

# First-Year Experience Seminars 2013-14

## Fall 2013

### **Bought and Sold: 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Slavery**

**Dr. Laura Murphy**

**Department of English**

Though most people think that slavery ended in 1865, there are nonetheless 27 million people enslaved around the world today, despite vigorous efforts of activists to stamp out this practice. Focusing on the accounts of survivors and activists, both in texts and in virtual classroom visits, this course examines the problem of modern slavery and explores opportunities for students to participate in its eradication.

### **The World of Tim Burton (2 sections)**

**Dr. Mary McCay**

**Department of English**

Director and producer Tim Burton is famous for films such as *Edward Scissorhands*, *Ed Wood*, and his darkly re-imagined *Alice in Wonderland* that explore “excitement, mystery, discovery, life, and death.” He is also a whimsical and disturbing artist and a writer of lyrical poetry and prose. Students will view the art, read the writings and watch the films to understand how contemporary culture speaks to the need for imaginative approaches to difficult social issues.

### **Creating Medieval Monsters: Constructions of the “Other” in Medieval Society**

**Dr. Sara Butler**

**Department of History**

Medieval Christendom protected community by lashing out at those on the margins—heretics, the disabled, witches, women Jews, and Muslims. The seminar explores the ways that marginal people were demoralized, literally turned into “monsters,” to create unity in the Christianity world.

### **Creole Crossroads**

**Dr. Judith Hunt**

**Department of History**

New Orleans mixture of African, Caribbean, and European culture, forged through early European settlement, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the revolution in St. Domingue, and waves of international immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries make the city unique. By focusing on the music, food, literature, religious practices, and Carnival traditions of New Orleans, the seminar traces the historical threads that converged in this cultural crossroads to create a city like no other.

### **Globalization**

**Dr. Sanjog Rupakheti**

**Department of History**

Globalization has produced amazing technological innovations and unprecedented wealth. At the same time, it has amplified global inequality, and fundamentally reconfigured socio-political relations. This class will examine the forces behind this phenomenon, and resistance to it, through a consideration of people whose lives it has shaped. It will challenge students to look into how this has shaped civic engagements and conceptions of social justice in their own lives.

### **The Idea of America**

**Dr. Mark Fernandez**

**Department of History**

Where does America come from? What is liberty? Who and what shaped our conceptions of our country? This course will probe these questions from our colonial origins to the very recent past by looking at the intellectual history, literature, political, cultural, and religious aspects of the American past and the ideas and thinkers who helped shape our views of who we are.

### **Rebellion and Revolution in China (UHP) (2 sections)**

**Dr. Rian Thum**

**Department of History**

**\*This course is open to HONORS students only**

China is often mistakenly portrayed as a place of complete conformity. This course shatters that myth that by exploring cultures of rebellion and revolution, starting with the China's latest uprisings and tracing traditions of disobedience backward through music, visual art, literature, artifacts, and historical writing. Through comparisons with revolutionary traditions from other parts of the world, the course invites students to examine their own notions of rebellion and revolution.

### **Climate Change Ethics**

**Dr. Ian Smith**

**Department of Philosophy**

Remember the devastation that Hurricane Katrina caused? This deadly hurricane has been linked to global climate change, and many climate scientists say that we can expect more of the same as the world's seas grow warmer. Drawing on moral philosophy, economics, political science, and climate science, this course examines the global, generational, and individual ethical issues that arise in the context of climate change.

### **Philosophy in "The Twilight Zone"**

**Dr. Joshua Lott**

**Department of Philosophy**

What are the implications of our dependence on technology? What are the consequences of behaving unjustly? Does civilization make us less civil? Does the fact of death make life worth living? These are but a few of the questions raised by Rod Serling's groundbreaking television series, "The Twilight Zone." Using episodes from the series as well as philosophical and literary texts, the course invites students to think critically about questions that give meaning to human experience.

### **Images of Latin America in Film**

**Dr. Leopoldo Tablante**

**Department of Languages and Cultures**

Representations of Latin America in American films reveal much about American attitudes toward the Latin American world. Images of Latin characters as exotic, highly sexualized, and dangerous uncover the fears that underlie discrimination against Latin Americans both inside

and outside the U.S. The course explores these themes and the social justice issues implicit in them.

### **The Meaning of Life**

**Dr. Dittmar Dittrich**

**Department of Religious Studies**

Life is complicated. It can be painful and it can bring joy -and humans tend to ask themselves why. Traditionally, we have turned to religion and philosophy to find answers and meaning in our lives. However, for almost a century now filmmakers have been at the forefront of those trying to find or create meaning. We will watch their movies -e.g. Fight Club, American Beauty, and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind- and discuss how they see modern life as deeply meaningful.

### **Social Justice and the Wire**

**Dr. Boyd Blundell**

**Department of Religious Studies**

The dominant theme of 20th-century Catholic Teaching is the problem of structural injustice. This course examines this theme through the critically acclaimed series, The Wire. Readings from Church documents and contemporary authors support The Wire's exploration of social justice.

### **iBrains (2 sections)**

**Dr. Brad Petitfils**

**Department of Psychology**

Are we the same people we were when Freud, Piaget, or Erikson theorized about human development? Our lives are becoming more complicated by the barrage of information that comes to us through our time online; what's worse, our attention spans are becoming shortened as we experience more of life through "the screen." What can we learn from the notion of "Catfish" culture and Manti T'eo? What are the lessons of the Tyler Clementi case? Did you know that, in 2008, a South Korean couple's real-life infant starved to death while they were raising a virtual child at an Internet café? By the end of the course, we will decide whether traditional theories of learning and human development might need revision in our "hyperreal" present.

### **Pursuit of Happiness**

**Dr. Charles Nichols**

**Department of Psychology**

The pursuit of happiness is a right enshrined in the U.S Declaration of Independence. But what is happiness? Can it be measured? What can science tell us about the best ways of becoming (and helping others to become) happier? This course explores happiness, what it is, why it matters, and how we can get more of it, personally and collectively.

### **Diversity in Society**

**Ms. Liv Newman**

**Department of Sociology**

**\*Service Learning Required**

As Americans, we pride ourselves on the diversity of our nation. But what do we really mean? With our commitment to diversity as an ideal, how do we reconcile the inequities around us?

This course challenges you to think critically about how diversity shapes our identities, our beliefs, and our daily lives.

### **Gender and Mardi Gras**

**Dr. Sue Mennino**

**Department of Sociology**

Sociologists see gender as a socially constructed set of relations that is not “natural” but instead is reproduced as we go about our daily lives. This course explores the social construction of gender in Mardi Gras celebrations worldwide, from New Orleans to Rio, Sydney, and other locales, focusing on gender differences in participation in Mardi Gras festivities including balls, parades, costumes, krewe membership, art and music.

### **Community, Connection, and Contagion in a Networked World**

**Dr. Carol MacGregor**

**Department of Sociology**

Facebook and Twitter: social networks surround us. We are more aware of connections between people and the diffusion of innovations than ever before. But few pause to consider the larger significance of this seemingly superficial pastime. This class will challenge you to examine the consequences of network membership and consider how these connections might influence health, happiness, and community.

### **Political Satire: Speaking ‘Truthiness’ to Power**

**Dr. Philip Dynia**

**Department of Political Science**

Satire as political protest can be traced to the earliest days of American government. This course traces the uses, power, and historical significance of satire from such famous satirists as Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain to the contemporary satire of Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Michael Moore, and others.

### **Rebuilding New Orleans**

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**Dr. Peter Burns**

**Department of Political Science**

This course allows students to study and participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans post-Katrina through research on issues of policy and politics that this rebuilding has generated. Education, housing and economic development are highlighted from the perspectives of race and class.

### **Dishing it Up: The Business of Food in New Orleans**

**Dr. Frankie Weinberg**

**Department of Management**

New Orleans’ cuisine is world famous, and residents are proud of the diverse roots of our food traditions: Creole, Cajun, Italian, Vietnamese, Caribbean and French—the list goes on. Indeed, food is serious business in the Crescent City and an integral part of our sense of community. Through readings, discussions, and field trips, this seminar explores the way New Orleans’ restaurants, markets, food businesses and co-ops organize themselves to serve and build our community.

### **Branding New Orleans**

**Dr. Ashley Francis**

**Department of Marketing**

Carnival. Crime. Tourism. Racism. Bourbon Street. Bounty-gate. There's undoubtedly a ying and yang to the Big Easy's brand. But while New Orleans possesses a distinct image throughout the world for its good food and fun, "the city that care forgot" is experiencing an economic rebirth. In this class, students will take a behind-the-scenes look into the city's institutions, industries, business strategy, and leadership and will experiment with their own marketing plans for New Orleans.

### **Media Myths, Cultural Realities**

**Ms. Lisa Martin**

**School of Mass Communication**

Much of what we know about others, ourselves, and the world comes from the media. And the media in America— newspapers, magazines, books, radio, TV, and films—are owned and controlled by a handful of corporations that shape our understanding of reality. The course teaches students to deconstruct the images packaged for us by the media, analyze the ways these images influence our perceptions, and think critically about that influence.

### **Spinning the Planet**

**Dr. Robert Thomas**

**School of Mass Communication**

The language we use to talk about the environment shapes our attitudes toward the science, social issues, and politics surrounding environmental questions. The importance of these questions demands that we distinguish responsible communications from "spin." This course helps students think critically about environmental issues and the language in which they are discussed.

### **Violent Crime and the Media**

**Dr. Rae Taylor**

**Department of Criminal Justice**

#### **\*Service Learning Required**

A few days of watching TV would make the average American believe that we are all "sitting ducks" in a nation of violent crime. But is this a media fabrication? Has violent crime become rampant in America or merely a powerful archetype of our media narratives? This course compares violent content across a variety of media to actual crime rates, dispelling common myths, and cultivating a habit of critical thinking with regard to media consumption.

### **Love, Death, and Opera**

**Dr. Alice Clark**

**School of Music**

How can music reflect cultural attitudes? How can it be used to shape those attitudes? This course examines issues such as gender and race, love and death, as exemplified in works such as Carmen, Don Giovanni, and West Side Story. No musical background necessary.

### **Southern Comfort, Southern Soul: A Story of Southern Identities**

**Dr. April Prince**

**School of Music**

The South continues to maintain a distinctive set of musical and cultural identities. The various notions of the "South," however, create a sometimes complicated relationship with those outside of the region. By contextualizing and exploring the diverse musical and media landscape created within and about the South-- and using the musical soundscape of New Orleans as a

vantage point-- this course hopes to work through various understandings of Southern identity and the musical sounds that have critically defined crucial aspects of the Southern story.

### **Walking New Orleans**

**Ms. Barbara Brainard**

**Department of Visual Arts**

Our fanciful expectations of place often conflict with gritty cultural complexities, and this is especially true in New Orleans. By examining local architecture, the complex fabric that is New Orleans will come into focus. Through personal narratives based on on-site photographs, guided research and intensive critique, we will make sense of geographic influences, social and artistic tides, and often incongruous building trends and their contributions to the cities' unique identity. (Please note that classes may include walking tours up to 2 miles.)

## **Spring 2014**

### **The Devil's Advocate: Depicting the Devil in Literature and Film**

**Mr. Robert Bell**

**Department of English**

The devil has historically been used to explain man's dark side or as a signifier for "the other." This course will examine the ways in which the devil has been depicted in literature, film, and music. By examining how the devil has been constructed, students will move beyond seeing the devil as simply the source of evil to consider why demonization occurs in the world around us.

### **Imagining New Orleans (2 sections)**

**Dr. Tracey Watts**

**Department of English**

Representations of New Orleans in literature, film, and political discourse offer widely divergent images of our unique city: a site of hedonistic freedom, racial tensions and discrimination, and social redemption after Katrina's devastation. The course critically examines these representations to uncover the truths, idealizations, and biases that underlie them.

### **Way Down Yonder in New Orleans (2 sections)**

**Dr. C.W. Cannon**

**Department of English**

The Creole city, the Queen of the South, Sin City, the Big Easy, the Birthplace of Jazz, Bohemia's Last Frontier, Hollywood South and post-Katrina Renaissance New Orleans: the city of New Orleans has been richly mythologized for most of its almost three-hundred year history. Indeed, the careful crafting of the city's image began in the first decade of its existence and is now a multi-million dollar industry. Like cultural archaeologists, we will unearth the roots of the complex symbol of New Orleans in the national imagination. An examination of a diverse variety of texts, spanning three hundred years, will enhance our understanding of how New Orleans sets itself apart (and is set apart) from the United States as a whole.

### **Creole Crossroads**

**Dr. Judith Hunt**

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New Orleans mixture of African, Caribbean, and European culture, forged through early European settlement, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the revolution in St. Domingue, and waves of international immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries make the city unique. By focusing on the music, food, literature, religious practices, and Carnival traditions of New Orleans, the seminar traces the historical threads that converged in this cultural crossroads to create a city like no other.

### **The Philosophy of *Star Trek***

**Dr. Robert Brice**

**Department of Philosophy**

Boldly go where no class has gone before...a philosophical analysis of *Star Trek*. In this class we will consider topics in ethics, metaphysics, language, and logic that emerge in *Star Trek*. Questions include: Is it always better to be ruled by logic than by emotion? Is Lieutenant Commander Data a person? Is time travel possible? Do we have a moral duty toward other living things...including aliens?

### **Forming the Self: in the Steps of Ignatius Loyola (UHP)**

**Sylvester Tan, S. J.**

**Department of Languages and Cultures**

**\*This course open to HONORS students only**

The formation of the self is central to Ignatian thought: every idea, experience, action, and relationship contribute to forming who we are. This course explores this concept through Ignatius Loyola's spiritual exercises and writings, the writings of Plato, Augustine and others, and offers formative experiences that range from Japanese tea ceremonies and music appreciation to ropes course activities and field trips.

### **The Pity of War**

**Dr. Denis Janz**

**Department of Religious Studies**

Why does our species regularly engage in orgies of collective violence and mass killing? Why, when the cost of war is so appalling, have we not discovered a better way? What have the great Western religions said about the morality of war? This course addresses these perennial questions against the background of wars in the history of the West, from tribal war in the ancient near east to today's "war on terror."

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traditional theories of learning and human development might need revision in our “hyperreal” present.

**Living With Dying: The Psychology of *Six Feet Under***

**Dr. Brad Petitfils**

**Department of Psychology**

This course is not about “death” per se... it is about life itself, and the developmental processes that we all face – living with dying around us. When the HBO series *Six Feet Under* was first broadcast in 2001, the American public embraced it with rave reviews. On the one hand, the series explores the issues surrounding death itself – grief, disease, sickness – and the business of death in American capitalistic culture. On the other hand, the series explores our very humanness and our lifelong search for happiness, acceptance, and the goal of a well-lived life. In this course, we will explore questions including why Americans fear death, how we deal with death and dying in the family and in the community, and how mortality defines individual and cultural identity.

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