FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

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Department Assistant: Marsha Peruo

Mission

Every Barnard first-year student is required to take a First-Year Seminar during her first or second semester at Barnard. First-Year Seminars are designed to develop further the essential and prerequisite skills a student brings to Barnard in critical reading and analysis, writing, and effective speaking. First-Year Seminars are intellectually challenging interdisciplinary courses which explore important issues through significant texts ranging across genres and historical periods. Seminars also serve to initiate students into the intellectual community of the college.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students in First-Year Seminars will develop their skills in critical reading and analysis, writing, and effective speaking.
2. They will assess and use textual evidence in support of oral and written arguments.
3. Students will explore important issues through significant texts ranging across genres, disciplines, and historical periods.

First-Year Seminars fall into two categories: Special Topics and Reacting to the Past.

Special Topics seminars reflect the variety of faculty interests and expertise, and thus vary in topic from year to year. They offer students and faculty opportunities to explore topics of interest across disciplinary lines, genres, and historical periods. Use the "Courses" tab above to view the full Special Topics offerings; current semester offerings are indicated with schedule details.

In Reacting to the Past seminars, students participate in role-playing games that enable them to relive important intellectual debates in three separate historical moments.

Courses of Instruction

Every Barnard first-year student is required to take a First-Year Seminar during her first or second semester at Barnard. Transfer students are not required to take First-Year Seminars.

Special Topics

FYSB BC1105 Language and Power. 3 points.
This course will address the relationship between language and power from a philosophical perspective. We will investigate questions such as: How does language influence the way we think of gender, race, society, and politics? What are the limits, if any, on free speech? In what ways, if any, can language be used to harm people? Some topics we will discuss include hate speech, trigger warnings, slurs, dog whistles, propaganda, and silencing. Readings will include philosophical papers and recent op-eds.

Director of First-Year Writing: Wendy Schor-Haim

Professors: Robert McLaughey (History), Kristina Milnor (Classics), Stephanie Pfirman (Environmental Science)

Associate Professors: Ronald Briggs (Spanish)

Assistant Professor of Professional Practice: Alice Reagan (Theatre)

Instruction in the First-Year Seminar Program is provided by the following regular members of the Barnard College faculty:

Professors: Elizabeth Bernstein (Sociology), André Burgstaller (Economics), Mark Carnes (History), Robert McLaughey (History), Kristina Milnor (Classics), Stephanie Pfirman (Environmental Science), Jonathan Rieder (Sociology), Herb Sloan (Professor Emeritus), Patricia Stokes (Psychology), Caroline Weber (French), Jennifer Worth (Reacting to the Past)

Associate Professors: Severin Fowles (Anthropology), Elizabeth Hutchinson (Art History), Brian Mailloux (Environmental Science), Lisa Son (Psychology), Claire Ullman (Political Science),

Assistant Professors: Orlando Bentancor (Spanish), Michael Campbell (Chemistry), Ralph Ghoche (Architecture), Sandra Goldmark (Theatre), Bradley Gorski (Slavic), Ayten Gundogdu (Political Science), Daniel Kato (Political Science), Gale Kenny (Religion), Ellen Morris (Classics), Elliot Paul (Philosophy), Sonia Pereira (Economics), Alice Reagan (Theatre), Aaron Schneider (English), Michelle Smith (Political Science), Claire Ullman (Political Science), Manu Vimalassery (American Studies)

Lecturers and Other Faculty: Maureen Chun (English), Monica Cohen (English), Pamela Cobrin (English), Dennis Dalton, Margaret Ellsberg (English), Katie Glasner (Dance), Andrew Lynn (English), Linn Cary Mehta (English), Barbara Morris (English), John Pagano (English), Stefan Pedatella (English), Laurie Postlewate (French), Jennifer Rosenthal (English), Wendy Schor-Haim (English), Timea Szell (English), Margaret Vandenburb (English)

This program is supervised by the First-Year Seminar Committee:

Directors: Pamela Cobrin (Senior Lecturer in English), Laurie Postlewate (Senior Lecturer in French)

First-Year Class Dean: Wendy Garay
FYSB BC1107 RACE, SCIENCE, & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE (WKSHOP). 4 points.
This course is about reproduction—a biological and social process that is often the target of deep-seated ideas about nation, culture, conflict, and definitions of life. Looking at the relationships between reproduction, science, and identity formation, we will explore a variety of literary works, films, journalism, public health studies, and policy/legal texts, all of which differently narrate, debate, script, and theorize about reproduction. Questions we will explore include: what is reproduction—scientifically, culturally, politically, historically? How do recent medical/technological/pharmaceutical developments shape reproductive experiences? What are the distinctions between reproductive rights, health, and justice, particularly in their responses to long histories of reproductive violence? How do different historical and geopolitical contexts shape our understandings and management of reproduction, from ancient Egyptians who used pebbles as IUDs, to in-vitro fertilization and so-called “DIY” abortions, to population and development projects all over the world? Our conversations will both reveal and challenge the way we understand reproduction and the contradictory beliefs and actions associated with it.

NOTE: This 4-credit version of First-Year Seminar (FYS)—FYS “Workshop”—is specially designed for students who believe they would benefit from extra support with their critical reading and academic writing skills. In addition to regular seminar meetings twice per week, students are also required to participate in six “writing labs” over the course of the semester. The writing labs for this section will take place on the following Fridays, 11:40 am-12:55 pm: 1/31, 2/7, 2/28, 3/6, 4/3, and 4/17.

FYSB BC1114 Hot Stuff. 3 points.
Long before humans walked the earth; before dinosaurs were wiped out; before any sign of sentient life on earth; volcanoes were a feature of our planet. With the power to help create life, as well as wreak devastation and destruction, volcanoes inspire awe and terror in equal measure. This seminar will explore the science behind volcanoes, their impact on the environment and societies, as well as our enduring fascination with them through the lenses of history, arts, mythology and religion. Where and why do volcanoes erupt? How do they affect nature, climate and society? How has our understanding of these amazing natural phenomena evolved over time? Why do people stay in close proximity to volcanoes, despite the dangers? Can we predict when the next catastrophic eruption will occur? Can we harness the power of volcanic activity as alternative energy source? These are some of the many questions that students will seek to answer and will serve as a starting point for our deeper investigation into the subject throughout the semester. Students will study historical texts, case studies, current data and methods of analysis, as well as depictions of volcanoes in art and film. Group discussion, independent study and individual and group presentations. Students will research case studies and present their finding to the class.

FYSB BC1138 Free Speech in the Age of Neoliberalism. 3 points.
Despite the fact that free speech is seen a fundamental right and venerated by individuals across the political spectrum, it nonetheless is continually at the heart of social and political debate in the United States. What speech and which speakers are protected and what limits and burdens can be placed on speech are topics of perennial debate. In the United States our concept of free speech rights stems from the language of the First Amendment which has not changed since it was drafted in 1789. Nevertheless, our understanding of the value and meaning or free speech has changed and continues to change depending on social, political, and economic contexts. This course will explore free speech rights and principles within the social contexts that have shaped them in three ways. First, we will explore the development of free speech doctrines and philosophies in U.S. law. Second, it will explore the challenges to and limits on free speech. Third, we will explore how the contemporary social and political era is shaping ideas about free speech and its protection.

FYSB BC1113 Feminist Futures. 3 points.
This course develops intersectional approaches to the study of power by surveying forms of speculation in fiction, cinema, music, theater, visual culture, and political discourse. Topics include: feminist utopias and dystopias; afrofuturism and technological approaches to gender; and discourses of population control, reproduction, and predictive policing.

FYSB BC1189 Enchanted Imagination. 3 points.
A survey of fantasy works that examines the transformative role of the imagination in aesthetic and creative experience, challenges accepted boundaries between the imagined and the real, and celebrates Otherness and Magicality in a disenchanted world. Readings will be selected from fairy tales, Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Tempest; Romantic poetry by Blake, Coleridge, Keats, and Dickinson; Romantic art by Friedrich, Waterhouse, and Dore; Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Lewis Carroll’s Alice books, Tennyson’s Idylls of the King, Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings; Magical Realist works by Borges, Garcia Marquez, and Allende; Sondheim & Lapine’s Into the Woods, Rushdie’s Haroun and the Sea of Stories.
FYSB BC1196 Modernism in the City. 3 points.
In this course, we explore Modernism in literature, art, architecture, music and dance. How do these different disciplines express the explosive and jarring experiences of twentieth-century life? Primary sources will include the cubist paintings of Pablo Picasso, the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and Langston Hughes, Bebop and Boogie Woogie jazz, Igor Stravinsky’s classical music “The Rite of Spring,” International Style architecture, and Alvin Ailey’s dance. Our classwork will be enriched by excursions throughout New York City.

FYSB BC1199 Losing Yourself: Absorption in Visual Media. 3 points.
How do we pay attention now: too well, or not well enough? This course aims to clarify the ongoing debate about both the value and the meaning of absorption in visual media. We will begin by comparing contemporary polemics on the decline of attention with writings by a generation of cultural critics writing in Germany in the 1920s and 30s, for whom distraction was both a symptom of and a response to an increasingly commodified culture. Next, we’ll draw on recent theorists to help us consider how three representative works (a painting, a sequence in a video game, and a chapter from a novel) shape the way we attend to them. When we imagine the way we pay attention now, we tend to think of ourselves as not reading, and of the book as a medium in decline. In the second half of the class, we’ll therefore turn our attention to the late eighteenth century, when it was widespread reading that seemed strange and new. Together, we’ll focus on two mixed forms from the period — the epistolary novel and the ballad collection — that helped make reading itself at once troublingly distracting and dangerously absorbing.

FYSB BC1200 Banned: Dangerous Art. 3 points.
In this course we will engage with various forms of artistic production (literary, cinematic, pictorial, musical) that have been banned or censored by religious authority, governmental institutions, or by public opinion. While discussing these primary texts we will investigate who gets to censor art, to what ends, and according to which criteria. Who is protected from tasteless, subversive, or obscene art? How do these categories change with time, and from culture to culture?

FYSB BC1228 Ethnicity and Social Transformation. 3 points.
Novels, memoirs, films and fieldwork based on the American experience of immigration during the twentieth century. Readings will include works by Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Christina Garcia, Julia Alvarez, Fae Ng, Gish Jen, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, and Malcolm X.
FYSB BC1291 Utopias. 3 points.
In his 1516 work Utopia, Englishman Thomas More created a name for a perfect society from Greek roots meaning either no-place or the good place (eutopia). More's vision of an ideal alternative world reflected his worries about social problems in England as well as the possibilities he imagined in America, which offered a real new world for most Europeans in the early 1500s. More was neither the first nor last person to imagine an alternate world, and this class will examine the ways writers, politicians, social critics, and revolutionaries have constructed eutopias (or good societies) as well as dystopias (bad societies) in fiction and in real life. We will ask how utopian fiction has developed as a distinctive genre, and we will also ask how utopian thought is a product of its particular time. What motivates writers and thinkers to come up with alternative models of society? What has made utopian fiction and science fiction so interesting to so many different kinds of writers? Additionally, what is the relationship between people who have written fictional visions of the future and those people who have tried to create real utopian societies? Can one person's eutopia become another's dystopia? Readings in the class will range from Plato's Republic through modern science fiction and studies of survurbia. Texts include More's Utopia, Columbus's journals, Shakespeare's The Tempest, the Communist Manifesto, Gilman's Herland, and Hopkins's Of One Blood.

FYSB BC1294 Art, Sex and American Culture. 3 points.
Sex is the ultimate forbidden public topic and yet from the New England Puritans' sermons to Bill Clinton's (in)famous affair, sex has often been publicly staged in dramatic, literary, religious, political, legal and social forums. In this seminar, we will explore how issues of sex and sexuality have insinuated themselves into the formation of American identity. We will examine texts from the seventeenth century to the present with a particular emphasis on the arts, politics and sex. Texts include Puritan sermons, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suzan-Lori Parks's Venus, photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, literature from Margaret Sanger's birth control movement, and theoretical works by Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey and Judith Butler.

FYSB BC1295 Imagining Equality Between the Sexes. 3 points.
What constitutes equality between the sexes? By studying visions of equality between the sexes offered in law, politics, international development, religion, literature, psychology, anthropology, and the writings of activists, we will explore what such equality must or might look like. Focusing on western authors, we will consider issues such as rights, equality and difference, reproductive roles, violence, and language. Texts will include Elizabeth Cady Stanton, A Woman's Bible; the U.N.'s "Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women"; Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time; Catherine MacKinnon, Only Words; and Rebecca Walker, Becoming the Third Wave.

FYSB BC1296 The Hudson: America's River. 3 points.
Called "America's River" the Hudson not only runs right behind our campus, but right through American history. Throughout American history the Hudson River has been a complex social and cultural entity, simultaneously a commercial conduit, a historic place at the center of the American Revolution, an industrial resource, and a privileged site for aesthetic experiences and the as birthplace of modern environmentalism. In this course you will explore the Hudson in relationship to the varied historical communities which have made meaning with it, identifying its contributions to discourses of nation and nature, but also race, gender, art and science. Readings will include literary works by Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper as well as essays and poems on subjects from fairies to trees to architecture to railroad travel. Close analysis of works of architecture, landscape design, and the iconic paintings of the Hudson River School will be accompanied by an exploration of the various methods for "reading" these objects and paintings. Visits to Museum collections and to sites along the river will be an important part of the curriculum.

FYSB BC1298 The American Middle Class. 3 points.
The focus on the "middle class" in American politics is not new. Indeed, the size and (seeming) success of the American middle class has long been treated as a mark of American exceptionalism. Why is the "middle class" so important in American politics? What does its much-reported decline mean? What, for that matter, is the middle class—a subdivision of American income? Personal rank? Status? If the middle class is such an important site of economic, social and political aspiration, why is it also so often a site for scathing criticism and cutting satire about the challenges of modern (suburban) life? What do we think about when we think about the middle class?

FYSB BC1336 Witches. 3 points.
From ancient Greece to "Wicked," the figure of the witch has fascinated and frightened, compelled and repulsed. In this seminar, we'll analyze written and visual texts from Homer to The Brothers Grimm and beyond to develop a deeper understanding of the witch and the anxieties about gender and power that she represents.

FYSB BC1337 Feminism & Politics of Anger. 3 points.
Of late, much attention has been given to the political role of feminist anger. However, not all feminist anger is received or interpreted in the same way; not all women have had the same freedom to express or represent anger. This course asks us to think critically about expressions and perceptions of anger. How do race, sexuality, gender identity, class, and ethnicity shape who is perceived as "angry" and whose anger is taken seriously? What other affects circulate and interact with anger: from rage and irritation to wonder and joy? We'll begin with the figure of the "feminist killjoy," as theorized by Sara Ahmed and will consider texts by authors including Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Susan Stryker, and Nella Larsen, alongside manifestos, comics, film, visual art, and zines.
FYSB BC1338 Inventing Childhood. 3 points.
What defines a child? What do children know? How much autonomy can children have: for example, should a two-year old represent herself in court? (This just happened.) Before the nineteenth century, children occupied the status of legal property, owned by their fathers. How, when, and why did we start thinking of children as people in their own right and how did children’s literature participate in that change? In our seminar, we’ll consider these questions and their implications through an interdisciplinary exploration with a particular focus on the literature of childhood. We’ll dip into philosophy, psychology, and law in order to examine some of the classics, such as Alice’s Adventure’s in Wonderland. We will also make time to consider contemporary issues in our country, such as the migrant children crisis. Authors may include John Locke, the Brothers Grimm, Lewis Carroll, Harriet Jacobs, Freud, and Hillary Rodham.

FYSB BC1339 Buried Past: Object & History. 3 points.
This course takes an object-centered approach to explore the meaning of gender, power, and identity of women in Bronze Age China, whose names are unsurprisingly omitted and lives are unfortunately stereotyped through the patriarchal prism of the written history. Thanks to modern archaeology, we have been afforded the opportunity to see the complexity and richness of the material and ritual life of ancient women long hidden underground. We focus on such a woman named Fu Hao and rediscovery her extraordinary life as a queen, a mother, a high priestess, and a royal military commander of the Late Shang Dynasty (ca. 1300-1045 B.C.E.). Through examining the life histories of the objects buried in her tomb and their interactions with Fu Hao, in life and in death, we delineate and analyze the ways that gender roles, political power, and cultural identity were and are still entangled in women’s life.

FYSB BC1400 Walking and Looking. 3 points.
Walking and looking are among the most "natural" of human activities. But what really goes on—physiologically, culturally, socially—when we engage in them? And what can we learn if we examine the two practices together, as fundamental parts of how humans explore their world? This course will study how the interacting behaviors of walking and looking have been represented in word and image, from the Bible to impressionism painters to Hollywood films. Our base texts will be Wanderlust: A History of Walking by Rebecca Solnit (2000) and On Looking: A Walker’s Guide to the Art of Observation by Alexandra Horowitz (2013).

FYSB BC1421 Crossing Borders: Americas. 0 points.
This course cuts across the borders between North, South and Central America and the Caribbean, in a search for the ways in which literature illuminates different aspects of American identity. We see the Americas as active historical and aesthetic actors, acting and interacting with each other. We might even say that modernity, in the sense of freedom from tradition, first developed in the Americas; as a result, the literatures of the Americas are characterized by diversity and innovation from their beginning. We will devote particular attention to the roots of Modernism in North and South America at the end of the 19th century, and the development of modernism, post-modernism and post-colonialism in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

FYSB BC1422 Art, AIDS, Activism. 3 points.
This seminar explores the varied ways artists responded to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s. As government indifference persisted and deaths soared, artists became radicalized and contemporary art became a vehicle for activism. We will follow different tactics in artwork responding to AIDS including the use of gay desire as a weapon and emblem of the fight for visibility. The work we will view, think about, discuss, and write about is political, often angry, and always tinged with loss. Because AIDS affected marginalized communities, whose histories are still being told, we will examine a range of artists and materials that includes but also moves beyond the gay white male perspective. We will spend time with videos by Juanita Mohammad, visual art by Kia LaBeija, Feliz Gonzalez-Torres, and David Wojnarowicz, plays by Reza Abdoh and Tony Kushner, and the writings of Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill, and Sarah Schulman. The final project will be an academic/creative hybrid: students will develop and pitch their own activist artwork.

FYSB BC1460 Memory. 3 points.
Memory is arguably the most important faculty that we possess. Not surprisingly, memory has been a ubiquitous topic in poetry, science, fiction, and in the media. Ironically, memory’s value is perhaps best understood when it ceases to exist. Indeed, it isn’t hard to imagine the devastation that comes with memory loss. In this course, we will survey various components of memory, including its role in writing and history, and its existence in various non-human populations. In addition, we will explore the fragility of memory, including distortions, unusual memories, and basic forgetting. Readings will include poems, theoretical essays, scientific articles, and fiction. Assignments will consist of essays, opinion pieces, and creative stories. Students will also participate in a final in-class debate. Readings will include works by William Blake, James Joyce, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, S. Freud, Oliver Sacks, Truman Capote, Spinoza, Luria, J.L. Borges, and Elizabeth Loftus.

Spring 2020: FYSB BC1421

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Fall 2019: FYSB BC1460

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FYSB BC1465 On Dreams and Nightmares. 3 points.
In the dead of night it is not uncommon for even the most socially staid of individuals to fly, to ride an elephant at breakneck speed, to visit with the dead, or to expose themselves in public. Ancient Egyptians struggled to understand how and why we dream, as have countless individuals in other times and cultures. Some thinkers, ancient and modern, have dismissed dreams as essentially meaningless byproducts of natural processes. Others have taken dreams seriously as a primary means of access to an ordinarily imperceivable world in which one can commune with spirits and deities and receive from them valuable information about future events or even one's own health. The implications of this belief have led to vigorous theological debates as to whose dreams may be trusted (and, alternatively, whose need to be actively suppressed). From Freud onward, many have felt that dreams offer the key not to other worlds but to the complicated realm of the psyche. Over the course of our semester we’ll look at how scientists, philosophers, hypochondriacs, pious pagans and monotheists, opium addicts, psychologists, playwrights, novelists, artists, and film directors have understood dreams and been inspired by them. Authors whose works we’ll read include Aristotle, Cicero, Chung Tzu, Freud, Carl Jung, Andre Breton, H.P. Lovecraft, Jorge Borges, Ursula Le Guin, Neil Gaimon, and many others. Special attention will likewise be paid to the phenomenon of lucid dreaming and to the immense influence this practice has had on the creative output of both writers and filmmakers.

FYSB BC1466 Sustainability. 3 points.
Sustainability is being hailed as the solution that is going to link activists, citizens, and corporations to solve the world’s environmental problems. However, there are many ways to define the term and assess the long-term effects of so-called sustainable measures. In this course, we will examine current and historical writings about human interactions with the environment in order to understand and identify our most profound environmental challenges and the most appropriate responses. Responding critically to the ideas of the past, we will also ask how our views have changed over time and what it might take to tackle the current large-scale.

FYSB BC1467 Activism and Social Change. 3 points.
Frederick Douglass famously stated, ‘if there is no struggle, there is no progress.’ This quote captures the essence of activism, which is the struggle between that which is and that which ought to be. This course will trace the many ways in which activism has been defined over time, situating them within different historical social movements. We will also explore contemporary debates about the re-conceptualization of activism in the age of social media and the internet. Readings include texts from such canonical authors as Plato, Mary Wollstonecraft and Martin Luther King, as well as more contemporary works by Clay Shirky, Malcolm Gladwell and Alissa Quart. Questions that this class will examine include: what are the different ways in which activism has been defined, practiced and justified? To what degree do new forms of activism expand on or refute more traditional forms of activism? How do social movements define, shape and challenge activists? What are some inherent problems within activist groups, and what are some of the challenges facing activists today?

FYSB BC1469 Liberation. 3 points.
Liberation can be defined as freedom from limits on thought or behavior. More specifically, it can be defined as setting someone (or oneself) free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression. This seminar examines political, philosophical, aesthetic, and theological traditions and movements for liberation, with an emphasis on collective liberation.

FYSB BC1471 The Body Social. 3 points.
At once material and symbolic, our bodies exist at the intersection of multiple competing discourses (including biomedicine, law, and mass media, among others). In this discussion-based seminar, we will draw upon both sociological and interdisciplinary literatures to consider some of the ways in which the body is constituted by such discourses, and itself serves as the material basis for social and cultural life. Among the key questions we will consider are the following: What is “natural” about the body? How are distinctions made between normal and pathological bodies, and between psychic and somatic experiences? How do historical and political-economic forces shape the perception and meaning of bodily existence? And finally: how do bodies that are multiply constituted by competing logics of gender, race, and class offer us resistance to these and other categorizations?

FYSB BC1474 Think Like A Scientist: From Plato to Hawking. 3 points.
This course will examine the "scientific worldview" throughout the history of the Western world. Key questions will include: how do science and philosophy intersect to influence our views of nature?; how does science help us to understand our place in the world and in the universe?; what happens when objective scientific inquiry clashes with political and societal interests?; how does popular opinion affect the way that science is conducted? In attempting to answer these questions, we will reflect on what it means to use what we have learned (from both science and history) to synthesize new viewpoints that can have a positive impact on our future.
FYSB BC1475 Texts of Protest in the Americas. 3 points.
This interdisciplinary course examines the rich tradition of progressive protest texts in the Americas. Using a broad definition of "texts of protest", we focus on the cultural production and consumption of dissent as a site of social critique, using a wide variety of print and visual forms, such as essay, fiction, painting, and film. We examine the historical links between forms of protest, social change, and meanings of literature and visual art, and we explore how various expressions of dissent function as political, ideological, rhetorical, aesthetic, and performative texts within specific cultural contexts.

FYSB BC1546 Shapes and Shadows of Identity. 3 points.
A look at the elusive meaning of "black", "white", and other group identities in the United States and the forms—novel, literary essay, stand-up comedy, ethnography, performance, film, television, magazines, radio, memoir, sermon—through which such identities are depicted. Readings will include: Johnny Otis; Upside you Head; Upsky; Bomb the Suburbs; Nelson George, The Death of Rhythm and Blues; Mary Waters, Black Identities; James McBride, The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother; Ann Douglas, Mongrel Manhattan; selected sermons and speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.

FYSB BC1572 Animals in Text and Society. 3 points.
Interdisciplinary examination of the intimate and fraught connections between animals and humans in literature, philosophy and culture. We will consider topics such as the historical constructions of species boundaries and of the multiple meanings and uses of animals in human life; animal and human identity; emotions evoked by animals; and conceptualizations of animals as colonized "others." Readings include Aesop, Edward Albee, Angela Carter, John Coetze, Geoffrey Chaucer, Gustave Flaubert, Jean LeFontaine, Marie de France, Michael Pollan, Ovid, selections from Genesis (in the Hebrew Bible), and Virginia Woolf.

FYSB BC1597 Taboo and Transgression. 3 points.
This seminar explores taboo and transgression within a range of mythic, scientific, anthropological, psychoanalytical, feminist, and literary work. Topics include the treatment of the corpse during the Paleolithic, the centrality of the incest taboo in kinship studies, and the equation of boundaries and of the multiple meanings and uses of animals in human life; animal and human identity; emotions evoked by animals; and conceptualizations of animals as colonized "others." Readings include Augustine, Confessions; Foucault, History of Sexuality; vol. 1; Ginzberg, The Cheese and the Worms; Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground; Miranda v. Arizona; Gillian Slovo, Red Dust; Jackson, The Politics of Storytelling; Bauer, The Art of the Public Grovel; Cole, The Torture Memos; Asad, Genealogies of Religion; "The Lives of Others" (film; 2006, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarc).

FYSB BC1599 Tipping Points. 3 points.
The printing press helped pave the way for the scientific revolution and the invention of human rights. What will transpire in the digital age of artificial intelligence and globalization? This seminar questions whether intellectual, economic, technological, and ethical tipping points transform what it means to be human. Authors include Locke, Jefferson, Shelley, Freud, Rushdie, Ishiguro, McLuhan, Lyotard, and Offill.

FYSB BC1707 Confession. 3 points.
Not offered during 2019-20 academic year.
This seminar explores the notion of "confession" in many manifestations (autobiography, memoir, sacrament/ritual, political/judicial performance, public spectacle/confessional culture) and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (history, literature, psychoanalysis, theology, cultural studies). Readings include: Augustine, Confessions; Foucault, History of Sexuality; vol. 1; Ginzberg, The Cheese and the Worms; Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground; Miranda v. Arizona; Gillian Slovo, Red Dust; Jackson, The Politics of Storytelling; Bauer, The Art of the Public Grovel; Cole, The Torture Memos; Asad, Genealogies of Religion; "The Lives of Others" (film; 2006, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarc).

FYSB BC1709 Drama, Theatre, and Art. 3 points.
The seminar will explore multiple ways of perceiving the world through drama, theatre, and art. Beginning with classical mythology and Shakespeare, we will focus on 18th - 21st century works that foreground aesthetics and meta-theatricality, individual agency and social change. We will investigate fluid categories such as realism, impressionism, and modernism. Plays by Ruhl, Shakespeare, Wertenbaker/Farquhar, Marber/ Pinero, Wilder, Kennedy, and Reza; novel by Woolf; opera by Gluck; film by Kurosawa; musical by Sondheim. Productions, adaptations, films, and museums will provide cross-disciplinary contexts.

Spring 2020: FYSB BC1572

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Fall 2019: FYSB BC1709

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FYSB BC1713 Things and Stuff. 3 points.
How do our material choices shape our cultural and individual narratives? How do the things we make, buy, use, keep, and discard tell stories, impact our environment, and help define who we are? Americans create over 250 million tons of landfill every year, and up to 60%-80% of global greenhouse gas emissions have been traced to household consumption (food, stuff, and transport). With this contemporary reality as our reference point, we will examine how designed and built objects contribute to the human story over time, and how our decisions about "things and stuff" might change our stories moving forward.
FYSB BC1715 Arts of Adaptation: From Snow White to Sidney White. 3 points.
Can a ballet tell the same story as a Shakespeare tragedy? Do the violent fantasies of a fairytale shape romantic comedy? What does Bollywood have to do with Victorian England? Using as textual anchors Grimms’ Snow White, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles, and Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, this course will explore poems, paintings, films, musicals, dance, illustration, advertisement and song to consider the accretion of meaning that results when stories cross, historical, cultural, and generic borders.

FYSB BC1718 The Woman in the Mirror. 3 points.
This seminar will examine women’s creative self-representation through writing—diaries, letters, poetry, essays, memoirs—the visual arts, and film. We will think about the possibilities each form elicits and excludes, and discuss such issues as self-assertion and self-exposure, creative ambition, social critique and social taboos, femininity and queer identity, the family and motherhood, desire, bodies, and shame. Theoretical writings on gender, female development, creativity, and the self will anchor our analysis of the works we study. Writers, artists, and filmmakers may include Virginia Woolf, Anne Carson, Maggie Nelson, Roxane Gay, Mary Karr, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sheila Heti, Sarah Manguso, Alison Bechdel, Louise Bourgeois, Adrian Piper, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Dee Rees, Greta Gerwig, Agnès Varda, others.

FYSB BC1719 Short Stories: Big Moments. 3 points.
In this course, we’ll read and analyze a range of short stories, most of which will be stories of initiation: that is, stories in which the protagonist, often young, undergoes some kind of a significant rite of passage—an initiation through crisis or conflict into a new stage of life, into the adult world, or into new ways of thinking about, seeing, experiencing, or understanding the world. We’ll focus mainly on American and British writers, but will also read a few stories by writers from Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand. We’ll also consider the theme of initiation as it’s expressed in at least one other medium—dance, theater, possibly film—depending on what’s on stage locally in the fall. Also, we’ll focus a bit, at least initially— as a kind of introduction—on some of the formal properties of short stories. How do they differ from novels? When did the short story form begin to flourish in English? What earlier forms—such as the fable, the exemplum, the fairytale— influenced the development of the short story form?

FYSB BC1721 Fact, Fiction, & Truth. 3 points.
Truth is stranger than fiction,” wrote Mark Twain in 1897, “because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn’t.” In our era of “reality TV” and “fake news,” Twain’s observation gains new relevance and meaning. In this course, we will investigate the complicated relationship between documentary evidence and artistic creativity in twentieth-century literature, theater, poetry, film, and visual art that purports to tell a (mostly) true story. When you tell the truth creatively, blending fact with fiction, is it still the truth? What do authors and artists gain from taking this risk? What do we lose?
FYSB BC1724 Postcolonial Comics. 3 points.
In postcolonial studies, we look at the history, politics, and culture of countries that were once colonized. In literature, this work is done through careful close-reading and paying attention to how the struggle for independence is represented in literary texts, both on an individual and collective level. In this course, we will push the boundaries of the discipline of postcolonial studies and use its methodologies to read about locations and peoples that weren’t formerly (or formally) colonized (for example, Ancient Greece, New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, 20th century Iran, and female Jewish immigrants in New York City circa 1910). We’ll also investigate why graphic novels present an appropriate medium for studying postcolonialisms.

Fall 2019: FYSB BC1724
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FYSB BC1725 Mystics: Medieval and Modern. 3 points.
This course will compare and contrast medieval and modern mysticism, or aspirations toward the sublime. Through careful examination of literature, art, and music, we will explore how peoples from distinct cultures and time periods engaged in various rhetorical strategies to express their union with God. We will discuss how mystics of all stripes, from Hildegard of Bingen, a twelfth-century German nun, and Rebecca Cox Jackson, a formerly enslaved person in antebellum Philadelphia, to Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Soviet Suprematism, enlisted the written word, bodily gesture, vocalized song, and painted form in their attempts to convey the transcendent. Museum visits are required.

Fall 2019: FYSB BC1725
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FYSB BC1726 Girl Talk: Language & Femininity. 3 points.
Women are often described as talking differently than men do, of having a different relationship to language than men do. Is this true? If so, how? What are the implications? This seminar explores the relationship between language and feminism in works of literature, psychology, sociolinguistics, anthropology, feminist sociology and philosophy, literary theory, and popular media including film and music. In addition to investigating these questions across disciplines, we consider them between language and femininity in works of literature, psychology, and political ideology. We will focus how social divisions are constituted, experienced, questioned, and bridged. Most of the assigned material will be available as readings, including texts by women who have written about language and feminism. Assigned books may include Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, and Ted Chiang, as well as a number of science fiction films, including Fritz Lang’s Metropolis and Denis Villeneuve’s Arrival.

Fall 2019: FYSB BC1726
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FYSB BC1727 Periodic Tales of the Elements. 3 points.
What is the “cosmic history” of the atoms that compose our bodies and the world around us? How do these elements come together to make us during life’s fleeting journey? What becomes of our atoms after we die? In happy coincidence, 2019 is the 150th anniversary of Dimitri Mendeleev’s publication of an organized chart of the chemical elements, as well as the year of Walt Whitman’s 200th birthday. We will celebrate the Periodic Table with Mendeleev as one of humanity’s great intellectual achievements and sing elemental songs with Whitman on scales minute and enormous, instantaneous and eternal. Readings to include Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” Primo Levi’s The Periodic Table, Oliver Sacks’s Uncle Tungsten, and a selection of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

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FYSB BC1728 Worlds of Science Fiction. 3 points.
Since its beginnings, science fiction has offered places to explore both our dreams and our nightmares. This course will investigate how science fiction writers and filmmakers imagine other worlds as a way of reflecting on our own. Ranging through science fiction past and present, we’ll examine how SF’s most enduring features—time travel, aliens, cyborgs, utopias and dystopias—have enabled writers to explore questions we face in the real world. How might SF help us better understand our relationship to technology, or to nature? What new perspectives can it offer on issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality? Course materials will include readings by such authors as Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, and Ted Chiang, as well as a number of science fiction films, including Fritz Lang’s Metropolis and Denis Villeneuve’s Arrival.

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FYSB BC1729 AMERICA’S SOCIAL DIVIDES. 3 points.
This first year seminar explores some of the central cleavages dividing American society today, along such lines as social class, region, race, and political ideology. We will focus how social divisions are constituted, experienced, questioned, and bridged. Most of the assigned material will be based on primary research in the social sciences, along with a small number of documentaries, novels, and/or memoirs. Assigned books may include Arlie Hochschild, Strangers in their Own Land; Eric Klinenberg, Palaces for the People; Barbara Ransby, Making All Black Lives Matter; Rachel Sherman, Uneasy Street: The Affluence of Affluence; and Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj, The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility.

Spring 2020: FYSB BC1729
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FYSB BC1730 THINKING THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE. 3 points.
What is the origin of the notion of “natural resource”? What is the connection between past and present colonialism and the current ecological crisis in Latin America? And, what is the relation between cultural diversity and a sustainable economy? In this seminar, we will explore these questions (and more) by looking at the history of Latin America through primary and secondary texts, including Latin American Literary, philosophical, aesthetic, legal, political, and economic texts. We will read both canonical and non-canonical writings from the colonial and modern periods as well as indigenous literature. The course will place this tradition in dialogue with the most recent developments of eco-feminism, materialist ontologies, discussions of environmental justice, “deep ecology,” and the rights of non-human nature. Readings will be selected from Domingo Sarmiento, Jose de Acosta, Andres Bello, Domitila Barrios, Ivonne Guevara, Enrique Leff, Luis Sepulveda, Donna Haraway, Jason Moore, McKenzie Wark, Timothy Morton, Naomi Klein, and John Clark. Throughout the course, we will consider how indigenous ideals of solidarity, reciprocity, and emancipation offer an alternative to strategies of domination.

FYSB BC1731 FROM EPIC HERO TO SUPER HERO. 3 points.
The enormous box office success of recent moves like Avengers: Endgame, Wonder Woman and the Batman franchise attests to our present societal fascination with heroes. Yet this fascination is a millennia-old phenomena. Gilgamesh, one of the oldest surviving literary works in the world, tells the story of a great hero and his accomplishments. What accounts for the enduring appeal of heroes throughout history, across cultures and in different forms of media? What connects ancient epic heroes like Gilgamesh to modern superheroes like Batman? This seminar will seek answers to these questions by comparatively studying a range of artistic texts depicting heroes. Course readings will include Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns, as well as studies by Marco Arnaudo, Joseph Campbell and Grant Morrison, among others. Students in this seminar will have the option of taking part in a class excursion to see Marvel’s upcoming Black Widow movie.

FYSB BC1732 FEMINISM & POLITICS OF ANGER. 4 points.
Of late, much attention has been given to the political role of feminist anger. However, not all feminist anger is received or interpreted in the same way; not all women have had the same freedom to express or represent anger. This course asks us to think critically about expressions and perceptions of anger. How do race, sexuality, gender identity, class, and ethnicity shape who is perceived as “angry” and whose anger is taken seriously? What other affects circulate and interact with anger: from rage and irritation to wonder and joy? We’ll begin with the figure of the “feminist killjoy,” as theorized by Sara Ahmed and will consider texts by authors including Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Susan Stryker, and Nella Larsen, alongside manifestos, comics, film, visual art, and zines. NOTE: This 4-credit version of First-Year Seminar (FYS)—FYS “Workshop”—is specially designed for students who believe they would benefit from extra support with their critical reading and academic writing skills. In addition to regular seminar meetings twice per week, students are also required to participate in six ‘writing labs’ over the course of the semester. The writing labs for this section will take place on the following Fridays, 11:40 am-12:55 pm: 1/31, 2/14, 2/28, 3/6, 3/27, and 4/3.

Reacting to the Past
In these seminars, students play complex historical role-playing games informed by classic texts. After an initial set-up phase, class sessions are run by students. These seminars are speaking- and writing-intensive, as students pursue their assigned roles’ objectives by convincing classmates of their views. Examples of games played in First-Year Seminar Reacting classes include: 1) The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C. explores a pivotal moment following the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, when democrats sought to restore democracy while critics, including the supporters of Socrates, proposed alternatives. The key text is Plato’s Republic. 2) Confucianism and the Succession Crisis of the Wanli Emperor examines a dispute between Confucian purists and pragmatists within the Hanlin Academy, the highest echelon of the Ming bureaucracy, taking Analects of Confucius as the central text. 3) The Trial of Anne Hutchinson revisits a conflict that pitted Puritan dissenter Anne Hutchinson and her supporters against Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop and the orthodox ministers of New England. Students work with testimony from Hutchinson’s trial as well as the Bible and other texts. 4) Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor and the New Woman investigates the struggle between radical labor activists and woman suffragists for the hearts and minds of “Bohemians,” drawing on foundational works by Marx, Freud, Mary Wollstonecraft, and others.
FYSB BC1601 Reacting to the Past. 3 points.
In these seminars, students play complex historical role-playing games informed by classic texts. After an initial set-up phase, class sessions are run by students. These seminars are speaking- and writing-intensive, as students pursue their assigned roles' objectives by convincing classmates of their views. Examples of games played in First-Year Seminar Reacting class include: 1) The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C. explores a pivotal moment following the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, when democrats sought to restore democracy while critics, including the supporters of Socrates, proposed alternatives. The key text is Plato's Republic. 2) Confucianism and the Succession Crisis of the Wanli Emperor examines a dispute between Confucian purists and pragmatists within the Hanlin Academy, the highest echelon of the Ming bureaucracy, taking Analects of Confucius as the central text. 3) The Trial of Anne Hutchinson revisits a conflict that pitted Puritan dissenter Anne Hutchinson and her supporters against Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop and the orthodox ministers of New England. Students work with testimony from Hutchinson's trial as well as the Bible and other texts. 4) Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor and the New Woman investigates the struggle between radical labor activists and woman suffragists for the hearts and minds of "Bohemians," drawing on foundational works by Marx, Freud, Mary Wollstonecraft, and others.

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