Spring 2022 Honors Colloquia

HONR 290 sections fulfill a University Creative Arts and Humanities breadth (see note)*

HONR 290-083
Two Cultures: Theatre and Science
John Jungck
MWF 11:15 - 12:05
“Two Cultures: Theater and Science "will focus on iSTEAM (Interdisciplinary Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics). We will address the classic division between STEM and the arts and humanities and how we might build a "Third Culture." After reading and discussing C. P. Snow's famous essay: “Two Cultures,” we will couple four or more plays/movies with counterparts in Science, Technology, and Society texts. The first two are: (1) Bertolt Brecht's "Galileo" with his notion of revolutionary theater with Thomas S. Kuhn's "Structure of Scientific Revolutions;" (2) Jerome Lawrence's and Robert Edwin Lee's "Inherit the Wind" with “The Book that Changed America” about the impact of Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" as an abolitionist anti-slavery, anti-racism thesis and its impact upon the abolitionist movement in pre-civil war America. With class discussion, we will move on to consider choices from a long list of plays/movies that have major intersections with science and mathematics depending upon the interests of students in the class.

HONR 290-085
Gods, Heroes, and Superheroes: Comic Books as a Modern Mythology
Alan Fox
TR 11:00 - 12:15
We will examine religion and myth by looking at its most modern expression in the Superhero genre. Superheroes are a modern form of mythology, in that religious motifs are prominent in the characters, situations, and ideas presented in these stories. For instance, in the case of Superman, this includes the fact that Superman’s Kryptonian family name, El, is the Hebrew word for any divine being, and he is the only son of a father from a distant planet sent to save humankind, discovered by locals like Moses in his basket of reeds. It is also characteristic of the archetypal and mythic nature of comics that characters like Superman and Batman can be reinvented in so many different ways and still retain their power and influence. We will examine works by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell about myth and archetype, and movies, graphic novels, and novels including Kingdom Come, the Dark Knight Returns, the Ultimates, and Watchmen, among others. Students will write response papers, two extended essays with rewrites, and a final research paper on the topic of the student’s choosing, with the guidance of an Honors College Writing Fellow. Class participation and other forms of visible effort will also be part of the grade.
Stephen Barrett, the doctor who founded and operated Quackwatch, defines quackery as “the promotion of unsubstantiated methods that lack a scientifically plausible rationale. Promotion usually involves a profit motive. Unsubstantiated means either unproven or disproven. Implausible means that it either clashes with well-established facts or makes so little sense that it is not worth testing.” This colloquium will explore quackery and other forms of bad medicine. In particular, we will examine unscientific claims about pills, potions, operations, and devices. Readings may include Lydia Kang’s Quackery: A Brief History of the Worst Ways to Cure Everything, S. Weir Mitchell’s The Autobiography of a Quack, and Paul Offit’s Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine. In order to examine the latest in medical pseudoscience and conspiracy theories, we will also read current articles and online sources such as Quackwatch, Snopes, and the Science-Based Medicine Blog. Students will write brief response papers, critical reviews, analytical essays, and a research paper analyzing why people believe medical pseudoscience.

In a 2015 New York Magazine interview, DeRay McKesson defined protest as “confrontation and disruption, as the end of silence.” The educator, author, and civil rights activist recalled his first protest experience following the shooting of Michael Brown, “It was in Ferguson that I began to understand that protest is also community-building, literally bringing together people to form new communities of power.” As societies develop, hierarchies and inequalities often emerge. Those in power form institutions that advance their specific interests. When the policies of these institutions conflict with a community’s freedoms, ways of life, or beliefs, protest is a powerful method for inciting change. People want to be heard but words and actions are inevitably accompanied by things: signs, posters, wearable items, shields, flags, repurposed objects, graffiti, and art. Specific objects sometimes become a defining feature of that protest, such as the umbrellas of the Hong Kong democracy protests, the pink pussy hats of the Women’s March, and the yellow vests of the French protesting tax hikes on fuel. But the material culture of protest is not limited to the protestors. Law enforcement or military personnel, or counter-protestors may respond to protestors with barricades, crowd-control munitions, or weapons. The material culture of protest extends to the body as well; itself a material entity, the human body is often used as an object of passive resistance as in the case of Rosa Parks, the sit-in against segregation at Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, or the occupation of the San Francisco offices of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare by disability rights protesters. In this course we will ask the question, “What do these things do within the act of protest?” and we will explore protest as a generative and/or destructive endeavor. Social movement cultures or subcultures are constituted by such things as
rituals and symbolically charged actions; works of art and other expressive forms; unique ideologies and value systems; and material culture objects peculiar to the movement. These behaviors and expressions enhance movement solidarity, strengthen movement-bred identities, and communicate movement ideas, values and goals inside and outside the movement. We will also consider the use of social media as a virtual space that enables the organization and propulsion of material outcomes of protest into physical spaces. Students will hone their skills in analyzing historical and current models of protest and critically engage in discussions of the use of visual art and material culture in selected time periods and nations around the world.

HONR 291 sections fulfill a University History and Cultural Change breadth (see note)*

HONR 291-080
“Life on the Move”: The Pasts & Futures of Climate Migration
Délice Williams
TR 9:30 - 10:45
Among the possible futures for our warming planet is one in which more and more species—human and non-human—are compelled to move to more habitable locations. In fact, that movement is already underway, as climate-driven drought, melting, and sea-level rise have led populations to relocate in order to survive. This interdisciplinary course invites you to take a deep dive into the causes, patterns, prospects—and histories—of climate migration. Where and how are humans moving in response to climate changes? What are experts thinking about the scale and timing of these future movements? What do we know about past human movements in response to changes in weather and climate? Where and how are other life forms moving? Is climate migration—human and nonhuman—really a crisis? These are some of the questions we hope to explore. Course discussion will be informed by a variety of texts, including news reports from ProPublica’s series “The Great Climate Migration”; documentaries such as “The Island President” and “Fleeing Climate Change”; excerpts from Sonia Shah’s *The Next Great Migration* (from which the title of this course is taken); and Cherie Dimaline’s novel *The Marrow Thieves*.

HONR 292 sections fulfill a University Social and Behavioral Sciences breadth (see note)*

HONR 292-080
Sustainability: At the Crossroads of Social Justice and Climate Change
Michael Chajes
TR 8:00 - 9:15
What does it mean to be a sustainable society? According to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, sustainable societies must be environmentally sound, socially just, and economically prosperous. As such, the looming climate crisis, racial injustice, and global pandemics like COVID-19 are very much linked. We will examine how these
events share roots in unsustainable and unfair economic systems, cause disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable populations, and demand solutions that require an overhaul of how we live and interact. As a report by the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis states, “What happens next—for racial equality, for public health, for the climate crisis—depends on us.” Our goal will be to explore the intersection of these issues and discuss and write about what we can do individually and collectively to create a better future for all.

HONR 292-081
Communication, Happiness, and Well-Being
Tracey Quigley Holden
MWF 9:05 - 9:55
The course explores theories and practices of happiness and well-being, integrating readings and research from a wide range of perspectives with a core focus on communication, philosophy and psychology. In alignment with the readings and materials, we will engage in multiple activities and interventions designed to increase happiness, awareness, mindfulness, and well-being. These foundational activities are evidence-based practices grounded in communication and supporting well-being in college students. Students will write a series of journal entries and short reflections throughout the semester. The course culminates in a research paper and presentation analyzing the connections between their chosen happiness practice and the philosophical, scientific, and experiential perspectives explored in class.

HONR 292-082
Family and Juvenile Justice
Judge Janell Ostroski
MW 5:00-6:15
The law governing family relations affects all of us in our private and public lives. With the definitions of marriage, parentage, and intimate partnerships in flux, family law is a fascinating, challenging, and dynamic field of study. In this course, students will read and discuss relevant cases as well as material in the assigned textbook. Topics include marriage and divorce, relationships outside of marriage, parent-child relations, community property, juvenile justice and child welfare law, adoption, domestic violence, and immigrant rights. Some material may be challenging or disturbing; the course will include trauma-informed approaches. The instructor brings her real-world experience as a Delaware Family Court judge into the classroom. The class will tackle fundamental questions: What policies contribute to the health of children and families in our diverse society? What principles should guide the resolution of family conflict? How can we better serve clients facing family disruption? Do our laws accurately represent and protect what families experience and need in order to thrive?
“We have met the enemy and he is us.” Walt Kelly’s famous phrase from his 1971 Earth Day Pogo cartoon strip continues to ring true a half century after it was published. People are very good at making babies and keeping them alive until they mature; in turn, they make babies of their own. So, what traits do humans possess that make us so successful at reproduction, and how has this explosive population growth affected the environment? We will begin by examining several models of population growth to see how humans fit into various reproductive strategies. Is it possible that we can draw an analogy between our growth rate and that of a fermenting vat of beer? Using several chapters from Jared Diamond’s Guns, Germs and Steel we will see how the structure of our planet has affected population growth around the globe. In addition to sheer numbers, humans have developed technologies to exploit the Earth’s resources far beyond the capabilities of any other organism. We will use excerpts from Dawkins’ The Selfish Gene, the National Geographic video The Power of Water, an interview with Garrett Hardin, and articles and essays from current publications to try to understand how population growth is the driving force behind the environmental problems we face today. Students will write short response pieces, two essays, and a research paper throughout the semester.

As a society, we must not confuse technological advancement with moral progress. If we fail to do so, then we are in danger of becoming “tools of our tools,” in the words of Henry David Thoreau. Since the ultimate goal of technology is to improve the quality of life for all, we must be cognizant of not only the technical feasibility of our designs, but also the social impact on humanity, as well as the environmental impact on our shared planet. Technology structures our communication, transportation, education, health care, and economy. Technology drives the distribution of food, water, energy, and shelter. Technology shapes the way we work, the way we are born, the way we die, and the relationships we form in between. Novel technologies can assuredly bring societal benefits, yet these technologies can also exaggerate societal disparities, leave out underserved communities, create moral and legal dilemmas, and remove human agency. The National Academy of Engineering convened a panel of leading scientists, engineers, and policymakers to identify the most important challenges for engineers in the 21st century. The 14 challenges, known as the Grand Challenges for Engineering,
are grouped into four categories – energy & environmental sustainability, health, security, and joy of living. However, the Grand Challenges have not fully addressed the philosophical and moral dimensions of novel innovations. In this course, students will examine each of the Grand Challenges for Engineering from a critical and multidisciplinary perspective. Students will discuss the moral, ethical, social and cultural dimensions of the engineering innovations, as well as the technical and economic feasibility of engineering designs. Students will discuss strategies for designing technology to support a diverse and growing global population, thereby bridging the technical-social divide. Finally, students will re-examine the Grand Challenges for Engineering in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Readings will include articles on emerging technology from Wired, Scientific American, and The New Yorker; excerpts from science fiction such as Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick; and policy reports from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. Students will write papers and make oral presentations, in which they will propose modifications to the Grand Challenges. Diverse students with a variety of interests and backgrounds outside of engineering would benefit from this course, including (but not limited to) sociology, economics, philosophy, science, history, business, education, and public policy.

HONR 292-085
Love and Relationships
Em Rowe
MWF 9:05 – 9:55
Love—or the search thereof—fundamentally structures nearly every aspect of our lives. It holds immense power over us. Love can elicit an ecstatic elation, a brazen feeling of wholeness and confidence… yet it can also devastate and destroy. In this class, we will explore the topics of love, sexuality, and relationships through the following questions: how do we distinguish love from lust? When do the two blend into one, and when do they separate? How has technology shaped our sexuality? Are sex robots really a thing? What is the hook-up culture, and does it still exist? Are humans hard-wired for monogamy (and if so, why do we cheat)? Why do we structure our lives around fairytale happy endings and the concept of our “one true love”? How have marriage and dating patterns differed across time and place? Is it racist to have a “type,” and from where does attraction originate? We will employ a variety of texts and media to investigate these topics. Assigned material might include clips from films such as Her, Blue is the Warmest Color, and Moonlight; excerpts from novels like Miranda July’s The First Bad Man, Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah, and Robert Jones Jr.’s The Prophets; episodes from podcasts such as The Nod, Reply All, Invisibilia, Freakonomics, Criminal, and Radiolab; both popular and timeless love songs;
and (of course), academic writings ranging from Foucault to modern publications in various sociological journals.

HONR 292-086
What is America’s National Purpose? A Seminar on Grand Strategy
Muqtedar Khan
Tuesdays 5:00 – 8:00 PM
This course is about America’s grand strategy and its national purpose. We will read some key books about grand strategy and explore America’s strategic journey from ‘manifest destiny’ to ‘relentless diplomacy’. We will examine both external and internal challenges to America’s security and democracy. The course will involve debating America’s national purpose in the past, today and in the future.

* In most cases, Honors Colloquia are approved to fulfill both University and College-level Breadth requirements as indicated, except in the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources and the College of Education & Human Development where they can only count as University Breadth, if applicable. Finance Majors should check with the College of Business & Economics Undergraduate Advising Office for approval of Colloquia into the finance majors’ College-level breadth requirements.