Thomas G. Palaima  REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

An ideal summer job of teaching, learning

Let’s keep Austin weird. Please. I’ll tell you why.
I have been team-teaching a Telluride seminar at the University of Texas at Austin. We are exploring the Telluride seminar at the University of Texas. By stories, we mean every kind of human expression: diaries, memoirs, stories people tell about war and violence, movies, paintings, drawings, plays.

Imagine yourself in a room three hours north of Austin, and on a weekend of the most intellectually gifted soon-to-be high school seniors in the world. They are diverse in interests, cultural backgrounds, educational experiences and political and religious beliefs. They discuss ideas openly and honestly. And they do this because they are all creative, hard-working and respectful. They think and talk and write and listen well. They are nearly tireless in investigating who we have been, are and will be as human beings. They are nearly time in investigating who we have been, are and will be as human beings. They are all creative, hard-working and respectful. They think and talk and write and listen well. They are nearly tireless in investigating who we have been, are and will be as human beings. They are diverse in interests, cultural backgrounds, educational experiences and political and religious beliefs. They discuss ideas openly and honestly. And they do this because they want to.

Imagine teaching with a talented professor like Stacey Peebles of the Honors College at the University of Houston. Stacey was in the Plan II Honors Program and then got her Ph.D. in English at UT-Austin on the subject of how violence is portrayed in war novels and films. She understands the human condition and posed hard questions, by chance, with author Cormac McCarthy, whose new book is absolutely gripping and is Texan through and through. I then talked in the hallways with biologist Jared Diamond, who was just embarking on the study that produced his just-concluded three-part National Geographic special “Guns, Germs and Steel,” about how and why societies differ in their most important traits and institutions.

Imagine, too, meeting once a week in UT’s national cultural treasure, the Harry Ransom Center, and having on display every week new selections of original manuscripts, galley proofs, first or rare editions, drawings, paintings, musical scores, photographs of H.G. Wells, e.e. cummings, William Faulkner, Tim O’Brien, Bessie Smith, Homer, Eudora Welty, Siegfried Sassoon, Ezra Pound, William Whitman, Joseph Conrad. Imagine being guided through Bill Bryson’s collection of mesmerizing photographs of the horrific eastern front in World War II. These black and white photographs of H.G. Wells, e.e. cummings, William Faulkner, Tim O’Brien, Bessie Smith, Homer, Eudora Welty, Siegfried Sassoon, Ezra Pound, William Whitman, Joseph Conrad. Imagine being guided through Bill Bryson’s collection of mesmerizing photographs of the horrific eastern front in World War II. These black and white images take you right to the heart of Bryson’s provocative essay, “Why Men Love War,” despite brutality and waste on an unimaginable scale.

If you have a vivid enough imagination, you will grab why I feel now, in the last week of the Telluride seminar, like Lou Gehrig in Yankee Stadium on July 4, 1939.

Austin is weird all right. Weirdly rich in people and institutions dedicated to preserving our humanity and freely sharing their own deeply human passions with others.

Palaima teaches Classics at UT. For Telluride programs, see www.tellurideassoc.org.