



June 2014

Dear students,

As part of your orientation to Brown, you will participate in a seminar about a documentary film that you and all new Brown students will watch this summer. The film we have chosen is *Oil and Water*, by Francine Strickwerda and Laurel Spellman Smith. Think of this film as a welcome gift from Brown and your first official college assignment.

Oil and Water tells the coming-of-age story of two young men from opposite ends of the oil pipeline, each of whom is working to protect the indigenous people of Ecuadorian Amazon and their lands. Hugo Lucitante travels to the U.S. to fight for the survival of his tribe, the Cofan, in Ecuador. David Poritz '12 launches the first company to certify oil as "fair trade." The film raises important questions, such as: How we do balance the rights of the few and the needs of the many? Should we promote more environmentally and socially conscious oil production, or focus our efforts on developing alternative sources of energy? What are our responsibilities toward other people in distant parts of the world? We hope that *Oil and Water* will help you reflect on these questions and what it means to live lives, as Brown's mission suggests, of "usefulness and reputation."

We would like you to watch this film and to tell us your reactions. What aspects of the documentary did you find most compelling? Was there anything about the film that surprised you or bothered you? Does the fight for environmental justice in *Oil and Water* remind you of a moment where you wanted to make a difference in the world? Can each of us, in fact, make a difference? You can access the film here: <http://library.brown.edu/firstreadings>.

Write up your reactions in the form of a letter to your academic advisor. Think of the letter as a way of introducing yourself to your advisor, giving him or her a sense of who you are and how you think. While you are introducing yourself, you should also talk about your goals and aspirations for Brown. What do you consider your areas of strength? Are you concerned about any aspect of your undergraduate education? Are there particular fields that you want to explore? Please submit your

letter online (https://ask.brown.edu/frst_rdngs/) by August 15, if you are entering this fall, or January 3 if you are entering in the spring. We will make sure it gets into your advisor's hands before your first advising appointment.

I should mention that your letter will be read by a few other people as well. The specialists in Brown's Writing Center will review your letter to get a sense of your strengths or weaknesses as a writer. We will also share a copy with the person who will be leading your seminar discussion on *Oil and Water*, and who may want to use your ideas as a starting point for the discussion. For both of these reasons, we ask that you give this first college assignment some careful attention and thought.

When you arrive on campus, you will receive a packet of information that includes the time and location of your seminar on *Oil and Water*, and the name of your discussion leader. We hope this opportunity to meet new friends and discuss ideas will make your orientation to Brown even more meaningful. So enjoy your “reading,” and bring your thoughts about the film with you when you come to Brown this fall!

All my best,

Margaret Klawunn
Interim Dean of the College