

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 2019 First Year Seminar Course Descriptions: (Section)

(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? [AWAITING CONFIRMATION]

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 examines plays and films inspired by actual people and events that address contemporary issues such as racism, genetic research, sexism, and sexual identity. In addition to discussing the ethical conflicts raised by these works, students will also be asked to consider how much poetic license authors and filmmakers can take when using factual materials and how much responsibility audiences bear in distinguishing between what is fictionalized and what is not.

(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) Feast or Famine: A Foodie's Guide to the Politics of Hunger and Consumption
(Feast or Famine)

Ann Kolbrek (Success Center/English)

In a world filled with self-proclaimed “foodies,” we rarely consider the political implications of food. This course will examine food as a political weapon for both oppressor and oppressed. Appetite, hunger, and satiety will not only be the subjects of our readings, but more importantly the lens through which we examine scenes of oppression and representations of identity. We will ask how hunger shapes consciousness, subjectivity, and language. Even more, how does this tool influence identity, particularly already marginalized identities? Our readings/films invite students to explore food in the contexts of famine, hunger strikes, and eventually overconsumption and inebriation.

(F) Latin America Today

Cory Conover (History)

Latin America makes news for its grinding poverty, violence, and corrupt politicians. However, there are striking success stories as well. This class will examine this region to learn more about the issues that most affect Latin Americans today and to explore possible solutions. We will discuss topics like civil wars, drug trafficking, and government abuses of power. Using ethical thinking and the concept of human rights, we consider the best response from citizens as well as from U.S. foreign policy.

(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) 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?

(I) 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.

(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) Perils of Prediction [AWAITING CONFIRMATION]

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.

(L)The Brain of the Future

Alex Kloth (Biology)

Over the last thirty years, there has been an explosion of new ideas about how the brain works, stemming from the proliferation of new technologies that allow scientists to examine and manipulate the nervous system. At this new frontier of neuroscience, there are promises of improvements in our lives, but there are also pitfalls in the potential abuse and misuse of this information. This course will introduce these developments in neuroscience. It will also provide ample opportunity to consider the ethical implications of the future use of this technology to alter human brain function or reinterpret our ideas about human behavior. Topics will include cognitive enhancement; biohacking; memory and personal identity; and “brain reading” technologies that have potential applications in law, business, politics, and everyday life.

(M) Waking India: Gandhi and the Struggle for Independence

(India: Gandhi and Independence)

Margaret Preston (History)

In 1885, the Indian National Congress (INC) formed to fight for India's Independence. The INC would eventually be led by Mohandas K. Gandhi. This course will wrestle with the history of the INC and look at the life of Gandhi. His fight was not only to bring independence to India, but to do so through peaceful civil disobedience. In addition, Gandhi unsuccessfully, but peacefully, struggled to overcome the sectarian divisions which would lead to a geographic split and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Ironically, Gandhi will be dead within a year—assassinated, not by a Muslim, but a radical Hindu.

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

Lindsay Twa (Art)

From a “gash in the Earth” that memorializes the Vietnam War to the indecency of a urinal turned upside down and exhibited on a pedestal, art and controversy have gone hand in hand throughout 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 culture and society.

(O) Media Activism

Kathleen McCollugh (Communication Studies)

What role does/should the media play in social change? Media activism appears to play a critical role in everyday activism and within broader social movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, #BlackLivesMatter, and the feminist movement. In this course, we will work to formulate ethical perspectives on the power and limits of media to contribute to social change or whether it’s all “slacktivism.” To do so, we will consider examples of media activism as they take shape in a variety of media forms such as documentary, 4Chan/Anonymous, and social media (Twitter, Tumblr, blogs).

(P) The Ethics of 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) Here I Stand? Religion and Communication

Michael Nitz (Communication Studies)

Many have called Martin Luther the first strategic campaign communicator. The advent of the printing press helped spread the faith. This class adopts a strategic communication approach to study how religion is communicated across a variety of contexts. We will examine historical channels, but will focus also on contemporary outlets. In essence, the class asks how is religion communicated in the 21st Century?

(R) Ha! Laughter Humor Comedy 2.0

Richard Bowman (Religion)

Jokes, sketch comedy, stand-up comedy, late night comics, sit-coms, rom-coms. Comedy is an integral part of human life. Comedy can amuse and entertain but still offend. Laughter can wound as well as heal, condemn as well as commend. Humor can instruct, critique, and transform society. View, read, and think about stand-up comedy and comedians. Ha! FYS doesn’t get any better than this!!

(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.

(V) The Power of Different: Beyond Diagnosis, Classification, and Labels (Power of Different: Beyond Labels)

Matthew Johnson (Education)

As a society, what are we supposed to do with the evidence that suggests the characteristics that can cause our lives to be difficult (inability to relate to others, learning problems, cognitive challenges, for example) often come with unique skills and aptitudes (creativity, artistic ability, remembering numbers, to name a few)? For example, some suggest that Albert Einstein could not have made his historic scientific breakthroughs were it not for his daydreamy, distractible mind. What if we focused on the potential of an individual rather than diagnoses or labels like intellectual disability, autism, ADHD, learning disability, etc. This course will explore this possibility.

(W) Education: Grading Our Schools [AWAITING CONFIRMATION]

Monica Lhotzky (German)

What are we required to learn? Why do we learn these things in our schools? Do we learn what is important and necessary? Do grades reflect performance and mastery? These fundamental questions will be explored. An educational system reveals the values of the society that created it. In this course, U.S. schools and their curricula and policies are critically examined via a comparison with educational systems around the world.

(X) Applied Batman Psychology

Benjamin Jeppsen (Psychology)

Batman is one of the most popular characters in modern pop culture. One reason for his popularity is that he is a superhero despite his lack of super powers. There is something about the real possibility of being Batman that is inspiring (if we only had his resources!). In this class we will take an in-depth study of the Batman and his mask: Bruce Wayne. What can we learn from Batman to be super-versions of ourselves? What ethical dilemmas does Batman face, and how would you respond to them? This isn't just Batman Psychology, its Applied Batman Psychology.