November 2, 2014

Dear Colleague,

This month the third Emeritus College Interdisciplinary Seminar will be completing its syllabus of readings on the topic of The University in Crisis. A dozen members are taking part, having submitted readings for the group on subjects ranging from massive open online courses (“MOOCs”), to the need for humanities education for medical students, to administrative bloat at American universities. Two previous seminars, one on The Nature of Evidence and the other on the topic of “Individual and Community,” took place in the spring of 2014.

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in (or even leading) another such seminar in the spring semester of 2015.

Whatever the topic proposed and agreed upon, the seminar will follow the format of the first three: members of the Emeritus College will sign on for a certain number of weekly seminar meetings in which they’ll engage in a sustained and wide-ranging discussion of serious issues arising from a focus on a single, mutually agreed-upon topic.

As you probably know, the seminar is modeled on the University’s Luce and Gustafson Seminars of a decade and more ago. Like them, this program also aims to bring together faculty from many different disciplines in the shared intellectual enterprise that is the lifeblood of any “college,” properly so called.

Here are some more details. I envision the spring, 2015 seminar having between six and twelve members; they will meet once a week for two hours, over a period of two to three months starting in February, the number of meetings depending on the number who sign on. Our meetings will take place in one of the conference rooms in the Luce Center.

The new seminar’s general topic will as broad in scope as the first three have been, thus amenable to widely different disciplinary approaches; this should insure that participants from many different fields will discover ways in which it proves relevant to their own disciplines. Here are some possible topics:

- Inequality
- Globalization
- Science and Religion
- Narrativity and Myth
- Reimagining America
- Recent Major Developments in my Discipline
- Luminaries in my Field, and How Their Stories Matter
- The Joys (or Compensations) of Ageing
-Favorite Poets
- The Intellectual Life in Cyberspace
- Creativity

The topic of “inequality,” to take the first example, will have obvious and immediate relevance to many different fields of inquiry, ranging from educational theory to political science, from economics to gender studies and to the law; less obviously, perhaps, it might also find expression in literature, linguistic theory, and medical practice.
The topic of “globalization” is also clearly tangent to many different areas of intellectual inquiry and professional specialization, so much so that it’s hardly necessary to provide specific examples.

For most of the topics listed here – and these are just suggestions, don’t forget – the main task will be for each participant in the seminar to bring to the topic the most salient intellectual considerations relating to it from his or her own discipline or academic specialty, these to be conveyed through books or essays assigned for all to read.

With other topics, however, the approach might be different. For the topic “The Joys (or Compensations) of Ageing,” for example, the approach would clearly be more personal: each seminar member would assign a collection of readings – essays, short stories, TED talks, and so on – that spoke trenchantly to the universal condition we all share, and the seminar-time would be taken up with discussion of the themes they raised.

The ground rules are pretty simple:

1. Each member of the seminar compiles and assigns a short list of readings (maximum of about 100 pages), usually from his or her own academic field, that are both relevant to the topic at hand and yet suitable for a general well-educated audience.

2. The convener of the seminar puts together a syllabus consisting of the readings suggested by the members – featuring one participant’s set of readings each week.

3) The readings and other materials are made available on the Emory “Blackboard” web site and thus can be read on one’s computer screen.

4) Each participant “presents” his or her readings at one meeting and then moderates the discussion that those readings provoke.

These rough guidelines are loosely based on the Luce and Gustafson Seminars; for further information, see http://cfde.emory.edu/research/gustafsonsem/index.html

Here, then, is what I would like to have from you in reply to this email (you can copy and paste the following questions into your return email to me – engjmb@emory.edu – and insert your answers after each):

If you interested in participating in the Emeritus College Seminar:

1. Which TWO of the suggested topics above (if any) would you be most interested in pursuing, in order of preference (first choice, second choice)?

2. What is your academic field or specialty?

3. Is there another topic not listed here that you would suggest as appropriate for an Emeritus College Interdisciplinary Seminar? (Please name it, and if you like, add the title and author of one or more books or other sources that you think would serve as a resource for the topic).
Thanks for taking a moment on this. I hope you will seriously consider taking part. And many thanks in advance for your response!

Yours sincerely,

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