

Fall 2016 First-Year Writing Seminar Course Descriptions

Section A: Does God Choose Sides? U.S. Politics and Biblical Rhetoric

This course provides opportunities to read, watch, discuss and write about how politics and Christian biblical rhetoric are interwoven in today's U.S. society and used by political candidates to sway votes in their favor. Exit polls following the 2008 presidential election indicated that religious beliefs about social issues influenced its outcome and the lead up to the 2016 election looks no different. The Bible and politics often mix in the USA. For example, the first stop on Ted Cruz' campaign trail was Liberty University, a powerful biblically based institution. Jerry Fallwell, Jr. is among Christian leaders who have lent their support to Donald Trump in the primary elections. Politicians and many in their constituencies read the same Bible yet often draw different conclusions about what these texts say about today's social and political issues. Through critical thinking, intensive writing and peer review, students will explore some of these issues (e.g. healthcare, race relations, incarceration, religion and violence, economics, war, gender and sexuality, same-sex marriage, immigration, colonialism, the environment), paying attention to how political leaders incorporate biblical texts and precepts as they promote their political agendas. *Instructor: Reverend Dr. Deborah Appler*

Section B: Where Do Ideas Come From? The Nature of Creativity

How do artists, writers, musicians, and entrepreneurs develop new ideas for their work? What can you do when you are "stuck" for ideas? Do you sometimes struggle for ideas for an assignment in college, a project at work, or your own new work of art or musical arrangement? This course includes fun art-making prompts to help students cultivate their creative thinking skills. We will examine the origin of ideas and consider the nature of the creative process. Each student will create an artist's journal that will become a storehouse of ideas for projects in our academic and personal lives. No art experience necessary. *Instructor: Dr. Kristin Baxter*

Section C: Yoga and Writing: A Phenomenological Research Journey

Research shows that a yoga practice can improve our writing skills by filling our creative wells, releasing fear, helping us find our authentic voice, and improving concentration. Research also shows that our stories and ideas are not just stored in our minds and imaginations, but they are also stored in our bodies. Readings for this course include a brief overview of yoga philosophy. We will also analyze research by psychiatrists, psychologists, English professors, philosophers, poets, and yogis to learn how yoga can be used to improve our writing skills. This course includes one, weekly, one-hour yoga class. A culminating writing project for this course will be a phenomenological research study where students record observations about their experiences in our yoga classes. Students will analyze their findings to understand the impact of yoga on their writing skills. No experience in yoga is necessary. Our yoga classes offer many modifications to meet individual student's abilities. Therefore, students of all abilities are welcome. Course fee for yoga mat and props: \$35.00.

Section D: Race and Gender in the United States

What exactly is the Black Lives Matter movement? Are we in the midst of a War on Women? What feelings might a person of color experience living on General Robert E. Lee Avenue? Why do women earn only 79 cents for every dollar earned by men? Has there always been this much police brutality or are cell phone cameras revealing a longstanding pattern? Who should make decisions concerning women's reproductive health? In this FYS section, we will debate questions such as these as we try to make sense of contemporary race and gender relations. We will look to history and nationally renowned scholars to answer some questions and to social media and hip-hop artists to answer others. Along the way, you will be developing college-level thinking, reading, researching, and writing skills and also cultural competency, or the ability to interact effectively in intercultural settings. *Instructor: Dr. Jane Berger*

Section E: Medieval Imaginations: Warriors, Beasts, Lovers, and Saints

The medieval imagination was dynamic and complex—sometimes cautious, sometimes bold; abounding in promise, but laden with menace. What do imaginative tales and images of adventure, travel, and struggle tell us about the Middle Ages? about the cultures that construct them? about ourselves? How did/does the power of imagination shape the past? Through our reading, discussion, and writing, we will explore these and other questions, first by grounding our inquiry in concepts of the imagination and then by examining a variety of texts and images that exemplify the richness of the medieval imagination. In its emphasis on the development of skills in critical thinking, research, writing, and reflection, this course is designed to help you become more capable and confident as an active participant in college-level learning. Extra cost: approx. \$50 for a field trip to a medieval collection in New York or Philadelphia. *Instructor: Dr. John Black*

Section F: Transitions of Youth

Many of the psychological themes, principles, and theories related to growing up in America are unique to adolescents in the beginning of the twenty-first century; while other issues pertaining to transitions of youth span across generations. With an intense focus on critical thinking, self-reflection, and writing, this course will explore both new and classic issues involved in the movement from adolescence to adulthood. Novels, short stories, films and research will be the stimuli for writing personal reactions, descriptive and persuasive essays, synthesizing multiple perspectives around issues, integrating research-based citations, comparisons between viewpoints / audience / theoretical frameworks, and analyses of contemporary issues confronting adolescents. *Instructor: Dr. Robert Brill*

Section G: Investing in our Children, Investing in our Future

How does access to economic prosperity, healthcare and education lead to specific outcomes for various groups of children in our country? In this class, you will explore the layers of systematic influences (e.g., families, communities, and public policy) through a socio-ecological model to consider how those systems impact the future of our citizens. Through multiple lenses, you will have the opportunity to investigate, question further and research more thoughtfully the interrelationships between contextual factors (e.g., individual, family, community, and society) that affect health, developmental milestones, and educational outcomes. Examples of possible

discussion and writing topics may include investigating broad essential questions, such as “How do adverse childhood events impact educational and social outcomes?”, “How does a child’s zip code determine access to health and educational resources?”, and “What social determinants impact child health and education?” Joint guest speakers, collaborative group discussions, and project-based learning that could impact your own community and world will be conducted with students in Dr. Terrizzi’s FYS class. *Instructor: Dr. Jean L. DesJardin*

Section H: A Journey to Middle-Earth: Exploring the Thought of J.R.R. Tolkien

In this course we will use the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien as well as their cinematic portrayal by Peter Jackson to explore some of the main themes of Tolkien’s thought such as: morality, evil, violence and just war, the environment, grace and friendship. Exploring his debt to ancient legend and thought, we see how he reshapes the thought of Aristotle, Augustine and other sources through the eyes of his Roman Catholic faith in the designing of his new world.

Section I: Love your Mother: Building a Sustainable Future for Earth

It is common knowledge that the current ecological crisis threatens the quality of all life on this planet. What can, and should, be done to insure a decent quality of life for all who inhabit it? In this course we explore the work of scientists, philosophers, religious thinkers and artists as they struggle to find solutions to this question. In the end, we will make our own recommendations as to how we and our descendants might not simply survive but flourish. *Instructor: Dr. William Falla*

Section J: Analyzing Public Spaces, Making Public Arguments

How does one’s gender, race, socioeconomic status, (dis)abilities, sexual orientation, education level, religion, and other aspects of an individual’s identity affect how one experiences (and possibly contributes to the inequalities found in) various public spaces? To investigate this and other related questions, students in this FYS section study spatial rhetoric. Specifically, we explore how the location, materiality, and discourse of public spaces contribute to sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant arguments that welcome some people while silencing others. Examples of possible discussion and writing topics include the characteristics of “safe” spaces, power dynamics in classrooms, American border issues, and gender discrimination in online gaming. Emphasizing the development of college-level critical thinking, research, and writing skills, this course asks students to rhetorically analyze and digitally map local public spaces, research spaces that exhibit compelling and/or controversial public arguments, and create podcasts related to those spaces. *Instructor: Dr. Crystal Fodrey*

Section K: Analyzing Health Perspectives From Community Citizens

What does it mean to be healthy? How does the definition of health differ between individuals? What effects does the health of an individual have on the community? This first-year seminar (FYS) course will explore concepts of health and wellness from a personal and community perspective while developing your writing skills for the college-level. During this course you will identify your own perspectives and support those impressions with appropriate levels of evidence. As you discover your “inner-writer” you will need to become aware of your opinions,

develop a valid argument, and communicate through verbal and non-verbal venues. This course will enhance your writing and expand your knowledge as to why it is the responsibility of every citizen to be an active participant in building a healthy community. *Instructor: Dr. Karen Groller*

Section L: Living on Earth: Topics in Sustainability

In “Living on Earth,” we consider the pressing challenge of the 21st century to create sustainable modes of living and working in a global environment that is increasingly at risk. Through a variety of readings, discussions, and writing assignments, students in this course will examine how threats to the natural environment are influencing our ways of living, and how communities are working to create more balanced lifestyles, social structures, and economies. This seminar introduces first-year college students to a liberal arts education that emphasizes critical thinking, effective writing, and civic engagement. *Instructor: Mark Harris*

Section M: Philosophical Psychology: History, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse

The goal of this course is to challenge each student to become an increasingly capable and confident writer, a critical reader and thinker, and then be able to express your ideas and discussion in a reasonable and well thought out presentation. This course is designed to research and examine Psychology from a philosophical and critical thinking perspective: specifically history, mental health, and substance abuse. We will research, discuss, and debate the advancement of behavioral and medical treatment processes throughout our history. This semester will be an engagement of multidisciplinary discussions, debates, educational aims, increased communication, and writing skills including a semester Critical Thinking Journal. *Instructor: Dr. Thomas C. Helm*

Section N: Raise Your Voice

In times of joy, exhalation, despair, and sorrow, people *sing*. One of the oldest forms of communication, songs have unified, defended, protected, and built community. What is it about bringing voices together that is so powerful? How is it that, through song, we can understand the experience of others? Through singing, readings, lectures, and even songwriting, we will explore the power of communal singing historically and culturally. While the course will be very experiential in nature, no prior musical experience is necessary—just a love of song! *Instructor: Dr. Joy Hirokawa*

Section O: The Politics and Problems of Identities

Ideas of belonging are often shaped by the politics of Identities in modern society. This course examines this important issue by introducing students to writings on construction of identities from the multi disciplinary perspective, such as philosophy, social psychology, sociology, history, anthropology and cultural studies, and encourages them to contemplate how different identities become meaningful in the context of their everyday lives. Students will critically analyze how identities defined around ideas of individual, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion and nationality are always contested and constantly re-constructed at all levels of society, in turn giving rise to new social spaces in which individuals can re-formulate ways to conceptualize ideas of culture and identity. *Instructor: Dr. Akbar Keshodkar*

Section P: More Than A Little Revolutionary

What is a revolution, and how does it differ from “just” an overthrow of leaders or the government, or from a war of independence? How have revolutions shaped the world we live in, and the future we face? This course establishes concepts, patterns and vocabulary through a short introductory unit that examines the French Revolution, especially in contrast to the American Revolution and Latin American Wars of Independence. We then fast-forward to the hugely important Chinese, Mexican and Russian Revolutions, all occurring in the 1910s. In the last major unit we focus on prominent revolutions after World War II such as in Cuba, Iran and either Angola, Ghana or another nation in Sub-Saharan Africa. We also consider what “revolution” means to a society’s culture, to language, religion, families, and the roles of women and men. Self-expression, critical thinking and the exchange of ideas, both in class discussion and in individual student writing, are central to this course. *Instructor: Dr. Richard Krohn*

Section Q: Latino/Latina: Another Voice in USA Literature

“Latino studies, in fact, is no longer situated at the margins of literary studies. With the growing interest in culture, ethnicity, and gender, Latino studies is now an important part of US Literature” (Del Rio 1). This course will be organized around a selection of literary works (short stories, essays, poems, plays) written by Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban writers who form the majority in population and literary production of Hispanics in the United States. Course goals include learning about the unique qualities of Latino/Latina literature in the USA, and reading and writing critically to help students develop their academic writing skills. *Instructor: Dr. Nilsa Lasso-von Lang*

Section R or S: Writing Your Experience

In this course we will demystify academic writing by exploring how and why we communicate information in various contexts. To facilitate this discovery, we will examine how information is conveyed in various genres, with a specific focus on written and audio formats. While conventions of academic writing will be our primary focus, personal perspectives will be the means through which students practice and develop writing skills and strategies. By the culmination of this course, students will become more rhetorically aware readers and writers who have the skills necessary to make meaningful contributions to academic conversations. *Instructor: Professor Meg Mikovits*

Section T: Science vs. Pseudoscience: Is the Scientific Method Still Alive?

It can be difficult to distinguish between scientific fact and fiction amidst the ever-changing landscape of science. To complicate the issue, the general public is quickly persuaded by popular opinion, social trends, and personal experience instead of pure scientific evidence. In this course we will use reading, writing, and discussion to reinforce the importance of the scientific method and separate evidence-based science from pseudoscience. We will explore the general public’s perception of science, discuss popular controversial issues, and evaluate the challenges and strategies involved in educating the public about scientific issues. *Instructor: Dr. Kara Mosovsky*

Section U: Meaning of Life

In the grand scheme of things despite our individual efforts the universe can be vastly indifferent to our hopes, dreams, and desires. What do we live for or what is the purpose of life if our aspirations turn out to be pointless, especially given that, in the end, we all die anyway? In the face of pointless suffering, gross injustices, natural calamities, and a life which inevitably ends in death, this course explores the question, "Does anything really matter?" And, "Does it matter whether anything really matters?" Students will carefully consider these questions as they read, reflect upon, and write about philosophers who have tackled the question of whether there is a point to life or not. *Instructor: Dr. Leon Niemoczynski*

Section V: Water in a Thirsty World

This course offers a scientific, social, and literary inquiry on water, the substance without which life would not exist. Only 1 percent of the earth's water is fresh and non-frozen; about one-fourth of the earth's human population lives where water is not readily available. Through reading, research, and writing, students will consider the following questions: How do we acquire water, how does water get to our homes, how do we treat water as a commodity, and how can we make water accessible to everyone? *Instructor: Dr. Carl Salter*

Section W: Mathematics: The Language of Technical Writing

Mathematical thinking is essential for understanding and appreciating the world around us. We will begin the course learning a little bit about pure mathematics which is not something taught in high school. We will explore the beauty and aesthetic qualities of proofs and abstract thinking rather than perform routine calculations. Along the way we will see connections with economics, computer science, music, sports, politics, and life. The mathematical concepts will be the foundation for our journey into the scientific study of language—linguistics. We will use the gems we have collected on our adventure to think and learn about technical writing, particularly how to think and write technically and effectively. *Instructor: Dr. Nathan Shank*

Section X: Healthcare: Let's Improve our Outcomes

Why does the United States lag other countries in terms of health outcomes while spending the largest amount of money per person on healthcare in the world? Can we make more efficient use of our resources to develop a healthier population? In this course, we will explore the healthcare system to determine where inefficiencies exist and how improvements can be made. We will contemplate the differences between resource allocation based upon equity versus efficiency and discover how factors outside the healthcare system can affect health at the individual, community, and population level. Students in this class will engage in collaborative research projects with students in Dr. DesJardin's class to deepen their understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of health and its effects on our world. Students will hear from guest speakers and participate in community engagement activities while also developing their writing and communication skills. *Instructor: Dr. Sabrina Terrizzi*

Section Y: Critical Thinking and Writing on Consumption as Transformation

How often do we consume without thought? We rarely wonder about how what we consume actually consumes us. Do our items own us or do we own them? Do we just watch entertainment, or does it also groom us and mold our thinking? In this course we will spend considerable time on how what we are exposed to influences us as a community, a society, and as individuals. We will touch on everything from social media, culture and cuisine, and mainstream media and current events. Students should expect to write, revise, and edit at least three college level essays as well as a final paper. Students will be required to participate in lively and respectful dialogue in class and sporadic journal assignments throughout the semester. By the end of this course students will have had the opportunity to hone not only their critical thinking expertise, but also analytical abilities, and effective writing and research skills.

Instructor: Professor LaKeisha Thorpe