you think your character sounded like? Was she a woman of the people? Would he look down his nose at others? Have some fun with it, and try your best to be true to your vision of your character in her/his time.

Our "gold standard" will be demonstrated investment in your character portrayal, as well as evidence of your creativity, conscientiousness and willingness to take some risks, whether orally in class, in your written work, or in your written postings during the simulation. This will mean that you'll be taking educated guesses as to how your character would react to questions, issues or ideas. The important thing is not to hold yourself to the unattainable standard of being "right" (how could we know?), but rather to make a thoughtful choice that you are prepared to defend, and then to put some creative energy into articulating and defending the point-of-view you've crafted for your character.

## **Supporting and Modeling Substantive Discourse**

A central aspect of your work as a mentor will be your efforts both to model and to support a deep level of engagement with the ideas that will emerge in the conversations at our trial. This will have implications for your character play, as you will be expected to be inventive in adding new ideas and twists to your portrayal of your character, and for your engagement with the students in your efforts to offer thoughtful responses to their postings. We expect that all of you will do everything that you can to avoid two hazards:

- 1) Being a "Johnny one note" (choosing one characteristic about your character to guide your character play, and not going beyond it) and
- 2) Anachronism. You're all thoughtful people and have your own ideas about the world, how we should treat one another, etc. Being "anachronistic" in your character portrayal means that you don't monitor yourself carefully to speak as your character and not as yourself. It is a challenge to keep pushing yourself to speak as your character and to ask yourself, what would s/he think, but it is vital that you continually make this effort.

## **Seminar Sessions & Course-related Work**

Perhaps the most important aspect of all is the **quality and frequency of your on-line interactions** with the students, your demonstrated engagement with doing this mentoring work, and your reflection on this work in our seminar discussions and in your written work. We will be spending a great deal of time in class talking about mentoring, sharing ideas for how to do it, and giving you opportunities to practice and think about it. We'll also have an online journaling space where we'll continue these reflective conversations.

Your mentoring work constitutes the most important aspect of the course. You'll be expected to spend **5 hours per week** doing your online work (this includes reading

student postings, responding to them, thinking about and reflecting on your mentoring work) and doing other course assignments as given. ***This will equate to at least ten substantive postings each week of the simulation.*** It is also important for you to know that, because of the nature of the project, it is often impossible to make up missed work. We expect that you will consistently participate in the online conversations, and that you will complete other course assignments in a timely fashion. ***Finally, this is a course that puts a premium on class participation: presenting material, interacting with other students, and taking the initiative in class discussions; we ask that you make your best effort to be a regular participant in our seminar conversations.***

## **Our “Banquet”**

One of the highlights of our term is the Banquet at the Alhambra, in which we visit one of our participating local schools at the end of the term, or host some of the students here at the University and, dressed as our characters, share conversations and a great feast. Our banquet will take place during one of our April class sessions, and we’ll talk more about this as the term evolves.