

First-Year Academic Seminars

Spring 2019

Philadelphia, Trusting Penn's Process: An Interdisciplinary Study of the City and Its Peoples

Francis X McKee

MWF 9:30-10:25

We will examine the literary, cinematic, artistic, musical, and photographic history of Philadelphia and its citizens both real and imagined who have breathed life, controversy, and character into the city for the past four centuries. William Penn envisioned a “City of Brotherly Love,” where people seeking religious freedom and individual rights would find a home. And so the process of building and becoming a city infused with unique character and characters began. Through founding fathers, eminent bankers and physicians, immigrant artisans and factory workers, religious scholars and the religious faithful, beloved entertainers, artists, and athletes, Philadelphia has grown from Penn’s principles and Benjamin Franklin’s virtues to current contributors to its character in Rocky Balboa’s “going the distance.”

Shakespeare Today

Claire Busse

MWF 10:40-11:30

William Shakespeare’s plays and poems are frequently invoked to address contemporary issues: quoted in political speeches, debates, and newspaper op-eds; performed on stage in contemporary settings (at times to great controversy); and reimaged in films and novels that relocate Shakespeare’s plots to global and contemporary settings. This seminar will study three to four Shakespeare plays with current cultural significance. We will examine them in their original historical and cultural setting and also in their contemporary reiterations to explore why these works have such staying power—as well as how much they change as we reimagine them for our own uses.

Philadelphia in Print and on Screen

Judith Musser

MWF 10:40-11:30

Students in this course will explore the diversity of Philadelphia through literature, film, and observation. Students will read texts that represent both an historical and contemporary view; students will study films and film clips that use Philadelphia as the location or background; students will actively explore areas of Philadelphia referenced in the texts and films.

Diverse Representations in Film and TV

Mark Lashley

MWF 12:50-1:40

The characters we love on television and in film often reflect our own experiences. Historically, members of minority or marginalized groups have seldom seen their experience reflected on screen; too often, screen representations include stereotypical portrayals (when portrayals are included at all). Using current literature on media and diversity (as well as visual source materials), this course will look at diverse representations through history and in the present day, engage with the discourse around gender, race, class, religion, disability, and sexual orientation in media, and examine what it means to have one's identity represented in popular culture.

Art of the Street: Monuments, Murals, and Graffiti

Mey-Yen Moriuchi

MWF 12:50-1:40

What is the impact of art located in the street, in other words, art in the public sphere? What is its value? Its purpose? This course will explore various forms of art that are located in public spaces: monuments, murals, graffiti, and street art. These artworks engage the public in different ways and raise questions about the significance of art. Throughout the semester, students will investigate the role of art in the street as a form of self-expression, social practice, political activism, identity building, and community engagement. We will examine diverse historical and contemporary perspectives integral to public art discourse. For example, we will use the Mexican Muralist movement and Mural Arts in Philadelphia as case studies to analyze muralism as a tool of social and political change and a means to unite communities.

Global Human Rights and Social Justice

Rosemary Barbera

TR 9:30-10:45

This course will examine social issues and injustices from a global perspective. A central focus will be the struggles of individuals, families, and communities from around the world. This course will introduce the student to the concepts of social justice, human rights, social welfare and oppression, and discuss ways to promote social welfare from a human rights and social justice perspective.

1960's Literature: Revolutions and Reactions

James Jesson

TR 9:30-10:40

This course focuses on the literature of the 1960s, a controversial period in American history that has prompted widely varying responses during the subsequent five decades. Students will study literary works that illustrate cultural and political issues that divided Americans during the decade, as well as non-fiction readings about the intense ideological debates that defined the 1960s. Many of these same debates still rage today. Perspectives on the 1960s to be explored will include various liberal and conservative views from the time (New Left, counterculture, Black Nationalist, Rockefeller Republican, Goldwater Conservative) and of the present (liberal, progressive, conservative, libertarian, evangelical).

Art, Fashion, & Identity

Catherine Holochwost

TR 9:30-10:40

Does fashion matter? Is wearing a particular outfit or a particular hairstyle just about aesthetics and style? Or can it be a political act? Can you “read” fashion to understand diverse cultures and identities? This class explores the way that both elite and everyday people from the Renaissance to today have used clothes and hairstyles to express their identities or make a statement. It also looks at the way in which fashion and the history of art are intimately intertwined.

Success and Failure in American Culture

Lisa Jarvinen

TR 11:00-12:15

How have Americans understood what it means to succeed or to fail? How have these ideas shaped American culture? In this course we will examine how Americans in different eras and from different perspectives have grappled with their hopes for success and fears of failure. We will apply an interdisciplinary perspective on how narratives of success and failure are created, maintained, questioned, and revised.

Dungeons, Dragons, and Demons: Was Medieval Europe Really a “Dark Age”?

George B Stow

TR 11:00-12:15

This course examines diverse perspectives on the Middle Ages, the period of European history from the fall of Rome (ca. 500 CE) to the Renaissance (ca. 1500 CE). It will survey the origin and development of several traditional, negative depictions of the era as an age of violence, warfare, destruction, death, and backwardness—a thousand years of miserable history wherein nothing of any significance occurred. But it will also consider more recent, positive interpretations derived from the interdisciplinary perspectives of political, social, and economic progress, innovative intellectual and cultural developments, as well as scientific and technological advances.

Tax Cuts, Immigration, & International Trade: Contemporary Policy Debates

David Robison

TR 11:00-12:15

This course will examine several contemporary economic policy issues in a seminar format (read, research, and discuss). Rather than attempting to draw specific policy conclusions or even build a policy consensus, the primary goal of the course is to help students understand the nature of the debates from their historic underpinnings to the contemporary views on the issues. A secondary goal is having students understand the trade-offs necessary to support a policy position, because no policy is free of costs.

Catholic Philadelphia: Then and Now

Maureen O'Connell

TR 11:00-12:15

Students will explore the rich and diverse story of Catholicism in William Penn's "holy experiment," Philadelphia, from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Using the central themes of the course—race, ethnicity, gender, devotional life, movements for justice, and the role of the parish—students will engage Catholicism from the perspective of historical and contemporary immigrants, African Americans, women, and the LGBT community particularly in light of issues that shaped the Catholic experience in Philadelphia such as religious liberty, social mobility, and the common good. In order to observe how Catholicism is lived in the city, students will participate in three guided site visits. No prior knowledge is required; students from other faith traditions, or of none at all, are welcome.

Catholic Philadelphia: Then and Now

Margaret McGuinness

TR 11:00-12:15

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Life Sciences & the Media

David Zuzga

TR 3:30-4:45

The course will examine both historic and modern life science research that underlies science headlines in the media. Historic case studies will be examined, such as media misrepresentation of evolutionary theory over time. Contemporary topics will be selected based on student's interest. Students will direct their own learning to deconstruct primary scientific literature and evaluate the concordance between study results and claims made in the media.

Monsters and the Monstrous

Craig Franson

MW 1:55-3:10

Monsters reveal our hidden fears and desires, they conjure specters of the past, and they even forecast the future, giving uncanny form to what societies won't or can't yet formulate. Tracking some of the shambling brutes that stalk the literary imagination, this course explores the haunted borderlands of humanity, offering students an introduction to literary, filmic, televisual, and new media studies.

Big Bad Wolves, Trolls, and Wicked Stepmothers: The History and Psychology Behind Nursery Rhymes and Fairytales

Victoria Ketz

MW 1:55-3:10

Over the centuries, children have been told fairy tales and sung nursery rhymes even though they do not know the history that originated the stories. Socially, fairy tales serve a variety of functions including developing imagination, building emotional resiliency, crossing cultural boundaries, creating a common language, crossing cultural boundaries, and teaching social mores as well as addressing the skills of critical thinking and problem solving. This course will focus on the evolution of children's tales to contemporary times placing emphasis on the history and psychology that gives rise to this fiction.

Black Philadelphia**Anthony Paul Smith****MW 1:55-3:10, 3:25-4:40**

Black people make up 44.2% of Philadelphia's total population, as of 2016 according to the US Census Bureau, making the community even with whites as the two largest population groups in the city. Despite this fact, the political, religious, and intellectual story of Philadelphia is usually told from the perspective of the various white settler-colonial stories of the Founding Fathers and the white immigrant struggles of the Italians and Irish. This course seeks to prepare Freshman for their academic career through a serious and focused study of the Black tradition in Philadelphia. To study and explore Black Philadelphia we will employ diverse methods from sociology, religious studies, political theory, history, and literature in addition to some field trips to historic sites and guest speakers. While we focus on understanding the ways in which various methods allow us to understand one part of an object of study, we will come to see how employing these methods together allow for a richer understanding of the city we inhabit, that we shape and that shapes us.

Love Actually**Marianne Dainton****MW 3:25-4:40**

Love is a central—if not the essential—part of human experience. This course examines the diverse (social) scientific approaches to understanding love. Specifically, we will focus on the historical, biological, psychological, interactional, and cultural factors that have been used to explain the experience of love.

America's Sports Films: Fair or Foul**Gerard Molyneaux****W 1:55-5:30**

The course will examine both historic and modern life science research that underlies science headlines in the media. Historic case studies will be examined, such as media misrepresentation of evolutionary theory over time. Contemporary topics will be selected based on student's interest. Students will direct their own learning to deconstruct primary scientific literature and evaluate the concordance between study results and claims made in the media.

The Evolution of Human Communication

James Mancinelli

TR 2:00-3:15

This course will engage the student in the study of the evolution of human communication which includes the biological, cognitive, sociological, and linguistic prerequisites to human communication as we now know it. The student will be read literature in the above areas and engage in discussions to compare and contrast the various theories proposed by researchers in this area of study. Students will engage in hands-on experiments related to the material being discussed. Comparisons and contrasts will be made with non-human, primate species and differences highlighted. The student will be required to develop and explain their own theory of the evolution of human communication, incorporating the biological, cognitive, sociological, and linguistic aspects discussed. Applications to communicative differences in today's society will also be discussed, e.g., male vs. female, cultural differences, etc.

Urban Health Field Experience

Candace Robertson-James

W 1:55-4:40

This course introduces students to some of the core components of urban life. Local urban problems and concerns along with assets and challenges of urban life will be investigated. Students will explore specific aspects of urban environments (e.g., housing, transportation, food outlets, crime) and their impact on health and implications for healthy communities. Content will include urban demography, changes in urban physical and social environments and their consequences for health. Programs and policies that influence the health of urban populations will be discussed and contemporary and historical perspectives will be considered. This course will combine academic approaches with real world experiences of urban life. Course concepts are broadly organized around four major themes: health, homelessness, community development and culture & arts.