

FYS 111: First Year Seminar II (4 credit hours) MWF 10:40-11:50

These courses are designed to develop students' abilities to construct research papers, craft and deliver presentations, and engage in ethical reasoning on complex issues. These courses will also help students reflect on questions of vocation, that is, on the ways in which we are called to use our abilities to serve others.

Spring 2017 First Year Seminar Course Descriptions:

(A) Political Trials: Rhetoric, Ethics, and the Law

Joel Johnson (Government)

Political trials - such as those of Socrates, Leopold and Loeb, and the Nuremberg war criminals - engage fundamental questions regarding society's values. In this course, we will explore the legal, ethical, and rhetorical dimensions of a number of famous political trials. We will focus not only on matters of guilt or innocence, but also on the bigger issues the trials bring to light, including the proper relationship between the individual and society, the role of religion in public life, inequality and discrimination, treason and patriotism, and the moral status of wartime acts.

(B) WTF, English?

Daniel Gerling (English)

Why the fuss? Is texting indeed eroding language? Is "y'all" improper? Is politically correct language obscuring the truth? What does the MPAA mean when they tell us a movie contains "some language"? Is academic English necessary to communicate certain ideas, or is it merely for prestige? This course considers consequential debates in the way we use language today and asks you to determine where it should go from here. We'll research similar debates in the history of English and look at comparative disputes in other languages to the end of gaining a richer understanding of English and its future. Our readings and discussions will intersect with class, race, gender, and sexuality as we analyze contemporary ethical dilemmas centered around language.

(C) All the World, Staged

Debbie Hanson (English)

All the World, Staged: Plays on Truth examines plays inspired by actual people and events and addresses the obligations of both the playwrights and their audiences with regard to such material. In addition to discussing the ethical issues raised by these plays, students will also be asked to consider how much poetic license authors can take when basing their work on factual materials and how much responsibility audiences bear in terms of accepting the truths of such situations when they are presented in a fictionalized form.

(D) Medicine, Literature, and the Ethics of Empathy

Mitch Harris (English)

This course will look at the field of narrative medicine, and immerse students in its foundational practices: reading and writing. In the late-20th century, narrative medicine emerged in response to the growing demand for competent health care providers who could strengthen the provider-patient bond by engaging in the process of narrative—listening carefully to the patient's history and responding in an empathetic manner befitting the intellectual, psychological, and spiritual dimensions at play in the provider-patient dynamic. Students will read fiction, poetry, drama, and creative nonfiction, as well as academic essays on narrative medicine and the relationship between reading and empathy.

(E) Crimes, Cops, and Culprits

Cheryl Jackson Nelson (English)

Approximately 18,417,000 crimes are committed annually in the United States. These crimes range from theft to assault to murder, and they result in over 11,206,000 arrests by the more than 900,000 law enforcement personnel. Through discussion and research of real-life crimes, narratives of law enforcement, and crime videos, students will explore the investigative process: Why are victims selected? How are suspects identified? What police procedures are practiced? Students will consider the ethical implications of these and other questions concerning the criminals, the crimes, the victims, and those who apprehend the suspects.

(F) Race & Rights in America: MLK to Obama

Matthew Pehl (History)

Since the modern civil rights movement emerged in the 1950s, the United States has abolished legal segregation, expanded voting rights, and embraced a pluralistic commitment to racial diversity. Yet, even after electing an African American to the presidency, the nation remains deeply divided over its racial past, and over contemporary issues like police brutality, mass incarceration, and systemic discrimination. This class poses a straightforward but difficult question: if the civil rights movement was victorious, and if almost all Americans today reject racism as unjust and unethical, then why do racial problems still bedevil our society?

(G) The Grand Endeavor of Making and Taking Drugs (Grand Endeavor of Drug Making)

Mark Larson (Biology)

It has been said that the creation and manufacturing of prescription medication is second only to warfare in terms of its total scale of human effort. The number of pieces that work together to fill our medicine cabinets is immense. However, there is a considerable range of considerations that go into drug making – scientific, economic, philosophical, and ethical – that allow the process of drug making to reflect who we are and what we believe as human beings. This class will examine the grand endeavor of drug making and the decisions that go into what gets made and consumed.

(H) Aloha ‘Oe

Michael Mullin (History)

Is it ever okay for the citizens of one country to forcibly seize another? What if that seizure produces a better standard of living, not right away, but over the course of a century? These are the types of questions the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy produced in 1893. The revolutionaries wanted the United States to annex the islands, but was such an annexation moral and legal? Using Hawaii as its focus, but examining events from around the world, this course examines the ethics of colonial conquest.

(I) Perils of Prediction

Tim Sorenson (Mathematics)

A Danish proverb says, “It’s difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.” Yogi Berra noted that, “The future ain’t what it used to be.” Throughout history, charlatans, soothsayers, philosophers, writers, bookies, stockbrokers, politicians, weathermen and scientists have all tried to predict the future, mostly with poor results. In many instances, lives were lost. We will use a moral compass to dissect and discuss the reality of humankind’s obsession with knowing the future.

(J) The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Literary Exploration of Character

Beth Boyens (English)

Literature is filled with conflicts of good versus evil. Determining a character’s character is often easy: the good wear white and do right; the bad wear black and do wrong. What, though, is our response when those lines blur, when characters and real-life people are simultaneously good and bad—or neither? And what does the way we label another’s character say about our own? This course will explore literary depictions of good, bad, ugly, and beautiful to wrestle with questions of how and why we draw such lines and whether they are helpful or hurtful—whether the labels themselves are good, bad, or ugly.

(K) Digital Disruption: Big Data, Automation, and Our Place in the World

Ryan Sougstad (Business Administration)

Technology is changing the way we live at an extraordinary rate. Companies use data from social media and video games to make hiring decisions. Driverless cars seem imminent. While technology can improve the human condition, many individuals face social and economic displacement. In this course we will examine digital transformations and consider the impact on our lives.

(L) The Injustice of Social Justice

Susan Bunger (Sociology)

This course explores social justice movements in modern American society. Particularly how power, race, class and gender roles affect American social movements. Which social movements are supported and ultimately successful? Which social movements fail to gain support and ultimately collapse? Some of the social movements explored are: Civil Rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s; Union and labor movements; the ongoing

women's movement. Class objectives includes recognizing how the structure of society affects the social construction of reality, and how the ethics of a society as a whole should address that construction of reality.

(M) Art Shock: Art's Power to Provoke

Lindsay Twa (Art)

From an Egyptian-style obelisk standing as the Washington Monument, to a "gash in the Earth" that memorializes the Vietnam War; from the indecency of a urinal turned upside down and exhibited on a pedestal, to photographs that reveal more than what the mainstream public has wanted to see, art and controversy have gone hand in hand throughout U.S. history. This course will examine the history of art's power to provoke and how public skirmishes over artworks can illuminate changing values, social structures, and identities. Through art controversies, we will interrogate the ethical, political, and social positions that impact U.S. culture.

(N) The Physicist's War (1939-1945)

Nathan Grau (Physics)

During one short period in the last century, the joy of scientific discovery turned deadly. Physicists in the US, Germany and Russia were pitted in a race to develop the first atomic bomb. The winner would ultimately decide the outcome of the Second World War. This course explores the rapid progression between the discovery of fission until the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima by exploring the people, places and situations involved in the race both here in the US and abroad.

(O) Cinema, Character, and Culture

Heather Bart (Communication Studies)

Students today are born into a culture who's most powerful and popular narratives are told through moving pictures and sound. This course examines how TV shows/films both represent and create moral narratives that define our culture. We will develop thoughtful, complex answers to social and ethical questions raised in film/TV. Through TV/film viewing, readings, critical thinking and writing, students will develop an understanding of what films (narratives) communicate aesthetically, philosophically, spiritually and sociologically about who you are, who you might be, and how you might treat your fellow humans in the years to come.

(P) The Ethics of Organized Sport

John Bart (Communication Studies)

Sports in America will be used to learn ethical reasoning. While professional and college sports generate significant economic development, they also require cash strapped government entities to invest in expensive facilities. While sports teams generate community pride, they also divide communities through fan loyalty. While sport has been on the cutting edge of racial integration and gender equality, it has spawned backlash to that same diversity. While team sport champions physical fetes and athletic grace, it also causes significant injuries and tempts people to exploit performance enhancing drugs. We will examine the ethics of these issues and others of the classes choosing throughout the semester.

(Q) Sex/Drugs/Rock 'n Roll: Media Ethics

Michael Nitz (Communication Studies)

This course will challenge students to conduct significant ethical reflection related to the production and consumption of media messages. We will delve into a wide variety of topics, including censorship, media "bias," coverage of war, effects of sexual and violent content, and (mis)representations of minorities and body images. We will examine media from music to magazines and television to Twitter.

(R) Baseball Ethics or "Would Kant Cork His Bat?"

Richard Bowman (Religion)

Historian Jacques Barzum has noted: "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of Americans had better learn baseball." As such, baseball reflects the profound moral and ethical issues with which America has struggled. In addition to the violation of the written and unwritten rules of baseball, the history of baseball portrays America's engagement with race, immigration, political corruption, the role of women, and the conflict between labor and management as well as such personal character issues as substance abuse, performance enhancing drugs, and gambling.

(S) Global Poverty

Stephen Minister (Philosophy)

We often hear that more than one billion people live on less than a dollar a day. But what does this really mean? And why does this happen? And do we have a responsibility to do anything about it? This course will explore the realities and causes of poverty in a global context in order to ask what can and should be done in response to global poverty and who should do it. We will continue to develop our abilities in both written and oral communication as strategies for thinking through this question in a critical, cooperative, and creative manner.

(T) Matters of Life and Death

Leigh Vicens (Philosophy)

In this course will consider bioethical questions (questions arising from developments in medicine and biology) facing patients, doctors, researchers, policymakers, and voters. We will study some (or all) of the following issues: abortion, surrogacy, prenatal screening for the selection of offspring, cloning, genetic engineering, animal testing, experimentation on human subjects, the donation and sale of bodily organs, physician-assisted suicide, and the rationing of scarce medical resources. We will consider arguments for various positions on these issues, and formulate and defend our own.

(U) How to Begin to Solve Wicked Problems in Environmental Ethics and Policy

David O'Hara (Philosophy)

Wicked problems are problems that are especially difficult to solve because of factors like incomplete information, changing environments, and complex or interdependent systems. Often the solutions to complex problems generate new problems. This course considers several "wicked" problems concerning nature and the resources we extract from it. Students will learn to analyze the problems, examine proposed solutions, and apply interdisciplinary resources from literature, philosophy, religion, and law to formulate ethical and practical approaches to these problems.

(V) Dating in the Digital Age

Tasha Dunn (Media Studies)

More than 1/3 of U.S. marriages today begin with online dating, a strong indication that the quest for finding a life-mate has changed dramatically. Traditionally, people have married for social and economic reasons, not for love. Today, however, people spend years trying to find their "one true love." This cultural shift is due in part to online dating platforms where single people have been given more romantic options than at any point in human history. With so many options, how do people find "the one," and how do they know when they've found them? This course will explore these and other questions to examine the cultural shift to finding love, the dating habits of humans in the digital age, and the ethical conundrums therein.