

# 16F Honors Colloquia Course Descriptions

## HONR 290-080

### Engaging the Dramatic Imagination

Leslie Reidel

Why the theatre? What accounts for a form lasting thousands of years? What does it mean to engage the dramatic imagination? What is the unique nature of the dramatic form and how is that form made manifest in the theatre? What distinguishes the theatre from television, film, and other mediated performance forms? Working in collaboration, we will explore these and other questions in depth as we read about theatre, see theatre, make theatre, and speculate about the possibility of the theatre in our media age.

## HONR 290-081

### The Art of Interpretation

Richard Hanley

Does Genesis contradict Darwin? Did slavery violate the U.S. Constitution? Is Dumbledore gay? Who decides—authors, readers, or someone else—and how do they do it? Does what a text means change as time passes? Does good interpretation depend entirely upon the domain in question, or are there objective and universal principles at work? Interpretation is indispensable, and can be a life-and-death matter. But it also produces intense disagreement. Can anything be said to settle disputes such as these? We shall read texts from various sources (for example, short stories by Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce, excerpts from the U.S. Constitution, the Bible, the Koran, and *Origin of Species*), as well as examining more commonplace expression, and consider them all in the light of what experts in language use have to say. One of the benefits will be a better understanding of how to write and say what you mean to write and say. Assessment includes short assignments spread though the semester, and a final research paper focusing on a particular dispute over interpretation.

## HONR 290-082

### The Art of Medicine

Ray Peters

We will explore connections between the arts and medicine by looking at the patient-doctor relationship, the interpretation of illness, the duties and responsibilities of medical professionals, bioethics, death and dying, and other topics in medicine. Using stories, plays, films, essays, memoirs, poems, and the visual arts, we will examine the many challenges faced by medical professionals and patients as they deal with birth, death, health, illness, suffering, treatment, and recovery. We will study works by doctors and nurses who are also accomplished authors (such as Anton Chekhov, William Carlos Williams, Atul Gawande, Richard Selzer, Courtney Davis, Jeanne Brynner, and David Hilfiker) as well as provocative works on medical themes, such as *Wit*, *Equus*, and *Miss Evers' Boys*. Students will write brief response papers, analytical essays, and a research paper analyzing the connection between medicine and the arts by focusing on an author or artist of their choice.

## HONR 290-083

### Social/Science/Fiction

Jenny Lobasz

The notion that science fiction might provide insight into the study of social and political life is not as far-fetched as it initially sounds. Indeed, for a genre purportedly focused on the future, sci-fi has long been recognized for its ability to speak to concerns of the present, from cautionary dystopias of *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* to the startling prophetic *Neuromancer* and *Snowcrash*. In Social/Science/Fiction we will explore one theme in particular: the cultural politics of alien encounter. "Alien encounter" in this case refers not to the actual or potential existence of extraterrestrial life, but to encounters with the Other—those marked as outsiders, as less-than-human. The required reading for the course include novels such as *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card, *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin, and *Wild Seed* by Octavia Butler. In reading works of science fiction in conjunction with those of social science, our purpose will be less to seek out new worlds than to strive for a nuanced understanding of our own, and of the fear and wonder that accompany, in the words of astronomer and science fiction author Carl Sagan, *contact*. We will explore these themes together through class discussion, a course blog, and the writing, workshopping, and revising of a long essay.

## **HONR 290-084**

### **Reading Crucial Texts**

#### **Lawrence Duggan**

Learning to read texts accurately and dispassionately is one of the most critical skills which any educated person should cultivate and constantly refine. We will therefore spend the semester reading closely, discussing, and writing about provocative selections from four central, meaty texts: the Bible, Aristotle's *Politics*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, and the Quran. We will look closely at what these texts (and different translations of those works) say and do not say about creation, women, slavery, politicians, and sacred war, and reflect upon our knee-jerk reactions to certain passages and what our reactions teach us about ourselves and our cultural conditioning.

## **HONR 290-085**

### **Popular Culture and High Culture: Analyzing and Evaluating Taste**

#### **Steve Tague**

We make many decisions and choices every day, choices about what to watch, wear, listen to, read, which team to root for and generally, how to spend our dollars and our free time. These choices make up our taste. Our taste has been formed over many years and it could be said that our taste describes us, expresses who we are as an individual and who we are in groups, large and small. Your taste and our taste will be examined in this class through culture that is defined variously as high, popular, folk, and mass. It will include, but not be limited to, the subjects of visual art, theater, newspapers, music, visual media, fiction and sports. The issues we look at inside of those subjects and others will be as contemporary as we can make them, in some cases unfolding as the semester goes. There will be four papers for this class. Two of them will be examinations of a cultural debate of today-gender issues in sports, the culture of “hooking up,” drinking in college, core curriculum, the pressure to decide everything early, etc., issues the student finds upsetting, interesting or confusing. The third will be a response paper to a cultural encounter during the semester. This encounter could be a production at the REP or a visit to the Mechanical Gallery on campus, both part of this course. The fourth will be an examination of the student’s personal taste in cultural consumption.

## **HONR 290-086**

### **Reading Green: Literature and the Environment**

#### **Karen Quandt**

The scope of this course emulates Charles Darwin’s “tree of life” as it proposes to explore a network of texts across time and place that are all rooted in a profound questioning of the human relationship to nature. Is there an unbridgeable gap between humans and nature? Do we have the right to interfere with nature’s processes? Have industry and technology rendered nature completely alien to us?

Literature is a unique meeting place of the natural environment and the creative imagination that allows us to explore these challenging questions. Examining the legacy of myth in our understanding of nature, the cultural impact of science and industry, the environmental catastrophes that result from war and corporate globalization, as well as dystopian visions of a world rid of nature, we will consider how literature from all periods and places calls us to reexamine how we interact with and treat the earth.

Selected texts include Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*, Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Readings will regularly be supplemented by relevant articles or news pieces that address contemporary environmental concerns, and we will watch two films. Writing assignments will include two short essays and a research paper.

## **HONR 290-087**

### **Making Shakespeare**

#### **Matt Kinservik and Jordan Howell**

Today you can buy Shakespeare finger puppets and Shakespearean insult mugs. You can read a choose-your-own-adventure *Hamlet* and watch Shakespeare’s plays reimaged in works like *10 Things I Hate about You* and *The Lion King*. You can even see the Bard’s plays performed in a reconstructed Globe Theatre, complete with the only thatched roof in modern-day London. But how did Shakespeare become Shakespeare? How did this man transform from a working actor and playwright to the “be-all and the end-all” (to quote the man himself) of the English literary tradition? And what can Shakespeare-mania, or “Bardolatry,” teach us about the ways that we construct a literary canon? To answer these questions, we will study Shakespeare’s changing reputation over the centuries. Beginning with the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Samuel Pepys declared that *Romeo and Juliet* was the “worst [play] that ever I heard in my life,” we will study the ways that

writers “improved” Shakespeare by adding more music, dancing, and (occasionally) flying witches. As we study these textual adaptations, we will also work to reconstruct their performance histories, allowing us to imagine what these plays would have been like to witness. We will move through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which saw the publication of new editions of Shakespeare’s plays and first biographies, as well as memorable performances by celebrity actors like David Garrick. During this period, Arthur Murphy declared that Shakespeare had become a “kind of established religion in poetry.” Over the course of the semester, students will write papers and make oral presentations, analyzing texts and other material objects that memorialize the playwright. The course will also include collaborative assignments in which students design and present digital artifacts that explore Shakespeare’s many afterlives.

### **HONR 291-080**

#### **Food, Glorious Food: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

##### **Rolf Joerger**

“Food production must double by 2050 to meet the demand of the world’s growing population and innovative strategies are needed to help combat hunger, which already affects more than 1 billion people in the world” experts told the United Nations General Assembly in 2009. Are we likely to achieve these goals? What are the challenges that face food producers and consumers now and in the future? Videos and reading materials will introduce students in the course to our food system. Food insecurity, sustainability, impact of climate change, genetic engineering, vegetarianism, animal rights, obesity and other food-related issues will be topics to be researched and discussed in this course. Students will write about challenges and possible solutions to problems with our current and future food system and create a video documentary on a food-related topic of their choice.

### **HONR 291-081**

#### **Failure**

##### **Megan Killian**

What does it mean to fail? How do we handle failure when it occurs? Can we design for the inevitable failure, or should we aim to prevent it? In this colloquium, we will discuss several engineering, medical, and economic crises, placing special emphasis on what defined these events as failures (or not failures). Case studies of engineering, medical, and economic failures will be examined throughout the duration of this course, with special emphasis on the ethical and societal implications of these events. For example, the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986 tragically resulted in the death of all seven crewmembers on board; in addition, this accident led to an overhaul of the Space Shuttle program, a much-needed discussion regarding the ethics of engineering decision-making, and demand from the public sector on agency transparency. In this course, we will discuss how failure can be discovered, predicted, mitigated, and- in some cases- ignored, and what impact these actions have on society. Additionally, we will address what it means to define failure, how to handle and address failure, and how to design for or against failure. This course will utilize excerpts from popular texts, such as *The Big Short* by Michael Lewis and *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich, as well as interview transcripts, magazine articles, accident reports, podcasts, documentary footage, and filmography.

### **HONR 291-082**

#### **Changing Conceptions of Political Order**

##### **John Bernstein**

Political thought is always concerned with "order" in some sense, including domestic peace and unity. But the fundamental ideas that should serve these ends and the fundamental goals of individual life that influence political philosophy vary. The readings of the course will include selections from St. Augustine, whose political ideas are centered around Roman Catholicism. Then we will examine more "secular" views that emphasize domestic peace as best served by a very strong ruler, as in Thomas Hobbes, or a more democratic ideal, as in John Locke and Rousseau. The first two of these writers, however, also wished to make abundant room for economic development, hardly a concern of Augustine's, and we will examine closely the reasons for this difference. We shall conclude with Huxley's Brave New World as a prediction of the ultimate consequences of a "technocratic" method for establishing order. There will be very short papers required on the assigned readings and a larger paper on a topic to be chosen with the professor's approval.

**HONR 291-083****The Art of the Vote****Jason Hill**

The colloquium convenes in order to consider how art and visual culture influence, document, and sometimes complicate the progress of modern American democracy. With one eye on the 2016 presidential election campaigns and the other on election seasons past, we will collectively consider the role of the visual arts, photography, and film and television in the shaping and re-shaping of American political life through a focused historical engagement with the role of the image in electoral politics. Students will consider a wide range of cultural materials ranging from historical televised debates and campaign advertisements to editorial cartoons, photojournalism, posters, Hollywood films, and works of modern and contemporary art, as these have variously engaged with both the often-divisive politics of presidential elections and the wider American struggle for voting rights. Students in this highly participatory and wholly interdisciplinary colloquium will write three brief essays analyzing works of art and visual culture in the context of specific historical election seasons, past and present.

**HONR 292-082****Our Ocean Planet****Carolyn Thoroughgood**

The ocean covers nearly three quarters of our planet, provides 70 percent of the oxygen in the atmosphere and houses about 20 percent of the known species on Earth. The ocean regulates climate and weather and provides food and energy resources for humans worldwide. Water in every stream or river on the planet eventually ends up in the ocean, and all life on Earth is dependent upon its health. More than half of all Americans live within 50 miles of the coast, but whether near or far our lives are inextricably linked to the ocean. Society's increasing demands on marine and coastal resources have placed ocean issues at the forefront of public concern. As a result, there are growing calls for improved governance to promote the wise use of ocean resources. This course will examine both the natural science and human dimensions of such issues as global climate change, ocean pollution and dead zones, dying corals, overfishing, sea level rise, and oceans and human health. Come learn more about "our ocean planet" through discussions of specific ocean processes and how they are intertwined with human survival and quality of life. Topical reports that present overviews of each of these topics will serve as the bases for discussion and students will be evaluated on their ability to think critically and analyze approaches designed to address complex, multiple use demands on ocean resources.