Rutgers University Writing Program
201: Research and Writing in the Disciplines
Course List Spring 2020
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 Jaqueline Loeb, 201 Coordinator, jloeb@english.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 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 on 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.

**College!**

This course explores the changing meaning of college in America, with a focus on the increasing privatization of public education. Research topics might include the rising costs of college and matching student debt, the disconnect between student life and academics, the stressful competition for admission to the most selective schools, the expense of remedial education, the rise of big time college sports as a revenue stream, the history of student protest movements, the role of fraternities and sororities, and the complex relationship between faculty and corporations. As part of the class, students will be required to conduct at least one primary source interview that is appropriate to their projects. This is a hybrid course with meetings one day each week supplemented by online activities, which will include keeping a research blog and participating in online discussion forums.

**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.

**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 airbnb.

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.

Fake News

There are few new tricks available to kings, sheiks, prime ministers, or presidents to hold onto the power of their office, whether elected or inherited. Technology was first used to reinforce state authority with the invention of the the printing press (1456), giving rulers the tool to impose their views on all their subjects across a large geographic area. Fast forward 500 or so years: more powerful technologies now make it possible for widespread “truth decay” - the factless and research free journalism that blasts lies, propaganda, fake news, innuendo, gossip, via the
consumption of social media, to feed ideological rigidity in every country. Out of initial readings, students will choose a research topic from any country, system, or historical moment that allows them to explore the media and its effects on rulers and ruled. How does this “truth decay” function to impose a particular point of view? These are questions we will explore throughout the semester.

**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.

**Film**

E.T. The dance of death at sunset. Gangsters, hangovers, and martial arts. A slum dog millionaire. Perhaps no other art form in the last century has left an impact on culture the way that film has. Through the images on screen, audiences engage in their hopes and fears, find their heroes, and confront their demons. Hollywood, Bollywood, the indie, the foreign film, documentaries and animation--the categories that fall under the art form have left a lasting legacy on our imaginations. This course will explore the nature of film as an art form and look at its power to inspire and
enchant. Students may write about the lasting influence of a particular film, a director, or the significance of a genre.

**The Fourth Amendment 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.

**Frugality, Simplicity, Life Off the Grid**

The average American is plagued with debt, yet continues to spend. Tethered to our phones we consume 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 consumption and dependency that have become hallmarks of contemporary American culture. Topics might include, but are not limited to: voluntary simplicity; self-sufficiency; thrift and frugality; social conditioning; alternative energy, housing, and economic practices; preppers and survivalism; the growing “off-grid” TV genre; "opting out" of social/technological paradigms; theory and practice(s) of minimalism; religious influences; 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?

Happiness

What does it mean to be happy? How is happiness achieved? What are the differences between “the good life” and “a good life?” What forms does happiness take and which of these seem the most desirable or elusive? Readings from philosophers, essayists, journalists, and those in the “happiness-providing industry” will guide our journey to the answers—or, perhaps, leave us with even more questions.

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.

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.

Let’s Go! - The Car and Society

From the days of the “Surrey with The Fringe On Top” to a not-so-distant future of fully automated self-driving cars, the automobile has touched every facet of human life for more than a century. The personal freedom, access, and independence that cars provide are unparalleled. Cars represent status, reflect our personalities, and cater to our personal preferences. This course will study a range of topics relating to the ubiquitous automobile and its effects on society. Research topics may include: automotive safety; environmental impacts; governmental policy and regulation; business and industry; marketing and advertising; history; sociology; music movies and pop culture; motorsports technology and many more.

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 Musical Expression

Music has long been thought to possess unique powers of expression. The ancient Greeks, for instance, believed that it could elevate or depress moods, influence behavior, and even shape character. All major religious traditions prescribe liturgical singing or chanting, with the view that intoning, rather than merely reciting, sacred texts enhances the devotional experience. There has been no end to the philosophical debates about how or why music has such power. Some have argued that music is uniquely capable of representing the yearning of the soul. Others, emphasizing music's purely internal relationships, have held the opposing position that emotions are mysteriously embedded in the tones and rhythms themselves. Still others adhere to the more modern idea that music is merely a personal mode of self-expression. In this class, you will be invited not to resolve this imponderable question but to contribute your research-informed voice to the ongoing conversation about it in a field of your choice. Topics might look at music and musical expression in relation to religion, literature, film, drama, oppression, advertising, politics, identity, among many other possibilities.

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.

**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.

**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.
Religion and Politics

How do religions come into being? How are they theorized, and in relation to what? Rather than consider religions to be isolated institutions or belief systems, this course will investigate how religions interact with and participate in their surrounding worlds. If we separate the spiritual out from the worldly, temporal, or “secular,” we miss the opportunity to reflect on how religions, and their attendant beliefs, impact the sociopolitical issues and everyday lives of individuals and communities across history. Students can devise a research question that relates to (but is not limited to) the following topics: how religions inform contemporary politics or historic debates surrounding civil rights and slavery; how religions are used by persons to promote their own or contest others' power; how religions devolve into cults and cult communities; how religion structures theories of the relationship between gender and sexuality, the private and the public, race and class.

Science & 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 and 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.

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.
Survival

During his catastrophic 1913 Polar Expedition, explorer Douglass Mawson stood 100 miles from base camp. His friend was buried under Antarctic ice; his dogs were dead, he was sick and snow-blind. Only then did he discover that his rotted and frostbitten soles had become detached from his feet. Alone in the frigid wasteland, Mawson strapped his soles back onto his feet... and kept walking. Truly it is astonishing what human beings can endure. Faced with desperate odds, raging cataclysm, or heartbreaking loss, we somehow manage to survive life’s traumas and challenges. How? How rather than sink into terror or despair does the human spirit find the capacity to survive, to endure, and to heal? Students are invited to explore this question in a way that fascinates or inspires them. Topics might include, but are not limited to, grit and perseverance; career comebacks; navigating crisis; personal loss or tragedy; friendship and fellowship; community or cultural survival; psychosocial and spiritual factors, etc.

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?
**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.