

Yale University

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Dear Alumna/Alumnus of Directed Studies:

I am pleased to invite you to participate in an important conversation about your experience in Directed Studies.

Yale's Directed Studies program, Columbia University's Core Curriculum, and the University of Chicago's Core Curriculum are ambitious, many-decades-long experiments created to ensure that students at these universities experience a deep and challenging liberal arts education. Our programs are models for similar courses at colleges and universities across the country, and even for programs for non-traditional students, such as the Clemente Course in the Humanities for people living in economic distress, and a component of the Bard College Prison Initiative.

In collaboration with the University of Chicago and Columbia University, Yale's Directed Studies Program is participating in a multi-year project to assess the impact that our programs—emphasizing core primary texts, seminar-based learning, and intensive writing—have on students. The collaboration is supported by a grant from the Teagle Foundation (<http://www.teaglefoundation.org/>).

The first stage of the assessments was a series of discussions conducted among current and former students at each of the three universities, as well as discussions conducted among DS faculty. As a DS alum, you are in a unique position to help us better understand the long-term impact of the program as we move into the eighth decade of Directed Studies.

We hope that the results of these assessments may help us highlight concrete aspects of the Directed Studies experience for the rest of Yale and beyond, and that they will help us to better articulate the short- and long-term value of our programs, particularly in ways that might not be evident until students have moved on after graduation. Ultimately, these conversations about our programs stand to contribute to a larger national discussion about higher education, the liberal arts, and the place of intensive, text-oriented programs like DS.

We plan to conduct Yale DS alumni “focus group” discussions on both Saturdays of the upcoming Yale Reunion weekends: Saturday, May 27 and Saturday, June 3, at the Whitney Humanities Center. (Directed Studies hosts a reception those days for DS alumni, from 3–4pm, and we hope you will be able to join us for the reception as well.) Discussions will last about one hour and we will have refreshments. Each group will consist of about 6–8 participants, and will be hosted by Kathleen Wise and Charles Blaich from the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College (<http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/>). No DS faculty or staff will be present at

these conversations—we genuinely want you to be able to speak your mind!

The conversation hosts will ask you to reflect on your experience in DS. They might ask the following kinds of questions, for example: “What did you learn from Directed Studies?” “How has your thinking about Directed Studies changed over time?” “Does Directed Studies influence the way you think about choices you’ve made since leaving Yale? If so, how?” Although the discussion hosts will take notes during the conversation, they will not record the conversation, they will not include your name in their notes, and all of your comments will be anonymous. If you are interested, we will distribute to participants a summary of these conversations next fall.

If you are able to join one of these, please let me know on which date you will be available. We are tentatively planning the sessions to take place between 9am-1pm and will follow up with concrete scheduling options once we hear from you.

I do hope you will be able to join with your fellow DS alums in participating in one of these discussions, and will give the program another opportunity to learn from you.

With best wishes,

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