

Rutgers University Writing Program

201: Research and Writing in the Disciplines

Course List

Spring 2018

Consult your Course Schedule Planner for specific times and locations.

Register for a topic of study related to your major or personal interest, develop your own research question within that topic, and learn the process of researching, writing and revising a 10-12 page analytic research paper.

The class meets core requirements for most schools at RU, and will help you gain valuable expertise in your topic area, learn how to do scholarly research, and improve your writing and revision abilities.

For more information, visit the Writing Program website at wp.rutgers.edu, or contact Lynda Dexheimer, 201 Coordinator, lynda.dexheimer@rutgers.edu

SAS Students: 201 is Core certified for both the Revision-Based (WCr) and the Discipline-Based (WCd) Writing & Communication goals.

SEBS Students: 201 meets Core Curriculum Requirements in Area VI: Oral and Written Communication

Other Students: 201 meets requirements for most schools at RU. Please check with your advisor.

Transfer Students: If you did not take Expository Writing at RU, you must register for 301, which is designed for transfer students, rather than 201.

Activism and Social Change

How can citizens, individually and collectively, accomplish social change? Social movements are forms of collective action in response to inequality, oppression, and unmet needs. What do movements and social change look like? We will engage with readings, speakers, videos, case studies, social campaigns, music, and other visual media to study how change occurs. Students will have the opportunity to explore questions related to the history of social movements in the U.S., how movements begin, how they maintain momentum when opposed, and how traditional media and social media influence and facilitate policy change.

Autobiography and Memoir

How do life experiences shape us? When we write the stories of our lives, why do we choose to construct a particular narrative in place of so many other possible representations of the self? In this course, we will examine autobiographical modes of reading and writing that focus on the self in historical and cultural contexts. We will explore the ideological assumptions that underpin how we conceive the nature of the self, as well as the identity politics that inform the ways in which we understand the deceptively simple question: *Who am I?*

Broadway and Beyond

Lights up on an empty stage! Combining performance studies, theatre history, and contemporary theoretical constructs from across the humanities, this course will allow fans and practitioners of theatre to examine collaborative cultural production from a variety of perspectives. Students will produce independent scholarship on topics ranging from the evolution of form and style through theatrical history, the cultural work of a provocative playwright or composer, or contemporary production and casting practices in commercial musical theatre.

Celebrity

The idea of celebrity began in the ancient world with powerful Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. Celebrity grew to include Olympic athletes, gladiators, mighty warriors, rulers, and religious figures such as saints and martyrs. Mass media have greatly expanded the list of celebrities to include the famous, not so famous, and the infamous. Possible topics include the cult of celebrity, celebrity culture, privacy, movie stars, heroes, athletes, royalty, daredevils, fictional characters, nonebrities (the famous for being famous), religious and political leaders, judges,

chefs, artists, and entertainers. Inanimate objects like bridges, buildings, monuments, mountains, museums, and cities can also achieve celebrity status and hold a place in our imaginations.

Comics and Graphic Novels

This course focuses on graphic narrative of all kinds. Students will have the opportunity to explore topics related to comics art, from superheroes to manga, DC to Dark Horse, and Kirby to Bechdel. Through this course, you can investigate everything from what makes something a comic to how the industry is run. Possible research topics include women in comics, comics marketing, differences among Japanese, European, and American comics, and the iconic nature of superheroes.

Communication in the Digital Age

Texts. Emails. Facebook. Twitter. LinkedIn. G-chat. Skype. The way we communicate has changed over time and the channels of communication seem to be ever increasing. This course gives students an opportunity to research and explore changes in communication in the context of the digital age. Examples of research options include topics such as the changes in language attributable to increased electronic communication, the loss of a message's meaning on social media, the importance of (or lack thereof) body language in communication, and the effects of increased connectivity on communication.

Conspiracy Theory

JFK. Roswell. The Moon Landing. People seem to love a good conspiracy theory. Conspiracy narratives are important precisely because of the intense level of belief or disbelief that they provoke. By putting aside judgment as to whether a particular conspiracy theory is true or false, students will analyze just why certain conspiracy theories catch on so quickly and stay around for so long. Over the course of the semester, students will choose a specific conspiracy theory and examine its significance: What are the meaning-making structures that make it click? Why does it have such a hold on the popular imagination? What does this say about people who “want to believe,” as the *X-Files* put it? What does this say about those who refuse to believe? How do new conspiracy theories develop and what determines their future level of popularity?

Constructing Identities

Who are you? Is your identity fixed or is it always changing? How much of what makes you “you” comes from how others see you? How does identity intersect with values, beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, language, religion, family, music, fashion, history and so on? This course explores multiple and overlapping ways humans perceive themselves, both as individuals and as part of a collective group, and how identity affects people’s lived experiences every day. We will examine the relationship between environment and psychological and biological selves. Possible areas of research include musical preference, fashion style, race relations, self-help books, plastic surgery, and national pride.

Creativity

Exploring creativity! Where does it come from—the cosmos, the muses, our DNA? Do creative people think outside the “box?” What is the “box?” How do we break through to our innate originality and live it rather than conceal it in order to fit in? Are imagination, innovation, and inspiration the exclusive domain of the arts and sciences, or essential components for enriching our lives as well as our diverse profession? Those are some of the issues we’ll investigate. Research topics to consider include: creative ability and autism; effects of drugs on creative output; advertising and creative persuasion; the dark side and curse of creativity; left-handedness; the use of the Golden Mean—the mysterious number employed to establish order and beauty in art. Ultimately, you are free to follow your inspiration to discover other related topics.

Culture Through the Arts

Do the arts only mirror culture, or do they create and spread it—or both? What can we learn about ourselves and others from the arts and individual artistic expressions? What is the value of art (music, literature, drama, film, TV shows, painting, architecture) in today’s society, and what value did it have in the past? Does art have to be useful in some way to be valuable, or is art for art’s sake sufficient? Is art always positive, or can it have a negative influence on an individual or a whole culture, and if so, how? Have any artists’ creative expressions greatly influenced and/or changed a society’s culture—or the world’s? Can art offer us solutions to present or future problems in society? This course will allow the students to explore the answers to these questions and to focus on other aspects of the relationships between culture and the arts. Students will have the opportunity to do independent research on a topic of their choosing (instructor approved) related to culture and a specific kind of art.

The Ethics of Food

"Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food," Michael Pollan advised in his bestselling book, *In Defense of Food*. In our busy contemporary society, we cram down French fries that don't grow mold if we forget to eat them for a month; foot long sandwiches stuffed with processed meats; fizzy drinks of a dazzling array of colors. This course will explore the ethics of food, in terms of its production and distribution. Possible topics of research include an investigation of the ethics of the fast food industry, genetically modified foods, factory farms, agribusinesses, organic foods, food waste, and the recent increase in interest for local produce in farmers' markets, and rooftop farming in urban areas.

The Ethics of Urban Development

Cities are dense fabrics consisting of people living in close proximity, and they are constantly changing through urban development. Ethics is the study of right and wrong, or, as applied to urban development, who wins and who loses, and do some groups seem to matter more than others? For example, using Eminent Domain, the construction of an expressway through a crowded residential neighborhood might hurt some of the residents of that area, but might give improved access to many city dwellers who use that road. Possible research topics for this course include the ethical implications of such urban developments as urban renewal, gentrification, suburban and exurban development, urban parks such as The Highline, the new urbanism, and air&b.

Exploring Asia

How are the ways that we think about Asia changing in our rapidly transforming world? Contemporary India and China, for example, are among the world's most influential nations economically, technologically, and politically. South Korea is currently a world leader in digital innovation. Human rights issues in India, China, Myanmar, and other Asian countries regularly make headlines in Western media. This course will explore a range of topics relating to the diverse cultures of Asia, both classical and contemporary. Among issues addressed will be globalization, human rights, orientalism, and the relevance of Eurocentric notions of East and West.

Family as Culture

Family serves our society as icon, metonym, definer. We identify ourselves by our last names. We buy cars made for families. We consume media--from the Cleavers to the Winslows to the Sopranos--about family. We choose colleges and careers based on their proximity to family. We model businesses and governments on families. Even when our families disrespect or disavow us, we cannot escape their influence. In this course, then, we will undertake a sustained personal and scholarly exploration of what family means to us as individuals and to our society (or your home society, if not from the U.S.). We will engage with representations of family from criticism, journalism, and primary sources, thinking about the role family plays in our lives, and how family intersects with other forces of influence, such as race, gender, religion, economics, geography, etc. Students will write and revise a sustained research paper on a topic relating to the course theme, as well as shorter assignments and in-class writing to practice entering academic conversation. Students will also research their own family history and identity, putting their lives into conversation with course material on a class blog. Potential course texts could include *Notes of a Native Son*, *Fun Home*, and *Breaking Bad*, along with appropriate critical articles from Stephanie Coontz, Arlie Russell Hochschild, Melinda Cooper, and others.

Fashion

How did something as essential as clothing evolve into something as frivolous as fashion, constantly changing and regularly discarded? How did the verb "to fashion", which means, "to make," end up as a noun that describes the latest and hottest garment to be worn, a word synonymous with change? This class will explore these questions. We will also examine how fashion is used to define individuals and how fashion is a form of communication and culture with rules, values, and prohibitions. From fashion design and designers, to beauty and marketing, to subcultures and politics, this course will look at fashion as a social and cultural language today. Some possible research topics are: the cultural significance of specific designers; an examination of fashion trends as subculture; or a history of cosmetic use and its evolution in the last 100 years.

Feminism for Everyone

Regardless of age, race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, feminism is relevant to everyone. In this course we will explore the roots of the feminist movement, modern-day issues within feminism, the misconceptions about what it means to be a feminist, and the ways in which feminism is relevant to today's Rutgers students. Drawing on a wide range of sources from Mary Wollstonecraft to Sarah Silverman, from blogs to books, from fashion magazines to photographic

archives, we will delve into feminism as not just an isolated movement, but one that intersects with myriad modern-day issues in politics, the sciences, sports, the arts, and pop culture.

From Print to Film

You read the book; you saw the movie. What changed from print to film? In this course, you will research and write about the process of film adaptation. Your main project for the class will be a research paper based on the critical discussion surrounding a classic film of your choice, subject to instructor approval.

Games

Senet. Gladiator games. Chess. Poker. College Football. Monopoly. The Legend of Zelda. Call of Duty. Pokemon Go. Games have been an integral part of human affairs since the days of prehistoric Egypt, and although they have continuously evolved since, they are arguably more pervasive than ever. What is it about “games” and “play” that humans find so appealing? In what ways have individuals (or entities) endeavored to harness the elements of game-play, and to what ends? Research topics may include video game addiction, gamification in business or education, the use of simulation games for training, the impact of massively multiplayer online games on human behavior, and the rise of “serious games.”

Gender in the Workplace

How do your gender, sex, and sexuality affect the way people perceive your abilities? Despite advances made in gender equality through the last century, contemporary legal cases, academic studies, and popular testimonials reveal persistent inequality. How does gender affect perceptions of collegiality, leadership, and ambition?

Health Care Ethics

“Healthcare Ethics” focuses on the how personal, cultural, community and political ethics affect the practice and delivery of healthcare. Research topics include medicine, doctor/nurse patient relationship, mental illness, alternative and experimental healing, western and eastern medicine,

nursing, pharmaceuticals, biomedical engineering and insurance industries. Students can also study how personal, cultural and religious views influence the practice and delivery of healthcare.

Health and Human Ecology

In this class students will have the opportunity to explore their own research into how major diseases and breakthroughs in health have shaped human civilization. What happens when some people start to live longer than others? How might germs contribute to the collapse of nations? Explore how illness and health help explain the fate of civilizations across time and geography.

Into the Wild

"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success." – Ernest Shackleton, London Times, 1913. What possessed 5,000 men (and a few women) to respond to this ad one hundred years ago? Why do we hike thousands of miles, ascend mountains, disappear—or dream of disappearing—into the wild? This course, which borrows its title from Jon Krakauer's 1996 book, invites students to explore exploration in a way that fascinates or inspires them.

Issues in Education

Education is a hot topic in the media, on the campaign trail, and even around the family dinner table because of controversies over issues like student debt, cyber bullying, affirmative action, and sexual education. This course will cut through the sound bytes to explore real research on important topics including teacher accountability, tuition hikes, high stakes testing, gender and learning, equality of education, school climate, the technology gap, funding crises, and charter schools, among many others. Students will explore how teaching practices, education policy, and pedagogical ideals affect what and how people learn, and how that learning then affects the fabric of a society.

Justice and the Law

Justice, in its most basic sense, can be defined as the fair treatment of people in a civil society through the political enactment, administration, and enforcement of law, which in the United States is embodied by the Constitution. In this course, we will examine the theoretical and practical foundations of justice in our society, especially the “social contract” between the

individual and the state. We will analyze the extent to which our government and its legal system have succeeded in upholding the ideals enshrined in the US Constitution. Possible topics include discrimination and civil rights, the death penalty, abortion, free speech, citizenship, gay rights, affirmative action, voting rights, and the rights of the accused.

Justice in Popular Culture

Mr. Robot. How to Get Away With Murder. The Wire. Serial. Orange is the New Black. NCIS. Narcos. This course will explore our culture's fascination with crime, law enforcement, and the justice system. Students will discuss and research the glamorization of the pursuit of justice, and the link between law and entertainment as seen in novels and "true crime" literature, films, theater, television, and news media. Students will explore cultural viewpoints on crime and punishment as they have been presented today and throughout history.

Love & Sex

Countless songs, novels, and movies focus on the same theme: love. How can we define love? What is the difference between loving someone and being in love? In this course, students will investigate the ways in which love and sex affect cultural traditions, gender norms, and the human condition. We will look at controversial issues that arise when people defy, redefine, or revisit cultural and social norms associated with love and sex. Possible topics include acts of flirtation, gay marriage, public displays of affection, serial killers and necrophilia, sexuality in comic books, female genital mutilation, Internet sex addiction, sexual predators, and pornography.

Motivation and Success

This course explores the science of motivation and the psychology of success. Research topics may include topics related to developmental psychology, social psychology, personality psychology, theories about motivation and achievement, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, self-control and self-regulation. We will examine the work of Carol Dweck, Tony Wagner and Daniel Pink, among others, to help students develop their own research projects.

Music and Dance

Music and Dance explores a range of collaborative possibilities between musicians, dancers and choreographers. We seek to understand how artists work together to create performances and how music and dance affect us individually and culturally. This rich topic is ideal for dance and music majors interested in an opportunity to build on their expertise and knowledge, but a background in the arts is not essential, and there is no requirement to write about both music *and* dance in individual research papers. Possible research topics include specific dance forms and the iconic artists associated with them; music and dance in film, on Broadway and in smaller, more rarified venues; gender in dance and music; commercialism and its effect on the arts; anorexia and body image; dance and music therapy etc.

Musical Expression and Performance

This is an exciting, collaborative course designed to accommodate serious and meaningful research on a wide variety of topics. These have included important projects about the influence and significance of musicians like Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley and George Harrison; fusion in Jazz and World Music; protest music; music and racism; fan behavior; film scoring; file sharing; the creativity of amateur musicians; and even stage fright. Accomplished musicians who can use their expertise to shape a research topic, and students who love music and want to explore a topic that they are interested in, are equally welcome!

Nutrition and Exercise Science

This course gives students an opportunity to research nutrition and exercise strategies for optimal wellness from a humanities perspective. Research options include topics such as training techniques; sports pedagogy; training and diet for athletes; diet and/or exercise as treatment for or prevention of disease; nutrition and exercise for pregnant women; childhood obesity; occupational therapy; physical therapy; sports medicine; weight management; eating disorders; food insecurity; etc.

Privacy Rights in the Digital Age

Texts. Emails. Facebook. Twitter. LinkedIn. G-chat. Skype. The way we communicate has changed over time and the channels of communication seem to be ever increasing. This course gives students an opportunity to research and explore changes in communication in the context of the

digital age. Examples of research options include topics such as the changes in language attributable to increased electronic communication, the loss of a message's meaning on social media, the importance of (or lack thereof) body language in communication, and the effects of increased connectivity on communication.

Prohibition, Pharmacy & Drug Policy

What makes drugs legal or illegal? Students explore the pharmaceutical industry, drug education, neuroscience research, prohibition, and the criminal justice system to investigate the significance of drug culture and counter-culture. The course culminates in original research engaging multiple academic disciplines, such as Pharmacy, Chemistry, and Politics.

Propaganda and Power

Jesuits first used the word propaganda in the 16th century as a response to the Protestant Reformation. They set out to reconvert all those who strayed from the Catholic fold and *propagated* the faith to new believers around the world. Until the early 20th century, something “propagated” was neither insidious nor underhanded, but rather referred to the pride of making a product of exceptional quality. World War I, however, changed all that, giving the word “propaganda” its modern meaning: lies, especially lies told by your very own government. This course will begin by reading articles about the history of propaganda in film since World War I, focusing on its unique possibilities in this medium. Students will then undertake a research project that examines fictional or non-fictional forms of propaganda, researching and examining its mission and context.

The Psychology of Conflict

“Can we all get along?” Rodney King touched the soul of the nation in 1992 with this simple but insightful question because it poses fundamental human concerns: why do we fight with our family, friends, and loved ones? Why is argument the basis of so much of education and business? Why do gender, class, race, and ethnic groups sometimes fight over core values and backgrounds? Why do nations go to war? “Psychology of Conflict” will allow students to address these issues and more. Conflict may not always lend itself to resolution, but resolution can often be managed. Investigation of techniques for conflict resolution can provide an additional avenue for student research.

Public Health Issues

Public Health is the science of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, research for disease and injury prevention, and development of policies that help make the home, workplace and public sphere safe. This course allows the student to research the intersection of health concerns with many other disciplines – public policy, psychology, history, sociology and science. The choices for research papers range from family planning to studying infectious disease outbreaks to biochemical terrorist attacks.

Queer Drama: Performing LGBTQ Identity on Stage & Screen

How has dramatic literature, performance art, and representation in mass media contributed to our culture's evolving understanding of gender and sexual identities? What does it mean to perform identity? In this course, students will synthesize readings from queer theory with scholarship on theatre, film, and television as they develop independent inquiries into the complexities of cultural identification, queering perspectives, and creative expression.

The Quest for Immortality

Is it possible to avoid death? Would you really want to live forever? From ancient tales of magic elixirs and the fountain of youth to cryonics and @LivesOn (a Twitter account that will tweet for you after your death), the quest for immortality is as old as human history. Where religions have traditionally offered the spiritual solace of an eternal afterlife, today “transhumanist” entrepreneurs invest billions in an attempt to cheat death altogether by reversing the aging process or uploading our minds into cyberspace. This course will examine various immortality narratives, ancient and modern, as we seek to understand the origins and stakes of this drive for everlasting life. Possible research topics include immortality as an ethical and philosophical problem; the theme of immortality in film and literature, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to Harry Potter; cyborgs, vampires, and superheroes; resurrection and mummification; virtual or “technological” immortality; and the neuroscience of immortality

Rebels: Cause or Not?

Historically, the term “Rebel” has embodied a controversial connotation. From one perspective, rebels have functioned as ethical voices of resistance to challenge existing power structures to ignite cultural and political progression; alternatively, rebels have performed as outlaw deviants

operating on the margins of society. This course investigates Rebels, in their myriad forms, and analyzes theories and case studies of resistance, while devoting specific attention to the often problematic and contradictory relationship between cultural challenges and political change. Ranging from civil rights leaders (Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X), feminists (Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Emily Dickinson), artists (Jackson Pollack and Jean-Michel Basquiat), cultural/iconic figures and vigilantes (Robin Hood and Batman), punk and rap musicians (Minor Threat and Tupac), counter-culture representatives (The Beat Generation), professional athletes (Jackie Robinson), militants (Che Guevara and the French Resistance of World War II), and any voice contesting forms of discrimination and inequality, “Rebels: Cause or Not?”, explores how individuals and social groups have used, and continue to implement, culture as a weapon of resistance.

Science, Medicine & Society

“Science, Medicine and Society” focuses on ethical, social, and political controversies in a variety of medical and health fields. Research topics include biomedical engineering, nursing, pharmaceutical and insurance industries, health care, mental illness, alternative and experimental healing techniques, hospice, hospitals, and midwives. Students can also study aspects of medical training and the doctor-patient relationship.

Science and Politics

Trying to bring science and politics together may seem as fruitless as trying to mix oil and water. Yet the emergence of scientific discoveries including technological and engineering advancements, public health achievements in the 21st century, improved environmental awareness, and new medical techniques demands that our political debate no longer be driven by ideology alone. This class will explore the challenges of using social science methods and research that emphasizes science within politically infused discourses more often shaped by social media than by valid data. Students will learn how to analyze the scholarly debates about how science is used to persuade politicians and inform public policy debates.

Science and Power

In the twenty-first century, scientific knowledge is more and more emerging as a dominant form of power. But what are the consequences of scientific breakthroughs and new technologies for human societies? The more we utilize science to take control over ourselves and nature, the more

we are confronted with new problems that can be perceived as dangers inherent in modern technology. As a result, debating the intended and unintended consequences of scientific discoveries becomes a crucial task for thinking. Students may conduct research on topics that deal with bio-genetics and interventions into the genetic inheritance of humans; the continual sophistication of artificial intelligence; cyber-technologies and their range of application from virtual social spaces to cyber warfare between nations, among others.

The Selfie

What does it mean to live in the “age of the selfie”? While selfie-taking and sharing has proliferated in the past several years, the phenomenon of documenting our own lives and leaving traces for others to discover and interpret long predates the term itself. This course will explore how the selfie -- named 2013’s “word of the year” by the *Oxford English Dictionary* -- fits into historical modes of self-representation, as well as the far-reaching (aided, perhaps, by a selfie stick) implications of the selfie for contemporary culture. Potential research topics may include but are not limited to: identity construction; visual digital culture; celebrity and branding; photography and self-portraiture; neuroscience and pathology; the relation between media and psychology; exhibitionism and voyeurism; and sociology and diversity. As part of our effort to investigate how this particular cultural artifact can affirm, reveal, conceal, subvert, bear witness, and question, students will also produce and analyze their own selfies throughout the course.

Stories We Tell

What is your personal narrative? What are the stories you tell and listen to that make you who you are? Storytelling shapes identity and can be first-person accounts about relationships, honoring the dead, journeys, adventures, faith, politics and accomplishments. It is also living history as in the thousands of stories that make a culture’s collective identity. Storytelling is digital, written, oral, image, song, and dance and never before have so many diverse fields used the power of the story in their work. Storytelling played a role in evolution, and today is practiced at every cultural level, manifest in uprisings in Africa and cover ups in boardrooms, on porches in rural America and hospitals in urban centers, in the rituals of churches, mosques, temples, the courthouse – and your house. Past research topics have included how story relates to voodoo healing, an Indian epic tale, cigarette ad campaigns, Palestinian exile, photos from the civil rights era, classical music, the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, dementia treatment, hip hop dance, and chocolate. Yes, chocolate.

Taboos and Transgressions

What activities are we expected not to entertain publically or even privately? Sexual deviance, death rituals, illicit drug use—why do certain taboos both appall us and appeal to us at the same time? And who gets to decide what's forbidden? In this course we will consider how our ideas of transgressions have changed throughout the years and what new codes of conduct we're expected to abide by today. Topics of exploration include all things offensive, disobedient, and unmentionable.

Technology

Technology sells the promise of doing more and more *for* us: one million apps and counting, drugs for all problems, TV on demand, self-driving cars, 3D printing, Internet in your glasses. Yet side-by-side with state of the art tech, we find mounting chaos: government gridlock; epidemic obesity; environmental degradation; privacy invasions; economic stagnation; debt crises, etc. This course offers students the opportunity to read and analyze research that may help connect the dots between the promise and the chaos, to step backstage and ask: Does technical progress really equal human progress? Or is the rising technical order at the expense of human/environmental chaos? Or both?

Thinking Outside the Box

There is currently a premium on “creative” thinking, and its role in developing leadership skills. Can this be taught? Is there a discipline that will develop your critical writing and habits of thought? This section will consider the practical solutions realized by thinkers in the arts and sciences who, while trying to solve problems in their fields, created new ways of understanding and communicating basic concepts. To help focus independent research projects, this section reads a selection of fundamental arguments that have created innovative paradigms, and considers how research can be inspired by surprising questions. The choice of texts will be determined in part by the interests of the participants and is intended to help students shape their own research projects.

Trees

Did you know only 1 in 50 people can identify 5 varieties of trees? Trees are a symbol of life, sacred in mythology, prominent in religion and cultures across the world. They provide food, fuel, shelter and thousands of modern products. Trees maintain our climate and protect our soil; they spark our imagination, inspiring art, poetry, metaphor, and even mathematical theorems! Trees embolden activists to live for months in their branches, and to form human chains to protect them from the buzzsaw. In this course, students will have the freedom to explore the beautiful, precarious, controversial, and formative place of trees in human life. Research approaches might include but are not limited to philosophy, religion, biology, business, ecology, or history to name a few.

Villains, Violence & Heroes

Walter White. Cersei Lannister. Tony Soprano. Dwight K. Schrute. We love antiheroes, and we love to watch them be bad. The recent Golden Age of Television has given rise to a number of characters that fascinate us with their depravity. Beginning with the readings from Chuck Klosterman's *I Wear the Black Hat* and Maggie Nelson's *The Age of Cruelty*, students will develop an original research project that deals with questions such as: Why do we root for the villain? How are flaws more relatable than virtues, and what does that say about contemporary morality? Is the experience of violence and evil in entertainment dangerous, or a necessary release? How does antiheroism make available new types of fictional narrative, ethics, and subject matter? What political, technological, and intellectual trends have come to undermine our love for traditional heroism?