First-Year Seminar

332G Milbank Hall
212-854-3577
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.

In The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C., students draw on Plato’s Republic as well as excerpts from Thucydides, Xenophon, and other contemporary sources to debate the prospects for Athenian democracy in the wake of the Peloponnesian War.

In Confucianism and the Succession Crisis of the Wanli Emperor, students study the Analects of Confucius and apply Confucian thought to issues of governance during the Ming dynasty. The final semester’s final game varies by section. Some sections explore seventeenth-century Massachusetts, drawing on the Bible, Calvin’s Institutes, and colonial trial testimony to participate in The Trial of Anne Hutchinson. Other sections draw on texts by Marx, Freud, and Wollstonecraft to explore the contest between women’s suffrage advocates and labor activists for the hearts and minds of “Bohemian” Greenwich Village in the spring of 1913.

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

Director of First-Year Writing: Wendy Schor-Haim

Professors: Robert McCaughey (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 McCaughey (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), John Pagano (English), Stefan Pedatella (English), Laurie Postlewate (French), Jennifer Rosenthal (English), Wendy Schor-Haim (English), Timea Szell (English), Margaret Vandenburg (English)

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 BC1000 Big Problems: Making Sense of 2020. 1.00 point.
This course, designed for First-Year Barnard students in the fall of 2020, puts our current moment into multiple contexts. COVID-19 has triggered massive social, economic, political, and environmental upheaval that requires critical analysis and broader perspectives. What does this moment reveal about existing power structures, value systems, and the institutions that (re)produce them? What might our world look like as we move forward? Through lectures by renowned experts, collaboration with Barnard's incomparable intellectual and material resources, small discussion groups, and peer-to-peer projects that will live on in Barnard's digital archives, students will learn how to make sense of the “big problems” of 2020.

Fall 2020: FYSB BC1000

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FYSB BC1105 Language and Power. 3.00 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.

FYSB BC1107 RACE, SCIENCE, AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE. 3.00 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. With an emphasis on the reproductive justice movement in the United States, which centers the experiences and leadership of BIPOC women and LGBTQ people, 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, and rhetorically? What is reproductive justice, and how is it distinct from reproductive rights and health? How have recent innovations in medicine and reproductive technologies both empowered and harmed reproductive experiences? And what kind of world does the reproductive justice movement urge us to imagine and create? Please note that the material for this class discusses obstetric violence; this material is important for understanding the relationships between race, science, and reproductive justice. Throughout the semester, we will discuss as a class how to work through this difficult material in respectful and inclusive ways. 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 Friday “writing labs” over the course of the semester. The writing labs for this section will take place on the following Fridays, 11:40am-12:55pm: 1/15, 1/22, 1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 3/26. These dates are for the Spring 2021 semester only.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1107

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FYSB BC1113 Feminist Futures. 3.00 points.
This course uses feminist and queer anti-racist engagements with science fiction as a starting point for considering speculation as a mode of inquiry and practice more generally. How and why do feminist authors, artists, activists, and theorists invoke the future in order to analyze and contest gendered inequalities and dominations that are experienced in the present? What are the consequences of speculation in the context of platform design and reproductive technologies? What is the role of imagination in dealing with archival documents? By posing these and other questions throughout the semester, we will explore numerous issues about the role of speculation, imagination, and forecasting in the everyday practice of feminist critique. The seminar meetings, readings, and assignments in this class all serve the larger goal of helping students cultivate intersectional approaches to the study of power.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1113

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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 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 BC1189 Enchanted Imagination. 3 points.

A survey of fantasy works that examines the transformative role of the imagination in aesthetically and creatively engaging, 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; Victorian 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 BC1278 Economic Life and Human Character. 3 points.
In a society governed by markets and economic competition, which human traits flourish and which decay? Through an examination of four novels and some classic writings in social theory we seek to understand how modern capitalism builds on an unchanging set of human needs and aspirations, yet reshapes both their expression and the relative importance they possess in individual lives and across social groups. Our readings comprise Dickens, Oliver Twist, Gissing, The Odd Women, William Dean Howells, A Hazard of New Fortunes, Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and Communist Manifesto, Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Wharton, The House of Mirth. The seminar's practical goal is to develop your communication, presentation, and expository writing skills.

FYSB BC1286 Culture, Ethics and Economics. 3 points.
What if humans were only capable of caring for their own interests? What kind of economic world could we expect to find? One in which the common good would be attained by market forces, or one in which many would be left behind? This course uses a diversity of sources to examine the interplay of culture, ethics and economics. The starting point is Adam Smith's work. Economists and policy makers have focused on one side of Adam Smith's work represented by self-regarding behavior and the supremacy of the invisible hand in market functioning. However, Adam Smith also pointed out that one of humans' central emotions is "sympathy", a natural tendency to care about the well-being of others. In light of the recent events as well as research this other side of Adam Smith's work appears now more relevant. We analyze evidence of cooperative versus self-regarding behaviors and its relationship with the economy, human evolution and cultural values in a variety of settings. Readings include works from Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, Charles Dickens, David Rockefeller and Chris Gardner.

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 utopias (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 suburbia. Texts include More's Utopia, Columbus's journals, Shakespeare's The Tempest, the Communist Manifesto, Gilman's Herland, and Hopkins's Of One Blood. We will also examine attempts to create utopias, including several American experimental communities from the early 1800s, nationalist racial dystopias such as Nazi Germany, and master-planned communities in the modern United States.

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 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 Impressionist 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. 3 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 agents, 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 Abdoth 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.

Fall 2020: FYSB BC1422

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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 from William Blake, James Joyce, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, Emily Dickinson, Ben Jonson, Mary Carruthers, Francis Yates, Aristotle, William James, Elizabeth Loftus, Spinoza, Luria, J.L. Borges, S. Freud, Oliver Sacks, Truman Capote

Fall 2020: 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 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 up 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 BC1583 CARIBBEAN DIASPORA LITERATURE IN NEW YORK. 3 points.
Historically, Caribbean cultures have been profoundly affected and shaped by the massive displacement and migration of their populations. In this course, we will examine how this condition of displacement is articulated in the writings of the Caribbean diaspora and how these literary representations of mobility, migration, and intercultural contact reflect current globalizing processes and discourses. Texts will be drawn from the Francophone, Anglophone, and Hispanic Caribbean diaspora. These include the novel The Mimic Men by the recent Nobel-Prize-winning Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul; the novel Lucy by the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid; and short stories by Junot Diaz and Edwidge Danticat, writers of Dominican and Haitian descent respectively, the latter a Barnard graduate. These readings will be complemented by essays from critics such as Edouard Glissant, Stuart Hall, and James Clifford.

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 secular modernity with the successive breaking of taboos.
FYSB BC1598 Building Utopia. 3 points.
Building Utopia examines the rich tradition of utopian thinking in literature, social philosophy, architecture, and the visual arts. Here, utopia is explored in its modern form: as a call to transform the world through human planning and ingenuity. Aside from an important excursus on Thomas More’s pivotal novel Utopia (1516), the course centers on nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers whose often wild and idealistic imaginings profoundly affected the shape of the real world. We’ll read and explore the works of Charles Fourier, Edward Bellamy, the Italian Futurists, and Le Corbusier, among many others. The purpose of the course is to better understand the role that the utopian imagination has played in the construction of power.

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 BC1709 DRAMA, THEATRE, AND ART. 3 points.
Drama, Theatre, and Art will consider the ways in which the performing arts and the visual arts help change the ways we see art and life. Beginning with reimagined classics and Shakespeare’s plays, we will move to the 18th-21st centuries and note how views of individual agency, social justice, and collective responsibility have changed over time. We will also ask what the performing arts and visual arts of the past have to say about issues confronted in the arts of the present. This will help us to understand how evolving aesthetic movements such as realism, impressionism, and modernism promote and critique our cultural perspectives and our social values. Plays include Sarah Ruhl’s Eurydice, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Timberlake Wertenbaker’s Our Country’s Good, Thornton Wilder’s Our Town, Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun and Les Blancs, and Yasmina Rez’s Art; novels include Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse; musicals include Stephen Sondheim’s Sunday in the Park with George and Rachel Chavkin’s Hadestown. Art from The Metropolitan Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, and other sites will promote student engagement with visual and verbal interactions and cross disciplinary conversations.

FYSB BC1715 Arts of Adaptation. 3.00 points.
Can a ballet tell the same story as a Shakespeare tragedy? Do the violent fantasies of a fairy tale shape romantic comedy? What does Bollywood have to do with Victorian England? Can ancient mythology animate slave narrative? Using as textual anchors Grimm’s Snow White, Ovid’s Medea, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, and Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, 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 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 125 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 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 folktales—developed the process 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 BC1722 Writing American Lives. 3 points.
This interdisciplinary course explores the problem of representing American experience, one’s own or someone else’s, in the context of a nation-state’s fraught history of self-fashioning. What motivates a person to tell his or her life story, or to investigate someone else’s, and how are these stories bound by both authors and readers to narratives of citizenship, belonging, and/or exclusion? What motivates a writer to share what she shares, and what motivates an audience to demand what it demands from her? What claims about the exemplary or excessive qualities of the life story are made, or are emulated, by the life story’s readers? In addition to critical consideration of biography and memoir in traditional media, your work in this class will include examinations of the fake memoir and the digital overshare; you will also be invited to curate a branded footprint of your own, using tools of new media.

FYSB BC1723 Intimate Partnerships. 3 points.
We shall investigate how the concept and practice of intimate partnership has developed from ancient days to the present, with readings from the Bible, classic fairy tales, a Victorian novel, love poetry, a YA novel about a teenage single mother, and a selection of contemporary short stories and novellas. How do these texts account for race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender within the context of love and marriage? We will also explore marriage, commitment, and partnership in film and television.

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.

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.

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 femininity 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 in a wide variety of social contexts including 19th century American intellectual circles, Tanzanian beauty pageants, Chicana girl gangs, Bedouin nomadic women’s poetry, Japanese animation, and ancient Greek lyric. Topics include “good girls” and “bad girls,” talking about feelings, silencing and the right to be heard, language and femininity as labor, and the role of language in judgments of feminine beauty in pageants and drag balls.
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 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 Sack’s Uncle Tungsten, and a selection of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

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.

FYSB BC1729 AMERICA’S SOCIAL DIVIDES. 3.00 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, 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 Sack’s Uncle Tungsten, and a selection of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

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. 3.00 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 (WKSHOP). 4.00 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
FYSB BC1733 Women # Comedy. 3.00 points.
“What a language it is, the laughter of women, high-flying and subversive. Long before law and scripture we heard the laughter, we understood freedom.” -Lisel Mueller “I'm not funny, what I am is brave.” - Lucille Ball
This course focuses on the intersection between comedy and gender, race, class and sexuality. We will explore laughter as a subversive act and how the identity of a “funny woman” can be both dangerous and liberating. As Margo Jefferson writes, “Given the history of social restriction and sexual regulation, how many women have been in a position to – or been willing to – take these risks?” We will explore how the tools of comedy can be used to make mischief, to transgress the bounds of genre and form and to contest popular ideas about difference and power. How can humor be illuminating? How can humor be feminist? How can humor be intersectional? How can humor help us tell the hard truths? Can we laugh at oppression without laughing it off? At every step, we will put our inquiry into action – trying our hand at satire, sketch and storytelling to explore our own intersections. Readings may include Audre Lorde’s Sister Outsider, Samantha Chanse’s Lydia’s Funeral Video and Patricia Lockwood’s Motherland Fatherland Homelandsexuals.

FYSB BC1734 CULTURE, IDENTITY, & THE SELF. 3 points.
In this First Year Seminar, we explore how people discover themselves and others in the frameworks of different cultures and times. Our focus is on the idea of the self (who are you?) and the other (who are you not?), and we investigate these concepts as they appear in six great books from Western and Non-Western sources. The texts include: The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Aeneid, The Golden Legend, Austin’s Emma, Satrapi’s Persepolis, and Woolf’s A Room of One’s One. Additionally, we will contrast these with their movie versions and a visit to a museum. Students in this class will develop key fundamental skills, such as active reading and analysis, how to write in different rhetorical modes, and how to verbalize and present ideas effectively.

FYSB BC1735 IS GOD DEAD?. 3 points.
Friedrich Nietzsche’s 1882 pronouncement that “God is dead” is one of the most notorious and widely-referenced criticisms of the relationship between Theology and Modernity in contemporary thought. But what does it mean to say “God is dead,” in fact? What was Nietzsche talking about? How might this statement be “true”? How might it be inaccurate? In this class, we will use Nietzsche’s statement as a jumping-off point to begin thinking about how modern ideas about the continuities and distinctions between religion and politics developed between the 16th to the 20th centuries in such a way that to say “God is dead” became a meaningful summation of Modernity. In addition to Nietzsche, we will read classical and critical works of political theology from a diverse array of authors such as Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, Benedict de Spinoza, Beatriz Kampa Vita, Carl Schmitt, Max Weber, Zora Neale Hurston, W.E.B. DuBois, and Simone Weil to answer for questions: What does it mean to talk about God? Is God dead? If so, when and how did God die? And if God is not dead, how has God been kept alive — and where can this figure be found today?

FYSB BC1736 TECH & SOCIETY: GOOD, BAD & OTHER. 3 points.
Computing and information technology has improved our lives in many ways, contributing to significant advances in science and medicine; making it easy and efficient to communicate with people across the world; and enabling online business and recreational activities; and more. However, the same technologies can also have negative impacts, such as the move to a surveillance society and surveillance capitalism; major disruptions in the workforce of the future as automation becomes more widespread; and social media contributing to depression in young people and the weaponization of disinformation. This seminar will explore technical, cultural, legal, and economic factors that can impact how computing technology is used, while raising the question of how to encourage and ensure that these technologies are used for good, while eliminating or mitigating the potential negative impacts.
FYSB BC1737 SURVEILLANCE, CONTAGION, AND CARE. 3 points.
Very recent events have forced local, regional, and international communities to once again confront contagion as a globally shared event. This seminar examines some of the historical and contemporary expressions of contagion as moral and ethical experience. We will interrogate the surveillance systems that are utilized by modern governments and economies not only as public health goods and private sector assets, but also legacies of conquest, colonialism, and capitalism. Finally, we explore the role of care within these systems, its inherent power dynamics, and the politics of vulnerability. Texts include (and are not limited to) Katherine Anne Porter’s Pale Horse, Pale Fire; excerpts from Camus, Gaëtano, Sontag, Foucault; historical and sociological accounts of the global HIV epidemic; feminist philosophers on the politics of care and the sciences (e.g., Sandra Laugier, Annemarie Mol); and written and audio journalism topical to these accounts.

Fall 2020: FYSB BC1737

Course Number Section/Call Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
FYSB 1737 001/00550 T Th 10:10am - 11:25am Gina Jae 3 16/16
Room TBA

FYSB BC1738 PERFORMING PUBLICS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM. 3.00 points.
This seminar examines how different publics engage in the political process through performance. We start our exploration with the notion of “the publics” as introduced by the twentieth-century German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and then expand our view of this concept to the contemporary political setting. We will look at how elected representatives use theatrical tropes to shape their public personas, and equally at how popular protests stage large scale public interventions. How might performance as a series of citational strategies allow us to think about the political process? We will draw heavily on the works of feminist performance scholars like Judith Butler, Shannon Jackson and Peggy Phelan, who discuss the different ways in which gendered bodies navigate public space. In this seminar students will be required to draw on their personal experiences of public performances. This may be in the shape of their own activism, politics in their hometowns, their favorite public figures, or memorable live shows they have watched. Writing ethnographically, students will engage with the theorists we read to investigate how performance has shaped their lives. For Fall 2020 we will be focusing on public responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Different populations reacted differently to the global pandemic. From local politicians, medical professionals, frontline workers to everyday citizens, everyone reflected, in different measure, on the loss of the public sphere. We assembled in the digital commons instead. How did we deal with our own isolation from public life while at the same time thinking of keeping the collective body safe from contagion? What are the ways in which we engaged with our community to reaffirm a common humanity?

Fall 2020: FYSB BC1738

Course Number Section/Call Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
FYSB 1738 001/00683 M W 10:10am - 11:25am Shayoni Mitra 3.00 15/16
Room TBA

FYSB BC1739 Dead and Undead (Wkshop). 4.00 points.
What does it mean to be dead? Why the fascination—across time and culture—with conceiving of ways in which the dead can become undead? And how is being undead different than being alive? To investigate and trouble the boundaries between life and death (and un-death), we will analyze works across genres—among them horror, comedy, myth, folklore, and medicine—discussing near-death experiences, beating-heart cadavers, and a range of figures including zombies, ghosts, and other revenants. Readings will likely include texts and excerpts from Montaigne, Shakespeare, Zora Neale Hurston, Ovid, Toni Morrison, Carmen Maria Machado, Edgar Allen Poe, Nalo Hopkinson, and Mary Shelley, along with Japanese death poems, the Netflix series Russian Doll, and Tim Burton’s Frankenweenie. NOTE: Several of the readings for this class involve references to or representations of violence, sometimes explicit. 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 Friday “writing labs” over the course of the semester. The writing labs for this section will take place on the following Fridays, 1:10 pm-2:25 pm: 1/15, 1/22, 1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 4/2. These dates are for the Spring 2021 semester only.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1739

Course Number Section/Call Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
FYSB 1739 001/00591 T Th 1:10pm - 2:25pm Penelope Usher 4.00 16/16
Room TBA

FYSB BC1740 Approaching Trauma. 3.00 points.
Trauma today is evoked in a variety of contexts. But what precisely are we referring to when we use this term? Drawing on psychoanalytic and anthropological approaches, our seminar will interrogate the politics of diagnosing, treating and healing from disturbing past events. We will watch films and read case histories of hysteria, studies of infants, and attempts to integrate mind, brain and body. The course will also examine the rise of PTSD, attend to questions of intergenerational transmission, and learn about responses to national and racial trauma. Featured authors include Sigmund Freud, Beatrice Beebe, Allan Young, Marilyn Ivy and Reshma Menakem.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1740

Course Number Section/Call Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
FYSB 1740 001/00587 T Th 1:10pm - 2:25pm Nicholas Bartlett 3.00 16/16
Room TBA

FYSB BC1741 Science and Society on Screen. 3 points.
When we turn on TV and go to the movies we are typically looking to be entertained. When it comes to science on screen is the purpose for entertainment or education? How do science-related movies and TV reflect but also impact society? Can movies and TV be used to discuss the complex intersection between science and society and how are they received by the public? To discuss these questions and more, we will analyze texts, including Silent Spring and Demon Haunted World and visual media such as Hidden Figures, The Twilight Zone, and Erin Brokovich.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1741

Course Number Section/Call Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
FYSB 1741 001/00588 M W 10:10am - 11:25am Logan Brenner 3 16/16
Room TBA
FYSB BC1742 Journeys. 3 points.
The journey is a central motif in narrative writing dating back many thousands of years. The classical example of the journey comes from the experiences of Odysseus in Homer's The Odyssey but journeys also feature in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as well as the Buddha. The idea of the journey as a transformative experience has remained relevant and, indeed, become so prevalent that it is arguably the foundation of modern popular culture. This class examines the idea of the journey (and travel in a wider sense) through five primary analytic frameworks. The course begins (framework #1) with the interplay between travel and wonder as epitomized in the classical Islamic literary tradition through the travel accounts of Battuta and the famous story of Sinbad. It then turns to Jonathan Swift's use of travel as a means for social satire in Gulliver's Travels (framework #2) before drawing on William James' psychological framework to consider the journey as a metaphor for conversion (framework #3) through the example of Malcolm X. The course then considers travel writing in the modern period as a performative or confessional act through representative examples from Kerouac, Didion, Krakauer, and Gilbert. This is followed by an engagement with Joseph Campbell's notion of the monomyth as embodied by the films Star Wars: A New Hope (1977) and Spirited Away (1991). The final reading in the course centers on Octavia Butler's Kindred which depicts a series of voyages through time that demand a reckoning or confrontation with the past.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1742
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
FYSB 1742  001/00589  M W 1:10pm - 2:25pm  Najam Haider  3  16/16  Room TBA

FYSB BC1743 Existentialism in Lit # Film. 3.00 points.
This seminar explores literary and cinematic depictions of themes in existential thought. The term “existentialism” was first coined to refer to German and French philosophy from (roughly) 1920 to 1950, but it also applies to writers of the previous century, especially Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche. Moreover, its central subjects — perennial matters of human concern such freedom, anxiety, alienation, faith, the meaning of life — can be found in fiction and cinema, from Kafka to Martin Scorsese. Authors will also include Camus, Sartre, and Beauvoir, and we will watch and discuss films directed by Carol Reed, Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, and Michelangelo Antonioni.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1743
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
FYSB 1743  001/00472  T Th 8:40am - 9:55am  Taylor Carman  3.00  15/14  Room TBA

FYSB BC1744 Here/There: Migrant Narratives. 3.00 points.
This first-year seminar brings together texts, films and contemporary art that focus on migrant, immigrant, refugee, expat and exile experiences. We will explore how migrant subjects negotiate dominant discourses of nationality and citizenship, and how their identities as migrants intersect with their other positionalities, with a particular emphasis on race and queerness. Some questions we will consider: How are immigrant, migrant and refugees marginalized, racialized and queered by dominant discourses? How do Black and/or queer subjects negotiate belonging when they travel across cultural, national, linguistic and religious borders? How do these authors, filmmakers resist erasure and complicate our understanding of home, belonging and identity? Possible texts: fiction, poetry and nonfiction by James Baldwin, Ocean Vuong, Marjane Satrapi, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Cherrie Moraga, Gayatri Gopinath, C.P. Cavafy, Masha Gessen, Kazim Ali, Nazim Hikmet; films such as Saving Face, My Brother the Devil, Mr. Gay Syria, My Beautiful Launderette; as well as contemporary visual art, podcasts and activist texts.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1744
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
FYSB 1744  001/00475  M W 1:10pm - 2:25pm  Durgu Ula  3.00  16/16  Room TBA

FYSB BC1745 The Soul of the Nation?. 3.00 points.
One will hear from across the political spectrum references to an entity called the “soul of the nation.” But how to think about this mystified idea? This seminar explores the literary history of the idea of the soul in connection with the question of American identity. By way of interdisciplinary readings from theology, philosophy, and science in accord with readings in American prose and poetry, we come to see how the concept of the soul changes over time as scientific innovation leads culture to reassess what counts as reality. We learn to navigate the arc and contour of this literary history and sharpen our sensitivity to what’s at stake in contemporary uses of the soul’s idea, insofar as they inflect how we think about important questions as what should be valued about the nation and within our lives. Readings will include James Baldwin, St. Augustine, René Descartes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, Audre Lorde, and Antonio Damasio.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1745
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
FYSB 1745  001/00522  T Th 10:10am - 11:25am  Kristi-Lynn Cassaro  3.00  14/16  Room TBA

FYSB BC1746 WOMEN OF COLOR IN SPECULATIVE LITERATURE. 3.00 points.
"The Future is Female" except in science fiction, where it still looks pretty white and male. What happens when women of color take on such tropes? How do black and/or queer subjects negotiate belonging when they travel across cultural, national, linguistic and religious borders? How do these authors, filmmakers resist erasure and complicate our understanding of home, belonging and identity? Possible texts: fiction, poetry and nonfiction by Octavia Butler, Franny Choi, Sam Chense, G Willow Wilson, and Tananarive Due with potential critical readings from Lisa Yaszek, Charlotte E Howell, and bell hooks.

Spring 2021: FYSB BC1746
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
FYSB 1746  001/00682  M W 4:10pm - 5:25pm  3.00  16/16  Room TBA
Reactivity 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.