Spring 2023 Honors Colloquia

HONR 290 sections fulfill a University Creative Arts and Humanities breadth (see note)*

HONR 290-080
Quackery, Pseudoscience, and Conspiracy Theories
Ray Peters
TR 9:30-10:45
This colloquium will explore debunking of quackery, pseudoscience, and conspiracy theories by analyzing pseudoscientific thinking in print, film, tv shows, and advertising. In particular, we will examine unscientific claims about history, vaccines, alternative medicine, conspiracies, fringe science, paranormal phenomena, U.F.O.s, and aliens. Throughout the course, the emphasis will be on weird beliefs and denialism, focusing on the techniques that result in effective debunking. Readings may include Steven Novella’s *Skeptic’s Guide to the Universe*, Paul Offit’s *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine*, and selected journal articles. In order to examine the latest in pseudoscience and conspiracy theories, we will also read online sources such as *Quackwatch, Neurologica*, and the *Science-Based Medicine Blog*. Students will write brief response papers, critical reviews, analytical essays, and a research paper and multimodal project analyzing why people believe in pseudoscience and conspiracy theories.

HONR 290-081
Gods, Heroes, and Superheroes: Comic Books as a Modern Mythology
Alan Fox
TR 11:00 - 12:15
We will explore religion, psychology, and philosophy through a study of mythology in its most contemporary expression in the Superhero genre. Superheroes are a modern form of mythology in that archetypal philosophical, psychological, and religious motifs are prominent in the characters, situations, and ideologies. It is characteristic of the archetypal and mythic nature of comics that characters like Superman and Batman can be reinvented in so many different ways and still retain their power and influence. We will read works by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell about myth and archetype and watch movies and read graphic novels including *Kingdom Come*, the *Dark Knight Returns, the Ultimates, and Watchmen*, among others. There will be a focus on effective argumentative writing, and class participation will be emphasized.
HONR 290-082
Gretchen Von Koenig
HONR 290-082: Material Culture of Technology
TR 9:30-10:45

This colloquium will explore the material culture of technology, looking at the role technology plays in our lives from smartphones to standing mixers. From systems to objects, we will consider the way technology shapes, and is shaped by, the man-made world and ask what that means for society and culture. We will read works that investigate data rights in smart objects like cell phones and thermostats, labor-saving tech from kitchen gadgets to robotic manufacturing, technological racial bias in cameras and job applications, and surveillance technologies from internet cookies to CCTV cameras. We will investigate how cultural impulses shift their materiality through technological development over time—like how the QWERTY keyboard has replaced ballpoint pens as a dominant writing instrument. How does the government, technologists and users affect the way that technology is deployed in our physical world? This class takes a close look at who is enfranchised and disenfranchised by infrastructures of technology. We will also look at speculative technologies through a humanities lens; how can visions of technological futures, like The Matrix or Black Mirror, speak to how humans use material realities to assess the technological future? Topics include material culture, Internet of Things, consumer technology, surveillance studies, disability studies, data rights activism and policy, design history, film studies and anthropology. Students in this course will write brief response papers that critically review the weekly readings and will produce 2-3 analytical essays that critically investigate technologies of their choosing.

HONR 290-083
The Idea of Unity: Identity, Democracy, and the “Battle for the Soul of the Nation”
Brett Seekford
TR 3:30 - 4:45

What is required for “unity”? This has been the objective of many Americans in recent years during an era of ceaseless partisanship, with Joe Biden waging a successful presidential campaign in 2020 that pledged to “Restore the Soul of America,” a promise to which the idea of national unity was inherent. Its realization is complicated, however, by differing (and sometimes competing) formulations of identity, whether it be in terms of race, gender, class, etc. If we are to achieve unity, then, how must we see the world—and ourselves within it? To answer these questions, our First-Year Honors Colloquium will study the intersections of personal and national identities through various reading and writing exercises designed to help us imagine the future. We will begin the course with several critical readings from intellectuals such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Francis Fukuyama, and Stacey Abrams before surveying various novels, films, and other texts meant to aid our conceptualization of the ideal of unity. Students can expect to engage with the following texts as part of our discussions: Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, Nella Larsen’s Passing, Amiri Baraka’s Dutchman, Ta-Nehisi Coates’s Between the World and Me, and Jordan Peele’s film Us. Along the
way, there will also be multiple writing assignments, including a personal identity map, a rhetorical analysis, and a comparative research paper. Through our work, we will consider what unity means and whether it has (or should have) potential for success in American culture—questions that remain incredibly pressing in an age of anxiety over the survival of democracy.

HONR 290-084  
The Hero’s Tale: Medieval Europe to Modern Day Westeros (with a Pitstop in Marvel’s Universe)  
Cristina Guardiola-Griffiths  
TR 11:00 - 12:15  
This course introduces some of the earliest forms of medieval, western European literature (epic and romance) and explores its political and social import. As James Simpson summarizes, “[e]pic contests territory, while romance discovers the self.” Medieval epic often informs the heroic deeds of a warrior, seen within the communal bond between a lord and vassal; the chivalric romance delves into the fantastic world of a errant knight on his quest throughout an unexplored and fantastical geography and time. The first half of the class explores the tension faced by the hero/protagonist between communal goals and individual desires, as manifested throughout the origins of medieval literature; the second half of the class projects these notions of heroes onto the “medieval” works of the modern age in novel, film, and television series (movies and excerpts from the Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Gunslinger, and/or Deadpool may be used in this course). Students will be asked to reflect on the “medieval” appeal of modern characters, and how communal/individual goals of the modern characters respond to contemporary historical, political, or social concerns.

HONR 291 sections fulfill a University History and Cultural Change breadth (see note)*

HONR 291-080  
Public Monuments, Enslavement, and Justice  
Jennifer Van Horn  
TR 12:30 - 1:45  
Why are monuments built and why are they taken down? Who decides? This course investigates public monuments dedicated to enslaved people, emancipation, Indigenous peoples, the Union, and the Confederacy, erected in America between 1870 and the present. We will consider the reasons behind these monuments' initial construction as well as recent responses from racial justice activists including destruction and removal. Part of the seminar will address efforts on college campuses to interpret their racialized pasts through the construction or removal of monuments. Students will participate in a public-facing class project to further UD’s outreach on histories of disenfranchisement.
Among the possible futures for our warming planet is one in which more and more species—human and non-human—are compelled to move to more habitable locations. In fact, that movement is already underway, as climate-driven drought, melting, and sea-level rise have led populations to relocate in order to survive. This interdisciplinary course invites you to take a deep dive into the causes, patterns, prospects of climate migration. Where and how are humans moving in response to climate changes? What are experts thinking about the scale and timing of these future movements? What do we know about past human movements in response to environmental changes? Where and how are other life forms moving? Is climate migration—human and nonhuman—really a crisis? These are some of the questions we hope to explore. Course discussion will be informed by a variety of texts, including news reports from ProPublica’s series “The Great Climate Migration”; documentaries such as “Anote’s Ark” and “Fleeing Climate Change”; excerpts from Sonia Shah’s The Next Great Migration (from which the title of this course is taken); and CherieDimmaline’s novel The Marrow Thieves.

Women have been involved in conflict since time immemorial, having fought, suffered, and died alongside their male counterparts, although their stories have often been muted by the sagas of their more celebrated brothers-in-arms. This course examines the female perspective on war in America and world-wide. Thus, we will start with the narrative of Massachusetts resident Hannah Dustin (1699), captured by Native Americans during a colonial-Indian war. Dustin manages to escape—but not before taking her revenge upon her tormentors. The captivity of Mary Rowlandson (1682), also of New England, is another example of a tough female. Her wartime tale becomes one of America’s first bestsellers. We will discuss other accounts of American women in wartime and then go world-wide to read Women Warriors: An Unexpected History (2020) by Pamela Toler as well as looking at female fighters in the Bible. We will then finish with a longer work of American women in battle in Afghanistan: Ashley’s War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield (2015) by Gayle Lemmon. These stories will provide a rich venue to discuss themes of women in non-traditional roles. Are female warriors an aberration? Is the “band of sisters” as viable as the much-touted band of brothers? Assessments will include several short response papers (about two pages) on selected readings, quizzes, participation, a team presentation (multi-modal) on a female warrior selected by students, but approved by the instructor, and a modest research paper. The warrior ethos takes on many forms; thus, the capstone of this course will be a researched argument (about five pages) where you take a stance on an issue regarding women in any non-traditional occupation.
(loosely defined), i.e., the military, politics, law enforcement, public safety, medicine, first responders, the sciences, the arts, sports, etc.

HONR 292 sections fulfill a University Social and Behavioral Sciences breadth (see note)*

HONR 292-080
Sustainability: At the Crossroads of Social Justice and Climate Change
Michael Chajes
MF 8:40-9:55
What does it mean to be a sustainable society? According to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, sustainable societies must be environmentally sound, socially just, and economically prosperous. As such, the looming climate crisis, racial injustice, and global pandemics like COVID-19 are very much linked. We will examine how these events share roots in unsustainable and unfair economic systems, cause disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable populations, and demand solutions that require an overhaul of how we live and interact. As a report by the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis states, “What happens next—for racial equality, for public health, for the climate crisis—depends on us.” Our goal will be to explore the intersection of these issues and discuss and write about what we can do individually and collectively to create a better future for all.

HONR 292-081
Our Own Worst Enemy: Overpopulation and the Environment
Jack Bartley
T 5:00 - 8:00
“We have met the enemy and he is us.” Walt Kelly’s famous phrase from his 1971 Earth Day Pogo cartoon strip continues to ring true more than a half century after it was published. People are very good at making babies and keeping them alive until they mature; in turn, they make babies of their own. So, what traits do humans possess that make us so successful at reproduction, and how has this explosive population growth affected the environment? We will begin by examining several models of population growth to see how humans fit into various reproductive strategies. Is it possible that we can draw an analogy between our growth rate and that of a fermenting vat of beer? Using several chapters from Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs and Steel* we will see how the structure of our planet has affected population growth around the globe. In addition to sheer numbers, humans have developed technologies to exploit the Earth's resources far beyond the capabilities of any other organism. We will use excerpts from Dawkins’ *The Selfish Gene*, the National Geographic video *The Power of Water*, an interview with Garrett Hardin, and articles and essays from current publications to try to understand how population growth is the driving force behind the environmental problems we face today. Students will write short response pieces, two essays, and a research paper throughout the semester.
HONR 292-082  
Family and Juvenile Justice  
Judge Janell Ostroski  
MW 5:00-6:15

The law governing family relations affects all of us in our private and public lives. With the definitions of marriage, parentage, and intimate partnerships in flux, family law is a fascinating, challenging, and dynamic field of study. In this course, students will read and discuss relevant cases as well as material in the assigned textbook. Topics include marriage and divorce, relationships outside of marriage, parent-child relations, community property, juvenile justice and child welfare law, adoption, domestic violence, and immigrant rights. Some material may be challenging or disturbing; the course will include trauma-informed approaches. The instructor brings her real-world experience as a Delaware Family Court judge into the classroom. The class will tackle fundamental questions: What policies contribute to the health of children and families in our diverse society? What principles should guide the resolution of family conflict? How can we better serve clients facing family disruption? Do our laws accurately represent and protect what families experience and need in order to thrive?

HONR 292-083  
Love and Relationships  
Em Rowe  
MWF 9:05 – 9:55

Love—or the search thereof—fundamentally structures nearly every aspect of our lives. It holds immense power over us. Love can elicit ecstasy, a brazen feeling of wholeness and confidence… yet it can also devastate and destroy. In this class, we will explore the topics of love, sexuality, and relationships through the following questions: how do we distinguish love from lust? When do the two coalesce, and when do they separate? How has technology shaped our sexuality? Are sex robots really a thing? What is the hook-up culture, and does it still exist? Are humans hard-wired for monogamy (and if so, why do we cheat)? Why do we structure our lives around fairytale happy endings and the concept of our “one true love”? How have marriage and dating patterns differed across time and place? Is it racist to have a “type,” and from where does attraction originate? We will employ a variety of texts and media to investigate these topics. Assigned material might include lectures by modern love experts like Helen Fisher, Esther Perel, and Florence Williams; episodes of the dystopian Netflix show Black Mirror; clips from films such as Her, Blue is the Warmest Color, and Moonlight; excerpts from novels like Miranda July’s The First Bad Man, Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah; podcasts such as The Nod, Reply All, Invisibilia, and Radiolab; both popular and timeless love songs; and (of course), academic publications.
HONR 292-084
The Political Economy of "Race" in the United States
John Martin
TR 12:30 - 1:45
America seems, once again, to be at a ‘crossroads’ with respect to race-relations. The country is now more unequal economically, and more segregated racially, than it has been in at least the last 70 years. Contemporary American discourse and efforts are typically dominated by questions of ‘identity’ and ‘culture,’ e.g., the raging battle between the ‘discourses’ of a revived ‘Christian Nationalism’ and the continuing commitment to building a fully multicultural society. As critical and essential as the focus on identity and culture is, this course will take a different (though not unrelated) tack. This course will focus on the long traditions of thought and practice regarding what has been called ‘structural racism,’ the complicated intersection of economic, social and political policies and realities. We will proceed historically, from the founding of the country to the contemporary situation in which we find ourselves; always, with an eye towards ‘what is to be done’ now, with respect to the structure of America’s political economy. This is a seminar-style class. The class will have an intensive reading load. Reading assignments will be drawn from original texts (or portions/chapters therein). Both power point material, as well as videos will provide summaries/outlines of the readings. Three major essays assignments will serve as the primary assessment. These essays will provide a detailed summary of competing analytic frameworks used to understand the conditions of race in the US. Class time will emphasize discussion (and debate) of the assigned reading material, and competing perspectives.

HONR 292-085
epi-STEM-ology: Perspectives on Knowledge, Science, and Mathematics
Sara Gartland
MWF 10:10 - 11:00
What is science? What is mathematics? Who is a scientist? Who is a mathematician? How have these definitions taken shape over time? Are these definitions fixed or in flux? This course will critically explore a variety of perspectives on science, mathematics, and the construction of knowledge. The topics we will discuss include (but are not limited to) quantitative and qualitative ways of knowing, the construction of knowledge, positionality, the social construction of the terms science/scientist and mathematics/mathematician, belonging in the context of science and mathematics, and science and mathematics in school and real life. Course readings will include books, such as Mathematics for Human Flourishing by Francis Su, excerpts, such as “Who is a Scientist?” from Disordered Cosmos by Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, peer-reviewed articles, blogs, and other resources. Students will write reader response essays, critical analysis, and a research paper examining a topic of choice related to course content.

* In most cases, Honors Colloquia are approved to fulfill both University and College-level Breadth requirements as indicated, except in the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources and the College of Education & Human Development where they can only count as University Breadth, if applicable. Finance Majors should check with the College of Business & Economics Undergraduate Advising Office for approval of Colloquia into the finance majors’ College-level breadth requirements.