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.

**Architecture, Design, and Public Space**

From shopping malls to student centers, war memorials to community playgrounds, historic buildings to iconic structures, places of worship and relaxation, place and space has a significant influence on our lives. How we construct and design our physical surroundings reveals a great deal about both who and what we are. This course invites students to explore the relationships between "space" and "place" by examining why different factors (e.g., history, geography, religion) impact the way individuals perceive and design the spaces they occupy in their physical world. Possible research topics include the politics of property rights and eminent domain; the redesign of urban centers, using concepts such as "defensible space:" and the representation of buildings, public squares, and monuments as evidence of cultural memory.

**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?

**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, nonebrites (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.

**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.

**Creating Identity**

In the wake of high-profile celebrities and performing artists publicly identifying themselves in ways that obliterate traditional notions of gender and sexuality, fans and creators alike have been inspired to explore expanded notions of self previously only seen in the fringes of artistic expression. Social media has created a platform for individuals to not only connect with other like-
minded individuals, but it has created a space where identity itself can be explored in a public and creative way. With the advent of apps like Instagram and affordable software creation platforms like Adobe Photoshop, amateurs and professionals alike are creating, editing and revising identity in ways that are fluid, and at times transgressive. Through exploration of texts from various academic disciplines such as behavioral science, gender studies, philosophy and the performing arts, this course will attempt to unpack and critique the subversive acts and gestures that are appearing with greater frequency in music, film, literature and social media feeds. Possible research areas include gender performativity, perfectionism, drag culture, racial identity in the performing arts, transgender identity in the media, and many more intriguing interdisciplinary topics to be discovered over the course of the semester.

**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.

**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 airb&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.

**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.

Frugality, Simplicity, Life Off the Grid

The average American is plagued with debt, yet feels compelled to maintain their onerous spending. Tethered to expensive devices we now consume eight hours of media a day – and still manage to create four and-a-half pounds of trash. It doesn't have to be this way. In this course students will explore alternatives to the unsustainable consumerism and mindless dependency that have become hallmarks of millennial American culture. Topics might include, but are not limited to: voluntary simplicity; self-sufficiency; thrift and frugality in American cultural history; social conditioning; alternative energy, housing, and economic practices; "preppers" and survivalism; urban simplicity; religious influences; "opting out" of social/technological paradigms; theory and practice(s) of minimalism; ethics, nature, and spirituality.

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?
**Immigration**

The U.S. has more immigrants than any other country, and immigration in this country is a complex issue with a long history. In this course, you will have an opportunity to write a research paper on topics connected to immigration and identity, legal and unauthorized immigration, the history of U.S. immigration, the future demographic impact of immigration, and changes in public opinion about immigrants. You may also study topics related to immigration and migration in other countries and contexts.

**Incarceration**

The United States has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the Western world: a status gained through tougher drug and sentencing laws in the 1970s that increased the imprisoned population by multiple factors. In this class, we will explore the legal and social phenomena that led to this increase, as well as the responses and alternatives that are being posed. Topics that students can explore in individual research projects include: prison overcrowding, the death penalty, social and educational rehabilitation, the impact of race and class on arrest rates, sentencing reform, the juvenile justice system, the growth of private (for-profit) prisons, lifetime voting bans and/or the social stigmatization of ex-offenders, and myths about imprisonment that may affect social responses to the issue.

**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.

**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.
Leaders and Leadership

The history of human affairs has been a history often defined by the decisions and actions of leaders. We think of leaders as individuals who look beyond their own narrow interests and enhance the prosperity and wellbeing of others. Great leaders emerge and can be recognized across different cultures, historical periods, and political contexts. But what are the qualities necessary for leadership? Why are good leaders esteemed so highly? How do we differentiate between good leaders and bad ones? Do we need leaders at all? If leaders are exemplars for others to follow, what is the relationship between leadership and public opinion? Students will conduct research on the significance of leadership and leaders in a variety of different contexts, including: politics, science, military affairs, business, art, religion, among other topics.

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.

**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.

**The Politics of Climate Change**

Record temperatures are causing melting glaciers and extreme weather. Sea level has risen eight inches since 1880. Coastal communities are flooding. The toll from storms and fires in the US has broken all records. The Pentagon considers global warming to be a major strategic threat. There is overwhelming scientific agreement that climate change is anthropogenic, and so, logically, solutions must involve changing human behavior. Yet somehow climate science has become a partisan
issue! Why, we will ask, has denial of human-caused climate change become a litmus test for Republican candidates? Why are school boards around the country, adopting requirements that climate science be taught as a “theory” and that the “other side” also be taught? This course will examine the politics of climate change.

**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.

**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.

**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.

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 and Culture

Science and culture collaborate and conflict in a myriad of ways. In Science and Culture students consider the junctures and fractures between culture and science, choosing a pertinent project to pursue for the semester. Research investigation examples range from how poetry informs physics, information technology inspires sculpture, medical workers are portrayed in film and television, climatology frames hip-hop, and arts funding competes with science education.

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.

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.

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.

**Stress and Mental Health**

*Are you stressed out?* How does stress affect your writing process? How is stress created, defined, and experienced? Using psychological and sociological lenses, students will examine the way we use and manage stress. Through independent research, students investigate a contemporary issue in the field of Psychology or Sociology.

**Surveillance and Privacy**

Americans often seem shocked when revelations of government snooping into citizens’ phone calls and emails come to light, yet the same Americans are entertained by fictionalized TV intelligence and surveillance thrillers such as Person of Interest and Homeland. Moreover, millions of Americans routinely publish their personal information on Facebook and other social media for the world to see. What expectations of privacy can we expect in a world in which surveillance has become so easy and so common? And if the government is collecting data on us, how is this different from the private corporations that do so as well? What is or should be secret today? In this course, students will explore and research the intersection between the reality of surveillance and the changing expectations of privacy.

**Taboos and Transgressions**

What activities are we expected not to entertain publicly 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?
Theater and Performance Study

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 though theatrical history, the cultural work of a provocative playwright or composer, or contemporary production and casting practices in commercial musical theatre.

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 antiheros, 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?

What’s the Point of Religion?

Do we really need religion, when we appear to have enough scientific, philosophical and social theories to answer all (or at least most) of our most pressing questions? For some, however, there remains a niggling and persistent need for something else, something for which words are insufficient, while for others, this need simply does not arise (or has not yet arisen). In this course, you will explore what drives us to embrace or reject religion, what we gain or lose from doing so,
and the shifting and often precarious relationships which exist at the various junctures between religion and society.