

## Instructor Spotlight: Leah Bryant

Eleven years ago I first taught my Discover Chicago class, *Dying to Understand: Loss and Society in Chicago*. After only living in Chicago for two years, having grown up on a farm and moving here from Lincoln, Nebraska, I was still discovering Chicago when asked (more like arm-twisted) to teach in the First Year Program. The conversation went something like this:

*Department Chair:* You should teach a Discover or Explore Chicago.

*Me:* No thank you. I really haven't really left Lincoln Park, except to get sushi in Lakeview.

*Chair:* It will help with tenure and promotion.

*Me:* I'll do it! And I will learn how to ride a bus today...for the first time ever.

And to my great surprise, I LOVED it — both the bus ride and teaching Discover Chicago.

My expertise is within the field of personal relationships, but more specifically my areas of research and teaching focus on the inherent difficulties of communicating within the context of relationships. So when trying to decide on a Discover Chicago course topic, death was the obvious and strategic choice. It was related to my research and it might not get enough students enrolled, thus getting me off the hook to teach it (credit would be given for trying, right?). But it did fill, presumably with students who were goth and emo kids, which would be an interesting contrast to my mostly pink-wearing positive-Pollyanna performing self.

And yet another surprise was in store, there were all kinds of students in this Discover Death Class. All of the late-teen archetypes were represented, like in the movie, "The Breakfast Club," except with more diversity. And upon enrolling in the class, students are asked to respond to the question, "What did you give up to come to DePaul University?" Bracing myself to read essays containing narratives of tragedy and heartache, it was surprising to learn that these were thoughtful and reflective stories of a range of losses (from pets to parents, grandparents to friends, and even an earring). Every student had a story to tell.

For eight weeks, beginning with one really intense one, the teaching team takes a journey with these 22 students to discover different types of loss that Chicago has experienced in addition to the types of loss that we are likely to encounter in our lives. We begin by walking to a few famous death sites in Lincoln Park (e.g., Biograph Theatre, St. Valentine's Day Massacre). And it wouldn't be a Death Class without a trip to a cemetery, where students learn about those who helped build Chicago. A trip to the Chicago History Museum to learn about historic tragedies (e.g., Chicago Fire, Eastland Disaster, Iroquois Fire, etc.) precedes a famous death



Photo courtesy of  
Riverbend Photography

site scavenger hunt. And prior to New Student Service Day, we make dinner for, and visit with, the families at the Comer Children's Hospital Ronald McDonald House.

The traditional portion of the class may be less physically demanding, but it is more intellectually challenging. For each of the seven weeks, the class covers a range of loss experiences. The first unit explores the idea of the loss of childhood with the transition to adulthood and how the students cope with the shift in roles and demands from society and family. Another unit addresses the loss of identity and ways to manage when things do not go according to plan, inspired by the founders of Mattea's Joy Charity who talk with the class

about the loss of their daughter. Students have the opportunity to learn from religious leaders about rituals that help support those who are grieving. Students also learn about the extant research in family communication and death studies about loss and resilience.

In the beginning, this class was largely shaped by Dr. Nancy Bothne, a human rights activist, who was an influential member of the teaching team. Next, Katie Walsh demonstrated an emotional availability and compassion that made the course feel like home for all of us. And now, with the leadership of Joann Martyn, this Death Class has evolved by expanding the service component and exposing students to the creative ways that humans process loss through art and literature. The profound impact that the co-teachers/staff mentors have had on this course is immeasurable and I cannot thank all of them enough for their insight and expertise. Another team deserving of thanks is the FYP office, Doug Long, Mike Edwards, and Sarah Miller, because without them, the Chicago Quarter would not be possible. I thank them all for this class, which renews my faith in our next generation of leaders, my faith in DePaul's mission, and my faith to find the light in the dark.

—Leah Bryant  
Associate Professor  
College of Communication

### Important Dates!

Tuesday, Dec. 15	Deadline for Chicago Quarter Proposals
Monday, Feb. 1	Deadline for Focal Point Seminar Proposals
Friday, Feb. 12	Winter Quarter Faculty Chat, 10:30 a.m., Richardson Library 400



## From the Director

Congratulations to everyone for completing Autumn Quarter. For many of you, this included teaching a Chicago Quarter class. Thank you for your work with your new DePaul students and your teaching team. We had a chance to celebrate the teaching teams at a Nov. 19 reception in the Lincoln Park Student Center. Faculty, Staff Professionals, and Chicago Quarter Mentors visited, took photos in a photo booth, and enjoyed sampling a smorgasbord of Chicago neighborhood foods – Italian beef, pierogi, Chicago-style hot dogs, etc.

Chicago Quarter instructors: If you had any outstanding students who might make good Chicago Quarter Mentors (for your class or others), please nominate them using this form by Friday, January 8:

[depaul.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_3xDJ2HcLsWtOz9H](http://depaul.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3xDJ2HcLsWtOz9H)

We enjoyed meeting with the 2016 Focal Point Seminar faculty on Nov. 13 for the annual Best Practices conference. Political Science Associate Professor Molly Andolina educated and entertained us with findings on her Focal Point subject of Millennials as well as our current students, who may or may not eventually be included in “Generation Y.” Among her myth busting: today’s students are not self-absorbed and apathetic – her findings show Gen Y to instead be “seeking authenticity.” A hearty

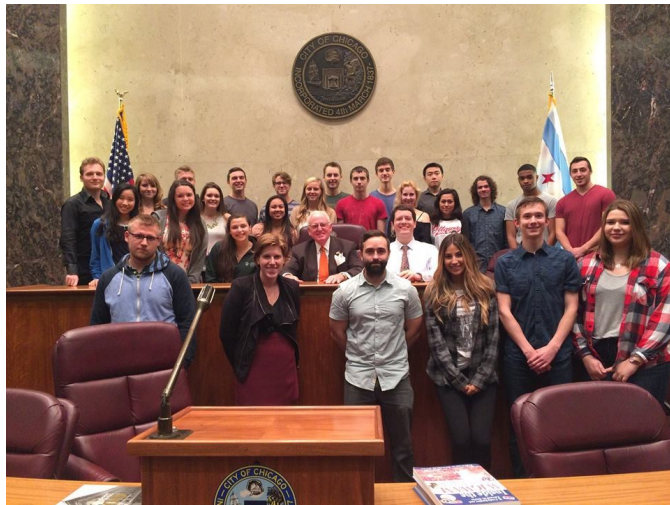


*Many Focal Point Seminar faculty attended the annual Best Practices Nov. 13 in the Lincoln Park Student Center.*

Q&A session followed. Earlier, Joyce Miller Bean, both a Chicago Quarter instructor and the new Associate Director of First-Year Writing, shared thoughts about responding to first drafts with an eye toward revision. She focused on how adjusting overall tone can help a writer convey meaning more clearly. If you would like to receive attachments for either of these presentations, please email me at [dlong@depaul.edu](mailto:dlong@depaul.edu).

On behalf of everyone in the First-Year Program, have a wonderful holiday season and some well-deserved time off.

—Doug Long



**Scenes from Explore Chicago** (clockwise from upper left):

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle visits with Nick Kachiroubas’ “Windy City Politics” class.

Zach Cook’s “Representatives/Representation in Chicago” class visits Alderman Ed Burke.

Mary Jane Duffy’s “Contemporary Art in Chicago” class visits the Hyde Park Art Center.

Margaret Lanterman’s “Sculpture in Chicago” class.