

COLLOQUY

continuing the conversation



A Journal of the St. John's College Annapolis Graduate Institute

Volume II: Fall 2017

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Toni Lambert, AGI '20

Photo by Teresa Krone, AGI '20

Note from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up a copy of the Fall 2017 edition of *Colloquy!* Our second issue has two major themes: first, a moment of realization that speaks to the essence of the Graduate Institute. We are grateful to all the GIs present and past who submitted stories of their time in Annapolis. The second theme is a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the GI. We are honored to include the eloquent addresses of Associate Dean Emily Langston and former Director Jeffrey Comber. We also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to President Pano Kanelos and Ms. Eva Brann for sitting down with the editors of *Colloquy* and sharing their wisdom with us. Finally, we are deeply indebted to the work of the journal's founding editor, Ms. Bonnie Naradzay, whose tireless commitment and inexhaustible creative energy made this issue and all future issues possible, as well as to the GI graduate council for graciously agreeing to provide funding.

We hope that *Colloquy* accurately reflects some part of our wondrous experience in Annapolis. The strength of the journal lies in the input and submissions we receive from students and in the support and participation of the faculty and administration. We eagerly anticipate publishing our third edition during the spring 2018 semester. We will be accepting suggestions about the theme of the next edition over the winter break—please address all comments and suggestions for future issues to colloquy@sjc.edu.

Sincerely,
The Colloquy Editors

Moments of Realization

Toni Lambert (AGI '20)

School was not easy for me; I found school fun, but never easy. I loved learning new things, but from as early as I can remember, I never liked reading. I was told the speed with which I read dictated how good of a reader I was, rather than the questions and ideas I developed. This idea convinced me that I hated to read; however, I never doubted my love of learning.

When the time came, I searched for a college or university that would allow me to learn the most and grow into my adult self. What qualities in a school was I looking for? My main priorities for a school were that it would be large (more students to learn from) and be in a different part of the country, so I could find new environments and political ideas to engage with. I followed neither of those things, but with much luck ended up at a small liberal arts college not far from where I grew up.

It took less than a week for me to discover that I do in fact love to read. How so? I encountered great books for the first time. I was reading Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mark Twain, and others. It was thrilling. I wanted to read, think, and discuss this way for the rest of my life. I took my education head-on. I never took a second to breathe, I wanted to keep learning, keep gaining experiences. Every course, discussion group, research opportunity, leadership position I came across I took on.

This drive led me to St. John's. It is the GI, however, that has taught me the importance of leisure, of taking my time with a text, of resting, and attending Friday night lectures. Knowing exactly what I want to do left the idea of slowing down completely foreign to me. I so pleasantly and gratefully learned that the best way to spend my life with these great books is to do just that, spend my life with them. There is no rush.

Brandon Wasicsko (AGI '20)

I felt more relieved than accomplished when I graduated high school, but the thought of four more years of formal schooling was a storm cloud casting a shadow on my

future. All of life had been preparatory: do well in primary school to get into a good high school; do well in high school to get into a good college; do well in college to get a “good” job. Usually that’s where it stopped, that funnel we toss children into and wonder why they come out listless on the other end.

Schooling was never conceived of in a broader sense than this, and there wasn’t anything after getting the “good” job that one had to prepare for—except, perhaps, a promotion. Marriage and children just sort of happened for some, and it was equally fine if they didn’t.

Reaching the end of that fixed funnel, in nearly unrestrained freedom, I found myself asking, “What now?” Up until that point, everything had been constructed for me in a sort of system. The goal of high school, for example, was set by others: get good grades. To do so, one simply had to follow the rules of the internal logic of the system. There was no room to think about our own ends. We weren’t taught that we should want to think of such things, nor had we been equipped with tools to do so. The plethora of choice encountered on leaving that system was therefore overwhelming without a why to guide us.

Sophomore year of college, after I’d reluctantly decided to enroll in school rather than enlist in the military, I wrote that I felt I had lost something I once had. Something like a passion, a zest for life, motivation—something I couldn’t quite put my finger on, let alone figure out where it went and why. I could plot out an infinite number of paths forward—I’d always been a planner—but I had no desire to follow any of them in particular.

When I came to read the chapter on “Eros” in Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* in a study group this semester, I finally found a name, robustly considered—and perhaps even a hint at a cause!—for that something that was missing. The chapter read like a diagnosis of the modern soul and its frustrated longings, our current crisis of purpose that is widely felt yet rarely discussed. Recognizing, if only tacitly, that something is missing, we grasp at anything to fill the void: militant politics, will-o’-the-wisp fads, raves and their drugs—all of which fade, until another placebo can be substituted in.

It’s especially heartbreakingly to see the fire die out in the eyes of the young as they come to maturity, those same eyes that just years before were so bright and so wide when they got something, when something clicked. Any parent or teacher knows that spark.

I wonder if it is too late to repair the broken *eros* of my generation, one so heavily dampened by years of the wrong sorts of experiences. Even here, enrolled in a program that speaks to the best and the highest in man, there are still mornings when returning to the world of dreams appeals more to me than waking to do what I know in my mind I love, but struggle sometimes to feel. Are we too far gone?

Nevertheless, there is joy in striving, and in those rare and beautiful (if fleeting) moments of communion with the gods. And there's cause for hope: that we may constitute a new wave of teachers who, by grit and will, can nurture the souls of the next generation with the knowledge and experience we gain at St. John's, that they might regain the promise of humanity and live fully and deeply.

Julia Shiller (AGI '17)

Each of us, Graduate Institute students and alumni, has our own way of arriving, but our roads have intersected in one place—St. John's College. Were we attracted by the charm of the library, or by the curriculum that resonated in our hearts? Perhaps it was the authentic spirit that original texts can reveal to seekers. What is the hidden essence of this magical place? My moment of truth here emerges from my personal transformation and from reevaluating my fundamental views. The Graduate Institute symbolically introduces us to Meno, who is in search of defining virtue. I thought I could tackle the questions about the nature of knowledge and truth with ease. I retrieved all information from the assigned readings, including the Merriam-Webster definitions of virtue, truth and knowledge; I simply memorized them. My strategy had never failed before—the more I memorized, the better my test score. After a few more classes at the Graduate Institute, though, I realized my strategy would not work—there were no tests!

Swamped by anxiety, I shuffled files with information like a “dumb” file clerk, who was Richard Feynman's metaphor for a basic computer system. I learned that only my own reflection glided over the surface of this ocean of information. Before St. John's, I related my life to a chess game; it was composed of a multitude of possibilities that I compiled from past experiences. I would then project these experiences into the future to achieve a result in a system of established rules. I never tried to step out of the system even after my first encounter with Wittgenstein's fly that has been shown the way out of the bottle. I instantly reached for the fly-trap but never thought to recycle the bottle.

Alas, I felt threatened that the reexamination of my fundamental views could destroy

who I really was. But the collaborative atmosphere among students and tutors gave me courage to overcome my fears and to embrace this program. At first I was deaf to the abundance of opinions of my fellow graduate students, who added the richness of color to my black and white systematic world. I was thrown into a new, unfamiliar place in which creativity can comfort the anxiety of the uncertain. I learned to listen, to hear, and to unchain my cognitive thinking.

My GI experience gave me the wholesomeness of Socratic irony. Didn't Socrates warn that we easily can turn into a non-thinking but fast computing "file clerk" that pulls files from one shelf to put into another without any understanding of content? This file clerk can pull the meaning of virtue from Merriam Webster in no time; however, it might be not be the definition that Meno should look for, but the process of becoming virtuous. Could this process of becoming endow meaning to the limited time we have before us? Or would we instead choose to quickly pull someone's answers to someone's questions that were saved for us in the "dumb" clerk's file? Maybe Socrates was wrong to say he knew nothing but the unknown.

Hailey Prickett (AGI '18)

This past summer, I was having a conversation with my dear friend Mr. Bukheister at ASG (After Seminar Gathering) one night. He had been reading the *Phaedrus* in his preceptorial. We were talking about the metaphor Plato gives for the soul, of the charioteer and two horses: the dark, impulsive horse seeks its own pleasure, and the light, obedient horse seeks to please the charioteer, which is reason. Mr. Bukheister shared with me his mid-class realization: that he had a soul. He wonderfully re-enacted his internal monologue: "I was sitting there and thought, 'Oh my god, I have a soul!' Then I started looking around the table: 'He has a soul! She has a soul! I have a soul!'" It was one of those really wonderful conversations at ASG that you wished could continue forever, but alas! There will always be more things to wonder about—like the cicadas, for instance! After I returned to my dorm room that warm summer evening, I found myself unable to fall asleep. Naturally, I turned to my dear love and friend, Plato.

One thing I've decided in my relationship with Plato is not to be in a hurry. I have still so many dialogues to read and re-read, and I know they're going to be there waiting for me throughout life. It was much to my delight that I chose to turn to the *Apology* that evening. In one sitting, I devoured it—flipping the pages quickly and impulsively, unable to slow down. I was so struck by many of his thoughts that I wanted to pause

and let myself process them, but I suppose my dark horse was pulling more strongly than the white. Anyway, the true moment of realization was when I finished, noticed the tears streaming down my face, and knew (maybe felt) the soul was immortal. I was changed by the words I had read; that, for me, is what the GI is about. We can read and discuss books that are unchanged, and in turn be changed by them. That's pretty awesome, in the real sense of the word: awe-inspiring.

Staci Hill (AGI '17)

I must give credit to Euclid.

In classes other than the mathematics tutorial, it is difficult for me to see the trajectory of a conversation. How did comment X relate to comment Y, and how did we get here from the opening question?...What was the opening question? I often feel like I'm missing the rational thread. Nonetheless, I am along for the ride.

When I took the math tutorial, the meanderings of a conversation and their value became more clear. The standard question remained: How did comment Z relate to comment Y, etc. As I would begin to piece together the chain of reason, another peer would react to the seemingly irrelevant comment with a moment of realization or a clarifying question. I could see the class trying to piece together our individual understandings, trying to create one conversation.

This might sound trivial to those of you avoiding or awaiting the math tutorial. Perhaps you think the *Elements* does not lend itself to the same kind of conversational trails as a work of prose. That may be true, but the conversations are no easier; they are just as indefinite as the conversations you have had to date. But I found that conversations grounded in something I could (maybe) see also illuminated the conversation itself. What I saw is one of the greatest achievements of a St. John's conversation: communication.

It's ironic, but true, that seemingly peripheral and unrelated comments—i.e., the signs of a lack of communication—are the steps to achieving true communication. The math tutorial gave me faith in the musings of my peers and gave me the courage to sometimes utter my own. I realized this thanks to Euclid and my other friends in Ms. Langston's math tutorial the Summer of 2016.

Joey Keegin (AGI '18)

When seen from afar as a dim light on the horizon of my future, the GI seemed like a boot-camp version of a Classics program. This excited me. Trimmed of all the dull scholasticism and unnecessary proceduralism of your average university Master's program, the Graduate Institute—so I thought, or at least so I think now that I thought then—would educate us in the tradition of Western thought through a direct encounter with its most venerable and significant texts. We would start in the ancient world and crawl our way toward the present, holding seminars along the way to pool our collective brain-power and figure out what all of these smart people were saying. The sayings of the smart people being, of course, the primary focus of our education. However, though the method may be different, the end goal would be—I thought—roughly the same as other higher-level philosophy programs: figure out what Aristotle (or whoever) says about such-and-such, how Kant (or whoever) later overturns what the ancients said, learn an intellectual history of our world by memorizing the succession of ideas that has gotten us to where we are, and then pick one of the characters in the story and insist that they got it all right and nobody should have ever disagreed.

I thought these things because I came to St. John's from a rather typical academic philosophy program, and typical academic philosophy programs train people to think in these ways. Expecting the unexpected is extremely difficult. In order to survive at all in this world we have made, we must make plans. And in making plans we tend to build ourselves an image of the future that looks roughly like the present but with a few exaggerated features (maybe more people, differently-shaped cars, larger hard drives on our computers, and so forth). Developing a truly historical habit of mind that is open to completely new things and surprises is a challenge that is rarely met.

Regardless, all of these presuppositions were obliterated my first day of class. Completely oblivious about what was in store, I had signed up for a preceptorial with Mr. Zeiderman billed as an exploration of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the supposed “ancient struggle” between philosophy and poetry. I assumed my undergrad class on “pre-Socratic” philosophy had prepared me sufficiently for this exploration. I was wrong. One of my classmates—Mr. Von Kerczek—offered an opening question that utterly baffled me: “Do we think in words?” Mr. Zeiderman later suggested that our obsession with logic has nothing to do with an interest in “truth” but an interest in being right and asked us whether it was possible to find a way around the principle of non-contradiction, to find a way of thinking that sidesteps it. I was in over my head. I felt crazy, scared, excited. In my natural science seminar I read Aristotle’s concession

that nature was not provable but rather must be believed, and I felt my thinking blossom like a rare flower.

Phil Richmond (AGI '17)

In May 1974, I was doing research in grad school at the University of Maryland—and not liking it very much, either. I was meeting with my professor one morning when one of the Zoology professors in our building barged in. He interrupted our meeting to bemoan that his summer research mission to Norway had just lost a team member due to a family emergency. He was at a loss to fill the position. It was a fully funded trip to the northern reaches of Norway. I volunteered. Ten days later I found myself on a month-long camping trip in the outback of a Norwegian national park and up beyond my ankles in tundra foliage, miles from nowhere, studying certain features of the Norwegian lemming. Masses of these furry little miscreants emerge from the snow in the millions, often eating the surrounding tundra bare and generally making a howling nuisance of themselves. Only the arctic foxes appreciate them—and then, only as a food source.

In any case, our encampment of six researchers turned out to be about only four to five kilometers away from another group from England, who were there to study aspects of the tundra flora. Since we were each other's only company for miles, we sometimes trudged the distance to enjoy meals and camaraderie together at night. (Night is another relative term, since at our latitude at that time of the year, we didn't really get any—the sky just goes gray for a few hours.)

On one evening's excursion, I happened to be conversing with one of my English counterparts and we both lamented a lack of fresh reading material. I traded him my copy of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* for his well-worn and dog-eared copy of the *Odyssey*. He had received it as a bon voyage present from a fellow graduate student. The book was filled with underlines and margin notes from its original owner, which were a bit annoying to contend with at first. But as time went on, the notes became fascinating to me: I began to feel as if I was reading a "book within the book" and regularly experiencing the thoughts of the initial reader. In the inside cover of the book was an illegible name. Underneath it was the reference to Saint John's College and the number—presumably the year—1969.

I spent the next several weeks reveling in the adventures of Odysseus while trapped in my tent, surrounded by hordes of vermin. After returning to the University of

Maryland, I decided to leave the program and move to Annapolis to start a business in financial services. I did not think of St. John's until decades later when I was encouraged to sit in on an Executive Seminar session. I liked it, so I signed up for a full year's session. When we read the *Odyssey*, I remembered my first experience with the book—and rediscovered on my bookshelf the dusty copy that I had read decades before in the chilly outback of Lapland while trying to endure my weeks with the indigent rodent population, unaware of the enduring Siren song of our academic enclave and its own love of the *Odyssey*. Such was the beginning of my own odyssey to St. John's. Sometimes our experiences feel less the result of a chance epiphany and more like the relentless rotations of the wheel of fate.

Maxwell Anthony (AGI '15)

The last day of class, fall semester 2014, two friends and I wanted to reminisce about our time together. It was a chilly late afternoon. We got some drinks and went to the Octagon room of McDowell Hall—the highest point on campus. We sat up in McDowell and started talking. And at some point in our discussion the room flooded with a deep purple-red. The walls seemed to have been painted without our noticing. We got up and looked out of the windows at the horizon draped with red. We had to get going so we drew ourselves away. When we got to the quad the three of us looked up expecting to see that same red. But we couldn't see the sunset. The sky was grey and dull. We were too low.

Terry Walman (AGI '16)

It was the morning after a seminar I had attended at the Annapolis campus. I had only recently become aware that reunions at St. John's College were different than other experiences from my past. It seems old habits die hard. When Johnnies get together for something like Homecoming, we don't hang out at tailgate parties before the big game. Instead, a reading is chosen, and a time and place agreed upon. About ten of us recent grads and current GI students, together with a tutor, gathered in the Graduate Institute to share in conversation a reading from *Going to Meet the Man* by James Baldwin.

We had read a short story entitled "Sonny's Blues" about two brothers who had travelled very separate paths after growing up together in Harlem. Over the years they had enjoyed little contact with each other, ultimately becoming distant and estranged.

Each had experienced devastating loss in their lives, and their individual suffering had brought them back together as adults. It was a powerful story by an author previously unfamiliar to me, but his writing was vivid and alive, and the theme deeply captured my imagination.

So there I was the morning after seminar, reading the Sunday newspaper about the previous day's Grand Opening of the new Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. The unique architecture of the building and its many thoughtful exhibits were described in glowing detail. I was drawn into the building and the story of its conception, when suddenly what I read moved me to burst out in a combination of hearty laughter and streaming tears. In large letters spread out in an open three story stairwell of this beautiful new monument to our nation's complex past appears the quotation:

"The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do." -James Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket"

Cynthia Barry (AGI '05)

When I was considering whether or not to apply to the GI, I sat in on a class on Descartes taught by Ms. Brann. I had read the assignment, but as I entered the classroom to listen to the discussion, I had not the slightest idea of what I had read. I was feeling very glum and hopeless. But then the most amazing thing happened: In the course of that two-hour discussion, listening to the conversation as led by Ms. Brann, I began to get an inkling of what Descartes was on about. Also, there was somehow created in the room a feeling of kindness and encouragement. In that two-hour time frame, a metamorphosis occurred. I realized that people could learn—I could learn—through close reading and thoughtful conversation. Learning wasn't like a telegram: send and receive; learning was more like an adventurous expedition—moving forward, sometimes retreating, poking around, and happening upon something new and wonderful, at once intricate and expansive. I signed on for the adventure, and the quest for knowledge has been a thrill ever since. Wherever I go now, the Graduate Institute is in my backpack.

Andrew McIntire (AGI '17)

Rather than describe a single moment of realization, I'd like to characterize a series of moments of realization that I experienced in many classes. These were moments when I was pushed up against the boundary of my way of thinking. Often it was something said by a classmate—an interpretation of the text that was very different from my own—that came into friction with my patterns of thought and ideas. I discovered in exploring these moments of friction that it seemed best to remain kind to oneself and also to one's classmates. The boundaries that have limited me will remain mine unless I am generous to the texts and the author and remain open to the alternative interpretations of my classmates. The recurring challenge I face in these moments—and something it seems I constantly have to re-realize—is to remain humble yet confident in my preparation.

Bonnie Naradzay (AGI '17)

During my first semester in the GI program, I learned that Mr. Nelson and Ms. Axelrod's study group—which met around noon on Mondays, and was almost entirely made up of a pantheon of current and retired tutors—was considering all of Plutarch's *Lives*, one by one. That semester my preceptorial was on Shakespeare's Roman plays, in conjunction with the *Lives* that gave Shakespeare his material. This was my introduction to the fascinating *Lives*, and I wanted more—so I inserted myself into their weekly study group.

Being an uninitiated first semester student, I knew not the St. John's way. That is, I had always been most comfortable taking copious notes, pen in hand. During the study group, while I was bent over my notebook writing as fast as I could to preserve what everyone was saying, something caused me to glance up at those luminaries sitting around the Hodson Room seminar table. Nobody was taking notes. Nobody had a pencil in hand. What's more, with few exceptions, nobody's book was open. People had read the material enough times to know what was there. They were paying full attention to the lively conversation involving the text. Note-taking was distracting me and cutting me off from this opportunity. I put down my pen and shut the Moleskin, edging it off the table onto my lap. Thus began my journey towards being more attentive and fully present.

I've tried to take note of the ways that tutors and fellow students take notes. Increasingly, I've tried jotting notes and indecipherable codes in pencil in the margins of the texts (a reason for owning the texts, as Ms. Brann has suggested). One day, when feeling bold, I will ask certain tutors (after class) what they are doing when they write something

tiny in their tell-tale green Loebs or in the ancient, yellowing, paperback texts that they hold together with rubber bands.

One night, a year after my “Plutarch Moment,” I looked over notes I’d written during that evening’s preceptorial on the Pre-Socratics. Wanting to capture an ineffable moment in time, or perhaps to better understand the readings (or myself), I arranged those provocative comments into a poem titled “Heraclitus Mon Amour,” and chose an epigraph from Parmenides that seemed to fit.

Heraclitus Mon Amour

*“And it is all one to me where I am to begin;
for I shall return there again.”*

Parmenides, Fragment 5

Why can’t we uneat the apple or reinvent the wheel?
Forget about the fifth postulate.
Lobachevsky discovered a different way of seeing space.
There are benefits in fragments.
Should the analysis of error?
What resides within
makes the connection between Priam and Achilles possible.
Am I closer to the person or the *logos*?
My paper will address the shortcomings of this approach.
I want to keep the thread of metaphor alive –
It’s wrapped up in the thunderbolt.
Is fire a metaphor for Heraclitus or for us?
Yes. Just don’t get trapped in it.
Do I read Heraclitus differently now,
for instance what he says about reflection?
How do we bring Heraclitus to life and still remain alive ourselves?
What happens to Aristotle’s Principle of Non-Contradiction?
Courage is not just taking a risk.
It’s performing an action while knowing its inherent goodness.
Achilles is an uprooted sapling destined to die.
Write about how quoting others makes you feel safer.
Then give it up.
Hume says.... I will walk out of my study.
Can we do this?

Eva Brann: Tips on Writing

(Excerpts from the Fall 2017 Colloquy Symposium)

1. I can't resist this, though it is not to the point exactly. It's something more about how to read than how to write. How many of you have read the *Republic*? Those who have read it and those who expect to do it, do the following. The numbers in the margin are called Stephanus numbers. First calculate how many Stephanus pages the *Republic* has, then find the middle page, which you can do by a little arithmetic. Then open to the middle page. Look at where you are and marvel at how this book is written.
2. There is only one moral injunction, one might say, about writing: The way to write a paper is to sit down and write it.
3. Don't drivel. What do I mean by drivel? Freshmen will write a paper that says, "Euclid was the greatest mathematician that ever was." That's drivel. If you're inclined to write a sentence that's bombastic or too general, don't use it. Throw it out.
4. Have a colleague or friend read your paper. Let that person correct your spelling and your punctuation, as long as you do the following thing: if there is a correction which you accept, think about it. This is a great way to learn to spell and punctuate correctly.
5. Use the word "I." I used to startle students in paper conferences by saying, "Did you write this paper?" They'd look at me as if I were accusing them of something. I'd say, "It's all in the passive, there aren't any personal pronouns. You don't take charge." Use the word "I." You are writing the paper, and it engages you in the writing in a very immediate way. Your personal experience should appear. You don't have to give it in personal terms. You could fictionalize it, or you can give it as an anecdote, but there's no reason why you and what you've learned in life shouldn't appear. It seems to me a good paper will often show that our personal experience bears on what we are thinking about. One can have personal experiences that bear on Lobachevsky. I know that for a fact, and it takes imagination to discover that.
6. Here is a practical thing to do: Make an outline. Outlines are good not because you're going to use it as a constraint—you can throw your outline out before you're finished—but because it means when you get up in the morning or sit down in the evening or in the afternoon or whenever you have time to work, you know what to do next. And in writing a paper, it's very important to know what to do next.
7. Never finish writing completely. If you're working late at night, when you find that

you're one paragraph before having said all you mean to say, stop. That means when you next get to it, you know how to start. And you know how difficult starting is, even if going on isn't all that difficult.

8. When you've completed the paper, whatever the outline may have been, use its parts as subheadings. Papers with subheadings are just easier to read, and clearer for you to see whether you've written something reasonable.
9. If you can, wait for the Muse to descend and welcome it. In other words, wait eagerly for the Muse to descend—and it will come—to give you the opening sentence. Find a really good opening sentence, not: “Euclid was the greatest mathematician, but Lobachevski showed that he was wrong”—which is of course nonsense in any case, but find something that will capture the reader's attention right away.
10. Here is something I believe in, but this may not work for you. I think you should be absolutely preoccupied by the paper you're writing. Think about it wherever you happen to be. That way it gets a certain ripeness, and when you sit down you know what you're going to be doing. So it really makes sense to devote yourself to this task, on the one hand. On the other hand, don't make too much of it. This is kind of tricky, and most advice of this sort has two sides to it. One the one hand, I've just said, “really concentrate, spend the week devoted to this.” On the other hand, “don't let it overwhelm you or scare you. After all, it's only an exercise.” Find some way to combine being involved and not being overwhelmed. You could say to yourself: “I really want to do this well, but if it doesn't work out—next time.”
11. Start early. If the paper assignment was made today, start thinking about it tonight. Don't do anything at the last moment. Writing is not something you can do quickly. People think they can, but it takes time. It's got to ripen. So give it time, start right off, and be finished sometime before the thing is due, so you have it in front of you. By giving it a last reading, you make it perfect. Another way to put it: trying for perfection simply takes time.
12. And now, the most important tip: write on something you care about. It could be a problem or a question. A problem is something you can solve; a question is something you can clarify. It could be a book you love; it could be a book you hate; it could be a passage you don't understand. But whatever it is, try to find something that grips you. Don't do it in a bureaucratic sort of way. Do it with passion. And I think most of you probably know this, but passion doesn't have to be first. You can rouse it in yourself. When you've got something that interests you, you need to focus on it. And if you don't care about it after dwelling on it for awhile, chuck it out and try again. Choosing something that is of personal interest to you is the most important kind of advice one can give.

Geoffrey Comber: on the Early Years of the Annapolis Graduate Institute

First, I want to thank Emily Langston for inviting me to speak on this 40th anniversary of the Graduate Institute on this campus of St. John's College. As I'm sure you all know the GI began 50 years ago on the Santa Fe campus in the summer of 1967. Since then, a large number of you have attended the GI at one or both campuses, often against a lot of adversity—some of you against financial problems, some who've had to make major readjustments to your family schedules, and all for some gruelling reading assignments.

It is now clear to everyone that the GI is alive and thriving. But, as you might expect, it was not always so. I believe it is important for all of us to have a sense of our various kinds of histories—personal, national, ethnic, and also the history of the institutions that have formed us.

I want to tell you just two vignettes from the early formative years of the GI so you will see how far we have traveled. We started the GI on this campus in 1977 after a tough two-year struggle with some of our more conservative colleagues here who were not sure whether to undertake an exciting and radical change on this campus. As you know, change of any sort in either people or institutions is often viewed as a threat or painful or both. But after a two-year struggle, the great adventure of the GI in Annapolis was undertaken with excitement and a degree of trepidation: 17 students, four tutors, the brand new History segment, and no air conditioning during a hot, humid summer.

Well, from 17 students in 1977, we went to 35 in 1978 and to 51 the next year—but still no air conditioning. In 1979, our third year, we enrolled a student who had been living in Mexico for a while. He had several diplomas and certificates of study from several places in the U.S. and in Latin America, but no standard BS or BA degree. I noted on his application form that he was 84 years old. So I certainly didn't want to insist he take two or three more years to complete his undergraduate degree. I felt time was not an ally in this case, so we accepted him as is.

He arrived in Annapolis a day or two late, having driven from Mexico to us in five days. He mixed well with everyone here, and added a richness to his classes.

But I was told that he often looked tired, and that he dozed off in some classes. Knowing he was 84, I looked on him as elderly and needing special dispensations. I was only a youngster in my forties at that time. But after two weeks, I found out that the poor man was sleeping at night in his ancient car, because he didn't have enough money for a room on campus. Suddenly, my whole view of him changed. I saw him as resourceful and younger. He didn't seem a day over 65. So of course, we gave him a special "room" scholarship, and I'm sure he slept much better after that. Certainly, his grades were good.

My second story concerns age differences. Again, in this third year of the GI one of the students was a 16-year-old boy whom I admitted as a fully qualified student, though not as a student for the Master's degree. He and his mother made an appointment with me a few months before classes began. The boy spoke well and clearly, and he had several excellent comments from his teachers here at Annapolis High School, so I admitted him.

That same year, there was a 72-year-old man who had been a federal bureaucrat and later a successful businessman. Within two weeks, tutors and students noted with admiration that these two argued with mutual respect, each gradually seeing more value in the unique viewpoints youth and age bring to a subject. They learned and demonstrated how to cooperate and found that discussions—properly conducted—don't produce winners and losers, but only winners. The very act of discussing makes you see other points of view more sympathetically and your own more clearly.

But of equal importance is the skill you can learn here to ignore or translate the enormous difference in time between us and the authors we read, bridging hundreds and thousands of years. Whereas in most other institutes of learning, those differences would be stressed and pointed out with some arrogance, here you have learned to treat them with respect, and above all, to bring their way of looking at the world into the orbit of your experience.

I happened to meet the 16-year-old boy about eight years later in a supermarket and he remembered his GI experience with great appreciation. By then, he had a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.

Between 1979 and 1985, we offered a number of what were called Middle East Fellowships, sponsored by grants from the U.S. State Department. We acquired these largely by the help of Burch Ault, vice president of this college for several years. He helped a great deal by putting me in touch with many of his wealthy contacts (and he

had many). This took me to several countries in the Near & Middle East to recruit students. The scholarships came for one or two summers from Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and Palestine. To say their presence on campus disturbed our Western complacency is a wild understatement. But I believe both they and we found it an enriching experience—socially and academically.

So, my friends, I hope these little tales from the past and the start of the Graduate Institute have given you a glimpse of how we started, and what we regard as success. Now, 40 years old, with a regular year-round program, a smart, permanent office, and a fairly steady enrollment of students—not very young nor very old as in our formative years—the GI can look forward to a steady future. The GI aims to give a set of discerning skills which I hope we can take into the world outside St. John's College. There is still a danger of becoming insular, coming from this college. Recently, a graduate from here told me that a friend of his was critical of our students, saying, "You people only seem to be able to talk to each other." I believe that is a sad and unnecessary accusation—even though it's sometimes true. But we have the ability of saying we believe—translating what you learn here—into a language familiar to your listeners wherever they come from.

So I give you my final recommendation: Go forth, speak the language available to the company you are in, and may all the discussion you have in the future, wherever and with whomsoever you find yourself, bear the imprint of all you have learned here. Thank you.

Emily Langston: Convocation Address (Spring 2017)

Living in the In-Between

The year 2017 marks the 50th year of the GI. We'll be celebrating this anniversary at events through the year, so it seems appropriate to say something today, at the beginning of this year of celebration, about the beginnings of the institute, especially as its beginnings reveal something of the community you are about to join.

As those of you doing the mental math have figured out by now, the first GI classes were held in 1967. To be precise, the Institute came into being in the summer of 1967, on St. John's brand new campus in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Then-president Richard Weigle obtained a grant from the Carnegie Foundation offering support for five summers to found a summer graduate program in the liberal arts. The initial sketch of the curriculum was drawn up by Lawrence Berns, in consultation with many of the members of the Santa Fe faculty at the time, for a program originally called the "Teachers Institute in Liberal Education." That initial summer saw an enrollment of 33 students. It wasn't as many as the founders had hoped to attract (though it seems to me like an impressive accomplishment!). But aside from that the program was regarded by all as a great success and every student who enrolled for that first summer elected to return in subsequent summers, there was *no* attrition. To quote a report by Robert Goldwin, the Institute's first director, students were: "Like [people] too long in the desert suddenly transported to an oasis. This was just what they had always hoped for but had never really seen."

Even in that first year, there was some surprise at the variety of students to whom the program appealed. At the end of that first summer, Goldwin suggested changing the name from the "Teachers' Institute" to the "Graduate Institute," to make it clear that this education was for anyone who desired to undertake it. That first diverse group of 33 did include a number of teachers: nine from inner-city schools in Baltimore, as well as various residents of Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and places further afield. Some came straight from college, but most already had some graduate work in their backgrounds; many even had advanced degrees. Which is to say, that the first GI student body looked in many ways like the student body we have today—a substantial number of teachers, but also retirees, recent college graduates, people working in other professions, in the military, government agencies, and NGOs. They were also like current GI students

in another, more significant, way: they, like you here today, were willing to make a deliberate and unusual educational choice at a time of life when it is neither expected nor convenient.

Such a choice must arise from a real and serious desire for the activity we engage in together at the college. At its core, this activity is the same in the Graduate Institute as in the undergraduate program. We are all engaged in liberal education, in an education that we believe will render us more free. But making the choice to undertake this education—*in medias res* as it were—necessitates a different relationship with or stance toward your studies than that of the typical St. John’s undergraduate. Very few undergraduates here attend part-time, and most of them live on or very close to campus. They are able to separate themselves, not entirely but somewhat, from the world—forming a tight-knit community in what you will sometimes hear called the “Johnnie Bubble.” But members of the Graduate Institute can’t live in a bubble. (No matter how much some of us might wish to from time to time!) Whether you come in the summer or during the academic year, you have commitments—careers, families, the multitudes of obligations of adulthood—that can’t and shouldn’t simply be put aside. Of necessity you find yourself living in the in-between, engaging with these texts and this community as you remain engaged also with what is called, with greater or lesser degrees of irony, the “Real World.”

This in-between-ness puts demands on you, and in turn on the educational program. Some of the differences between the forms the program takes at the undergraduate and graduate levels—such as the ability of GI students to take a preceptorial, which is to say an “elective,” every semester—I think can be simply put down to a sense that students who are older and more experienced may be offered a modicum more choice. Other differences, though, were originally the result of rethinking the program in light of what it meant to offer a program of liberal education, that would be rigorous and true to the mission of the college, to students with unavoidable ongoing commitments.

A couple of these differences have become defining features of the Graduate Institute program today. The most significant is certainly the division of the program into segments. The founders of the GI considered this a concession—not so much to an academic culture obsessed with marking out territories of expertise, as to the fact that they needed to divide the program into coherent chunks that could be offered in eight weeks of intensive summer study to students who would have a substantial break between terms. Evidence that it is a concession is found in the very term we use for each of these chunks; we call them “segments.” The word segment comes from the Latin, *secare*, to cut; a segment is something cut off. So “Politics and Society”

for example, the segment that some of you will be taking this semester and that was offered during the first GI summer, is not considered to be a subject-area unto itself but instead something cut off from a larger, integrated whole.

The fact, again, that although we adhere to a strict order within the segments, the segments themselves may be taken in almost any order was also a concession—this time to the fact that we can't offer every segment every term, but we need to bring in new students every term, and so students need to be able to start with whatever segments are being offered. And this again has necessitated that we focus less on technical subjects such as mathematics and foreign language study where a certain amount of expertise must be developed cumulatively and in order. The majority of our students earn the Master of Arts in Liberal Arts degree without engaging in any foreign language study—and it is possible to do so without taking any mathematics. (Although I urge you not to! Many GI students, and especially those who were most hesitant to take it, find the Math and Natural Sciences segment the most freeing of all.)

What emerged from all this necessary adjustment, however, was not simply a cut-up, truncated version of the undergraduate program; rather, as my predecessor in this role Jeff Black made clear in an address entitled “Liberal Education for Adults,” it is a version of the St. John’s program with its own integrity and distinctive features. For instance, reading the books organized into segments means that certain questions arise more persistently over the course of a semester, and it is easier to trace a strand of thought or a question from an ancient to a modern thinker. The fact that both new and returning students are likely to be present in any class means that the discussion of the class remains more focused on the books in that particular segment, rather than ranging widely over a long list of books that everyone can be presumed to have read. The fact that we do less math, science, and foreign language study means that we have more time in tutorial to devote to a close reading of key texts within a segment. These differences help make a program in the liberal arts that is particularly appropriate for older students living between worlds.

Finally, though, no educational program—however well-conceived—could ensure the success of this endeavor. What sustains the community of learning in the Graduate Institute year after year, as students and faculty alike negotiate the tension between engagement in liberal education and engagement with the world? It's a pressing question not only for students of the Graduate Institute, but for all of us. For (assuming that we remain engaged in learning at all after leaving school) the space within this tension is where most of us spend our lives. I won't attempt to answer this question fully in my remaining few minutes, but I think even to begin to answer I must return to what

I was saying about you, the students of the GI, and the unusual choice that brought you here. As I said earlier, it is a choice that evidences a strong desire to undertake the project of liberal education. What can we say about such a desire? The desire to become more free through learning already requires both the self-knowledge to admit that we are less than fully free and at least the hope that we might become more free by pursuing knowledge about essential things. We admit that there is something about this undertaking of being human in the world that we don't fully grasp. But of course, realizing that there is something we don't grasp is only the first step. To know that we only have to look at Meno—rich, good-looking and well-connected, certainly engaged with his contemporary world—who, when his ignorance about virtue is exposed, responds with bluster and threats, then throws up his hands as he makes the debater's argument that it is not even worth trying to know such things. I think I can safely say that most of you, unlike Meno, at some level already believe that it *is* worthwhile to seek what we do not know. But the task is not easy. It requires that we be, in the words of Socrates to Meno, “energetic and keen on the search.” Without a continual recommitment to the search this life in-between would be impossible. We rely on this quality in you, this resolve to resist the claims of the immediate and return again and again to search with us for what we do not know; we rely on it, and I think as a community we can encourage it in one another—but as the example of Meno again makes clear we can't simply instill it where it isn't present. Socrates tells us that this belief and this search will make us “better, braver and less idle.” It is something very close to virtue; and as with virtue, it is hard to say where it comes from. Maybe, as is suggested regarding virtue in the second half of the dialogue, it is a gift from the gods.

May we for the next 50 years continue to be blessed with students so gifted.

Conversation with President Kanelos on the Graduate Institute

C: You said in a recent interview with *Historia* that the *telos* of education should be education of the soul. Given that, do you see a difference between the GI and the undergraduate program?

PK: Yes, I think there is a difference between undergraduate education and graduate education by definition. Graduate education presumes a kind of preparatory experience at the undergraduate level—it presumes that it's building upon a foundation that's been laid, but that foundation is different for every person. Many people enter the GI in the same position that they would have were they to have come here as an undergraduate—kind of new to this world, this particular approach to liberal education. So it's different than if you're, let's say, an English major and then you go on to get a Masters or a PhD in English. What that does is presume that you've done these 12 classes and now you're going to do the next set at the graduate level.

We don't make that presumption in the GI. We presume that the kind of experience that you're going to have may align with experience you've had in the past or it may be totally new to you. Liberal education is evergreen: if you've already read Plato as an undergraduate, several times over on your own, or in many different contexts, you can come to it again at the Graduate Institute and it still has all this stuff to teach you. And that's I think what allows the Graduate Institute to be appropriate for so many different people at different points in their life. You could parachute into the Graduate Institute at 22 or at 92—and that's wonderful because I don't think most graduate programs offer the same kind of riches across generations. But the point of education is the education of the soul, and as far as I know we have souls the entirety of our lives, maybe even after—but that's a different question.

C: In your inauguration speech you made a note that there's no liberal art in the singular—there are liberal *arts* in the plural. Can you say more about this?

PK: The fundamental point that I was trying to make was that human beings are so complex and the world is so complex that there is no singular body of knowledge that can stand in for the whole. If you just study biology you could learn a heck of a lot about certain things, but it could never give you access to the total meaning of human experience—it just can't. And neither can some disciplines that seem to some people

to give that access.

For example, some people feel like if you study literature you have access to lived human experience in a way that creates wisdom, but I think you still only have a partial view. I still think you need to understand the world as a biologist, a physicist, or a musician would. It's important to realize that our experience of the world is prismatic, that there are all these different angles that we can see the world through, and we need to see it through as many angles as possible. Even then we'll never have a full understanding of the human experience. But we have a human drive to understand as much as we can, and that's education for the sake of education.

The prisms we have in the undergraduate experience and the graduate experience are parallel, but there are differences. The undergraduate experience is set up as a four-year block of time where most undergraduates are essentially sealed off from the world. Each body of knowledge has a kind of throughline, most of them a four-year throughline: the study of languages, the study of sciences, mathematics, great texts. The image I would use for that is we're weaving those together over four years. A student can study Euclid and think about geometric concepts and then study Aristotle and somehow those things start to weave together. The Graduate Institute is not constructed in that way: it's constructed in sequential way. Each student goes through the GI in a different pattern depending upon how the segments move around together. It's like a kaleidoscope—you can shift the thing and get different patterns. This compels our GIs to relate to the material a little bit differently than the undergraduates. We understand that the educational experience is blended together with life itself in a different way for GIs than it is at the undergraduate level. For most GIs—even GIs who are full time and going straight through—you are living your life more in the world and of the world than you would as an undergraduate.

C: If you were to enroll in the GI, is there a particular segment you would start with?

PK: I think I would roll the dice, I really do! Because I would be afraid of my own impulses. One of the things you need to do if you're really going to educate yourself is to move outside your comfort zone. You can start with the things you're most familiar with—my background, literature, theater, the arts, philosophy, politics, that's my comfort zone—I would be drawn in that direction. On the other hand, I don't know that it would be the best thing for me to just go the opposite way and start with all the things that I'm shamefully ignorant of. I honestly think I would just roll the dice and give the fickle finger of fate a chance. And the GI is constituted in a way that that would actually makes sense. The vicissitudes of fortune—sometimes you just need to

jump in the river and let it take you. I think that kind of surrendering is really the first step in education, and that's why I'd be reticent to engineer my own experience. I'd just say, "I'm letting go, I'm giving in, I'm not going to try to control this"—at least this kind of education. You're not going to do that if you're becoming an engineer—there are certain things that you need to do in a certain sequence. But in the liberal arts, you can just let it go.

C: What ideas do you have for the future of the GI?

PK: I think the GI is in many ways the future of St. John's. Not that we would ever divest ourselves of the undergraduate program—I think our undergraduate program is *the* essential undergraduate program in the country, but we're committed at the undergraduate level to staying exactly where we are in terms of size and format. But St. John's should reach many, many more lives than it does and I think the Graduate Institute is the place that's almost infinitely expandable. When you think about the flexibility of the program, the nimbleness of the program, the fact that there are so many different people it can appeal to in so many different ways—then we have to think about how we can multiply access to the GI without losing stability.

One of the questions that I have is: How dependent is the GI upon the foundational undergraduate experience for ballast? Is part of the GI experience the fact that you come to Annapolis or Santa Fe and you're plugged into this community that is there and thriving and you are a subset of that community? I think that's important. But could we do the GI in New York, for example, separate from the campus? We're looking at some options like that now, and I think there's a lot of potential there for delivering the same academic experience with the same intellectual rigor while not necessarily being tethered to a home campus in the same way.

C: Are there more places where the undergraduates and the GIs can meet where the two groups can come together and learn from one another?

PK: My graduate experience was at the University of Chicago, and there are a lot of affinities between the two institutions: this program was largely inspired by educational movements out of the University of Chicago; quite a number of people in my graduate program were Johnnies; and quite a number of people from the University of Chicago end up teaching here—so there's a kind of interpenetration of the institutions.

Chicago is a very graduate student-heavy place. I may be wrong, but I think there are more graduate students than undergraduates at the institution—it really feels that

way. And there were a lot of classes that were simply intermingled. I would need to take a class and often I would be in a class that was mixed graduate students and undergraduates—and there was no attempt to distinguish between the two—this is what was brilliant about it—you actually sometimes didn't know who was a graduate student and who was an undergrad. And it was wonderful for the undergrads because the undergrads were really pressed. Here these are mostly PhD students in that setting who are studying things very seriously and want to talk very seriously about stuff and the undergrads were expected to keep up. And similarly, for the graduate students, the kind of freshness, the openness, the earnestness of undergraduates was really stimulating.

So I would love to see more intermingling around the table. Could we do it in a curricular fashion? Maybe. Could we—I'm going to say this and then somebody's going to hear this somewhere and then I'm going to hear about it—could we embed GIs in undergraduate seminars as a teaching assistant or something like that? Maybe that's not the right word for it here, but as a kind of participant, an assistant to the process in some way? That's something that we could at least *think* about. We would be doing it for very different reasons than most schools—most schools do that because they get cheap labor. Our motivation would just be adding another layer of complexity to the intellectual experience. I would welcome these kinds of things. My experience of having undergrads and graduates together was really, really rich. One of the things that was brilliant about it was it just broke what's really an artificial mold, and this goes back to the original question—what's the purpose of education? If the purpose of education is to do this thing called “an undergraduate degree” and then some people go on and do a PhD for a different purpose—the instrumentalized vision in each of those cases, that you get this credential to go on and do X, is kind of broken down when you have many people together doing it for very different reasons.

C: What were the things that you were looking for in your education?

PK: I was raised by wolves [laughs] so I didn't have much direction when it came to undergraduate education. That's a very ungenerous way to put my upbringing—but what I meant was my parents were immigrants and not educated people, and not wolfish anyways, but had no experience with education themselves. I was the oldest in the family and I knew I needed to do this thing called “college,” but I really didn't know what that meant or how to discern the best possible path other than things people would say to me in arbitrary fashion about what a good college was or where you should go. I stumbled into my undergraduate education. I went to Northwestern, and in hindsight, I don't think I had a particularly fantastic education there. I think it

was mixed, even though it was a very so-called “prestigious” school. It taught me that prestige and quality of education don’t always match up.

When I got to graduate school, at that point I was a little more attuned to what I was looking for. My first graduate experience was at Boston University. I entered a program called the University Professors Program, which was an interdisciplinary graduate program. It is not around anymore; they pulled the plug on it a couple years ago. But it was the kind of program where the faculty were from a broad range of fields, but tended to be really high profile. The idea at BU was to get the Mount Rushmore effect: get really big important people in the world and put them into a graduate program and see what happens. And that really appealed to me, but I had had a relatively rigid and narrow undergraduate experience: pick a major, stick with it, pick a couple electives. So when I went to graduate school I wanted to be more free-ranging. St. John’s was not on my radar for graduate school—I had not heard of it at that point. But I thought [BU] was really great, I could take classes and study with these wonderful people, and I could read literature, and do philosophy and aesthetics, and all these sorts of things.

It was fantastic, I loved every minute of it, probably for the same reasons you all love what you’re doing. It felt like an intellectual adventure. It was a PhD program, but towards the end of my first year there, I had lunch with Saul Bellow, and he and I were chatting about what I was doing. I said I was getting ready to write my Master’s thesis on Hobbes, and he said: “Why are you here? You should be at the University of Chicago in the Committee on Social Thought,” where he had spent most of his career teaching. To be frank, I had never dreamed I could get into the University of Chicago for a PhD—that seemed beyond my capacity—but he was persuasive. He made a phone call to the University of Chicago and said, “you should take a look at this kid.” I finished up my MA thesis at BU and then went on to the Committee on Social Thought for the PhD program.

What I found there was something like that University Professors experience; the Committee of Social Thought is another interdisciplinary graduate program populated with high-powered faculty. You can take it in many different directions. I had been leaning towards the study of political philosophy, which is why I had written on Hobbes. In my heart of hearts, I was really most interested in language, aesthetics, and literature. Luckily, I landed in a program that let me move in any direction I wanted. I ended up focusing on Shakespeare, writing my dissertation on Shakespeare, and then going on to teach in English and theatre departments.

There has been a lot of dice-rolling in my life where I think, “There is an appeal here—I

don't know where it is going to go or how it is going to end, but I feel drawn to this kind of intellectual adventure, to this particular kind of experience." So I jump in the stream and see what happens.

C: Is there a reason why so many tutors come from the Committee on Social Thought?

PK: I think philosophically, the programs are in line with each other. In many ways the Committee on Social thought is the PhD version of the St. John's program. It's not structured in the same way, but the spirit of it is. You have to read broadly and synthesize. I'll give you an example. The typical PhD program has you take exams before you go on to write your dissertation. Let's say you're doing your PhD in English—you would pick three areas of knowledge. So you'd say: "I'm going to do restoration literature, early modern drama, and philosophy of language." Then you would create a reading list of 50 important secondary works in all of these fields. So you'd read and read and read and master the scholarly work on this, and then have an oral examination. When the committee was convinced that you had mastered the scholarly apparatus, then you would be permitted to write a dissertation.

At the Committee on Social Thought, the exams are radically different. They're called the Fundamentals exams. There are three broad areas: imaginative literature, philosophy and theology, and social sciences. You have to pick four primary texts for each of those categories, and they have to be divided so that there is at least one ancient and one modern text in each category. Then your job is to study these primary texts as deeply as possible. And you have to take your list around to each member of the faculty, not just members on a small committee. They would talk to you about it; they'd say: "Why *Genealogy of Morals*? What do you want to do with it? What's this about?" Once the entire faculty had signed off on it, then you prepared for your exams. They would give you a sealed envelope with three questions that had been composed for you based upon your reading list. You would take it home and have five days to write on two of the questions. You on average produce 50 to 100 pages of writing in those five days. It was all primary-text-focused and the idea was that you had to read from Plato to Nietzsche and beyond. So you can see how that is very Johnnie. It's radically different than the way any other graduate program is structured. The Committee on Social Thought fosters an ability to see across boundaries, to accept different ways of knowing, to be broad rather than narrow.

C: Which 12 books did you choose?

PK: In literature it was Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Hamlet*, *Brothers Karamazov*, and

Gulliver's Travels. In philosophy and theology, it was Cicero's *De Officiis*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. In social sciences, it was Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, and Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*. I mean, come on: look at that list! It's amazing to be able to study that way at the graduate level.

C: The story goes that when you first got to college for your undergrad, someone asked you what your major was—and you responded, “What? What the heck is that?” Many of us in the GI immediately thought, “This is the guy for the job.” So many of us immediately recognized you as a Johnnie.

PK: That is another reason why I am evangelical about the GI. Because people who learn to learn this way—whether they are directly involved in education or not—become advocates for this form of education and the value of a real liberal arts education. Part of the reason there is a crisis in the liberal arts is because there are very few schools that actually are liberal arts schools—even though they call themselves that. So people say that some squishy school somewhere is a “liberal arts” college, but it doesn’t really look any different from a non-liberal arts college. Maybe it’s a little bit smaller, maybe they don’t have a graduate school—but in terms of the core education, there isn’t much of a difference between going to a “liberal arts college” like Williams and going to the University of Michigan other than football teams and size. Both are great schools—but in terms of the experience, they are not very different from each other.

St. John’s has not lost the sense of what liberal arts should be. In fact, St. John’s represents that in its purest form, and that’s why I want as many people as possible to have this sort of experience. I want there to be 1,000 people sitting around this table. So how do we do that? We have to be careful—we don’t want to lose the essence of St. John’s.

C: So many GIs say they only heard about St. John’s by word of mouth. What kinds of outreach initiatives do you have in mind for the Graduate Institute?

PK: Part of the outreach we’re working on is through established schools like Great Hearts. I think that many of the people we encounter in our undergraduate outreach—through classical and homeschool initiatives—are potentially GIs. You talk to someone who’s been working in this area and they say, “Well gosh, that’d be great to go and study there as a graduate student.” And I tell them, “Well, you can!” But I think we do need to be more intentional about this. We have a lot of irons in the fire right now, and they’re all really exciting.

C: We are all thrilled to have someone with a clear vision of what liberal education means.

PK: I still pinch myself every day. I mean really? I get to be president of St. John's? This is crazy talk. It is just a joy to be somewhere where your values and aspirations align exactly with the institution. I have been a part of other colleges and universities and I have had a really nice career with wonderful people and great students, but things have always felt a little off-kilter to me. I was always trying to make every place a little more like St. John's. Talk to my colleagues back at Valparaiso where I was a dean. It was a Great-Books-based honors program, but it didn't have nearly the same kind of focus or commitment to liberal education. One of the very first things I did at that honors college was meet with Chris Nelson. I had never been on campus before, but I happened to be in the area and thought, "Okay, I am going to St. John's. I am going to call up this Chris Nelson guy. He seems like he's an advocate of liberal education at St. John's. I want to get a tour of the school, I want to sit in on classes, I want to speak with the president." I did all those things—Chris and I spoke about liberal education, and my intention in doing that was to be able to learn more about the way this place operated so I could bring those things back to my institution. I had no idea that the guy I was having lunch with at Harry Brown's—that four years later I would be taking his desk. I didn't even dream of that.

C: So, as a final question: do you have a piece of advice you'd give to a student in the Graduate Institute?

PK: I would say: immerse yourself as deeply as possible into the experience. Don't do it part-time, half-hearted. I understand students in the graduate program have lives that must go on—but immerse yourself as much as you possibly can in the text, the discussion, and most importantly into a kind of shared intellectual life with your peers. As I'm sure you guys know, it's a privilege to take a slice of your life, read things with others, read things in common, and talk about them. These are sacred moments in one's life. They're especially sacred at the graduate level. You don't have much of a choice K through 12; you're going to march along, that's expected of you. An undergraduate experience is kind of a rite of passage—but what you are doing now is *elective*. You've selected to carve this space in your life, and remembering that this is primarily for *you*... You might have some kind of practical reason in mind, maybe you're a teacher and you want to take some of this back, maybe you want to go on to a PhD, and that's fine. But this shouldn't be an instrumental experience. This should be an experience where you feel the muscles of your soul contracting and expanding as you're going through this. And the only way to do it is to do it with all your heart.

Staci Hill: Toast to the Tutors

(Dean's Reception, Summer 2017)

The instructions for this toast were just as open-ended as all assignments at St. John's. I am tasked with articulating what the program, classes, and tutors mean to us as graduating students. And like all assignments at St. John's, what follows will not convey all that the question merits.

In leaving such a strong community and stepping toward something new, we should ask what this education brings to what is next. I'm in the unique position of having spent my last semester as a student mostly away from the college. And as a result, I've already spent some time reflecting on what the GI has given me.

I think there are many answers to this question, but my answer begins with habits. Many of you might have already had the weekly or daily habit of reading books. That is a habit of action—and it is important. But what I have in mind is more of a habit of temperament.

The program calls for us to think a lot about the most important things. Class is where we examine those thoughts and where we have the discussions that help those thoughts remain with us. It is between the program and classes that we've been asked to develop a most important habit: the habit of listening both to the authors we read and our peers in class. By listening, I do not mean just leaving the space for others to speak, but the kind of listening that is demanding of the mind. The kind of listening that makes another's thoughts consume your own head space.

When we step off campus, we will all encounter people who have not been exposed to these books and who do not think much about what we may call the most important things. It will be easy to dismiss them. But St. John's has showed me that listening intently reveals the value in whoever is speaking. Every individual has a soul and reason and experiences that speak to what we're here for. Therefore, cultivating this habit of listening, so that we may carry it forward, is one of the most important gifts of the Graduate Institute.

The tutors are models of worthy habits, but especially the habit of listening. The tutors have the difficult and significant job of doing this kind of listening every class. They have chosen to commit themselves to this habit. And they do so with the seriousness and focus required. Their listening, on the rare occasion that it does not make us feel understood, at the very least makes us feel valued and heard. This listening is an essential ingredient to a life of inquiry.

Let us continue forward by emulating the tutors' habit of listening—

TO
THE
TUTORS!

“I grew up in the back of Greek diners; my parents worked in the restaurant. I’d go to school, and home was this place where you slept. But during the day I’d spend time in the back of the restaurant because that was where my family was. We moved from Chicago to Phoenix, Arizona when I was eight. My dad bought a restaurant in Phoenix and moved us out there. It was attached to this hotel—a kind of seedy place, to be honest with you—in the run-down, old hotel strip in town. There was a coffee shop/diner there and a hotel. It was like a David Lynch movie. The people who owned the hotel had a son named Frankie, who was my age. Frankie and I would spend our time drawing and coloring on restaurant placemats. I have such a vivid memory of these paper placemats: that was where we’d draw spaceships, play games. Here I am with this kid, in the back of a restaurant, and every once in a while one of the short order cooks would show up and give us a plate of French fries...such an unconventional existence! That sort of thing does not prepare you for a top 20 college. In fact, I never visited a college before I went.”

President Pano Kanelos