

COS Fall 2012 Sub-Theme Course Descriptions

Cohort 1: Sections 1, 2, & 3: Professors Schulz, Pelias, & Sneed

Post Human

This year's core seminar sub theme is the idea of the post human. One approach we will engage is to explore the notion of the “human self” and its complex and rapidly changing relationship to the technological ethos it inhabits. Such categories as estrangement and alienation will be investigated in relation to Nature and also in terms of interpersonal relationships. What kind of "second self" is emergent in our new cybernetic space and how time is experienced anew will also be framing questions for our course. Is the Matrix, the world of gene civilization demonstrating a new mutation in the human species? Is it possible now to assess this critically as progressive or regressive or a bit of both? We will give special attention to films such as *THE TIME MACHINE*, clips from *BLADE RUNNER* to *THE HOST* and readings in critical thinking and from science fiction about what it means to be human today.

Cohort 2: Sections 4, & 5: Professors Litchman and Baird

Prof. Lichtman: TBA

Notions of Slavery (Prof. June Baird)

This fall, the sub-theme for COS 50:005 is “Slavery”. We will look at the various ways humans become enslaved as they conform to the norm and values of society. We will also examine the influence that social order has on our desire to be accepted and why some people reject freedom and embrace bondage.

Cohort 3, Sections 6 & 7: Professors Frederick and Krasner

Gender & Sexuality (Prof. Frederick)

In this Core Seminar, Gender & Sexuality in Pop Culture, we will explore the impact of sexuality and gender upon various arenas of popular culture: i.e., hip hop, fashion, Hollywood, reality TV, politics, comics, technology, etc. We will

attempt to uncover what our popular interests tell us about ourselves and our society.

Nature & The Human Being (Prof. Krasner)

This course will provide a sophisticated, elaborate and intellectual introduction to the idea of the individual and intelligence through the process of inquiry into culture, science and art. Students will be concentrating on the theme of The Idea of the Human and The Exploration of Nature. The course will explore how nature helps us understand what it means to be human, and whether we are part of nature or totally distinct, different and independent of nature. We will use our imagination to understand the idea of the human and nature through readings, videos and in-class discussions. We will review a variety of readings which will reflect on the concept of self, life and the gift of imagination.

As we explore the theme of the course, how the idea of the human and the concept of nature interrelate or contradict, we will consider the following questions: What does the Idea of the Human mean to each of us individually and why? What is nature? What are the factors that define and support the power of nature? Does humanity abuse nature? Is it there for us to preserve and treasure or is it there for humans to manipulate? Is nature more powerful than humanity? As we learn in many other courses, humans and other species depend on nature and external environment for survival. Are we, humans, and other species all equal in nature?

Cohort 4, Sections 8 & 9: Professors Tyler and Achuthan

The Art of Resistance (Prof. Tyler)

History means change over time. American history now, through extreme social, political, economic and environmental crises is moving very fast. Our course focuses on our history through the work of artists, writers and filmmakers. Examples: the labor songs of Woody Guthrie, the poems of the African-American poet Langston Hughes, the feminist art work of Judy Chicago and the films of director John Ford. They have addressed the issues we care about that open our minds to the problems and the possibilities. The modern global world also impacts our history and offers ideas for Core groups here to explore. This fall voters will elect a president. We want to be aware of what is happening and with our new knowledge become part of the debates as we learn about our history through readings, talking, seeing, going on field trips and writing our own papers.

Think Globally, Act Locally (Prof. Achuthan)

What does it mean to be a human being in the 21st century in the midst of life found in our biosphere, and what are our opportunities and responsibilities? While we have our distinctions, in all probability we have our origins in plant, insect and other animal life that emerged in water, land or air.

The facility for language emerged and developed in us over one million years or so, a short time, given the scale of evolutionary time for life (about 4000 million years) in our biosphere. This ability has led us (how? under inquiry) to "create" symbols to depict things and their inter-connections and 'communicate the experience' of the external world. The same facility has empowered us to describe happenings internal to us referred to as emotions and associated feelings such as fear, anxiety, prejudice, violence, hope, love, and besides to dwell on borders barely perceptible, to create. Further, through experimentation, evaluation, and design, we have been able to make projections of realizable forms / things, and to have brief, limited "intentions", for the self and the group, resulting in progress / setbacks for personal and social evolution, our distinctions...

Cohort 5, Sections 10, 11 & 12: Professors Rosenberg, Parisi, and Baker

Political Perspectives 2012: Decoding the Real, the Ideal and the Idea of the Human

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”
(*Lewis Carroll*)

Have you ever asked yourself how political positions are framed in the 2012 Presidential election? Do you wonder how the major issues of our day, such as the future of education, health care, immigration, global events, and the economy are debated in the political arena? Based on the assumption that political processes represent a struggle between competing ideas about power, justice, and rights, this course will engage students in critically evaluating how contemporary political perspectives and policies are shaped through the use of rhetoric, and how issues are framed in the public realm. Using examples drawn from multiple sources, including presidential speeches and debates, mainstream and alternative media, and popular culture, we will decode and debate contemporary political perspectives.

Cohort 6, Sections 15, 16 & 17: Professors Isaac, Small, and V. Baird

Ethics

This course is inter-disciplinary and our cohort will explore the broad theme of Ethics as it relates to The Idea of the Human. Ethics, the branch of philosophy which defines notions of right and wrong, justice and the good, can be weighed in all human activities.

Normative Ethics (Prof. Isaac)

This course serves to highlight our reasoning ability in regard to notions of fairness and the good in a pluralistic society. We will examine current political conflicts centered on issues that highlight areas of inequality. We will consider fundamental issues like the role of empathy in human relations, the way(s) human beings exercise power, the way(s) we build and define community, and our construction of “the other” in society. We will grapple with questions such as: what is just and how do we exercise justice? What makes right actions right and wrong actions wrong?’ We will also reflect on and develop our own personal ethical principles for moral actions (Normative Ethics).

Prof. Small: (TBA)

Environmental Ethics (Prof. Van Baird)

Our section of COS 50 is on the sub-theme “Environmental Ethics.” As we explore concepts that explain the conditions under which all species (including humans) live, we will examine significant topics such as Sustainability and Replenishment and any other related topics that will emanate from our readings and discussions. The theme “Environmental Ethics” focuses on the ecology/environment (the Earth, generally). In exploring this theme, we will concentrate on the interdependence between and among various species and how their interactions shape and are shaped by their attitude to Nature. The dynamics of ecological changes as a direct result of human unethical behaviors will be interrogated as such. In examining the ideas of Sustainability and Replenishment, we will concentrate on how our ethics influence our interactions with each other, the Earth, and other (living) things whose existential conditions are created and controlled by their environment and how they in turn affect their environments.

We will examine the “Golden Rule” as a viable standard of ethical behavior or as a convenient principle that can be manipulated to absolve the unethical conduct of individuals. We will also investigate how our innate bias towards self-preservation strongly influences our ethical values and consequent behavior; and how the

Natural Law of Reciprocity and our personal interests often reject the principles and conventions of right conduct and inveigle/urge us to reconstruct/refashion them as a personal ethical convenience.

Cohort 7, Sections 16, 17 & 18: Professors Juwayeyi, Lehman and Thompson

In general Americans believe that we have a right to believe whatever we choose to believe regardless of the authenticity of our beliefs. In three separate sections, this course examines (1) The Origin of Modern Human Behavior; (2) Faith and Spirituality; and (3) Politics, Purpose, Passion and Power, collaborating for two joint sessions, which explore how beliefs impact the cultures that affect human behaviors, shape faith and spirituality, and fuel politics, purpose, passion and power, and how they shape who we are as human beings.

Human/Animal Interaction and Cultural Behavior (Prof. Juwayeyi)

“Where do humans fit in the natural world?” To answer this question, we will need to explore the whole subject of human origins, development and adaptations within the various ecological niches that humans have inhabited through time. This will involve understanding human biological and cultural evolution and human relationships with other animals, particularly the non-human primates. We will look critically at various human cultural experiences such as use of language, tool making, socialization and others that have been instrumental in separating humans from the non-human primates, making humans unique in the animal world.

Faith & Spirituality (Prof. Lehman)

The Core Seminar is an exploration of what it means to be human, both individually and collectively. This semester we’ll explore spirituality as one expression of our humanness. Standing on the shore and watching the waves might be a spiritual experience for some or praying in a house of worship for others, but what might be at the root of both these experiences? We’ll examine how people understand who they are based upon their connection to—or alienation from—the world of the spirit. Such a world means different things to different people, including religion, faith, belief, a link to world of nature, or a connection to the Divine. We’ll read both sacred and secular texts that discuss all of this, taking into consideration non-belief, atheism, and agnosticism as well.

Politics & Purpose (Prof. Thompson)

This course is designed to explore how what we believe creates and affects politics, defines and drives purpose, fuels passion, and establishes power, ultimately specifying who we are as human beings. We will look at how beliefs are formed, focusing on the dynamic between the family and the state, the reason of our being, and our passions: abilities and knacks as they relate to our status of power and our identity as human beings. Moreover we will examine how this identity makes us uniquely human – different from the other life forms around us, and from the tools and intelligence that we so depend upon.

Cohort 8, Sections 21 & 22: Professors Campbell and Robinson

Survival

As a human being, you probably don't think much about your day-to-day survival; you simply do what you have to do to keep on living. But, given the fact that 99% of all species have gone extinct, it's a marvel that you and all of the rest of us have managed to stick around the planet. While we've only been around for 50,000 years, we modern humans think – for lots of good reasons – that we play this game of survivor pretty well. But 50,000 years in the scope of billions of years of life isn't such a long haul. If you'd like to discover the stuff that makes you a player in the survival of our species, and discuss the costs of the endeavor to survive, join us this semester to look at your moment in time as you fight for your place in your family, in society, and in nature. Our classes will consider the many dimensions of human survival, including survival in memory and the possible survival -- immortality -- of the soul.

Cohort 9, Sections 21 & 22: Professors Zelski and Vak

The Self and The Other: Imagination as a Bridge to Understanding

In this course students will investigate justice, find what makes justice just, and see how our personal and social activities are justified. The focus of our class will be the controversy between the demand for universal (political, social) justice and our personal interpretation of it. We will see how this demand can help us to overcome our personal prejudices but at the same time may buttress and justify them. In this class students will be invited to reflect and reevaluate their own reasons for making judgments. We will investigate how these reasons are affected by prejudices and how our prejudices may shape our judgments and our self-identity. We will address some criminal cases and follow the election campaign to

see different approaches to the understanding of justice. Readings from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Gould's *Mismeasure of Man*, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, some selections from Aristotle, Nietzsche and other thinkers will provide a theoretical background for our revaluations of our judgments and self-identity.

Cohort 10, Sections 23 & 24: Professors Kaminski and Schrynemakers

Community, Individualism & Resistance (Prof. Kaminski)

This semester, we will focus on expressions of community and individualism in our surroundings. Buildings and activities uphold the values of a culture that dwells in them. Student field assignments are in seeking communal and, or, individual expressions in the urban environment. A keen field site is Little Italy during the Feast of San Gennaro, Sept. 13-23; another is Columbus Park on Baxter and Mulberry Streets any Saturday or Sunday at noon for Chinese opera songs and architecture. Expression may be viewed in light of buildings, behaviors, ideologies, and music displays, combined. I will prepare a joint presentation that will be fun and based on a music topic students can easily relate to.

Symbolism, Power, & Socialization (Prof. Schrynemakers)

Core Seminar is a writing intensive class, designed to assist you in learning how to write a research paper. This process is embedded within the theme "The Idea of the Human." Obviously, this theme is too broad to cover effectively in a 15-week undergraduate course; therefore, four subthemes have been selected to touch on specific aspects of what it means to be human. The first subtheme deals with *symbolism*, i.e., the way in which humans use symbols to represent meaning. The second subtheme concerns *science* and delves into the physicality of being a human as explained by Darwinian evolution. The third theme, *power*, explains the responsibilities of individual and collective power. The final theme of *socialization* not only recognizes that humans do not exist as independent entities, but interact with others. It is the nature of that interaction that we will explore.