# **COS SPRING 2013 Sub-Theme Course Descriptions**

# Cohort 1: Sections 1, 2, 3 &4: Professors Schulz, Pelias, Sneed & Litchman

#### **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.

## Prof. Lichtman: TBA

#### Cohort 2: Sections 5 & 6: Professors Hassan and Lehman

#### **Art and Culture** (Prof. Hassan)

In this course, we will consider art as a revelation of the human; as a unique way of speaking of the human in all of its aspects, including its imaginative and productive sources in feeling, spirit, and intellect. We will explore both what constitutes the impulse to create and what is created through that impulse. The fullest possible range of human relations and experiences will be open to our investigation, from the most intimately personal and internal to the most broadly collective and social, from the most traditional to the most exotic and innovative. While much attention will be paid to trends in contemporary art in the European tradition, we will not be limited by this. Our explorations will range over arts of other traditions and cultures, and will include an interest in how influence is traded between them and European art as it has been practiced over the last century. While the term 'art' as it is commonly used covers the entire spectrum of media and genres—including

music and literature—in this course we will consider art in the narrower sense: art that has a predominantly or significantly visual component, including painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, installation art, performance art, environmental art.

## Faith and 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.

#### **Cohort 3, Sections 7 & 8: Professors Krasner and Robinson**

#### **Nature & The Human Being**

For most people, most of the time, the routine of daily life (work, school, family, friends) is all there is. But perhaps this ordinary view is mistaken. In our Core Seminar class, we will consider the possibility that there is something lying beyond – or beneath – the world of appearances. Are there forces within our personalities of which we are usually unaware? Are social structures the manifestations of hidden influences? Is the design of nature the product of an invisible hand? We will use explorations of visual art and readings in philosophy, psychology, natural science, and literature to help us dispel our comfortable illusions and to guide us in our journey from the familiar to the unknown.

#### Cohort 4, Sections 9, 10 & 11: Professors Kaminski, Parisi and Baird

#### Community, Individualism & Resistance

The principal theme of this section is in finding expressions of community and individualism in our cultural surroundings. Buildings and the look of a community are shared visually and express the mores of the culture that dwell within it. Their value systems and expectations bond shared identity, and this reflects in community activities, especially rituals of the religious and musical nature. In a civilization of individualism, artists express their views as critiques of the culture within which they dwell, and art from its primitive mode of communication becomes the modern mode of expressionism. A later course theme is a discussion of human evolution.

## Prof. Parisi: TBA

#### Cohort 5, Sections 12, 13 & 14: Professors Achuthan, Vak, and Baird

## Think Globally, Act Locally: (Prof. Achuthan)

'Globalization' commenced with trade thousands of years ago. Through information, communication, technology (ICT), the facility for human interaction is unfolding currently at an exponential pace, and 'human social formations' that have been struggling with the limitations of the 'nation-state', can now facilitate 'reaching-out' farther. How do we prepare? For a start, by "Thinking Globally and Acting Locally".

## Think Globally, Act Locally: (Prof. Vak)

In our class, we will examine the nature of human beings from the perspective of intentions. We will approach human being as the goal-oriented animal. We will examine how human values, intentions and goals are formed and how they form a human being. Our analysis of human intentionality will be framed by the larger topic of the relations between global and local values. We will see what 'Think globally, act locally' means for goal oriented human beings on social and personal levels. To deal with the indicated topics we will read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as a diagnosis of a society that has lost its goals and values; we will read Gould's *Mismeasure ofMan* to understand how men are shaped and prejudiced by established values; by studying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we will question the political and social

intentions of humans. We will also read a few thinkers who have tried to understand man as a goal-oriented animal: Aristotle, Kant and Nietzsche.

## **Think Globally, Act Locally: 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 6, Sections 15, 16 & 17: Professors Birchette, Zelski and Punjabi

#### **Compassion**

Is *compassion* - the ability to feel sorry for the troubles or misfortunes of others, coupled with the urge to help them – a distinctly human trait? Is it in fact the most essential aspect of being Human and if not, why not? This class will explore the concept of compassion within the context of identity (self-identity as well as the act of defining and identifying with 'the other') and examine a range of human responses to a variety of different situations in an effort to delineate what constitutes a truly 'compassionate' reaction. Are there practical considerations to being compassionate in a world fraught with

violence, selfishness, and narcissism? We will consider the problem of determining whether or not there are individuals or groups for whom feelings of compassion and an urge to help may not be appropriate (e.g. so-called 'monsters') and if there are ever situations in which compassion is detrimental to the greater good (e.g., the pros and cons of torture to extract information from 'terrorists').

Prof. Zelski & Punjabi: (TBA)

# Cohort 7, Sections 18, 19, &20: Professors Mutnick, Burgos, and Campbell

This semester in Core Seminar we will investigate human perspectives on race through three disciplinary perspectives: scientific, literary, and political. We will explore the idea of race through the lens of the America experience from the early twentieth century to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the other movements for social equality it inspired. Students will have the unique opportunity to conceptualize, research, and frame issues at the very heart of the Civil Rights Movement by conducting oral history interviews.

#### Cohort 8, Sections 21 & 22: Professors Rosenberg and Isaac

# <u>Transcending Borders: Immigration and the Critical Imagination</u> (Prof. Rosenberg)

What is a border? How can we transcend them? In this course we will engage our critical imagination to go beyond the borders of the classroom as we explore the diversity and cultural richness that defines NYC. We will examine the immigrant experience with a focus on the newest immigrants. Beginning with an examination of push/pull, we will explore what factors influence and shape the immigrant experience. Our journey will start with a self-examination of own borders. What informs our sense of self and identity? What are our push/pulls? What shapes our world? What drives our hopes and dreams? Next we will turn our attention to some of the major immigrant groups in NYC and learn about their culture through exploring food, traditions, religion. Ethnographic field explorations and group presentations will provide an opportunity to extend and share what we have learned.

## **Transcending Borders: The Human Journey** (Prof. Isaac)

In our course, we will address the topic of immigration as one of the essential human experiences shaping the individual and his/her relation to the world. Consider the fact that more people migrate to the United States than any other country in the world. What draws people to our borders? We will examine representations and images of immigrants in American culture, the specific and metaphorical borders being crossed, as well as the immigrant's impact on the cultural makeup of the United States. We will examine current political conflicts centered on the issue of immigration 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. Finally, we will reflect on own personal borders, and our sense of self and identity construction.

## Cohort 10, Sections 23 & 24: Professors Perez and Schrynemakers

## Prof. Perez: (TBA)

## **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.