Place out of Time Mentor Seminar—Winter 2012
Mondays 9-12, 2310 School of Education

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CTools Site: “Place out of Time 2012”

Overview
This seminar revolves around Place Out Of Time (POOT), a web-based character-playing simulation involving college, high school, and middle school students. You will have a dual role in the simulation: you will play a character yourself, and you will also act as a project leader and mentor to the younger participants.

The core of the simulation is anchored in the years 711 through 1492 and the cultures in and around what was known as Muslim Spain, or “al-andalus.” However, the simulation draws from all periods of history and all world cultures. The simulation revolves around a trial -- different each time the simulation is run -- based on events and people from history. While the details are ever-changing, timeless and universal themes, such as "identity," "freedom," and "security," are the backdrop for POOT.

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

**January/Early February Schedule**

**January 9th**
Today we’ll look at the “big picture(s),” exploring some initial background for our trial as well as talking about your mentoring work and about Place out of Time itself. By tomorrow night, you will receive an e-mail from us telling you which character you will portray in the simulation, allowing you to begin work on creating your resume (see January 16th).

**Our Case:**

*Muhammad Kadhim is a man in his early thirties who lives in Stockholm, Sweden, where he has built a successful career as an architect, specializing in renovation and restoration. A native of Stockholm and a Swedish citizen, he is the son of Shiite Iraqis who fled Iraq in the late 1960’s. Although Mr. Kadhim has some personal attachment to what he calls “Muslim Culture,” he is not a practicing Muslim and lives the secular lifestyle of the majority of Swedes of his generation.*

*Mr. Kadhim won a bid to renovate an old clothing store into a small mosque for the Muslim community near the business/shopping district of downtown Stockholm. The project was going according to schedule until the day of a suicide bombing by a Swedish Muslim that caused considerable damage but no known casualties. Overnight, Mr. Kadhim’s project was in the public spotlight, with many voices among members of parliament and citizens at large saying that building a mosque would “send the wrong message” and show insensitivity to the many people who narrowly escaped with their lives. In the midst of very passionate debate, pro and con, an injunction has been brought against the building of the mosque.*

“This is an injustice!” Mr. Kadhim has said. “I have renovated four churches (and received an award for one of my projects) and I even designed a synagogue! I doubt I personally will ever attend the mosque, but I think anyone should have the right to build such a structure if it otherwise conforms with zoning laws.”

*Muhammad Kadhim is asking the Court of All Time to render a judgment in favor of his right to continue with the construction of the mosque.*

**January 16th—No Class**

*Due on January 16th:*
Resume due today on CTools (see “THE RESUME” below for more details). We will offer you feedback on your resume draft by January 23rd.

The Resume
As part of this written “resume” (a 1-2 page essay, written in the first person, and in a narrative, informal style), please tell everyone something about your background and about the kind of person you are, your passions, your limitations, etc. You might think of this as one part biography, one part personal ad—you’re telling your story and doing it in a way that you think reflects you. What makes you interesting, what makes you stand out from the crowd? One of the challenges of this activity is to try and represent your character, as much as possible, from your characters’ own perspective. Sometimes your character will have done things you don't agree with, or that we might question from our present-day perspective. While we encourage you to think about such issues, we ask you to do so primarily so that you can present your character’s thoughts and motivations in as genuine and as unapologetic a manner as you can. Some of you might want to speak to where your critics were misguided, and how they failed to understand your true motivations. Be your character, and allow yourself some dramatic license. Please do not give us a simple recitation of the significant events in your character’s life—the purpose of this task is not to recreate an encyclopedia entry.

Sample Resume Excerpts
We’ve attached excerpts from a couple of sample resumes for you to look over. They are done in somewhat different styles, but both are well done and are nice illustrations of quality work. We give them to you as illustrations, though, not as blueprints—we share them because they each have a great “feel.” Please make this endeavor your own, and allow yourself to develop a tone that feels like your character and that hopefully also allows you to have fun as well as being informative. Thanks to Adam Hellebuyck and Jon D'Angelo for allowing us to share their work with you.

Resume Excerpt: Sultan Mehmet II
I am Mehmet II Fatih, the Conqueror, sole ruler of the grand Ottoman state, Emperor of the Romans, ordained by God and my own will to lead my janissaries across Europe and Asia. When I was twenty-one years old, I conquered a city that no one else thought could be conquered. I succeeded even though my older advisors schemed against me, my army did not respect me, and other armies opposed me. I proved them all wrong by capturing Constantinople, winning the respect of my people and my army, the fear of my enemies, and a strong place in history.

Many across the world know me for my military achievements, which are unparalleled in the world. I conquered the impregnable Queen of Cities, Constantinople, defeating the treacherous Greeks and the arrogant Italians on land and at sea. I brought the incompetent emirs of Anatolia under my judicious control, invaded the Italian peninsula at Otranto, and conquered the Christian Empire of Trebizond. The Greeks spew vehemence and hatred in their writings
about me, calling me a tyrant that cares for no one, only wishing to enhance my own glory and secure my place in history. How can this be true? I merely followed the writings of a hadith, which says: "Verily you shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful leader will her leader be, and what a wonderful army will that army be!" I am the leader of prophecy, as my actions clearly have shown.

The Greeks are hypocrites and liars. Their empire oppressed those residents not of the Christian faith, only tolerating Muslims in their cities because my father Murad II forced them to. In contrast, I treated the residents of my new capital generously following its capture. Constantinople, ruined from years of neglect, was to become a grand city again under my rule. I prevented my troops from sacking the city and slaughtering its population, ending the traditional three days of pillage allowed to my troops in cities that resisted my rule after only a few hours. I repopulated the city, bringing many suffering Christians, Jews, and Muslims to live together in peace in my grand capital. While these non-Muslims had to pay a fee for my tolerance, it was better than the alternative….

**Resume Excerpt: Odysseus**

I am Odysseus, Greek king of Ithaca. You Romans out there may know me by a different name, Ulysses, but that doesn’t change who I am. My existence is immortalized in Homer’s epic poems during the 8th century BCE. Yet, they are older than that; they are the stories passed down orally for many eras before Homer. These stories are the Iliad and the Odyssey. The first is the story of the final year of the 10 year Trojan war in which I am warrior, leader, cunning strategist, and friend of God-like Achilles. However, the Iliad is but a prelude to the Odyssey, my own story, which chronicles my long and plagued journey home after the war. Mine are the stories of the Greek culture. Some call me a myth. Some call me a hero. “I am Odysseus son of Laertes, known before all men for the study of crafty designs, and my fame goes up to the heavens.”

Few know a great deal about my own background, and I find no need to go into a great extent about it. Thus, we shall simply begin my story with the beginning of the Iliad. I was at peace, ruler of my small country, husband of Penelope, and father of Telemachus. My life though, was disrupted as Menelaus, another Greek King. The Prince of Troy, Paris, stole this man’s wife, Helen, said to be the most beautiful in the world. Thus, Menelaus called the other Kings of Greece together to bring their armies and attack Troy.

I did not want to go. No, it was not the fear of battle, for I am a warrior. But there were unspoken circumstances. You see, the Oracle had prophesized that I would have a long and troublesome journey home after this war. I did not want that. I feigned madness to avoid the war, to stay at home with my country and my family. My plan was foiled though – but for good reason. I acted foolish, plowing my fields with salt so they would never grow again. However, Menelaus’s brother placed my young son in front of the plow; I could only swiftly lead the plow away causing much destruction, but proving me sound of mine. So the story is told, so I was forced to go to war. Before I picked up my spear though, I had to use my
other resource: my words. It was I who convinced, (or tricked some say,) the
great warrior Achilles to come to war with us. It was also I who nearly convinced
the Trojan courts to hand Paris back, but unfortunately no such deal was reached.
So be it....

It was these adventures, my battles, and my words, that lead me to be known as
the man I am. I speak with the Gods and hold the friendship of Athena, but face
the wrath of Poseidon. My wisdom is said to be only behind that of Zeus and
Athena. I am Odysseus the Cunning.

January 23rd
We’ll do some “hands-on” preparation for our mentoring work. We’ll talk in
greater detail about the case, focusing on the three articles that you’ve read, and
we’ll also talk about the resume. You’ll each be introducing your character to the
class, and we’ll be explaining/assigning the “Letter to a Student” assignment, due
on January 30th, as well as the resume revision, also due by January 30th, along
with your first weekly log (which this week will be about the resume revision—
details of how to post your log will be presented in class) that is due by Friday,
January 27th.

Due on January 23rd:
#1: Introduce your character in class
We’d like you to speak in the first person, and we hope that you’ll present yourself
in such a way that your colleagues will get a sense of the kind of person you are.
The way that we would like for you to introduce yourself is by doing the
following:

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

2) Choose three words to describe the kind of person you are.

3) Interview with my character
As you answer these questions (in character, of course) please feel encouraged to
respond in a way that, in accordance with your evolving sense of your character’s
personality and manner, reflects the kind of person you feel that they are, their
personal style, and their way of engaging with others:

1) Tell us a story from your life that you feel really helped to shape who you are.

2) Tell us about a flaw in your personality OR about a characteristic that some
*considered* to be a flaw.

3) Something that I really hate in other people is ____________ and here's why
I feel that way _______________
# 2 Background Articles
Please read and be prepared to discuss in class the three articles posted on CTools (Resources—Readings for January 23rd) about the 2010 bombing in Stockholm, the aftermath, and the broader context. We’ll be talking about the historical and the societal context in which this bombing took place.

January 30th
Today we’ll discuss the resume revisions that each of you did, and you will meet in small groups to workshop one another’s resumes. We’ll also discuss the decisions you made about the student resumes, and we’ll orient you to the website so that you can post your revised resume by Wednesday, February 1st and carry out other preparatory tasks. Finally, we’ll talk about the assignments that will be due over the next two weeks, including the essay about the Adele Diamond interview (see below).

Due on January 27th
#1: Mentor Log—First Log
Starting this week, and every week during the simulation, you’ll be writing a weekly log between class sessions, in which we’ll be asking you to share aspects of your mentoring experiences that week, along with your reflections on those experiences. This week, your log will describe the process you went through as you decided how (and why) to revise your resume.

Due on January 30th
#1: Letter to a student. You will be reviewing a set of draft resumes prepared by three high school students, and writing them each an individual letter (details to be presented in class on January 23rd) in which you offer your advice about which character you think they should portray, and why. Letters to be posted to CTools by classtime on January 30th.

#2 Bring four paper copies of your Revised Resume to class. We will be working in small groups to workshop one another’s resumes in preparation for the posting of the resumes on the POOT simulation website by Wednesday, February 1st.

Due Friday, February 3rd:
Welcome messages to POOT Buddies—posted on the POOT website by February 3rd. Details in class on January 30th.

February 7th—No Class
Michael and Jeff are away at a conference today so class won’t meet. This week, however, we will ask you to screen a video conversation with POOT teachers (available on our CTools site through ITunes U) and write a log entry about it and to read the two history articles (“Thinking Historically,” and “History as Food for Thought” and write a short essay about them that is due today.
Due February 7th on CTools:
Why study history? Essay
As you read the “Thinking Historically” article and the “History as Food for Thought” readings (posted on CTools in the “Readings for February 7th” folder), we would like for you to recall our discussion on the first day, and to continue thinking about what it means to study history, and where the value comes from in so doing. Please write a short essay responding to the following two questions about the respective articles:

• Choose one quote from the “History as Food for Thought” reading that you found to be particularly interesting or provocative (agree or disagree). Write a page in which you talk about why you felt as you did.

• Regarding “Thinking Historically”, choose a point that Holt makes that you feel is insightful and important and write a page describing the point and why you feel it is significant.

Due Friday, February 11th:
Mentor Log—Second Log
Mentor Log #2 due on the video interview with POOT Facilitators. You might respond to questions like...what did you learn about how POOT works in the classroom, or how individual students connect with the project? What questions arose for you? What thoughts do you have about things you might try to do as a mentor based on the insights you gleaned from watching the interview?

February 14th
Discuss the “Thinking Historically” and the “History as Food for Thought” readings and your essays about these articles. Discuss video interviews with POOT facilitators and your log postings. POOT website orientation continues and a closer look at being a POOT Mentor (POOT simulation begins today).

“History as Food for Thought” & “Thinking Historically” readings
A key dimension of our learning opportunity within POOT has to do with questions of how and why we study history (What “history lessons,” in your opinion, are worth giving? What is their value? How do we engage well with these lessons?) We’ll be talking throughout the term about how your experience as a mentor and as a student in this class impacts your thinking about these questions, and how that thinking will inform your mentoring work. For today, we’d like for you to read the thoughts of several historians regarding these questions, and to be prepared to discuss your impressions in class.

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

**Evaluation**

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

**Becoming your Character and Portraying your Character**

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

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

**Supporting and Modeling Substantive Discourse**

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

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

Seminar Sessions & Course-related Work
Perhaps the most important aspect of all is the quality and frequency of your on-line interactions with the students, your demonstrated engagement with doing this mentoring work, and your reflection on this work in our seminar discussions and in your written work. We will be spending a great deal of time in class talking about mentoring, sharing ideas for how to do it, and giving you opportunities to practice and think about it. Your mentoring work constitutes the most important aspect of the course. You'll be expected to spend 5 hours per week doing your online work (this includes reading student postings, responding to them, thinking about and reflecting on your mentoring work) and doing other course assignments as given. This will equate to at least five substantive postings each week of the simulation. It is also important for you to know that, because of the nature of the project, it is often impossible to make up missed work. We expect that you will consistently participate in the online conversations, and that you will complete other course assignments in a timely fashion. Finally, this is a course that puts a premium on class participation: presenting material, interacting with other students, and taking the initiative in class discussions; we ask that you make your best effort to be a regular participant in our seminar conversations.