

First-Year Seminars at Muhlenberg

What are First-Year Seminars?

First-Year Seminars are small, discussion-oriented courses that introduce students to what it means to think deeply, to talk, read and write critically about ideas. Required of all first-year students, First-Year Seminars provide the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member and to read and write about a topic in depth.

Taught by faculty from departments throughout the College, seminars vary in subject. Some examine a topic from an interdisciplinary perspective; others focus on particular issues within a discipline. What all First-Year Seminars share is an emphasis on writing and thinking critically about the values and assumptions underlying various approaches to knowledge.

All First-Year Seminars are designated writing-intensive, and therefore, they require frequent writing and reading. Seminars teach students how to formulate a thesis and develop an argument or an interpretation. In addition, students learn how to collect, evaluate and cite evidence that supports and qualifies a thesis. With the help of the professor's comments on preliminary drafts, students also learn how to revise their work.

What distinguishes First-Year Seminars from other courses at Muhlenberg?

First-Year Seminars are limited in size to fifteen. This small size creates a community of inquiry where participants share ideas. Often the professor serves as the academic advisor to the seminar participants. This arrangement enhances the effectiveness of the advising process and helps ease the transition to college life.

In addition, First-Year Seminars are assigned a **Writing Assistant**, a trained writing tutor who assists first-year students with their writing, reading and critical thinking skills. Writing Assistants (WAs) are highly motivated Muhlenberg students; all are skilled writers. They attend seminar classes and arrange one-on-one and small group conferences with students. Because WAs and professors work together closely, these peers provide first-year students with a writing specialist who understands the course material and the expectations of the seminar.

First-Year Seminars — 2019-2020

FYS 106: How Tea Conquered the World

Dr. Tineke D'Haeseleer

When I say the word “tea”, which country comes to mind? Maybe you think of China and jasmine tea, perhaps Japan, with its ancient tea ceremony, or afternoon tea in England. And let’s not forget iced tea, the American contribution to tea’s global presence. Tea is an important part of life in many cultures around the globe, including eastern Africa, Russia, and of course Asia, the home of the tea plant *camellia sinensis*.

Each cup of tea is a part of a much larger historical network of economic, political, social and cultural connections. In this seminar we follow the story of tea through two millennia, and look at its impact on medicine, religion, aesthetics, global trade and economics, through such topics as the role of Buddhist monks in the popularization of tea in medieval China, the origins of the Japanese tea ceremony, and why the Opium Wars could also be named the Tea Wars. Who drank tea? Why? Where and how did they buy it, and how did that influence global trade patterns? What did (and does) drinking tea mean in different cultures? All of these, and many more questions, will help us understand how tea conquered the world.

FYS 107: Very Bad Words

Dr. Alexandra Frazer

Words have power, but who decides what they mean? What are the differences between profanity, obscenity, and vulgarity? What types of speech are protected by the first amendment? What effect does language really have on how we think, if any? These questions and more will be examined in this course. We will explore what language is, how it works, and the relationship between language and power. We will then extend this discussion into understanding freedom of speech in the US and what is and isn't protected by that right. Where's do one person's rights end and another's begin with regard to language? Students will develop a series of evidence-based essays regarding profanity, freedom of speech, and ownership of language, and over the course of the semester will write a paper incorporating feedback regarding how these issues all intersect in the modern United States, with particular emphasis on politics and political discourse.

FYS 113: Quentin Tarantino, Film Geek

Dr. Franz Birgel

This course will examine the films directed by Quentin Tarantino as a basis for practicing oral and written communication. Tarantino, whose fast talking, allegedly super violent films helped to reinvigorate American cinema, was largely an autodidact who learned his craft watching films while working in a video store. Like Tarantino, we will watch films closely and analyze their themes, structures, and influences. This seminar will examine *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, the two-part *Kill Bill*, *Inglourious Basterds*, and *Django Unchained*, as well as some of the many disparate films that inspired him. Excerpts from selected French New Wave and Asian films, *The Killing*, *Coffy*, *The White Hell of Piz Palu*, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, as well as others will also be screened. Time should permit us to watch some of these films in their entirety. From other films we will only have time to watch excerpts, and you will probably be required to watch two or three films outside of class—more details regarding out-of-class screenings will follow.

Course readings will consist of secondary literature on Tarantino and postmodern popular culture. Since this is a writing-intensive course, students will write short weekly essays as well as some longer essays during the semester.

Disclaimer: As stated in the FYS course description, these films contain scenes of very graphic violence and vulgar language. If you feel uncomfortable watching and discussing these films, then you should choose another seminar.

FYS 126: Mobile Applications: The Appeal, Ethics, & Value in Modern Society

Dr. Kenneth Michniewicz

The use of mobile devices has increased dramatically over the past decade. How has this changed our lives, and is it for the better or the worse? In this seminar, we will discuss the prevalence and use of mobile devices (including cell phones, tablets, gadgets, and video games, used for games, life improvement, social media, finance management, and elsewhere), and the costs and benefits these have for users. This discussion will involve an exploration of broader philosophical and scientific reasoning spanning the disciplines of psychology, media and communication, political science, philosophy, and others. We will also discuss specific, timely topics, including addiction to or dependence on technology or to specific mobile applications, the potential benefits of this technology to address individual and global problems, and the ethics of marketing and designing mobile applications or devices. Students will be encouraged to develop analytical writing skills and, through writing, to critically evaluate philosophical and evidence based arguments about these issues.

FYS 139: Reading Fairy Tales

Dr. Grant Scott

This course focuses on the origins, socio-cultural history, psychology, gender dynamics and literary genre of Fairy Tales. We will examine some of the most influential works by the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault in a variety of interdisciplinary contexts. We will also consider selected adaptations of these tales in different media, including illustrated books, paintings, poems, short stories and films from different historical eras. The course will analyze how the meaning of these original tales has changed over time and how they have been transformed by contemporary culture. We'll spend a good deal of time learning how to interpret fairy tales, and thinking about how they make complex meanings in a very small space.

FYS 154: Now I Am Become Death: Brains, the Bomb, and the Bellicose

Dr. Brett Fadem

The gathering of intellectual talent for the construction of the atom bomb was attended by many of the world's most creative scientists. The product of their labors, however, was the most destructive weapon yet assembled. This seminar will explore the lives of these geniuses, the environment of the Manhattan Project, and the ethical issues that wove their way through the daily existence of scientists both in the United States and Europe. While some of the major players appeared to be deeply engaged with the ethical minefield that surrounded them, others seemed oblivious, and a few went so far as to adopt an attitude of active disengagement. We will explore these issues both from a modern perspective and from that of the participants.

FYS 164: The World of Anime**Prof. Randall Smith**

Anime of the present and past is filled with fun, fantasy and ferocity. Yet, when observing beyond its colorful imagery and language, a complex system of social structures emerge. This *First Year Seminar* will explore and critically analyze how anime can reveal power differentials, socio-cultural paradigms, paradoxes, the art of storytelling and conjured truths about how our worlds operate and collide. As part of this course we will watch and reenact different scenes from various genres of anime (nationally and internationally) as well as read texts specific to and connected with the phenomena. A key component of this course will call you to critically and analytically think using journal writing and essays that are used as scaffolding mechanisms to respond, react, interpret, and deepen your processing skills. How can anime provide understanding for the human condition? Why is it phenomenal? How does anime shape our investigation of global differences?

FYS 174: Brand New Plays**Dr. Jim Peck**

This course examines contemporary playwriting in the United States. We will read plays that have premiered in the last five years. Two questions will animate our study. First, we'll read these plays to develop facility with the process of script analysis. Dramatic structure, it turns out, is a rich topic with a twenty-five hundred year history. Really. Experienced readers of drama have developed numerous ways of reading suited to the demands of playtexts. We'll learn some of those methods. Second, we'll attend to the perspectives these plays offer on life in the contemporary United States. Taken individually, how does each play represent a world? Who populates that world? Who matters in it? What forms of action prove effective? Are some inert? How does the play shape the audience's sympathies towards its characters and events? Towards what ends? Taken en masse, how do the plays accumulate into a conversation about our moment in American history?

FYS 176: Road Trip: American Literature & Film**Prof. Susan Clemens**

Road Trip! The excitement of dropping everything and taking to the road is an American joy. We love the road and the freedom and adventure it represents, whether by automobile, train, bicycle, or on foot. In this seminar we will read books, short stories, and articles about other people's journeys. We will see films, listen to the music of the road, take a short road trip, and connect the intellectual with the actual wherever possible. In the past, core readings have been chosen from the following: *Water for Elephants*, *On the Road*, *Into the Wild*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *The Glass Castle*. We will watch a number of films that deal with road experiences, for example: *Oh! Brother*, *Where Art Thou*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Big Fish*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Elizabeth Town*, and even *Up!* From our readings and film, we will explore the lessons learned on and from the road, including personal growth and new ways of thinking.

FYS 180: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Global Pop**Dr. Kassie Hartford**

The technologies of the 21st century have created a world at our fingertips, and they have the potential to radically open our ears: the sounds of Indian ragas, Brazilian samba, Japanese shakuhachi, and Appalachian dulcimer are a click away on youtube. Popular composers over the last 40 years, both within the U.S. and beyond its boundaries,

have taken note: if Michael Jackson and Paul Simon have collaborated with the Brazilian samba-reggae ensemble Olodum in works intended primarily for U.S. audiences, Olodum's own samba-reggae fuses the Brazilian samba to the Jamaican reggae in an entirely new idiom that reimagines connections across the African diaspora both in a rich set of symbols and in sound itself. In this FYS, we will consider the ethical and aesthetic questions that these attempts at cross-cultural borrowings raise: What stakes are there in attempts to make music across national borderlines? What gives a "foreign" genre both symbolic and musical appeal? What happens when gaps in musical understanding reveal that music is a less universal language than it initially appears to be? What does it mean to engage in cross-cultural collaborations in view of differing levels of economic, social, and political power, shaped by global economic trends?

FYS 181: Microbial Chefs: Bacteria & Fungi in the Kitchen

Dr. Debra Walther

Bread, cheese, yogurt, beer, wine, and chocolate. These favorite foods and beverages have been an integral part of human society for millennia. The common thread amongst this group is that microscopic organisms are crucial to their production. This course will focus on live-culture and fermented foods from the perspectives of culture, history, socio-economics, science, and politics. We will examine the relationship between microbes and the foods they help to produce (including the vast nuances of texture, flavor, and scent that they impart) and explore the larger cultural and historical impacts of these types of live-culture foods. How has the use of microbes in food production helped shape/influence differences in taste across cultures and/or in establishing societal norms in this regard? What role(s) have these foods played in establishing cultural traditions and potentially forging cross-cultural connections? How has the use of microorganisms impacted politics and regulations on food production in the U.S. vs. worldwide? What are the potential impacts of various microbial infestations of crops on the final product/taste of fermented beverages? A combination of readings, in-class discussions, field-trips, media viewings, and a variety of analytical writing assignments (in-class writing, journaling, weekly response pieces, essays) will foster student connections between these types of foods, the role of microorganisms in their production, and their impacts on society and culture. Part of our class time will be spent observing as well as engaging in the production and consumption of live-culture or fermented foods to help you develop ideas for discussion and analysis.

FYS 182: All Flesh

Dr. Jeremy Teissere

Eventually each of us goes 'the way of all flesh': that is, we die. All flesh is mere grass. And flesh is also the soft tissues and connective bits that join our skin and bones. So mortality is built into the very word - flesh - that defines our connection to the animal kingdom. Our finitude is also our meat: one day we are a skin-sack full of worries; the next, food for something (or someone) else. Are we unique among animals in knowing that? This course is interested in looking deeply at death, mortality, and cycles of regeneration, partly from a 'human angle' - that is, considering the human rituals, ethics, and cultural meanings that have been fastened to death - but equally from an 'animal angle' - considering the relationship of human mortality to processes of the natural world and to the other living things that share in the Animal Kingdom and will inevitably die, too. We will consider 'all flesh' as broadly as possible, asking questions about the complex meanings we afford death and looking for answers in our relationship to nature: What does it mean to die? Would immortality be desirable? What is the relationship of death to beauty? To memory? Is multispecies, collaborative survival possible for humans on

Earth? What ought to be the rights of life afforded to non-human animals? What challenges or threats does extinction pose? What is the 'animal way' of death? Is human death a part of nature?

FYS 183: Epistolary Explorations: The History, Psychology, & Art of Letter Writing

Prof. Tina Hertel

When was the last time you sat down and wrote—not typed but “pen and paper” wrote—a letter to someone? Received a letter? This seminar will examine the history, psychology, and art of letter writing and other epistolary formats. We will discuss the extent to which, as some cultural critics claim, letter writing is dying and what implications that might have for our culture. But we will also consider alternative possibilities—that, rather than dying, letter writing is assuming new and vital forms. We will look at letter writing as a cultural practice, explore famous letters in their historical context, learn about who writes letters and why, appreciate epistolary fiction, and analyze the impact of digital technology on the epistolary format. We will use the epistolary practice of journaling to deepen our understanding as we will explore, analyze and discuss a wide range letters and other epistolary practices. And yes, there will be some actual letter writing!

FYS 184: Global Humanitarians

Dr. John Ramsay

Leaders of non-profit organizations work daily on what is often called "humanitarian relief" for children and youth throughout the world. We'll read case studies of Malala, Doctors Without Borders, the International Red Cross, Paul Farmer and others who have earned global admiration for their work. And we will study less acclaimed leaders and organizations who have dedicated themselves to problems such as poverty, hunger/malnutrition, political violence, stigmatization of ethnic and racial minorities, child labor, human trafficking. Importantly, we will use these case studies to write about complex questions: What is "humanitarianism"? What inspires "humanitarians" to do this difficult work? What codes of conduct inform their behavior? How do their organizations actually work? How are they funded? How should their effectiveness be evaluated? How should we reckon with their successes and failures? How and why does their work matter?

FYS 186: Looking at the Black Mirror: Technology & Business Ethics

Prof. Rita Chesterton

As businesses develop and deploy new technologies we must keep in mind how our human values and ethics can help define their uses and misuses. The course will use modern dystopian film, TV shows and short stories as a lens through which students can analyze the ethical implications for businesses that develop these technologies. Areas to be explored include artificial intelligence, privacy and surveillance, and genetic engineering. In addition to the fiction pieces, students will read academic texts and news articles to allow them to develop a thoughtful discourse on business ethics.

FYS 194: To Hell and Back

Dr. Francesca Coppa

In this course we will examine literary journeys through nightmarish and demonic landscapes. We will travel into and through various conceptions of hell, and try to articulate the moral and literary assumptions of each. What is

hell? How is it represented? What is gained by traveling there? What kind of "heaven" is implied by each of these hells? What kind of "crimes" condemn you to be there? What kinds of punishment do they offer, and to what end? Texts will include Dante's *Inferno*, Sartre's *No Exit*, Weiss's *The Investigation*, & Ellis's *American Psycho*.

FYS 195: Hopes, Dreams, & Walls: Stories of Migration

Dr. Ranajoy Ray-Chaudhuri

The course will examine the often overlapping political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental reasons behind human migration, as well as analyze its effects on various communities. Some of the specific topics we will cover are migration due to economic opportunities or lack thereof like the Gold Rush and the Dust Bowl; the refugee crisis and changing notions of legality and illegality in the context of migration; and climate change, natural disasters and environmental refugees. As a first year seminar, the course will focus on analytical writing, both in and outside the classroom, and on in-class discussions to critically examine issues around migration.

FYS 205: Cuisine as Culture: Exploring Allentown's Hispanic Communities

Dr. Erika M. Sutherland

From the earliest recorded history, humans have thought about food as something much more than physical sustenance. Proof of this can be found in nearly any context or medium, but in this course we will explore the concept of food as a marker of culture and change. In the Lehigh Valley's large and surprisingly diverse Hispanic immigrant communities, food is at once a marker of assimilation and a nostalgic link to a distant homeland or disappearing culture. Looking at food through the eyes of filmmakers and the words of poets, historians, visionaries, and activists, we will learn to consider food ourselves as an object of study and a lens through which broader issues can be analyzed. Exploring local restaurants and food stores, you will be able to add your own sensorial and analytical impressions to this mix.

FYS 218: Investigation of Improvisation

Prof. Megan Flynn

Whether practiced in the studio or on stage, in a laboratory or in the kitchen, improvisation is a dynamic process that requires deep listening, somatic awareness, and active decision-making in the moment. Drawing from S. Ama Wray's theory of "Embodiology", we will research how improvisation as creative scholarship is a form of bodily knowledge. Through writing, group discussion and "Embodiology" practices, we will investigate the ways improvisation is used across multiple disciplines--- from the performing arts, to creative writing, math, science and medicine. How do we develop our skills in play, observation, analysis, decision-making, collaboration and creativity to become better improvisers? How can "play" be serious research? What is the art *and* science of improvisation?

FYS 224: Reading Museums

Prof. Linda Miller

In this seminar, we will look at museums as texts - as objects to read and interpret - and will try to understand the cultural assumptions that guide the design of museums. What stories do museum exhibits tell? What do these

exhibits tell us about who we are as a culture and as people? Why do we even collect objects and place them on display? We will investigate how museum exhibits are constructed: what objects are included, excluded, emphasized and downplayed, how do museums weave together the objects on display, and how does the inclusion and organization of these objects create narratives? Since our primary texts will be museums, we will take day trips to local museums in Philadelphia, such as The African-American Museum and the Betsy Ross House. While the course will primarily focus on how we understand the museum exhibits, as a final project, we will create a digital story that allows students to put into practice their understanding of how objects create narratives.

FYS 226: Captives

Dr. Mark Stein

Captured by pirates. Carried away by Native Americans. Kidnapped by leftist terrorists. Stories about captives—men or women, children, enemies, neighbors—have fascinated readers since the 1500s. These stories share certain elements: capture, suffering, redemption. But their portrayals of captors vary. Are they torturing savages or a welcoming community? Does the captive fight for freedom or assimilate into their captor's society? And how were the captives viewed by their own cultures when they returned? In this writing-intensive seminar we will read about captives from North Africa to colonial America to 1970s California. We will read autobiographical accounts, contemporary plays, and scholarly work from history, literature, sociology, and psychology.

FYS 231: Forensic Linguistics: The Language of Crime and Justice

Prof. Mark Emerick

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.” -
Miranda Warning

How often do you think about the implications of what you say? In the criminal justice system, there can be grave consequences if you say the wrong thing at the wrong time, as the Miranda rights above warn. In this course, we will draw upon linguistic and sociolinguistic theories to examine the ways language is used and understood in the criminal justice system, from language as evidence in investigations to language use in courtrooms and police interrogations. We will address questions such as: Did you intentionally consent to that search of your vehicle? Did you unwittingly commit bribery, fraud, or libel in that last tweet you wrote? How do police use language to secure (or coerce) a confession? What should law enforcement and the courts do to ensure citizens and noncitizens alike comprehend the complex language of the legal system? Using case studies and linguistic data; empirical research from criminal justice, law, and applied linguistics; and docu-series and other media sources, we will explore the relationship among language, law, and power in society. In doing so, you will develop your critical thinking, analytical, and academic writing skills.

FYS 238: Witchcraft/*Brujería*: Magical Resistance for Social Change

Dr. Leticia Robles-Moreno

What does it mean to be a witch? Where does the fear of witchcraft originate?

Witchcraft has been often seen as fearsome, evil, or dangerous. Burning witches, literally or metaphorically, has often been used as a tool for controlling bodies, marking some individuals as deviant or contaminated because their value systems or cultural practices clash with the dominant society. Indigenous, female, queer, and racialized peoples have thus been seen as alarming “others” and pushed to the margins of societies.

Pop culture has explored the subversive power of witchcraft in terms of race, gender, and class through, for example, Willow Rosenberg’s queerness or the all-female-of-color cast of the *Charmed* remake. Some of these depictions, although appealing, somehow miss the complexity of casting fluid/hybrid identities as witches. “Witches” cannot be contained in one specific label.

Contemporary movements of political resistance have reclaimed witchcraft as a sign of self-identification and cultural heritage. In particular, Latinx and Afro-Latinx thinkers and doers have embraced *Brujería* as a site of belonging. What can witchcraft *do*? And why are people taking the streets in Peru, Argentina, Spain, and other parts of the world to protest social oppression by chanting: “we are the daughters of the witches you couldn’t burn”?

FYS 246: Proving the Unprovable: Religion, Science, and the ‘Unknown’ in Modernity

Dr. Dustin Nash

While the search for the remains of Noah’s ark, evidence of alien abductions, or the hunt for the Loch Ness Monster may seem unrelated, they are linked as products of a uniquely modern desire for “proof.” Indeed, modernity has seen an explosion of interest in scientifically “proving” elements of the scriptures, folk tales, and myths that have shaped various peoples conceptions of the past and the true nature of the present. In this course, we will question the origin and function of this desire within modern culture. Furthermore, we will read literature produced by authors attempting to prove such arguments, as well as those who challenge their conclusions. In this way, we will discuss the nature of “evidence” and its interpretation, and think critically about the ways in which we, as writers, interpret evidence in order to make claims and create knowledge.

FYS 249: Bad Boys & Rebel Girls: Juvenile Delinquency in America

Dr. Jacqueline Antonovich

Hooligans. Ruffians. Punks. Thugs. These terms have been used to describe juvenile delinquents at various points throughout American history. The problems of “troubled youth” have long frustrated and fascinated the American public – with their stories often portrayed in film, on stage, in song, and in literature. But do these depictions accurately reflect the real-life experiences of young men and women classified as “delinquent”? In this writing-intensive seminar we will read about juvenile delinquency in the United States from the nineteenth century to the present. In addition to examining the everyday lives of young men and women classified as delinquents, we will explore the social, cultural, legal, and academic responses to delinquency. We will pay particular attention to how constructions of race, class, and gender have influenced these responses. We will read work from history,

literature, sociology, and psychology, while also exploring juvenile delinquency through the lens of film, television, and music.

FYS 257: Strange Neighbors: Science Fiction Looks at Culture

Prof. Gail Marsella

Reading science fiction (SF) resembles an auction - the tables hold an impossibly enticing variety of unique things, the sellers make multiple bid calls for your attention, and you're never the oddest person in the room. You can be tongue-tied, brainy, or as socially awkward as a chimp at a wedding, but read SF and you've got a posse: people (some admittedly fictional) who along with you ask questions others avoid, imagine bizarre futures with new kinds of good and evil, and wonder aloud how they might fare in such scenarios. Why SF stories? Survival information, for one thing, but also provocative and potentially useful ideas on current cultural questions of otherness, change, technology, the future, and the environment. In the seminar, we will consider some of these ideas through various lenses, particularly scientific and literary.

FYS 263: Forced From Home

Dr. John Ramsay

The course will examine the plights of refugee families, forced from their homes by persecution, war, violence, disease or environmental crises. We'll study a wide variety of non-fiction case studies, essays, short stories and documentary films, including Matthew Cassel's documentary film "The Journey," the story of the Shalhoub family's three-year struggle to escape war-torn Syria and gain legal entry to The Netherlands. We'll read Rachel Aviv's "Letter from Sweden," about a mysterious medical condition that afflicts refugee children, and Viet Thanh Nguyen's collection of short stories *The Refugees*. We'll also consider the humanitarian responses of international organizations, such as the UN General Assembly's "New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants," adopted in September, 2016.

FYS 265: Quantum Weirdness & Probability

Dr. Adam Clark

Recently astronomers Adam Frank and Woodruff Sullivan published an article arguing that the existence of intelligent life somewhere else in the universe at some point in time was virtually certain. We will use this as our main focus for studying how probability informs science, pop culture, and things in between. We will learn some basics about probability in ordinary language, which we will then use to understand the claims of Frank and Sullivan. We will also look at some of the famous and famously weird experimental results of quantum mechanics, which makes extensive use of probability. In particular, we will explore the troubling notion that human consciousness somehow plays an important role in assembling quantum probability distributions into the physical reality all around us. Finally, we will look at ways probability and quantum mechanics are represented and misrepresented in popular culture, ranging from Han Solo's famous line, "Never tell me the odds!" in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics frequently used in science fiction to justify "alternate realities." While this is primarily a writing class, our subject matter necessitates a certain degree of mathematical proficiency. Students considering this FYS should be proficient with algebra. No calculus is necessary, nor is any prior experience with probability.

FYS 266: Do Robots Dream?

Dr. Irene Chien

From 19th century mechanical automata to C3PO to Siri, our concept of humanoid machines has shifted from the alien to the personal. And as technologies have interpenetrated our bodies and daily lives, it becomes harder to maintain the boundaries between what is natural and what is artificially constructed. What distinguishes humans from machines? Do new technologies open up our human potential or dehumanize us? Should we care if our machines are smarter than us? In this course, we will trace how artificial intelligence has been represented in literature, film, visual art, and popular culture to discover how robot identities have challenged our concepts of human identity. With a particular focus on the figure of the female, racialized, and/or queer robot, we will critically examine how gender, race, and sexuality intersect with technology to destabilize our ideas of what it means to be human.

FYS 272: The Next Pandemic

Prof. Melissa Dowd

In 1996, microbiologist Rita Corwell suggested the idea that one could use the history of cholera to better understand other emerging diseases and their potential to lead to a pandemic, something she called the Cholera Paradigm. Using Sonia Shah's *Pandemic*, in conjunction with primary literature articles, we will explore the biological, public health, socioeconomic, and political intersections involved in understanding past outbreaks, from the flu to Ebola to HIV/AIDS, and of course cholera. In this course we will analyze our potential ability to learn from past pandemics and explore the way in which it can impact or desire to respond.

FYS 279: Fairness

Dr. Daniel Doviak

Fairness is a powerful concept, impacting nearly every area of social life. We appeal to fairness in setting wages, debating taxes, and distributing scarce resources like organs, jobs, and educational opportunities. We strive to be fair in personal and legal disputes. We demand fair elections, fair hearings, and fair negotiations, and implore children, businesses, and athletes to play by a fair set of rules. Despite the centrality of fairness in modern society, significant disagreements over how to define and interpret this notion persist. This writing-intensive seminar examines these disagreements, exploring both theoretical debates about the nature of fairness as well as complex, practical issues over what fairness implies for real world challenges like organ sharing, wage determination, and environmental remediation. Some leading questions include: How do we determine who merits what? Is fairness inborn or learned? How is fairness linked to equality? Can society become more fair? By what means? Through various formal and informal writing assignments, students will develop analytical skills in observation, description, and interpretation, and also learn how to develop and refine an evidence-based thesis. Readings will draw from a wide range of academic disciplines including philosophy, political science, law, economics, and psychology. Authors studied include Barbara Goodwin, Nicholas Rescher, and John Broome, among others.

FYS 282: Coffee: The Great Soberer**Dr. Keri Colabroy**

The sale and consumption of coffee is a billion dollar industry, making it the second most traded commodity around the world (behind petroleum). The coffee bean was first discovered in the mountains of Ethiopia and treasured for its psychoactive properties. This powerful elixir has fueled political, cultural and economic revolutions since its discovery in the 6th century. Today growing and exporting coffee employs some of the world's most impoverished people, while the urban chic flock to a new generation of coffeehouses. Did coffee really shape world history? Why are so many of the world's poor tied to the economy of coffee farming? Why do we think of coffeehouses as places of comfort and conversation? Can coffee really break down social barriers? In this seminar, we will explore the globalization, economy and culture of coffee and the coffee industry. Course work will include analysis of short stories, other narratives, essays, and film. Students should expect to analyze through writing and improve that analysis by revision.

FYS 283: Salem Witchcraft: Evidence and Interpretations**Dr. Lynda Yankaskas**

Salem, 1692. Nineteen witches hanged. One man pressed to death. A community in panic. We know this story. But what really happened at Salem in the last decade of the seventeenth century? How can we know, and why does it matter how we tell this story? Why has the same evidence given rise to so many very different interpretations of the events of 1692? In this writing-intensive seminar, we will consider the story of the Salem witch trials from multiple angles, from records produced at the time to historians' diverse takes to fiction and art. We will delve deeply into the world of colonial Massachusetts in order to try to understand how religion, economics, gender, and race may have shaped the witchcraft crisis. We will also investigate the different ways that the evidence of the trials has been interpreted—explained, exploited, and made into art—over time, and what those retellings might tell us about the interpreters of Salem, including what they might say about us as readers and as writers.

FYS 287: Middle Earth Stories**Dr. William Tighe**

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy became something of a craze in the 1960s, and has maintained its popularity ever since, and almost twenty years ago became the subject of a film trilogy which attracted a vast audience. Tolkien's trilogy actually emerged as almost a by-product of his professional (and professorial) interest in language, philology (the study of words, their origins and changes in meaning), myth and legend and Anglo-Saxon England and its literature. In this course we will study the sources of Tolkien's creative imagination and its origins in his own life experiences, and how it has been received and purveyed as a work of popular culture, working our way backwards from the films through the stories to their sources and origins. We will also look at the historical and biographical contexts of LOTR (and ancillary works), and at Tolkien's own ideological, cultural and aesthetic commitments.

FYS 296: Transgender Peoples and Cultures Around the World**Dr. Casey James Miller**

Although every culture defines what it means to be male or female, each does so differently. Similarly, in every society there are people whose gender identities do not fall neatly within the gender binary and who call into question what it means to be a man or a woman. This first-year seminar introduces students to the study of transgender peoples and cultures around the world. What roles do culture and society play in shaping and regulating gender and sexuality? How are the experiences of transgender communities around the world similar and different? What does the study of transgender peoples and cultures reveal about how gender and sexual norms are created, continued, and challenged? Together we will look for answers to these and other related questions by reading, discussing and writing about a range of texts that explore transgender lives and cultures from around the globe, from the memoirs of Herculine Barbin, an intersex person from nineteenth-century France, to ethnographic studies of American drag queens in the 1960s and contemporary transgender cultures in Brazil and India. Through a variety of writing assignments, including close-reading and lens analysis, students will also develop and strengthen their writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills.

FYS 297: The U.S. Constitution: Crisis and Convention**Dr. Alec Marsh**

Current events and the phenomenon of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: The Revolution* suggest that we should rediscover the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. After reading the libretto and listening to the music and (I hope) seeing Miranda's *Hamilton* we will turn to the debates accompanying the writing of the US Constitution, via *The Federalist* and *Anti-Federalist*, Madison's notes, the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, John Locke and, by way of contrast, J.J. Rousseau in his *Social Contract*. All of this material is available in good cheap editions new or used. Given the current state of affairs in the country, the relevance of this material is self-evident. The more we know, the better we can understand the current crisis and the Founder's prophetic thinking and constitutional remedies.

Scholar Seminars — 2019-2020

DNA 121: The Power of Maps

Prof. Sharon Albert

In this course, we will read, think, and write about maps: how we use them, how we make them, and the power they have to inform, to transform, and to shape how we understand our world. Readings will include work on the significance of maps as visual representations of space and the authoritative power they can wield. We will also read texts dealing with the history of cartography, as well as some travel literature and geographies, real and imagined. Our questions will explore the assumptions that underlie the making and using of maps. For instance: What gets included on maps? How are they oriented? What gets left out? Who makes the maps? How do maps sustain structures of power? And how and when can they be instruments of change? Students will use the theoretical work we read to create their own critical analyses of maps, and will also think and write analytically about the creation of maps and how maps are used.

DNA 122: Ignorance

Dr. Tad Robinson

We have mixed feelings about ignorance. On the one hand, we regard ignorance as something to be eliminated, dispelled, or overcome. On the other hand, sometimes we are happy to remain ignorant, and to willingly put our heads in the sand. Often we simply do not want to know, for example, how much the gift cost, how many calories the cheeseburger has, or where our products come from. In short, we also know that ignorance can be bliss. In this seminar we will take a close look at our attitudes toward information and knowledge. After considering the nature of ignorance and its relationship to education, we will take up a number of related questions including: what motivates us to ignore certain kinds of information, and does this ever make sense? Do some groups, practices, or institutions strive to keep us ignorant? How so, and for what end? Exploring these questions will involve readings from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, education, and political science. This seminar is writing intensive.

FYS 124: World War II in the American Imagination (Emerging Leaders)

Dr. Brian Mello

Americans remember World War II as the paradigmatic example of a good war—a just war. Moreover, the dominant national narrative is that perhaps in no other war was the United States so clearly on the side of justice. Dragged into war by an unprovoked imperialist attack, America finished the war as a liberating force, the greatest generation having pulled together in shared sacrifice. Forever after the United States would become “the arsenal of democracy.” This writing intensive first-year seminar challenges the ways in which World War II has been embedded within the American imagination. Through the study of academic and popular texts we will examine representations of the war in film, literature, and national memorials, focusing on those aspects of the war that have slipped from national memory. We will explore the following questions: Which narratives tend to dominate the popular imagination about the war, and what effect does this have on both the construction of American national identity, and on America’s interactions with the world militarily? How might a focus on parts of the history that challenges the dominant narrative of the war affect both American identity, and how Americans view their place in the world?

FYS 250: Art, Politics, & Borders (Emerging Leaders)**Prof. Frederick Wright Jones**

What differentiates political art from propaganda? The objective of this course is to analyze how visual culture influences how we view and relate to Power, Success, and Fulfillment. We will reflect on if the imagery that saturates our days affects how we identify socially and with history, how we dress, or how we form political decisions. Students are asked to question how aesthetic culture relates to such themes as freedom, access, property, border and individual rights both today and historically. This course will introduce students to contemporary artists and how they approach political action. From there we journey into the visual characteristics of political identity and the politics of separation, whether on the basis of Race, Nation, Culture or Gender. We will search for visual overlap of art, pop-culture and political history. How do artists like Glenn Ligon or Hank Willis Thomas invert stereotypes? How does talk show host, Hasan Minhaj, talk about the Streetwear brand Supreme, how have they stolen imagery from Barbara Kruger and who is this anyway? How does the German hard-rock band Rammstein play with the Fascist imagery of Leni Riefenstahl? How do corporations package and market rebellion?

MBS 103: Writing Meditation**Dr. Kammie Takahashi**

“Reduce Stress!” “Discover Inner Peace!” From Tazo’s Zen Tea to Google’s “Search Inside Yourself” workshops, modern references to mindfulness are everywhere. This seminar examines a variety of traditional contemplative practices, and modern applications of their techniques in such diverse contemporary arenas as education, business, and medical science. How is meditation understood as process? As performance? As expression? We will also critically and experientially engage with the emerging field of Contemplative Sciences as we “sit and write” about the contributions of contemplative techniques to our own creative and analytic process as writers.

RJF 110: Curiosity**Dr. Jim Bloom**

Students will analyze, discuss, and reflect on cultivating curiosity across various fields of inquiry and forms of expression, including literature, science, movies, plays, and social research. Throughout the semester students will focus on relationships between cultivating curiosity on one’s own and public, institutional efforts to promote and to regulate curiosity, to sponsor and to constrain inquiry.