

## Thoughts on the Title of “Master”

August 31, 2015

Dear Fellow Sillimanders,

As many of you are no doubt aware, we are embarking on an exploration of the title and form of address for college “masters” at Yale. While this is connected to the issues expressed in President Salovey’s and Dean Holloway’s addresses to the freshmen on Sunday about the possible renaming of Calhoun College, I think it can also be seen as a distinct topic.

I’d like to share with you here my thoughts about my role and title at Silliman College. I do so with the hope that this is the beginning of a conversation, not an end, and that we can all get to know one another well this year regardless of things like titles.

Here is what the Yale College website says about my position: “The master is the chief administrative officer and the presiding faculty presence in each residential college. He or she is responsible for the physical well being and safety of students in the residential college, as well as for fostering and shaping the social, cultural, and educational life and character of the college.” I take this charge seriously, and it governs our relationship. It is a big honor and responsibility to be a college master at Yale. I want to help all of you create a home here – one where you are able to pursue your intellectual and personal aspirations and obtain the most from this world-class university.

The word “master” can evoke thoughts of slavery and other forms of subjugation, and it has made me at times quite uncomfortable to be referred to as “master.” But I also think that it is important to acknowledge that the word “master” has diverse applications and origins. As many have pointed out, its use at Yale was not taken from the context of slavery. We see similar words used for Master-at-Arms, Master Sergeant, Special Master (in court proceedings), Master Electrician, Master of Science (as in the degree!), or Master of a martial art, and so on. The use of the term for the heads of Yale colleges was directly copied from the Oxford and Cambridge Systems nearly 100 years ago.

Of course, I understand that words have meaning, and that they can be hurtful. But, as you will learn about me, I see words as both important and unimportant.

Here is why. The central issue for me regarding this topic is that I don’t want us to get so satisfied that we have dealt with the surface issue of language that we don’t address other potentially more important issues – such as how we nurture talented students from all backgrounds who now come to Yale (such as those struggling with poverty, physical or mental illness, violence or ethnic hatred in their home countries, or lack of social connections, and all sorts of other circumstances people face). And it seems to me that Americans are too content with being innocent of the ugliness in our past. I worry that changing our titles would seduce us into thinking that we can self-exculpate, that we can absolve Yale of itself. Handling troubling things by adjusting words rather than deeds is indeed a sort of cop-out, I think. It reminds me, in some ways, about how the very recent national attention about removing confederate flags from sale at Wal-Mart came to stand for addressing mass murder, racism, inequality, and other disturbing features of our society. It made many people feel good and it was easy to do. But, as a public health expert, I would rather see us remove guns from Wal-Mart than flags.

I have been genuinely confused by the word “master” in our collegiate setting, all the more so precisely because of its legitimate roots. Alternatives in use at other places, like Lord, Rector, Chancellor, Provost, Governor, Dean, and, yes, even Warden (in use in some colleges at Cambridge) do not seem workable – or even reasonable. Or they are already claimed by others at Yale (think of Dean Hill or Provost Polak). And the title “Head” is not an easy form of address, as in “Dear Head Abovewater,” and has less gravitas. So, given the alternatives, I think “Master” is not a bad choice.

However, I see the title of “master” as distinct from how a person in the role of “master” is addressed. For my part, I believe that people should be allowed to call themselves (within reason) what they prefer – e.g., President Obama cannot ask to be called King Obama, but he could ask his friends to call him “Barry,” with no slight to the office of the president.

It seems to me that all good relationships are rooted in acknowledgement of a person’s thoughtfully self-chosen identity, including form of address. Hence, I fear that, in focusing on the search for the appropriate or uniform form of address, we might run the risk of inauthenticity, which is potentially toxic to the work of relationship-building we do so well in the colleges.

Personally, I have always preferred to be called by my first name, but I also worry that my usual practice of asking to be called “Nicholas” might now be misinterpreted as a challenge to others, or as an attempt to be special. Yet, because of my comfort with – and, indeed, preference for – being called “Nicholas,” I can in some ways sidestep the issue of “master” as a title. This preference for my first name reflects both my own personality and the status I am apparently accorded as a large, white, middle aged man who went prematurely grey at age 35 and has a voice that carries across a dining hall. I may not always need to assert authority through rank or address because it is socially conveyed – in this way sometimes unfairly, I realize. Needless to say, I don’t take pride in that. On the contrary, I like to be called “Nicholas” precisely because I am granted too much authority at times, for instance, when it gets in the way of the collegial and mentor/mentee relationships so vital in the college residential system.

On the other hand, I admit that some formality helps as well. Many students don’t want an avuncular Master. Many like the way tradition looms large at Yale. Most of you chose Yale precisely because of its storied past. I like tradition too! And there are times when, in advocating for students at this great university of ours, it helps that I am not just a “Professor” or a “Doctor,” but one of the twelve “Masters.”

The college master is in some important ways a last defense against the encroachment of the bureaucratic university, with its uniform standards and procedures and its occasionally impersonal tone. College masters see their students up close, unfiltered, for better and, indeed, for worse. The Masters are aligned with the college administration, of course, and we report to the Dean and President, but, in some key way, we stand apart from the administration, too, by virtue of living and eating with students. We fulfill our master's role in communion, in companionship, in camaraderie. It is this sort of fellowship, above all, that I hope to foster and safeguard here in Silliman College. And I respectfully submit that I can do so in spite – or because of – the forms of address you choose to use with (and about) me.

Still, I also must admit that I just like the informality of my first name. I am inspired by the custom in many progressive schools, and in the Quaker tradition, of using first names for all, including those in positions accompanied by considerable authority and tradition.

I would also like to add one more consideration to the mix, namely that I am uncomfortable with the asymmetry of "Master Christakis" while Erika, as Associate Master, is called by her first name. It's simply too much of a mouthful to expect students to address her as "Associate Master Christakis" and, again, context may matter as we consider alternatives. Perhaps this asymmetry carries a different sort of weight with a female master and a male spouse? It could be less of an issue if Erika were herself a professor. She is a Yale faculty member, as Lecturer in the College, and often called "Professor" by her students, but she is not, in fact, a professor (by title at least – since she certainly "professes knowledge" in her teaching!), and she is always very clear about that with her students and invites them to call her "Erika." She, too, comes from a progressive education tradition and is more comfortable with first names. Erika will play a very important role at Silliman in her capacity as Associate Master, and it's important to me that our community understand our roles vis-a-vis each other, and not only as individuals. I want very much to model for our students, in our forms of address, the healthy and reciprocal relationship I have with my wife.

Finally, I am aware of the fact that if I go by my first name, this creates a new problem because our Dean should not be obliged to go by her first name, and she prefers "Dean Hill" for a number of good reasons, including that all the other deans go by "Dean," as well. "Dean" is not a problematic or culturally loaded term, and it also has the nice advantage of having one crisp syllable, so why not use it?

So here is what I am thinking at the moment (and, based on conversations with you, I reserve the right to change my mind, one way or the other). In official Silliman notices, we will use our titles (e.g., "Master Christakis invites you to..."), but I will often sign letters "Nicholas," except where they come from both me and Dean Hill, in which case we will sign them "Master Christakis and Dean Hill." There might be potential confusion or inconsistency (when, for example, Dean Hill and I are together, or when you are introducing me to someone for the first time and choose to be more formal). I trust that we can be flexible and not overly worried about precedents. The last thing I want is to feel that my attempts to be sensitive and reasonable might actually be contributing to anxiety that could cause someone to avoid me. So, please, call me Master Christakis, Professor Christakis, Doctor Christakis, or Nicholas! But call me something, so we can get to know one another. (Erika is equally flexible, though she has a secret preference for "She Who Must Be Obeyed.")

Finally, I am happy to talk to any and all of you about this, if you are interested, and to hear your thoughts and ideas about this topic – keeping in mind that, actually, we also have other important topics that surely warrant our hard work and attention. I look forward to discovering them with you.

Best Regards,

Nicholas

# The Idea of Positive Intent

November 13, 2015

## Open Letter to the Silliman Community

Dear Silliman students,

I write to you today to ask you to join Erika and me, in good faith, to help us nurture and support a strong, inclusive, vibrant, and stimulating community of which we can all be proud. This note is addressed to all of you today, the many students who have expressed various perspectives, both angry and supportive, and also to the students I have not yet had the privilege of meeting.

### Part 1: Preamble

I would like to offer an important clarification before I start: Many of you have requested that I explain my and Erika's views with greater specificity, and I am eager to do so because I believe these views have been distorted or misunderstood in many of the retellings. We do not recognize ourselves in some of the portrayals of us. But I also want to speak to you with warmth and kindness, and not just from an intellectual position.

Therefore, you can expect to receive another communication in a few days, with much more detail about our beliefs and intent regarding the email Erika sent to the community two weeks ago and our perspective on events since then. I know that some of you are waiting impatiently for further explanation. As we said in our note last week, it's not easy to write an omnibus response that will reach everyone in the intended way. For now, I will merely share my deep conviction that, contrary to what some pundits are alleging, *there is no necessary tradeoff between respect, on the one hand, and freedom on the other*. They can productively coexist. In fact, this duality is even captured with aphorisms such as "my rights end at your nose." This is a well-trod topic in philosophy and political theory. And the history of social justice in the United States, as well as my own research on human social networks, makes abundantly clear that our mutually reinforcing goals of respect and freedom are supplements, not substitutes. Together, they form the backbone of a civil society in which people are afforded, for example, not only the power of speech but also the gift of listening.

On this narrow issue: I also want to be clear that free speech does not mean harassment. Erika and I would find much of the same speech to be offensive or vile that most students would, and we would never countenance certain sorts of speech (e.g., the wearing of a Ku Klux Klan costume). We will explain this more later, and there are, as we are sure you can imagine, some difficult lines to draw.

I have heard from many individuals in Silliman who feel silenced for different and distinctive reasons (people of color, people of color who do not agree with the prevailing view of their "group," conservative students, uninvolved students who just want to study, and so on). I want everyone to have a voice. I want you to talk to each other, because the surest path to learning is to converse with others who hold different views than you do. But I also hasten here to add that many members of marginalized groups sometimes tire of having to "explain themselves" – which I also understand. It's easy to overlook how, when you belong to a majority group, you can move about without necessarily having to be aware of yourself in quite the same way. But for those of you – and there are many! – who want to engage in more conversation and debate about these topics, you will have an opportunity to hear more regarding our views at a later point, and to share your own.

Now, I want to speak to you from my heart:

### Part 2: Recent events at Silliman

I want to start by offering an acknowledgement of how hard it has been for certain of our students, including those who have had the misfortune to see their words and feelings broadcast in a public arena. Erika and I both observed, immediately after the event in the courtyard, that we were very lucky to have attended college in a technologically antediluvian era, and I join Erika in sending our warm regard to the people captured in the videos, publicly here, as we also did privately. We have reached out to the people in the videos, immediately, in a number of ways, including speaking directly to some of them. We truly bear absolutely no ill will to anyone, least of all our students.

On a narrower point, we also vigorously defend everyone's right to express themselves, even as we hope that Silliman can be a place where we act with the civility required of a healthy community. Silliman is a sort of family and, like all families, we sometimes let our guard down and say and do things that wouldn't come naturally to us in other settings. We hope that no matter what you may think about *anyone's* behavior, including my own, we can all agree that a few moments captured on film cannot possibly capture a person's whole self.

### Part 3: A climate of "positive intent" for all

Moving forward, I call on the entire Silliman community to try as much as possible to assume "positive intent" in all members of the community, both those with whom we agree and also those with whom we may disagree. The notion of "positive intent" is a conscious practice of assuming good faith, not bad, in the people with whom we interact or observe. It can be extraordinarily difficult, especially when personal and historical injury primes the human brain to be mistrustful.

But I believe that positive intent can be cultivated, as a core value, which becomes easier and more mutually reinforcing over time. I'll give you a small example. As a new person to Silliman, it has been very puzzling to me that people don't say hello in passing unless they know someone personally. Initially, I found this behavior quite cold – as do many of our students from the Midwestern and Southern states – until I began to

see that Silliman is full of many non-Silliman people throughout the day, especially at lunchtime. I began to reframe this observation as something less negative: people don't mean to be unkind, but they are busy and don't feel comfortable or inclined to greet everyone who passes in their path. Perhaps they may come from densely populated urban areas (especially in the Northeast) where it would be considered odd and exhausting to greet everyone in one's field of vision. We all have different norms about personal space too. Maybe they are tired or anxious and just don't have the bandwidth to deal with inessentials. As I began to assume more positive intent in the people who walked past me, I found myself proactively greeting more people – even knowing that I would be greeting people I would never see again or, just as likely, confusing the non-Silliman people with the Silliman students, which is my habit (and one of my failings). What happened next is this: I've noticed that the more I have reached out to greet strangers from a place of positive intent – and perhaps it won't surprise you to hear this – the less like a stranger I have felt myself.

Positive Intent. We have heard a huge range of perspectives within Silliman in the last two weeks, from current students, from alumni, and from parents of current and past students. It is impossible to assuage the concerns of this widely divergent community of voices except to say this: nearly every person who has written to me (and I have received over 1,400 emails this past week) cares deeply for Silliman, and I believe that, with a few exceptions, they have spoken with positive intent. Needless to say, I abhor any threats of violence or intimidation of any kind whatsoever; any such actions fall far outside the scope of "positive intent" and are typically illegal. But from the majority of people who have voiced their views, including, specifically, many of those who have engaged in chalking or raised their voices against me, I hear good faith, not bad, in their commitment to Silliman and to Yale.

In the spirit of positive intent, I want to share a few more thoughts about myself that I have hesitated to reveal previously because I feared they would be used against me and that I would be accused of trying to curry favor or accused of being unaware of the obvious fact that I am a white man. I want you to believe, for example, that Erika and I will be always on the side of students in our intentions, even if we have offended some of you or have articulated views that do not make sense or seem wrong-headed to some of you. Having positive intent does not mean we will always agree with you! But this does mean we will grant very good faith to you.

I also want you to know that I was raised in a multi-racial nuclear family (I have African-American and Chinese siblings). Erika was one of the very first white students at Harvard to join the Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations. (Her favorite college memory is of meeting Nobel laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa.) I want you to know that I am keenly aware of racial and economic inequality and injustice from my academic work (which has tried to reduce such scourges via research, and which has tried to teach people about these problems with my classes, such as *Health of the Public*). I am also aware of inequality and injustice from my practical work as a hospice doctor on the south side of Chicago, when, for many years, I would routinely make house calls, every Saturday, to families who lacked electricity and food and not just medicine.

I want you to know that Erika's belief in the complexity of defining "cultural appropriation" came in part from her experience working closely with disadvantaged populations in Kenya, Ghana, and Bangladesh, on behalf of impoverished women, and children deprived of schooling. These were places where her hosts and colleagues *asked* her to "appropriate" their culture and seemed offended on those occasions when she politely declined the opportunity to wear traditional dress.

I want to tell you that her impulse to push back on institutional authority, even an expression of well-intended authority that was encouraged by a group of students, comes from her experience as an educator and from her politically left-leaning perspective of "not trusting anyone over 30," an animating idea of the American progressive tradition that has fallen out of favor with your generation. I want to tell you, too, that Erika has spent most of her professional life working with marginalized and disenfranchised people: homeless veterans, persons suffering mental illness and addiction, subsistence farmers in the developing world and – above all – children who are voiceless. Indeed, her vision of the marginalized child became the basis of her seminar class, *The Concept of the Problem Child*, and reflects her fierce desire to bring the voices of children and adolescents, including children in poverty and children of color, into the open where their needs can be made visible. Agree or disagree with her arguments in her email – but it was her fundamental faith in you as *adults* that animated her questioning administrative authority. She, and I, have confidence in the power of your voices.

I ask you to assume a posture of positive intent as I share these features of our backgrounds and as I assure you that we care for all our students. We have voted with our feet again and again, including in our decision to move to Silliman College. I can think of no one more likely to be in solidarity with marginalized students than my own wife. You and I may differ occasionally in our views on the appropriate *means* to create a just world, but our aspirations for that just world are, I believe, exactly the same. Whatever your political persuasion, you are likely to be seeking a better society.

Finally, in the spirit of positive intent, I quite understand that the movement on campus has a laudable objective. It seeks better communication among groups; it seeks to redress past wrongs; and it seeks to have its own, powerful, voice. The last item in particular, if you re-read Erika's email, was a point she herself was making! And the crowd that surrounded me in the Silliman courtyard also can be seen to have positive intent! Students were using the passion of their words, coming from a desire to advocate for our community, in a way that I understand.

Plus, there are other movements on campus, with other agendas, that also are advocating for still more social causes. This is one thing that makes universities so exciting: the clamoring of ideas in our public places.

#### **Part 4: Moving forward**

Now that I have shared some details about our lives and perspectives and, in a spirit of positive intent, I wish to learn more about *you* and your experiences and perspectives, which I have been hearing over the past weeks and hope to hear more about. I imagine that there are many ways in which you feel I have misheard or misunderstood you, and I promise you that I will do my best to continue to listen and to get to know you all. I have been having personal one-on-one meetings with both critics and supporters, and I note that there is a wide range of opinion and diversity (of different kinds) even within those two categories. I have been hosting larger meetings in the college, including two planned for this weekend. I look forward to many more conversations. And I ask that you try not take any one sentence or word from this note, or any of the content of our discussions as a community, and use it out of context. If you disagree with something I have said, I am eager to hear from you.

I also want to remind you that I have been at Silliman for less than three months! I ask for more understanding of why a professor would

choose to be a College Master. I enjoy very much being in touch with college-aged students, in part because I admire your energy and the way in which you are often on the culture's leading edge. Some have accused me of having an "agenda" to foist on our community. Let me be clear that there are far easier ways to advance an agenda than to live amongst 500 college students, which is – with all due respect – not always easy. Insofar as I have any agenda, my motivation for being here is simply this: I care tremendously for you and I believe that my professional expertise – which includes counseling dying patients and years of research on the formation of healthy societies – might contribute in a small way to your intellectual, emotional, social, and moral growth and wellbeing.

Please join me in making this possible. I have an exceptionally new staff with little institutional memory and they are all getting their feet under them as well. If you possibly can, please resist the temptation to see things in a poor light. To cite a small example of the need for forbearance in my role, we heard several complaints that the free tickets to the James Bond movie were interpreted negatively as an attempt to "buy off" the students. Please understand that a friend to Silliman College made this generous offer *three months ago*, and it was scheduled a month ago. It seemed mean-spirited to punish someone else's generosity because of our own problems. I know it's asking a lot of you, but positive intent would be very helpful here – for all of us. Students who want to attend the James Bond screening shouldn't feel they are making a statement for or against me!

More generally, I have tried to say "yes" to virtually every request that comes my way: supplying food funds for parties; adding more social and intellectual events; increasing the SAAC budget as needed; shifting the times of master's teas to make it possible for athletes to attend them; increasing our budget for study breaks; and so on. My long-term goal is to transfer a lot more decision making to *you*, our students, in the selection of speakers and allocation of funds and programming. I want to empower students as much as possible to make their own choices. But I need time and trust to make the master's role work in the way I see it. I want you to know how genuinely happy and excited I was to be appointed Master of Silliman College – and I remember so fondly the day President Salovey introduced me to you. I remain happy and excited to live amongst you and to lead a college that has always had the best spirit on campus.

There are many more topics we need to consider as a community, including important issues involving how we define the goals of an undergraduate education and the objectives of the college system at Yale – about which I have my own ideas. I intend to be transparent, and to discuss my ideas with you. There are many diverse and legitimate opinions about these matters. But surely we can all agree that we want a community based on caring, learning, and positive intent. I will do anything I can to convey that to you, and I ask you to do the same for all members of the Silliman family.

Toward that end, I invite all of you – whatever your opinions about recent events – to meet with me to have a wide-ranging conversation among ourselves on Sunday evening November at 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Common Room. We will continue our discussions regarding how to foster a culture of learning and caring (and fun, let's not forget that!) – given the new Master (me), and given some inevitable changes to the running of the college, but with the same shared hopes and dreams for a thriving community.

I hope you will continue to use your voices and essays to advance your causes. I was especially impressed with the March of Resilience asking for a more inclusive Yale. It's a cause Erika and I both believe in.

Warmly,

Nicholas (and Erika!)

P.S. Our next (equally long) missive will come in a few days.

P.P.S. We are heartbroken by the terrorist attacks in Paris, a city we love, and send positive thoughts across the Atlantic towards France, and towards any in Silliman who are affected by these events (please contact us).

# Welcome Back, Programming, and Thoughts on the Master Role

March 29, 2016

Dear Sillimanders,

Welcome back from what I hope was a rejuvenating spring break for all. I look forward to reconnecting with you in individual meetings (which I continue to have with you, and which I greatly enjoy) and in group events (such as the many study breaks and Forums and Teas we will continue to have for the rest of the semester – see below).

As you can see from our fabulous new monitor on the first floor of Byers Hall, which is hard to miss, we have a large amount and great variety of programming planned for this spring. I hope you will give yourself time to enjoy some of these offerings and that you might even try something you have not enjoyed before. This week's list is attached below.

When I was appointed to Silliman, I was especially excited by the potential afforded by our amazing art gallery, courtyard, and other facilities. Now that we've got a full team in place in both the Master's office and house (Sergio Gonzalez, our crack Operations Manager; Elaine Vivero, our Senior AA; and Cara Vo, our house manager, are all new this year, like me), and now that we are officially into the spring home stretch, I'm confident that we will continue to make even more inventive use of these special spaces. As you may have noticed, Maya's Room (which is the best college gallery on campus), is getting non-stop use, with shows that feature student and professional art – ranging from shows about the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Burmese contemporary art, and (this week) photographs from Cuba in the 1960's, to diverse student shows, including one on "Womyn in the Arts" and others still to come. For our courtyard – apart from our hammocks and spontaneous student activities (such as marshmallow roasts and Frisbee) – we have planned diverse sorts of performances, including (this coming Saturday night) the rapper Matisyahu. We also hope to use our natural amphitheater for theatrical performances, and we are in conversation about having outdoor sculpture installations and a student-run spice and flower garden.

Please talk to us about your ideas regarding all this. If you are interested in serving on our recently formed speakers committee or want to suggest ways to highlight our Silliman students' talents and interests, please let Elaine or Sergio know or speak to me directly. Our series on comedy (more about that later) have sprung directly from student leadership and suggestions, and is being spearheaded by, among others, Fred Nicholas.

## **What does the college master do all day?**

A number of students have asked me about the role of a college master, so I thought I would take a moment to share a description that was offered to me when I assumed the role and that I have found very helpful, as well as a little detail about my work.

In a fundamental sense, as the head of the college, I am responsible for everything that happens at Silliman and the buck stops with me. However, the role of the college master is *primarily* to handle things that affect the whole college, whether related to the academic, intellectual, social, artistic, moral, physical, or financial, aspects of the college.

Although I greatly enjoy getting to know students as individuals and I welcome students to meet with me at any time (indeed, I have met with quite a few of you these past months, over meals in the dining hall or late evenings in the Master's House), the college master's office especially handles issues in the college that affect *students as a whole* (whether in small or large numbers). The Dean's office, by contrast, primarily handles issues in the college that affect *students as individuals*.

There is obviously much overlap between Dean Hill's office and mine, and there are plenty of exceptions to this distinction; we both take an active role in communicating with students and their families during crises of all sorts, for example, and Dean Hill provides sought-after suggestions regarding how to allocate funds for college programming. However, the primary division between college master and college dean still holds: it is not a distinction between social and academic; the primary division is between collective and individual.

Examples of our work in the master's office include oversight of our various speaker series and visitors (ranging from our Forum and Tea series, to the events our graduate affiliates and visiting faculty put on, and so on); our just-introduced graduate affiliate program (our graduate affiliates, in case you haven't noticed, are putting on quite a few events these days); our budgetary and hiring decisions (including appointment of our residential fellows); our use of (and forthcoming renovation of) communal spaces (such as our gallery, gym, kitchen, and courtyard, etc.); and our policies and practices related to events, safety, and dining (for example, we revised and liberalized the party policy this year). I also work with our SAAC to support various student-organized events (ranging from the ski trip to the upcoming SkyZone event), and so I see Matthew Stock and Eva Landsberg, and the many other members of SAAC, almost weekly. Finally, I also work with the Council of Masters and with Dean Holloway and President Salovey and other senior administrators to develop and enact policies affecting students (for example, a pet issue of mine that affects students as a whole is the absurd rise in the number of classes that are lotteried, and I am also interested in strengthening the college seminar series). Living among students on the "front line" of collegiate life, I see myself as an advocate for students whose concerns are not always readily visible to those in the administration with less direct student contact. I see Yalies as capable of judgment and control over their own lives, and my job is to support you to achieve your potential.

As some of you know, independent of my college master role, I run the Human Nature Lab at 17 Hillhouse Avenue and I am also the Co-Director (along with mathematician and computer scientist Dan Spielman) of the Yale Institute for Network Science. I have academic appointments in the departments of Sociology, Medicine, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and Biomedical Engineering. Many aspects of my academic interests

inform my job as a Master, ranging from my understanding of the impact of social interactions and so-called "peer effects" on human behavior, to my training as a physician. For example, while I no longer see patients, my medical knowledge comes in handy when we are dealing with student physical and mental health concerns or public health problems in the college. Some of you have already worked with me in my lab, where we do many experiments in network science and population genetics, or in one of my classes. Each year, I offer summer internships to students wishing to work at my field sites in Honduras and Uganda, and you should feel free to get involved in my work outside of Silliman if it interests you. I accepted the job of Master, when President Salovey asked, because I have always been devoted to students and have found my mentorship role very meaningful.

I hope this description of my work and role is helpful. Please be in touch with me – email is the most efficient and I generally respond very quickly – if you would like to share your thoughts or would like to have a meal. If you see the lights in my office at the Master's House on at night, do not hesitate to ring the doorbell and stop by (as more than a few students have!).

Finally, I look forward to seeing you all at some of our upcoming events (note below).

Very best wishes,

Nicholas

#### **Upcoming events:**

**All Week: March 28th-April 2nd Art Exhibit "La Societe Francaise"** (Maya's Room) Come see Yale's own Cordelia De Broses display work of and about life in France

**Tuesday March 29th 11-12:30 Dance Workshop** (Silliman Dance Studio) with Sidra Bell Yale graduate, world-renowned choreographer, creator of SBDNY. Known for an unconventional, forward-looking investigative process that pushes past dance's traditional vocabulary, venues, and boundaries. The movement material is risky, elegant, fantastical, peculiar, and darkly romantic with original themes and larger than life characters. Please email Joana Andoh if you are interested in attending this event

**Tuesday March 29th 7-8:30pm Tea and talk with Sidra Bell** (Master's House) "Embodiment, Language, and Movement: A Choreographers Pursuit"

**Wednesday, March 30th, 8-9pm Mindfulness Meditation session** (SAAC meeting room, Silliman Basement) Clear your mind, re-energize your spirit with a quick one our session hosted by YUMEI

**Wednesday March 30th 9-10pm Thai Food Brain Break** (Master's House) Satisfy your late night cravings with great food and company

**Friday, April 1st 3:30-5:00pm Cup o' joe & a law school chat** (Annex Room) Interested in applying to law school? Accepted and have pressing questions? Want to know more about the process? Join Silliman Graduate Affiliate, Alexandra Guterrez, for a cup of coffee and answers to your questions from a refreshing first hand perspective

**Friday April 1st 8-10pm Undergraduate Comedy Show** (Silliman Movie Theatre) Come listen to the future stand-up comics, late night talk show hosts and entertainers of America Hosted by the very talented, and Silliman's own, Frederic Nichols Snacks and beverages will be served

**Saturday April 2nd 9-10:30pm Matisyahu Concert** (Silliman Courtyard) Bring a blanket, sit back in our beautiful courtyard and enjoy the free show