



FIRST YEAR SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS FALL 2009

Title: **Jane Austen and the Contemporary World**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 A 10-10:50 MWF**

Instructor: **Mary Jane Androne**

Description: This course will explore the reasons underlying the contemporary popularity of a British novelist whose fiction centers on the lives and manners of early nineteenth century gentry. Issues this seminar will address include Austen's portrayal of marriage, friendship, sibling relationships and the critical choices characters make within the boundaries of class, family and place which often determine individual fulfillment. Most importantly, Austen's vision of the hierarchies of "character" that trump social and economic rank which anticipate modern democratic ideology will also be addressed. Austen's acclaimed mastery of the novel of manners as a genre will be an additional focus. Students will read five of Austen's novels – *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*.

In judging the proper relation of Austen's themes to contemporary culture, students will examine the historical contexts of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British society to identify the social attitudes reflected in Austen's fiction which determine the behavior of characters who are committed to maintaining the social hierarchy of provincial England and who actively resist the inevitable economic and social changes she records. The differences in attitudes and behavior various characters represent which produce so much of the conflict – as well as the wit – in Austen's novels clarify not only her treatment of character but also her complicated vision which employs observation of the social scene to express her distinctive values.

The contemporary popularity of Jane Austen's life and works is also evident in the plethora of films, novels and other media devoted to her; students will explore the implications of this wave of interest in Austen and analyze the relation of these contemporary works on Austen to her themes and characters.

Title: **Netherlands, Otherlands**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 B 1-2:20 TTH**

Instructor: **Richard Androne**

Description: "Netherlands, Otherlands" is a first-year seminar that explores attempts in Western literature to imagine and describe lands above, beneath, beyond, and hidden within the real world of everyday experience. Heavenly kingdoms, underworlds, places beyond the ends of the earth, faerie and enchanted lands are prominent in some of our greatest literary texts. What are they like? Why are they there? Readings will be taken from Gilgamesh, the Bible, Homer, Virgil, Marie de France, Dante, Milton, and other ancient, medieval, and renaissance sources.

Title: **Diversity on Trial: Galileo and the Catholic Church**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 C 9:30-10:50 TTH**

Instructor: **Brian Buerke**

Description: What happens when individuals who want to argue for diversity of thought come up against institutions that are opposed to it? The results can be both frightening and exhilarating, full of drama and pathos. This seminar course will study one of the most famous episodes in the history of intellectual freedom, the trial and condemnation of Galileo Galilei by the Roman Inquisition for teaching that the Earth orbits the Sun. Although often viewed as a conflict between science and religion, the episode is better seen as a conflict between two different scientific/religious world views and the limits to which diversity can be allowed within well-established organizations. As a believing Catholic, Galileo used both science and traditional theology to argue his case. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, demanded that Galileo prove his scientific claims before pressing its implications for theology. In the background are the issues of politics and international relations that made the Church vulnerable to Galileo's claims and the psychological and sociological motivations that caused Galileo to betray the very people he hoped would protect him. Understanding what happened to Galileo and why involves important issues in science, religion, philosophy, history, politics, psychology, and communications. Students will ultimately apply the lessons learned in this case to understand modern examples of the apparent conflict between science and religion.

Title: Educating the Prince Then and Now: Hamlet and His Descendants

Section & Time: FYS 100 D 11-11:50 MWF

Instructor: Alberto Cacicedo

Description: The goal of the course is to situate the liberal arts by comparing current approaches to and uses of the liberal arts to their function in the Early Modern period. We will focus on three major literary texts—Hamlet from the Early Modern world and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead and Gertrude and Claudius from the post-modern world—to consider the issues that the liberal arts raise. In particular we will consider the problems and ambiguities attending on the deployment of the liberal arts in "real world" use, and consider alternatives to the liberal arts in approaching problems.

Title: Science in Literature

Section & Time: FYS 100 E 12-12:50 MWF

Instructor: Karen Campbell

Description: This course is designed to provide insights into how the process of scientific discovery actually works through exploration of several literary works. In particular, Richard Preston's novel, *The Cobra Effect*, is a tale of medical pathology that mirrors the scientific process at many levels as experts attempt to unravel the details of a biological terrorist attack. Advances in molecular and cellular biology are integral to this work of fiction, with frightening applications in the real world. We will also explore some other applications of that world of discovery by examining *Mean Genes*, a journey into our past, to consider the factors that were important in supporting the genetic basis of some behaviors that might not be quite so adaptive in today's world. *The Lives of a Cell* by Lewis Thomas is a classic collection of essays originally published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* from 1971 through to 1973. These essays address the theme of science as an integral part of the culture of our age, as they explore the world around us and examine the interdependence of all things. This theme is integral in the world shared by parasites and people, presented in *New Guinea Tapeworms* and *Jewish Grandmothers*, where Robert Desowitz introduces us to the complexities of human – parasite interactions in the Third world and our own backyard. Other readings that allow us to explore the relationship between humans and the rest of the planet are presented in *Your Inner Fish: A Journey Into the 3.5 Billion year history of the human body* by Neil Shubin, who tells the story of evolution by tracing the organs of the human body back millions of years, long before the first creatures walked the earth. A second purpose of this seminar would be to encourage "scientific literacy" in general. Recent developments in science have provided significant advances in understanding how the body works and the patterns of inheritance of some traits. Along with these advances have come difficult questions relating to how new types of information are used, how specific conditions and diseases are most effectively treated, and how technological advances are used for the greatest benefit. These issues will be addressed through critical analysis and discussion of current articles from several sources discovered by the students in the class, to gain a better understanding of what is known and what is not.

Title: Coming of Age in African American Texts

Section & Time: FYS 100 F 9:30-10:50 TTH

Instructor: Teresa Gilliams

Description: What constitutes an African American bildungsroman? What are the major events in the protagonist's growth from individual self into social being? Who and what functions as the "educator" in the African American novel? We will read, think, talk, and write about—in literary, social, and historical ways (among others)—African American texts that centralize the coming of age experience. We will study African American autobiography, poetry, fiction and drama, attempting to explore the extent to which place and culture, race and gender become organizing themes among those texts that present some of the challenges facing black youth in America: the struggle to balance tradition and change, the quest for education, the development of political awareness, and the potential to envision fundamental social change. Special attention will be paid to the effects of racial, class, and cultural differences on the representation of gender in literature. Whereas the primary texts for the course illuminate a process, a moment, or a scene akin to the structural "scenes of instruction" inherent in African American narratives described by Dexter Fisher (1990), much of the course work and discussion will center on the discovery of American society's racism as the major event in the protagonist's development and in his "education."

Title: **Funny Women: Female Humor Writers in America**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 G 1-1:50 MWF**

Instructor: **Denise Greenwood**

Description: In the course we will trace the contributions to comic literature made by women writers from the colonial period to the present. We will examine major themes to see how the writers reflect and attempt to influence contemporary cultural and political issues, and, because many of the writers focus on women's concerns, we will look at trends in the ways women are portrayed in the works. Readings will include a variety of genres: poetry, short fiction, comic sketches, and novels produced by a wide range of women authors—some obscure but many fairly well known. Writing assignments will, of course, involve some analysis of literary devices and styles, but the readings will largely create opportunities for the students to discuss the material in a larger social context. We will read the works in chronological order so that the students can see the development of literary trends, subject matter, point of view, and social concerns. Using the complex relationship between humor and culture as a springboard, we will discuss ways in which people respond to and attempt to influence their environment. We will, naturally, take up such topics as the Battle of the Sexes. And, of course, we will examine the texts to see what makes us laugh—and why.

Title: **Perfect Children-Reproductive Technology and the New Eugenics**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 H 1-2:20 TTH**

Instructor: **Richard Heller**

Description: This course will study the range of technologies now offered to the public and the ethical, legal, social and economic issues that result. A reading list will include selections from books such as “The Clone Age” by Lori Andrews, “Bioethics and the New Embryology” by Scott Gilbert et. al., “Human Heredity-Principles and Issues” by Michael Cummings, “Before We Are Born” by Keith Moore and T. V. N. Persaud, and “The Unfit-A History of a Bad Idea” by Elof Axel Carlson. Readings from biomedical ethics websites will be assigned in addition to material available in the current literature in “Science”, “Nature”, and other journals. Books and Journals will be available on reserve in the library. A critical aspect of this subject is the conflict between diversity and genetic conformity, which is often the hidden objective in genetic screening and reproductive therapies. The interdisciplinary nature of the subject will be emphasized, and students will be required to present individual projects through written assignments and oral presentations using PowerPoint.

Title: **A Shot in the Dark: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 I 3-3:50 MWF**

Instructor: **John Incledon**

Description: “I think, therefore I am,” affirmed French philosopher René Descartes in the seventeenth century. Are we thinking subjects, constituted by our conscious thoughts, as Descartes claimed? Or is there another realm of the mind—the unconscious—that influences, perhaps even governs, our conscious thoughts and actions? This course will study the ideas of two of the twentieth century's most important psychoanalysts—Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Rather than attempting to determine the truth/falsity or the therapeutic value of their ideas, emphasis will be placed on the study of psychoanalysis as a method of understanding (“reading,” interpreting) the human subject—i.e., the subject as “text.” This method—methods, really, since the theories of Freud and Jung are quite different—will then be turned on other “texts,” literary and cinematic.

Title: **Experimental Fiction**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 J 8-9:20 TTH**

Instructor: **Ethan Joella**

Description: This course will study modern and contemporary authors who defy conventional story standards with non-traditional forms. Potential authors to be covered include Barthelme, Coover, Kincaid, Boyle, and Barth. The class will explore how these experimental stories still achieve end results similar to conventional pieces.

Title: **Difference and the Quest for Truth**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 L 11-12:20 TTH**

Instructor: **Fouad Kalouche**

Description: The course will introduce students to the historical quest for truth and to the role that “difference” plays in this quest. Lectures and readings will present an overview of historical figures, texts, and contexts that were engaged in the search for truth from different social, cultural, and political conditions. The class will highlight how any search for truth is made possible through individual and/or social encounter with difference and how the social, cultural, and political implications of the quest for truth are intricately linked to how that quest approaches difference, diversity, and otherness. This will reveal how ethics and politics are linked to ontology (study of being) and epistemology (study of knowledge), and will allow the class to assess the interconnectedness of historical, cultural, political, epistemological, and economic forces in shaping our individual and social realities.

Title: **Space and Place: Questions about Territory and Belonging**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 M 11-12:20 TTH**

Instructor: **Elizabeth Kiddy**

Description: This seminar examines the concepts of space, place, and identity and how conceptions of these relate to the creation of personal, regional, national, and global identities. We will examine several case studies from Latin American history to help us to understand the ways that conceptions and representations of space and power have been shaped by, and shaped, history. The case studies will bring us up to the present, as we use our personal identities as a jumping off point for thinking about critical contemporary topics, such as the creation of nations and nationalism, the juxtaposition of globalization and tribalism, and the question of whether or not we have become “de-territorialized” through movement and migration. We will explore ideas of space from many different angles, using geography and history as the main disciplinary foci. Nonetheless, we will think about space and place creatively as well, reading a novel, watching and discussing a film, thinking about performance art, doing an art project on (and using) maps, as well as drawing on the students’ personal experiences of space and place.

Title: **Creation**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 N 2-2:50 MWF**

Instructor: **Jennifer L. Koosed**

Description: How did it all begin? Why is there something rather than nothing? What does it mean to be human? Every known culture has asked these questions, and most have explored the answers through the telling of stories. This class will begin by examining creation stories from around the world, paying particular attention to how the stories embody the deepest truths of the people who tell them. Next, this class will focus on the creation stories of ancient Israel and their interpretations in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These stories from Genesis have shaped our understanding of what it means to be human and humanity's place in the world. We will, therefore, explore how our contemporary views on gender, sexuality, race, and the environment are shaped by these ancient stories. Finally, the class will look at the role of science in the crafting of our current cosmologies and cosmogonies.

Title: **Democracy**

Section & Time: **FYS 100 O 11-11:50 MWF**

Instructor: **Irene Langran**

Description: Today there are more democracies in the world than ever before. Despite the popularity of this form of government, it remains a topic mired in controversy. Whether it involves building a new democracy in Iraq or electing a U.S. president, democracy represents a fundamental challenge to politicians and citizens alike. This course will examine the practice of democracy in comparative perspective by analyzing methods of measuring democracy, examining different types of democracy, and exploring democracy in countries throughout the world.

Title: Yeats
Section & Time: FYS 100 P 12-12:50 MWF
Instructor: Lawrence Morris

Description: This course aims to develop strong academic skills by researching, analyzing, and critiquing the work of the famous Irish poet and public intellectual William Butler Yeats. Throughout his work, Yeats strived to make poetry relevant—indeed essential—to the rapidly evolving cultural and political life in turn-of-the-century Ireland. Yeats’s success as a writer and as a thinker made him not only one of Ireland’s most famous poets, but also one of the most influential artists of the early twentieth century. This course will develop skills in researching, critical reading, formal presentation, and expository writing as we collaboratively explore Yeats’s career.

Title: Media Literacy
Section & Time: FYS 100 Q 11-11:50 MWF
Instructor: Margaret Rakus

Description: This course will introduce students to the field of media literacy. Students will critically analyze mass media texts examining relationships among economics and movie and music production; advertising and consumerism; gender, race, and class and representation in television and movies; and, analyze the creative approaches activists and educators have used to "talk back" to mass media. Assignments will include response blogs, a book review, presentations, and development of a media literacy campaign.

Title: Drugs and Society
Section & Time: FYS 100 R 2:30-3:50 TTH
Instructor: Ian Rhile

Description: Drugs are substances meant to be used to treat or prevent a medical condition or to alter a mental state. We will discuss these fascinating substances from a variety of perspectives, looking at topics such as drug discovery and design, simple pharmacology, FDA approval, addiction, legal issues, public health issues, social and economic costs and benefits, and ethical concerns of use. Case studies will include both legal and illegal drugs. No specialized background is assumed.

Title: The Academy and Human Oppression
Section & Time: FYS 100 S 2:30-3:50 TTH
Instructor: Gerald Ronning

Description: This course will explore the ways that scholars and higher education more generally helped to advance the racialist moment in US history, roughly the 1870s to the 1930s. From the mid-nineteenth century into the twentieth century American scholars helped to advance the notion that racial and ethnic differences explained class and social hierarchies and that these biological, psychological, and social differences could be described and supported by the arts and sciences; in short racism was not an ideology but a recognition of real differences that could be confirmed by scholarly research. From across the academy scientists and scholars lined up to furnish proof using methodologies, some alive and well today in American schools, that proved that native born white Anglo-Saxon Protestants were the apogee of human development, justifying brutal oppression and routine exploitation.

Title: Approaching the Middle East
Section & Time: FYS 100 U 1-1:50 MWF
Instructor: Geoffrey Schad

Description: An introduction to appreciating the main issues in the contemporary Middle East. Topics to be covered will include: the physical and human environment of the region and contemporary politics, economics, and social issues. The major stress will be on identifying and analyzing dominant paradigms in both the academic literature and in popular culture that are used to frame knowledge of the Middle East region and the world of Islam.

Title: Dining with God: Food and Spirituality

Section & Time: FYS 100 V 12-12:50 MWF

Instructor: Robert Seesengood

Description: Food customs play a vital role in many religious communities, but have been particularly key in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Traditional Jewish communities center much of their daily religious practice around observance of food regulations called kashrut. Food restrictions mark major Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur and Passover. Christians have, as one of their central rituals, a celebration of the death of Jesus of Nazareth that involves symbolically eating Jesus' flesh (as bread) and consuming Jesus' blood (symbolized by wine). Fasting and specific food rules mark the preparation for and celebration of many Christian holidays (such as Christmas and Easter). Even in contemporary Reformed Judaism, there has been a return to traditional observance of kosher regulations. Many contemporary Evangelical Christians are rediscovering "biblical eating" – shaping their food choices around the dietary codes and general principles found within the Christian Bible. At present, many very secular Americans are also tuning attention to the ethical and spiritual implications of their food choices, using arguments that often reflect traditional Judeo-Christian values and views of food."

Title: It's Alive!

Section & Time: FYS 100 W 2-2:50 MWF

Instructor: Kristen Zacharias

Description: We all recognize when something is alive, for the most part, but how can life be defined? What must be present for something to be alive? This course will explore the philosophical assumptions underlying attempts to understand the nature of life and of living organisms and what constitutes the differences, if any, between the living and the non-living. After a brief consideration of the views of ancient and early modern philosophers, What is Life? will focus on four contemporary works. Although three of the readings are entitled What is Life?, they offer three very different answers that represent fundamental philosophical differences. Erwin Schrödinger approaches the question from a physico-chemical viewpoint; Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan discuss the issue from a biological point of view with emphasis on the origins of life and bacteria; Ed Regis poses the question in terms of artificial life. The fourth, a book by Richard Dawkins, focuses on evolution and DNA. A close reading of these works will develop a philosophical understanding both of the nature of scientific inquiry and of metaphysical reality.

Title: Digital Art and Installation

Section & Time: FYS 100 X 2:30-3:50 TTH

Instructor: Matthew Garrison

Description: The ubiquitous presence of technology in our day-to-day lives has inevitably transformed the creative process of many artists and profoundly influenced contemporary art. Image manipulation, 3D mapping, non-linear editing, special effects and the Internet are integral to the studio practice of many artists exhibiting in galleries and museums worldwide. "Digital Art and Installation" is a seminar course that explores the impact of technology on contemporary art, specific exhibitions and individual artists. The relationship of technology to ongoing themes of perception, process and site-specificity in the visual arts is investigated through readings, discussions and research. Visual literacy and critical thinking are fostered through the investigation of ideologies and messages inherent in the artwork, as well as the technology employed in its creation and distribution.