



MINDS IN MOTION

With spring break behind us, we have so much to share! We introduce a new class, talk to alumna Ebonie Trice about her community work, and celebrate some writing from our fall 2021 class in the Final Word. Read on!

Students Welcome Each Other Face to Face



For the first time since March 2020, Free Minds held class in person. After spending the first two weeks of class on Zoom, the spring 2022 class began meeting face to face in late February.

Even from behind masks, the excitement of seeing each other “in real life” was palpable, as students found their seats and arranged their books. One student offered free rapid Covid tests to fellow students, which she receives through her work at a nonprofit. Another confessed it felt strange—this was the largest physical gathering she had been part of in two years.

The pandemic has wrought countless changes—among them, the move of the physical Free Minds classroom space from M Station to the Jordan, the Foundation Communities complex in the Mueller development in Central East Austin. The learning center at the Jordan, built in 2019 but new to Free Minds, is filled with colorful posters for the kids who attend after-school programs there. One cabinet’s poster declares “A dream without a plan is just a wish.”

As students gathered for these first few classes with books in hand, they found themselves planning toward dreams that had only been wishes before. Students dove into discussions of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a collection of short stories by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie. Literature professor Pat García probed students to consider the semester theme: How does the personal become political? And how do we respond to Adichie's argument, made famous in [her 2009 TED talk](#), that a multitude of stories can restore lost dignity?

In a recent class, Free Minds alumna Christina Brunson visited with gifts for the group: stacks of books, including ACC's literary journal *The Rio Review*, and an essay she had written during her time in Free Minds. Christina affirmed students in their efforts. "It takes a hundred different steps to get to these seats every night," she said. "It may look easy from the outside, but we all know how hard you're working to be here."

If a goal of this class is to show up ready to engage in lively discussions about the stories that shape us, then the Class of 2022 has already achieved much to be proud of. Next challenge this group will tackle? The first formal paper of the semester. You've got this, Class of '22!

Applications to Open for Fall Class

Do you picture yourself back in the classroom? Or do you have someone in mind looking to try college? Free Minds offers a supportive college course in the humanities for adults with tuition, books, and childcare covered at no cost to students.

[Visit our website](#) to apply or find out about eligibility guidelines.
Call 512-610-7961 or email freeminds@foundcom.org with any questions.

Submit your application beginning on April 1, 2022

Alumna Ebonie Trice is on a Mission

When Ebonie Trice joined Free Minds in 2019, she came with a mission—literally. In 2014, she had founded her own nonprofit, [Mission Accomplished](#), with the goal of counteracting poverty. Born in Gary, Indiana, she moved to Austin with a history of community organizing. "I was raised in a church with a homeless shelter and food pantry," she said. "Providing for the community is in my DNA."

After completing Leadership Austin, a program to develop community leaders, she knew her next step was the classroom. "I wanted to further my education and challenge my way of thinking," she said. "Free Minds gave me a smooth transition back to school after 20 years away. I loved how I could bring my daughter with me—it let me get used to being in school without becoming overwhelmed."



Mission Accomplished remained a priority for Ebonie during Free Minds. "One of the things I would do is sell chips and candies. We were in class for a couple of hours, and even after dinner, you'd want something to snack on. Those proceeds would go to Mission Accomplished."

Today, Mission Accomplished offers Austinites access to food, as well as resources for education, employment, and shelter. The organization aims to serve community members in a comprehensive way, whether that means helping people find homes or thrive in their current homes.

Last year, Mission Accomplished expanded through Operation Clean Clothes, bringing

clean laundry to those who need it. “Initially, we would go to different homeless camps, pick up clothes to wash, and bring them back the same day.” Through fundraising and collaboration, the program has secured a trailer, improving their operations. “We’re mobile,” Ebonie said. “Now we go to different locations to provide the service directly.”

Ebonie’s journey continues—since Free Minds, she has received a Pell Grant, and remains enrolled at ACC, working toward a degree in social work. And she has just been accepted as a 2022 cohort fellow at the African American Leadership Institute. True to form, Ebonie had to run to another meeting right after our interview—she was helping someone complete their Free Minds application. “I’m so grateful to have started this journey with Free Minds,” she said.

Looking to help out? Mission Accomplished works with volunteers on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 8 am to 1 pm. Donations of toiletries and hygiene products are welcome as well. Email info@mission-accomplished.org if you would like to assist.

Thank you, Ebonie, for being a shining star in this city!

Special Thanks

On February 23, 2022, [UFCU announced a \\$10,000 donation to Free Minds](#). We are enormously thankful for funding that will contribute directly to our class—this money will help us provide books, childcare, and wrap-around support at no cost to our students.

UFCU shared this surprise announcement during the ribbon cutting ceremony for Foundation Communities' Prosper Center South. [UFCU also previously contributed one million dollars](#) to help renovate and open the new Prosper Center South.

Thank you, UFCU, for your support!

Upcoming Events

Write Together Saturdays

What better way to spend a Saturday morning than discussing, writing, and sharing with Free Minds?

All community members are invited to take part in the following Write Together sessions. Creative Writing Professor Vivé Griffith will lead the group on Zoom through a series of readings and writing exercises. Participants will write, share, and reflect together. We would love to hear your voice and perspective—hope you can join!

March 26 | 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

April 9 | 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Join the Zoom meeting [here](#). For more information visit [our website](#).

The Final Word

Free Minds unifies its discussions of literature, philosophy, art, history, and creative writing around recurring questions: What does it mean to live on the intersections of identity? How do we express the spaces between?

In her fall art history unit, Dr. Janis Bergman-Carton asked students to consider their family's history of immigration: "How did your ancestors' decisions to migrate or emigrate shape aspects of your life?"

Here are some of their responses.



On forced migration: "If my ancestors hadn't been forced to emigrate from Georgia [by way of the Trail of Tears], my life would truly be different. I would know my native tongues—all of them—by now. I would have been able to know and keep our ancestral traditions going because I would know the importance of doing so for my own children. I most certainly would not live in Texas, because we, the Cherokee Nation, resided in Georgia."
—Ruth Bonds

On resistance: "My great-grandmother on my father's side swears that her people never crossed the border because technically the border crossed them. She was a very strong advocate in her time and fought in the Mexican Revolution. I feel that I have a small remnant of her spirit that carried me while I advocated for my daughter when her special education rights were being violated."
—Veronica De Leon

On not knowing: "To this day, I do not know my grandfather's last name or tribe. He had several children, and the last living relative that knew that information would not share with us our history or roots, because even in the 1970s when she passed, it was still considered shameful to be a Native American."
—Wendy WhiteOtter

On hope: "Had my parents not made the decision to migrate to the U.S, I wouldn't have had the courage to cross all this distance into the uncertain future. They are my role models for working hard and succeeding. I feel so lucky to have the evidence of my family's migration in my DNA saved as a treasure that shines my new path into success."
—Rima Sibai

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A program of Foundation Communities, in partnership with The University of Texas at Austin and Austin Community College, Free Minds offers a two-semester college course in the humanities for Central Texas adults who want to fulfill their intellectual potential and begin a new chapter in their lives.

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