

Course Descriptions

University Honors Program

Fall 2016

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Origins and Evolutions of Modern Thought

Origins and Evolution of Modern Thought

The Good Life

Professor William Winstead
HONR 1015:MV - 4 Credits
CRN: 12143
MW 1:00-2:15 PM
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M30, W 2:30-3:20 PM, CRN 12870
Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

How are we to live well and flourish in a complex and ever-changing world? What constitutes a good life in the fullest sense? Does an authentic life depend principally upon virtue, reason, or happiness? What role should pleasure, desire, and love play in a life well lived? The question of "the good life" and its achievement is the principle theme of antiquity in both the Western and Eastern traditions. Philosophers, poets, historians, theologians, and political leaders contribute richly to the debate, often with sharply conflicting solutions to the perennial problem of realizing an authentic, meaningful existence. Our readings this semester will come from both Eastern and Western traditions, and include texts from the Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, and Indian traditions. Our discussions will be guided by fundamental questions: How ought I live? What is good (and, equally, what is bad or evil)? What is human nature? What is justice or a just community? What is knowledge or wisdom? What is natural? What is the divine? Throughout the semester, our discussions will be collective, critical, and open-ended. Because our course is designed to cultivate your capacity to write effectively, we will also pay attention to the different forms of writing that we encounter in our readings and work to access the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches.

Eudaimonia: The Art of Living

Professor Eyal Aviv
HONR 1015:MV1 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12333
TR 11:30-12:45 PM
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M31, T 10:00-10:50 AM, CRN: 12871

HONR 1015:MV4 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12336
TR 4:10-5:25 PM
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M34, R 10:00-10:50 AM, CRN: 12874

Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

Ancient thinkers followed the command of the oracle of Delphi "know thyself!" They saw life as a path of self--discovery and believed that living right would result in a state of Eudaimonia (human flourishing). During this fall semester, we will explore the oracle's ancient call. We will reflect upon the different visions of human flourishing, on the conditions that create them, on a society that fosters such life and how one should contribute to such a society. We will do so through engaging with some of the most fascinating Western and non-Western thinkers and writers in ancient world history, such as Plato, Aristotle, Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist writers.

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In addition to "content," our seminar will also focus on "form." One of the goals for this course is to build a solid set of academic skills that will serve you throughout your academic career. We will develop our analytical, presentational and persuasive skills, through close analysis of the texts, written assignments, in-class conversation, as well as debates over the "big questions," which will arise through the semester.

Justice

Professor Theodore Christov

HONR 1015:MV2 - 4 Credits

CRN: 12334

MW 8:30-9:45 AM

Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M32, W 10:00-10:50 AM, CRN: 12872

Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

Consider what might be the right thing to do: Are we ever justified in sacrificing ourselves for the community? Is it just to be a good citizen in a bad society? Is lying morally permissible? Can the just person reconcile knowledge and power, citizenship and tradition? Can reason and divinity coexist as sources for justice?

The perennial quest for justice remains a persistent concern across time, place, and cultures, from antiquity to the present. Ancient Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Far East thinkers faced problems that we may recognize as our own. We will grapple with some major works in ancient thought and engage in political and moral theorizing not only as an intellectual enterprise, but also in the making of a good life. Our common aim is to discuss significant and recurrent (if not unsettling) questions of moral and political value in order to understand how people have understood the nature of the just and virtuous life. In addressing the themes of justice, equality, and citizenship, our readings include the Western and Eastern traditions—Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Seneca, Dhammapada, Lao Tzu, and the Hebrew Bible—in understanding the foundations of the political and moral universe we inhabit today.

Control

Professor Joseph Trullinger

HONR 1015:MV3 - 4 Credits

CRN: 12335

MW 11:30-12:45 PM

Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M32, W 1:00-1:50 PM, CRN: 12873

HONR 1015:MV8 - 4 Credits

CRN: 14456

MW 2:30-3:45 PM

Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M38, W 4:10-5:00 PM, CRN: 14455

Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

What do you do with control once you have it? Everywhere we find examples of people straining to gain or keep control of situations, but we seldom stop to ask why they seek this in the first place. This seminar will foster such reflection through an intensive study of these questions as posed by the artists, historians, leaders, and thinkers of the ancient world. Who gets to be in control of your life, and why? Are we better off not being in control of nature? Does sharing control stabilize governments, or does democracy actually promote fickleness and corruption? What does it mean to have self-control, and is it worth having? What if there

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is no “self” to be controlled to begin with? By exploring classical conceptions of control, we will appreciate how modern thoughts evolve from ancient origins.

Work & Rest

Professor Helen McManus
HONR 1015:MV5 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12337
MW 10:00-11:15 AM
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M35, W 11:30-12:20 PM, CRN: 12875
Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

This Origins seminar will explore ideas of work and labor, rest and tranquility in the ancient world. How did ancient Greek, Roman, and Chinese thinkers understand and value work? How did they characterize rest, and why did they find leisure and tranquility so important? While a job or career often defines a person’s status today, ancient texts provoke us to question work’s place in our own understandings of identity, citizenship, culture, and community. To what extent do, and should, our ethical and political ideals revolve around work?

Wisdom

Professor Mark Ralkowski
HONR 1015:MV6 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12338
TR 10:00-11:15 AM
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M36, F 3:00-3:50 PM, 12877

HONR 1015:MV7 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12749
TR 1:00-2:15
Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M37, F 4:10-5:00, CRN: 12878

Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

What is happiness, and how can I live a life that will make me happy? How should I cope with the fact that I am going to suffer and die, along with everyone I love most? What is justice, and how can we reshape our institutions, as well as our own choices and lives, so that they better reflect it? Is love really such a good thing? Is art good or bad for us? Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing? These are among the earliest questions asked by human beings in the Middle East, Greece, China, and India. In this seminar we will read seminal texts from each of these traditions. Our syllabus will include the Hebrew Bible, Plato, Sophocles, Thucydides, Aristotle, Confucius, Lao Tzu, and the Buddha. And our discussions will cover issues in ethics, politics, psychology, aesthetics, religion, metaphysics, and epistemology. One of the primary goals of this seminar is to see that, in the ancient world, these concepts were studied as a way of life whose goals were wisdom and happiness. As Socrates once said, “We are studying no small matter, but how we ought to live.”

Faith, Belief, and Knowledge

Professor Ronald Dworkin
HONR 1015:MV9 - 4 Credits
CRN: 17121

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TR 2:30-3:45 PM

Writing Lab: HONR 1015:M39, R 1:00-1:50 PM, CRN: 17122

Equivalent Courses: UW 1020

Course Description: This class examines three great traditions—religion, philosophy, and science—and their influence on the origins and evolution of modern thought. Born in the ancient world, these traditions cast a long shadow; they guide our thoughts about our society and ourselves; indeed, many ideas that we think new or modern were already being debated in the ancient world, in one form or another. What is happiness? What is love? What is justice? Indeed, what is life? Do human beings have a nature; if so, is it good or evil? Were human beings meant to live in communities; if so, in what way? These are some of the questions we will explore over the semester from the perspectives of religion, philosophy, and science, through a careful reading of ancient texts. Writers to be studied include Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Epicurus, Euripides, and the Presocratics. “Non-Western” writers include Confucius, Mencius, Xunxi, the Buddha, and Kautilya. We will also read parts of the Hebrew Bible. At the end of the course, students will appreciate not only how religion, philosophy, and science influence modern thought, but also how these traditions compete with one another, with one tradition arguably emerging ascendant over the last century. Because the course has a strong writing component, we will also spend time during the semester covering the basics of good writing.

Enlightenment East and West

Professor William Winstead

HONR 2016:10 - 4 Credits

CRN: 13212

T 3:30-6:00

Fulfills: ESIA: Humanities; SEAS: Humanities

****This course is limited to students who joined the Honors Program as rising sophomores.****The great works of the Western and Eastern intellectual traditions take the problem of Enlightenment as their guiding theme. The concern with enlightenment emerges in the West with the origin of Occidental philosophy in Plato's famous allegory of the cave, while in the East it takes shape with the Buddha's call a century earlier to break with illusion and practice awakening. The modern enlightenment project contrasts sharply with those of antiquity thanks to its commitment to science and technological power and their political and economic counterparts, liberalism and free-market capitalism. Our seminar this semester will examine enlightenment projects East and West, highlighting particularly the sharp differences between a variety of seminal responses to the problems of human delusion, suffering, and injustice. In addition to the theme of enlightenment, our discussions will be guided by fundamental questions: What are good and evil? What constitutes genuine knowledge? What is the character of human nature? What is natural? What is just or virtuous? Our approach to these questions will be open-ended and deliberative, and we will strive to remain sensitive to the complexity of argumentation found in our readings as we discuss and debate their claims.

Scientific Reasoning and Discovery

Energy

Professor Bethany Kung
HONR 1033:10 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12330
TR 9:00-10:50 AM

Fulfills: CCAS: Natural/Physical Science with Lab; GWSB: Science; ESIA: Science

Our lives are a complex web of energy, yet we never give energy much thought. Only when energy resources (e.g. oil, solar, nuclear) become big news do people start paying attention. But how can we be savvy consumers of energy rhetoric without a basic understanding of the fundamental physics of energy? This course will serve as an introduction to the physics of energy, from the basics, e.g. kinetic vs. potential energy, to more complex issues such as energy production, storage and transportation. We will explore alternative energy sources such as solar and nuclear energy.

Topics to be covered will include:

- * The physics of energy: work, power, heat, electromagnetic radiation, electricity
- * Energy storage and transportation: fuels, batteries, the electrical grid
- * Nuclear physics: atoms, quantum mechanics, fission and fusion
- * Energy resources: coal, wind, alternative fuels, solar, nuclear

Throughout the course, students will also tackle the fundamentals of science including the scientific method, experimentation and error measurement. Quantitative analysis will be emphasized to help build problem solving abilities and mathematical intuition (mathematics will be confined to algebra and geometry). This course is designed to increase student scientific curiosity and science literacy. Students will be expected to take an active role in the classroom, where we will explore these topics through lecture, discussion, debate, writing, experimentation, group projects and mathematical exercises. (This is a Green Leaf course that satisfies the "Track A" requirement toward a Minor in Sustainability.)

Science: The Process in Practice

Professors Bethany Kung and Yolanda Fortenberry
HONR 1033:11 - 4 Credits
CRN: 13976
TR 11:00-12:50

Fulfills: CCAS: Natural/Physical Science with Lab; GWSB: Science; ESIA: Science

This course will serve as an introduction to the process and practice of science. Students will emulate scientists in the steps from developing hypotheses and writing research proposals through data collection, analysis, peer review and the presentation of results and conclusions in both written and oral form. This course will be primarily "hands-on" – bring your creativity and intellectual curiosity and be prepared to step outside of your comfort zone to develop new skills. In addition to carrying out scientific investigations, we will consider questions such as:

- * What are the ethical issues related to scientific research?
- * How do scientific claims in the media relate to actual science research?
- * How do you use prior knowledge to estimate unknown values?
- * What separates science from pseudoscience?
- * How are the internet and social media changing the way science is conducted and reported?
- * What might motivate scientists to commit fraud?

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Students will be expected to take an active role in the classroom, where we will explore these topics and others through lecture, discussion, debate, writing, experimentation, group projects and mathematical exercises. Uncertainty in science will be considered both qualitatively and quantitatively. There are no mathematical prerequisites, as the course will include an introduction to the tools and methods of basic statistical analysis and the presentation of data. We will use computer programs such as Excel to collect and manipulate data. This course is designed to increase science literacy – by experiencing for yourself what it takes to produce science, this class strives to make you a better consumer of the science you will encounter throughout your life.

Biology

Professor LaTisha Hammond
HONR 1033:MV - 4 Credits
CRN: 13073
TR 10:00-11:50 AM

HONR 1033:MV1 - 4 Credits
CRN: 12332
TR 1:00-2:50 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Natural/Physical Science with Lab; GWSB: Science; ESIA: Science

GMO foods, biofuels, food allergies, vaccines, cancer, honeybees. At first glance this may be a seemingly random string of topics, but a common thread throughout them all is biology, and all require some understanding of biological concepts to understand their implications and make informed decisions about them. In this course we will explore biological concepts through the lens of contemporary issues in biology as they relate to society and everyday life. This course will serve as an introduction to the fundamentals of biology and the nature of science. Topics to be covered include cells and molecules, genetics, physiology, ecology and evolution as they relate to the more complex and nuanced biological issues of disease, food sources, organism interactions, sustainability, climate change, and bioethics, to name a few. Lab exercises will introduce biological techniques for studying these topics. Students will engage in the process of science in an effort to increase their scientific literacy. Students will be expected to take an active role in the class, where we will explore these topics through lecture, discussion, debate, experimentation, data analysis, writing, and group projects.

Human Biology - Nutrition

Professor Carly Jordan
HONR 1033:MV2 - 4 Credits
CRN: 14187
MW 1:00-2:50 PM
Fulfills: CCAS: Natural/Physical Science with Lab; GWSB: Science; ESIA: Science

Every day we hear all sorts of claims about how to live a healthy life, especially about nutrition. How do you know if the claims you hear are true? The content of this course will focus on the chemistry of food and the biology behind how we turn french fries into energy for life, but the real work will be building skills. You will develop science literacy and critical thinking skills to make sense of the information you encounter. You will learn quantitative skills and basic statistics that will help you interpret data. You will practice communication, in many different forms. The major project in this course will be to find a claim and investigate its validity. You will determine the legitimacy of its makers, learn where to find primary sources to support or refute the claim, and create a public information piece to share your understanding with your peers. In this course, we will analyze serious medical claims and silly urban

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legends, but we will do it all using sound logic and the scientific method. At the end of the semester, you will be armed with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about your health.

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Introductory and Special

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Enlightenment East and West

Professor William Winstead

HONR 2016:10 - 4 Credits

CRN: 13212

T 3:30-6:00

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Self and Society

Ethics and World Politics

Martha Finnemore

HONR 2047:10 - 3 Credits

CRN: 15146

T 11:10-1:00 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Upper-level Political Science elective; SEAS: Social Sciences; CCAS: Social Sciences; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; ESIA: Advanced Fundamental for International/Comparative Politics, Comparative Political Economic and Social Systems Concentration, Conflict Resolution Concentration, International Politics Concentration

This seminar will explore whether and how ethical concerns shape world politics. Thinkers going back to ancient Greece have argued that, in fact, ethics have no place in world affairs. Understanding how this could be so is our starting point. Not surprisingly, this amoral view of the world has been challenged on many grounds over the past two millennia but figuring out exactly how and why ethical concerns can exert force and which ethical positions we should champion requires thought. To explore the role of ethics in global affairs we consider contrasting arguments by philosophers and social thinkers including Thucydides, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, Mohandas Gandhi, Michael Walzer, Henry Shue, Amartya Sen, Peter Singer, and Martha Nussbaum. As we consider these arguments we will apply them to real-world political problems including war, poverty, genocide, immigration, human rights, gender issues, and climate change. Our goal will be to use these classic philosophic arguments to explore ethical problems in contemporary politics and to think about politically successful routes to ethically desirable outcomes.

Justice and the Legal System

Professor Jill Kastle

HONR 2047:11 - 3 Credits

CRN: 14584

M 1530-1800

Fulfills: CCAS: Social Sciences; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS Social Sciences

The constitution of the United States is both a blueprint of government and a list of individual rights. We will examine both functions of the document using the approach of a law school class: employing a law school syllabus, reading and analyzing Supreme Court opinions, and writing law school exams.

An Introduction to Psychology: A Perspectives Approach

Professor Stephen Forssell

HONR 2047:12 - 3 Credits

CRN: 17076

MW 12:45-2:00 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Social Sciences, GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Social Sciences

This course will take a theoretical perspectives approach to a traditional introduction to psychology course. Students in this course will develop an understanding of the scope of the discipline of psychology, learn about key psychological models and theories, and apply that knowledge through the balance of the semester to: survey the range of real world applications of psychological theories; develop keen scientific and critical thinking skills, and understand current and historical methods of research on psychological and

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behavioral processes. Exercises and discussions will focus on critical thought about on the various theoretical frameworks and their usefulness in answering questions about the nature of mind and behavior, and in improving the human condition.

Empire and Imperialism from Rome to Washington

Professor Theodore Christov

HONR 2047: MV - 3 Credits

CRN: 14585

W 11:00-12:50 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Social Sciences, Pre-1750 History elective, Europe History elective, United States History elective, Asia, Africa, Middle East, and Latin America History elective, GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Social Sciences

Equivalent Course: HIST 3001

What gave rise to, and continues to sustain, a common aspiration to a single humanity and world citizenship, from antiquity to the present? This course traces the various ideologies of empire from ancient Rome through the great colonial powers of early modern Europe to imperial resurrections in our present day, such as the World Bank, the IMF, and US power globally. 'Empire' here should be understood loosely to embody a universal set of beliefs about the legitimacy of certain ways of life and political formations. Clearly the modern democracies of the 'West' are not empires in the widely understood sense of the term, but there are many – particularly in the developing world – who would claim that the objectives they pursue are distinctly 'imperialist'. Yet what modern democracies seem to share in common with ancient empires is a single understanding of what a 'civilization' is, and the conviction that such things as rights, freedom of expression and association, even access to free markets, are the properties of all human beings, and not merely the concerns of one particular hegemonic culture. In examining modes of justification used to theorize 'empire', the course focuses on how Europeans came to think of themselves as possessing a distinctive understanding of the world, which they had a duty (and a right) to export, and often impose on others, and how that understanding has come to shape the modern 'Global Neighbourhood'.

****CANCELLED**** Leadership in Theory and Practice

Professors Stephen Joel Trachtenberg and Gerald Kauvar

HONR 2048:10 - 3 Credits

CRN: 14587

W 12:45-3:45 PM

Fulfills: GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Social Sciences

Case Studies in Leadership and Guest Lecturers

Students will be assigned "cases" – some examples follow. Students will be divided into two teams. Team leadership will rotate weekly as well so that each team member has an opportunity to discharge that responsibility. The team leader will prepare the briefings and other relevant materials for that week. Each team will prepare recommendations to the President or Chief Executive Officer (the faculty members teaching the course and the week's guest lecturers) on how to deal with the issues that arise in each case. Presentations will be in PowerPoint or other suitable format to the entire class for discussion. Teams will turn in their presentations by email 24 hours prior to class including "notes" that document how and why they reached their conclusions and the research they undertook. The presentations should include information about dissenting views. Students will be expected to conduct research into how institutions have dealt with similar "cases" in the past. When both teams have submitted their presentations, copies will be distributed to the entire class. The teams must meet face-to-face at least once during the week of preparation.

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Disability in Film

Professors David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder

HONR 2048:11 - 3 Credits

CRN: 14586

M 12:45-3:15 PM

Fulfills: GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Social Sciences

Why do academy awards always seem to go to films with actors portraying disabled people? This class examines images of disability in popular and documentary film. The course teaches critical and technical knowledge about film interpretation while exploring the representational history of disabled populations in the U.S. and globally. Through film one may study the history of disability in exploring storylines where individuals are actively directed to lead a life of excessive restriction. Fortunately, one also finds a history about those who band together in order to resist the discrimination that so often results when some are thought to be alien on the basis of physical, mental, or emotional differences.

Monetary Policy, Financial Policy, and Financial Crises

Professor Robert Van Order

HONR 2048:13 - 3 Credits

CRN: 17224

T 3:30-6:00 PM

Fulfills: GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective, Finance: Global Focus Course, BBA Finance Concentration: International Field Course; SEAS: Social Sciences

The course will be about the financial crises (mainly the most recent one) and the role of banking and policy surrounding banking. It will be a series of seminars on the financial system in the wake of the Great Recession. It will draw on two media events at GW, Chairman Bernanke's lectures in 2011 and the GW MOOC on the Fed that was done last year. It will also use what I think are the best books on subject-popular, but at a high level, and the report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission in 2011, as well as other material. The course will be analytical but not technical-i.e., it will not use math or presume a background in economics.

Race, American Medicine, and Public Health: African American Experiences

Professor Vanessa Northington Gamble

HONR 2048W:80 - 3 Credits

CRN: 15443

MW 12:45-2:00 PM

Fulfills: WID; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Social Sciences

Equivalent Courses: AMST 4702W, HIST 3001W

This course focuses on the role of race and racism in the development of American medicine and public health by examining the experiences of African Americans from slavery to today. It will emphasize the importance of understanding the historical roots of contemporary policy dilemmas such as racial and ethnic inequities in health and health care. The course will challenge students to synthesize materials from several disciplines to gain a broad understanding of the relationship between race, medicine, and public health in the United States.

Among the questions that will be addressed are: How have race and racism influenced, and continue to influence, American medicine and public health? What is race? What have been some of the historical vulnerabilities of black bodies within the medical system? How has medical thought and practices contributed to the political and social status of African Americans? What are racial

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and ethnic inequities in health and health care? What is the history of these inequities and of efforts to address them? What have been the experiences of African Americans as patients and health care providers? How have African Americans challenged racism in medicine?

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Arts and Humanities

Arts and Humanities

Pious Forgeries

Professor Jenna Weissman Joselit

HONR 2053:10 - 3 Credits

CRN: 16706

R 11:10-1:00 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Humanities, Pre-1750 History elective, Europe History elective, United States History elective, Asia, Africa, Middle East, and Latin America History elective, Upper-level Religion elective; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

Equivalent Course: HIST 3001

This interdisciplinary seminar explores a series of forgeries of religious texts and sacred objects that date back to antiquity and forward to our own day. Along the way, it looks at the changing meaning of authenticity and its relationship to faith, practice and community.

Classical Mythology in Art

Professor Rachel Pollack

HONR 2053:11 - 3 Credits

CRN: 16707

TR 12:45-2:00 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Humanities, Classical Studies majors should consult their departmental advisor; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

This course examines the relevance and mutability of classical mythology in Western art. The iconic stories of gods and heroes, passed down through ancient poets such as the Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, have left an indelible impression on the visual arts from antiquity to modern day. Artists ranging from Titian, Caravaggio, Rubens, Rembrandt and Poussin to Picasso and Jeff Koons, have adapted and reinterpreted these myths through the direct appropriation of ancient myth and sculpture. Each time these giants of the visual arts reveal to us that their reimagining of classical mythology extends beyond ancient literary and visual sources.

Throughout the semester, we will discuss a variety of art history scholarship related to the appropriation of classical mythology, spanning from the sensuality of Venus to the heroic anguish of Laocoön. Starting mid-semester, students will select a particular artist who interpreted and adapted mythology in an innovative manner, and will then write an essay proposal (~4 pages) and will present their topic to the class. This essay (~12-15 pages) will be submitted at the end of the term.

Politics & Print

Professor Helen McManus

HONR 2053:12 - 3 Credits

CRN: 16708

R 12:45-3:15 PM

Fulfills: CCAS: Humanities, Upper-level Political Science elective; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

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In this seminar you will explore how political activists use printed texts to disseminate their ideas. How have marginalized groups relied on material texts to make their voices heard? You will learn to analyze the physical aspects of the printed word, from books to pamphlets to flyers. How does the arrangement of words on a page, or the choice of font and punctuation, shape the meaning of a text? How does an author's decision to self-identify or use a pseudonym change your reading of an argument? In the second half of the semester you will develop your own specific research question. You will delve into the archives of D.C. activists and discover what print meant to these groups. Through hands-on work in Gelman Library's Special Collections Research Center, you will acquire first-hand familiarity with the politics of texts and the textuality of politics.

Intro to LGBT Studies

Professor Robert McRuer
HONR 2053:13 - 3 Credits
CRN: 17409
TR 2:20-3:30 PM

Fulfill: CCAS: Humanities; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

This course overviews the multiple ways in which the interdisciplinary field of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies attends to questions of representation and/in culture. We will consider how lgbt people have been portrayed in a range of contemporary cultural locations, but we will also examine key texts in the emergence of what has come to be called queer theory, a critical project that analyzes the slipperiness of identity, gender, sexuality, and embodiment and that consider the complex power dynamics in circulation around identities and representations

The Idea of Beauty

Professor Margaret Soltan
HONR 2053:14 - 3 Credits
CRN: 17473

Fulfill: CCAS: Humanities; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities
Equivalent: ENGL 3830 Aesthetics, counts as Category E

What do we consider beautiful, and why does it matter? Does it matter that a lot of people seem to consider the art of Action Bronson, to take a recent example, not beautiful, but ugly? Or is it art? Can something be ugly and aesthetically valuable? Ugly and beautiful?

We seem to invest a lot of value in the concept "beauty," but what precisely is that value? For instance, will you lead a more valuable life if there is beauty (natural, artistic) in it?

In this course, we'll examine not only music, but architecture, film, poetry, painting, sculpture (we'll take a look, for instance, at the modern sculpture scattered around GW's campus) and other human objects we consider more meaningful and valuable than other objects because they are beautiful. We'll talk about human beings we consider in some way special because they are beautiful. And we'll talk about the natural world and how, according to some writers on beauty, our sense of nature's beauty can have moral effects on the way we interact with it.

Indeed, can a certain appreciation of beauty not only give you a richer life, but make you a better person?

Our reading for this course will be a series of selections from writers from all disciplines (including, for instance, the hard sciences) who, since Plato, have tried to puzzle out what beauty is, and why it seems to mean so much to us.

Fall 2016 Course Descriptions

Arts and Humanities

This is a no-lap (no technology of any kind, please), discussion-based, seminar. There will be an essay-style in-class midterm, and an essay-style in-class final exam. There will also be a 6 - 8 page paper due on the final day of class. Shortly before final papers are due, one class will be devoted to each of you briefly describing your paper.

Autobiography and the "Meaning of Life"

Professor Peter Caws

HONR 2053W:MV - 3 Credits

CRN: 15636

W 1:00-3:30 PM

Fulfills: WID; CCAS: Humanities; ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

Life as such doesn't have meaning in itself (an assertion already worthy of examination and challenge), but a life as lived can involve things and events and actions that do have meaning, for the subject who lives it and for others with whom that subject interacts. One of the meaningful products of a life may be a textual account of itself. We might say that language as such doesn't have meaning either, but as spoken or written it can carry meanings, among others the meanings of its speakers' and writers' lives. Life and language run in parallel, although the relation between them is complicated - they aren't always tightly linked, or true to one another. How do we arrive at the truth of our lives, how do we convey it in words? Can we expect autobiographies to be truthful? Might an autobiography be the construction of a life, rather than the telling of it?

We will read together a number of autobiographies, or excerpts of autobiographies. If we all agree on the conditions of the experiment we will each work on writing an autobiographical text. Perhaps we may answer, or disarm, the question of a life's meaning.

The Embodied Mind

Professor Eric Sidel

HONR 2054:10 - 3 Credits

CRN: 17215

T 1245-1515

Fulfills: ESIA: Humanities; GWSB: Non-Business Elective/Unrestricted Elective; SEAS: Humanities

How is the mind related to the body (brain)? There must be an answer to this question and it seems that it must come from one of these four possibilities: the mind is distinct from the body, the mind is the same as the body, there are only bodies (and no minds), and there are only minds (and no bodies). Each of these answers is flawed. Perhaps the reason no solution is satisfactory has to do with the question itself. A new movement in philosophy suggests that we think of the mind as embodied. If we shift our perspective on minds and bodies to see that minds are parts of bodies just as elbows and hearts are parts of bodies, many of our questions may be answered. The first part of the course will be spent looking at the standard answers to the mind/body problem. The remainder of the course will be dedicated toward investigating other more innovative answers, such as the idea that the mind is embodied. Along the way we'll look at recent intriguing results from the sciences, including studies having to do with the microbiome each of us houses in our bodies, and the effects of exercise on learning and memory.

Spring 2016 Course Descriptions

Contract Courses

Contract Courses

Honors Internship

Chosen by student
HONR 2182:10 – 0 to 4 credits
CRN: 13090

Please see an Honors Advisor for further information.

Honors Undergraduate Research

Chosen by student
HONR 2184:10 – 0 to 4 credits
CRN: 10901

The Honors Program gives credit for independent study work completed in cooperation with a professor. Each student needs a faculty member to oversee his or her project and assign a grade. The student and the professor must meet at least ten times during the semester.

Honors Research Assistantship

Chosen by student
HONR 2185:10 – 0 to 4 credits
CRN: 11805

Students pursuing a directed research project in collaboration with a faculty advisor may receive credit for the project with Honors Program approval. Students participating will be actively engaged in the scholarly research of the supervising faculty member.

Fall 2016 Course Descriptions

Senior Capstone and Thesis

Senior Capstone and Thesis

Honors Senior Thesis

Chosen by Student

HONR 4198:10 – 3 to 4 credits

CRN: 11805

The Honors Senior Thesis is a one or two-semester independent study to complete a senior thesis. This course is for students who are NOT doing departmental honors. The students and professor should meet at least ten times during the semester. Any student considering the Honors Senior Thesis option should contact an Honors Advisor. This course is only open to Seniors, and requires a completed Honors Contract to register.

September Capstone - The Art of Love

Professor William Winstead

HONR 4199:10 - 1 Credit

CRN: 10932

T 7:00-9:00 PM

This course will meet September 6th, September 13th, September 20th, and September 27th. Love and work have rightly been described as the great defining activities of our lives. Of the two, love is undoubtedly the more difficult and by far the more fascinating. Love gives meaning to our lives, brings ecstasies and sorrows, and entangles itself in thorny questions of power, possession, knowledge, and truth. If love often seems to liberate, it just as often threatens to enslave. What is love? How is it practiced? What are its historical forms? Is human happiness ultimately dependent upon deep and abiding love? Must love involve submission and possession? These questions and others will inform our capstone seminar this year as we discuss several of the most illuminating visions of love through the ages with an eye towards acquiring abiding insight into the difficult, essential, and lifelong “art of love.” Our readings will include selections from Plato’s Symposium, Ovid’s The Art of Love, the Letters of Abelard and Heloise, Fromm’s The Art of Loving, and Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex.

October Capstone - Humor

Professor Mark Ralkowski

HONR 4199:11 - 1 Credits

CRN: 12671

R 7:00-9:00 PM

This course will meet October 6th, October 13th, October 20th, and October 27th. This capstone will focus on the philosophy of humor. We will draw on ideas from antiquity and modernity, and discuss a broad range of authors—including Hobbes, Kant, Bergson, Beckett, Nietzsche, and Freud—in an effort to develop a philosophical appreciation of what we find funny. There are many different kinds of humor, and the essence of humor has been described in various ways. But in the end we will see how some of the most cherished humor helps us laugh at ourselves, by showing us that we are ridiculous and reminding us that we are not the people we would like to be. If Simon Critchley is right that jokes are like “small anthropological essays,” the point of this capstone is to learn something about ourselves and our culture by enjoying a lot of great humor, and hopefully laughing a lot along the way. You will also get an introduction to the surprisingly interesting philosophy of humor that dates back to the Greeks.

Fall 2016 Course Descriptions

Senior Capstone and Thesis

November Capstone: Life and Living

Professor LaTisha Hammond
HONR 4199:12 - 1 Credits
CRN: 13891
W 4:00-6:00 PM

This course will meet October 26th, November 2nd, November 9th, and November 16th. What is life? What does it mean for something to be living? What constitutes a life lived? In this capstone we will discuss life and living from biological and social perspectives, exploring where and how these perspectives converge and diverge. Some of the questions we will ask and attempt to understand will include: what are the biological requirements of life, and what does it mean for something or someone to live at these minimum requirements versus something more? What characterizes living? What is considered a "good" quality of life, and who or what decides this? What are the indicators of a good life, and what does it mean to live well? All of these questions and others will be considered in various readings and media as we reflect on the experiences of life and living.

September Capstone - The Pursuit of Happiness

Professor Maria Frawley
HONR 4199:13 - 1 Credits
CRN: 15782
M 1:00-3:00 PM

This course will meet August 29th, September 12th, September 19th, and September 26th. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The phrase resonates with meaning for most of us born and raised in the United States, but this capstone will give us the opportunity to reflect on just what we mean by "happiness" and what the implications of its "pursuit" are for our relationships, our career paths, and our sense of the future. Reading will be varied -- some philosophical essays (including John Stuart Mill); some literature extracts (including Jane Austen); some recent work that blends autobiography, psychology, and sociology. Hugh Mckay calls for a moratorium on the word "happiness," believing it a dangerous idea that has led to "a contemporary disease in Western society, which is fear of sadness." We will reflect on this and many other approaches to happiness in our four afternoons of conversation.