

THE CLEMENTE  
COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES®

**Women Veteran Initiative**

HOSTED BY



**VETERANSFIRST**  
*Limited*

**Women Veteran Initiative Goal**

Create a *“Bridge to Achievement”* by strengthening the habits of reflection and critical thinking of our Women Veterans so they are better able to manage the direction of their lives, engage effectively in society and in actions to empower themselves and strive to improve our Nation and communities through civic engagement.

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COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES®

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

### **Values, Mission and Goals**

Values: Clemente is based on the conviction that by studying the humanities, individuals who have been denied access to economic, cultural and social opportunities develop the critical, reflective, and creative skills that empower them to work effectively toward improving their own lives and those of their families and communities.

### **Mission**

Clemente provides free, accredited college courses in the humanities to those marginalized by economic hardship and adverse circumstances. Using the Socratic method, the Clemente Course provides a rigorous education in literature, philosophy, American history, art history, and critical thinking and writing. The experience of Clemente students around the world has demonstrated that through the dialectics of learning, in a caring and respectful classroom, participants develop crucial tools to set in motion personal and societal change, and are empowered to participate more fully in civic life.

### **Goals**

- Access: To remove significant obstacles that impede access to higher education by providing tuition, books, childcare and transportation at no cost to qualified students;
- Higher Education: To create a bridge to higher education by developing the skills, confidence and motivation necessary to succeed in that context;
- Civic Engagement: To strengthen habits of reflection and critical thinking so that students are better able to control the direction of their lives and engage effectively in action to improve their communities;

- Partnerships: To sustain courses at the local level by fostering partnerships with colleges and community organizations and developing collaborative resources to deliver the Clemente program to qualified individuals.

## **THE CLEMENTE COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES ® (CLEMENTE/CCH)**

Provides free, accredited college Courses in the humanities to those marginalized by economic hardship and adverse circumstances. Students are guided by highly experienced college faculty who, using the Socratic method, provide a rigorous education in literature, philosophy, American history, art history, and critical thinking and writing. Class discussions and readings increase students' skills in critical thinking, writing, communication, time management, teamwork, and self advocacy. There are currently 25 Clemente Courses in the US, and at a minimum, each Course enrolls 20-25 students per year for a one semester Course. Fifteen of the current Courses are accredited by Bard College, and ten receive credit from local colleges and universities.

**Our Vision:** Clemente is founded on the premise that liberal education is education to make people free, and it proceeds on the conviction that reflection in the humanities can liberate adults living in poverty and other marginalizing conditions to more actively shape their own lives and those of their families and communities. We believe that through engagement with and appeal to the humanities, individuals can achieve a new understanding of themselves, the world, and the fundamental values of goodness and justice. The experience of Clemente students around the world has demonstrated that through the dialectics of learning, in a caring and respectful classroom, participants develop crucial tools to set in motion personal and societal change, and are empowered to participate more fully in civic life. As one of our Course directors recently wrote about Clemente's aims for our students:

"... it is not just a changed way of thinking but a changed way of seeing the world, and therefore a changed world. It is a world seen in new depth, with a different order, a different logic, and different demands. It is about being able to construe personal experience as part of a whole that comprehends it, a whole that is shaped by enduring human concerns and within which personal experience has more than personal meaning. As long as one's sense of reality is sunk in personal experience, one can do no more than to share feelings with others, which might mitigate a certain kind of loneliness through

commiseration, but it does not provide a context for a wider view, a way to link up one's own experience with a wider world and the possibility of collaboration and transformation." (E-mail from Amy Thomas Elder, February 2015)

**Tuition** There is no tuition for qualified students. Books and all Course materials are provided, and the college credits offered through a partnership – primarily with Bard College, but also with other colleges and universities – are readily transferable to other institutions. In addition to free tuition and books, access to childcare and transportation is provided without charge. Courses meet two evenings a week for 6-8 months depending upon the length of the class meetings. There are no tests or grades. Students are granted college credit based on attendance, classroom engagement, and their satisfactory completion of written assignments. (Generally there are two papers and one revision assigned in each discipline.) Six to twelve credits are granted, depending upon whether the college granting the credits works on a semester or quarter system.

A Clemente Course is very similar to a freshman humanities seminar at a first rate college and shares many of the best practices associated with them: it offers academic credit and rigorous academic content, paid faculty are involved in all stages of program design, there is regular evaluation, and instructors use active learning strategies. Each class assignment is designed to give the students plenty of opportunity to read, write, reflect and discuss the ideas that evolve from investigating the texts. Our mantra is "engagement, not mastery."

**College Credit:** The majority of students who enroll are attracted to the free college credit, and those who earn it often express an immense sense of validation for achieving something they never thought they could do: succeed in a college setting. The credit underscores for them that they are doing work that is valued and important, and that they are being taken seriously as students, which is something many have never experience before. However, in every class, there are inevitably students who are unable to achieve the level of proficiency needed to earn credit, but who finish the Course anyway. Just as their credit granting peers do, they describe a deep sense of accomplishment simply by having finished something they have started – something that they have chosen *for themselves* – and from the profound experience of engaging intellectually at such a high level with their peers and teachers.

**Student Outcomes:** Student narratives, periodical surveys and interviews gathered by individual Courses, and anecdotal evidence support the following key outcomes from participating in Clemente. (Currently, we are at the end of a two year process to evaluate these outcomes nationally.

- Students become more engaged in their communities as volunteers.
- Students register to vote, often for the first time.
- Students seek continuing education for themselves.
- Students express a heightened sense of self-confidence and self advocacy.
- Students become more engaged in their children's education.
- Students express a new-found (or renewed) love of learning.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFFING STRUCTURE:**

**Host Organization:** Each independent Clemente Course is sponsored by a community "host" organization **Veterans First** will host in Phoenix. The host must have strong ties to the targeted population, community partners and network. These community partners may be colleges and universities, community and private foundations, service organizations and clubs, businesses, arts organizations, social service agencies, libraries, religious organizations, and/or public and private schools. Local institutions partnerships are vital in supporting the goals for the Course and create the collective impact central to our business model. Host is the fiduciary and responsible for site coordinator, classroom location, recruiting students, communicating with community partners, organizing access to childcare and transportation as needed and general oversight of course.

**Staff:** Each Course is run by an **Academic Director** who is responsible for hiring and supervising faculty, developing the curriculum, and creating an engaging classroom for the students and faculty. In addition, the Academic Director teaches one of the five classes according to his/her discipline and attends all classes to ensure continuity among discipline and to provide logistical and emotional support to students.

**Five faculty**, including the Academic Director, teach classes in the five core disciplines: critical thinking and writing, US history, history of art, literature and moral philosophy.

**Academic Oversight:** Local Hosts have the flexibility to customize their academic offerings based on the needs of the local constituents. At the same

time, CCH ensures that all Clemente Courses follow a set of established academic protocols to ensure that the Clemente vision is supported in terms of text selection and pedagogy, and that the level of the work is consistent with the college credits offered and earned.

### Women Veterans Initiative

*“ I have benefited from all the social services this community has to offer. I’ve been homeless, in the battered women’s center, AA, welfare, everything. These agencies taught me how to survive, and I’m proud of that. But Clemente showed me that there is more than just survival: that I have a future out there just like anyone and I can do more than survive. I saw a new horizon that I didn’t even know was there before. So one day I’m going to be a lawyer.”* Clemente Course Graduate

**The Clemente Course in the Humanities (Clemente):** Clemente is founded on the premise that liberal education is education to make people free, and it proceeds on the conviction that reflection in the humanities can liberate adults living in poverty and other marginalizing conditions to more actively shape their own lives and those of their families and communities. We believe that through engagement with and appeal to the humanities, individuals can achieve a new understanding of themselves, the world, and the fundamental values of goodness and justice. The experience of Clemente students around the world has demonstrated that through the dialectics of learning, in a caring and respectful classroom, participants develop crucial tools to set in motion personal and societal change, and are empowered to participate more fully in civic life. **Research has shown that participation in a Clemente Course significantly increases student’s self confidence, college readiness – including communication, critical thinking and writing skills – self advocacy, and fosters more involvement in their children’s education and civic engagement.**

*"Clemente teaches altruism. Most of us, when we come in, are on the needing end of everything. We are down, have minimal resources, and feel pretty powerless. What we learn from Clemente is that we have something to give to our communities, and we want to do that. It's pretty empowering, and it changes how we see ourselves."* Clemente Graduate

**Clemente classrooms are modeled on the classical ideal of civil discourse. Students learn through dialogue about moral philosophy, literature, history, art history, critical thinking, and writing. All classes**

are taught by seasoned college professors. There is no tuition; all books and course materials are provided, and the college credits offered are readily transferable to other institutions. In addition to free tuition and books, access to childcare and transportation is provided without charge.

**Women Veterans Initiative:** For centuries, women have made vital contributions to our nation through military service. These women have experienced the trauma of war and they have fought the stigma of being women in the military. Upon returning home, many suffer myriad psychological and physical issues, and often are homeless. Their difficulty with readjustment, combined with poor health, contributes to functional impairments that ultimately hamper their ability to be engaged parents and to be successful in educational and occupational settings. They become isolated and hopeless, feeling trapped between a culture that they are no longer a part of and one in which they feel misunderstood and disconnected. The goal of the Clemente Women Veteran Initiative is to break these cycles, creating a *“Bridge to Achievement”* that strengthens participants’ habits of reflection and critical thinking so they are better able to manage the direction of their lives and engage effectively in society. We will also offer wrap around services and a continuum of care to all students and their families to ensure that these women have everything they are entitled to and need as they rebuild their civilian lives.

With 20 years experience teaching the humanities to marginalized adults, Clemente is uniquely qualified to bring the humanities to struggling veterans. In fact, one of the motivating factors for this initiative was hearing from veterans who have graduated from Clemente Courses say that one of the main reasons that they enrolled was because it offered them the opportunity to experience college with no risk to their veteran’s benefits. Although a Clemente Classroom is as rigorous as the freshman humanities courses of the institutions that grant it credit, the material risks are inherently lower, and the individual contact with teachers is much more profound. Certificates of Achievement are just as valued as college credits, and students who don’t earn credit or can’t finish a Course have no negative consequences: student loan defaults, negatively impacted GPAs, loss of veteran’s benefits, etc.

Amy Smith, Graduate of Clemente Course  
Now Port Townsend City Council Member Position 6

Port Townsend, WA: For Port Townsend City Council, two young new council members will replace two who are retiring. For Position 6, Amy Smith, beat her opponent, by a 71.5 percent to 28 percent margin. Amy is a graduate of the Jefferson Clemente Course: “I took this course as a wayward youth; it changed my life.”

Homeless when she moved to Port Townsend, Amy is currently Executive Director for The Boiler Room, a nonprofit coffee house and social services hub. She credits the Clemente Course with helping build her self-confidence, empowering her to serve her community and inspire future generations. Of special note to Amy was a guest speaker who addressed the use of logical fallacies in debate. This presentation continues to help her recognize faulty rhetoric in the arguments of others. “The Clemente Course gave me a chance to realize that I could continue to learn,” says Amy. “I’d almost given up.”

Amy’s campaign emphasized issues of particular concern to low-income people: access to affordable housing and transit, economic opportunity, the environment, education, health care, and food security. She has a fifteen year history of working with nonprofits in Jefferson County. She serves in the role of Secretary of the Board of Directors for the Port Townsend Main Street Program, which promotes the economic vitality and preservation of our historic business districts (while maintaining a small town quality of life). She is also a member of the United Good Neighbor’s Campaign Cabinet, a nonprofit organization that helps raise awareness of and provides funding for critically needed social services in our community. And she volunteers for Habitat for Humanity and Centrum, and is a member of the Rotary Club of Port Townsend.

Because, Amy was concerned about all the waste generated by plastic campaign signs, she hand-painted hers on recycled cardboard.

