

COS Spring 2012 Sub-Theme Course Descriptions

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

TBA (Prof. Schulz & Pelias)

Post Human

Post human, Post Black, Postmodern, these are a sample of terms describing our current society. This core seminar's subtheme is Post Human. What does it mean to be post human and what then constitutes our humanity? What is the role of imagination and creativity in a post human world? What is the role of the poet in the face of technology? Most of all how is freedom defined and redefined in a post human world? Special attention will be paid to works of science fiction, including reading from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

Cohort 2: Sections 4, 5, & 6: Professors Robinson, Tyler and Lichtman

Images: Reflecting and Shaping Our World

Images are all around us – some bland, some provocative, some comforting, some frightening. In Core Seminar, we will explore a particular set of images: those that represent society or social change. One of our concerns will be the response such images evoke. Last March, for example, Governor Paul LePage of Maine removed murals depicting the history of labor from the headquarters of the state's Department of Labor. Why? That will be the subject of our first joint session, when we hear from Judy Taylor, the artist who created the murals.

While much of our focus will be on visual images, we will also study images expressed through language. Do we really live in a cave, contemplating shadows? The philosopher Plato thought so. Do the pressures of work and family turn people into insects? Franz Kafka wrote a story where this happened. But Martin Luther King envisioned a better world in "I Have a Dream." Our task will be to test the accuracy of various images, to analyze their appeal, and to speculate about their influence.

Students in our classes will engage in research on the messages artists, writers, and philosophers communicate in their controversial images.

Cohort 3, Sections 7 & 8: Professors Krasner & LoBianco

TBA (Prof. Krasner)

The Creation of a Social Network

Throughout the course we will explore how humans are interconnected to each other and the world around us through a social network. We will explore the many levels of social networks in our society, from the family to international relationships. We will look at how our social network plays a role in how we view and approach the world, solve problems, and achieve individual success. What systems have we created to connect with each other? How do we use politics, science and art to connect across racial, cultural, or social boundaries? We will look at how technology has been changing how we connect. We spend a lot of our time connected to technology and social networking sites. Is this the next step in our evolution?

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

The Art of Resistance (Prof. Goodman and Baird)

This course is an exploration of certain genres of art, music and literature (past and present) that express cultural, ideological or political dissent. How the idea of being human, (raison d'être) for many individuals, involves challenging accepted values and norms.

Community, Individualism & Resistance (Prof. Kaminski)

The first 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.

The subtheme of the section collaborates with the other COS sections, which is the expression of resistance: the ways people express against oppressive forces, economically or politically. While protests are obvious, civil disobedience has been practiced in the United States with results. Communities resist as part of dwelling, which artists express through modes of communication in literature, art, and music. The first theme and subtheme thus integrate in expressions of identity and need.

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

Think Globally, Act Locally

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... **(Prof. Achuthan)**

Our section of COS 50 is on the theme "Think Globally, Act Locally." As we explore concepts that explain the conditions under which all species (including human beings) live, we will examine the significant sub-themes of Sustainability and Change and the many others that will emanate from our readings and discussions.

The course therefore, aims at introducing you to the conditions under which all species exist and raises issues to create awareness that if we are to continue to exist on the Earth, then, we need to acknowledge the conditions of sustainability and change in the global and local environments. As species living in communities based on "Nature," it is important for us to comprehend how unregulated exploitation or devastation of the ecology threatens "Nature" and leads us closer to a synthetic world. **(Prof. Baird)**

TBA (Prof. Parisi)

Cohort 6, Sections 15, 16 & 17: Professors Zelski, Passer, and Lehman

TBA (Prof. Zelski)

The Others (Professor Passer)

The goal of this course is to learn to view the world, the issues and the conflicts that we as humans deal with in a new way by focusing on outside perspectives through the idea of *the other*. *The other* will examine alternate perspectives and points of view from people, areas and themes outside of your own experiences. The goal of

learning about “the Others” is to allow for exploration based on the members in the group and their own experiences. We do a variety of outside readings and activities designed to examine these perspectives through active learning and both in and out of class activities.

This course will attempt to teach you to open your minds to new points of view and to new experiences. We will be reading a variety of materials and it is up to you to bring your own perspective to these readings and *share* them with your peers. This course is meant to provide you with an opportunity to learn more about yourself and the various issues that surround you and affect you. This class will be only as good as you make it; you *must* be willing to share your own experiences and open your mind to new concepts and perspectives.

TBA (Professor Lehman)

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

Pathways to Freedom

The Idea of the Human: Pathways to Freedom is a learning community composed of three sections of COS 50 that are participating in Students and Faculty in the Archives, a project sponsored by the Brooklyn Historical Society and supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. This spring, students will continue an inquiry into Brooklyn history begun in fall 2011 in English 16.

After focusing last semester on the role of African Americans in building the city from 1776 to the Civil War, students in COS 50 will explore what happens to a society that fails to see that freedom and wellbeing must be guaranteed to all people, not just to some. They will investigate the human condition—how human beings construct their worlds, for better and for worse—by focusing on the changing face of Brooklyn from Reconstruction to the present. In addition to a research project based on archival materials documenting the struggles for freedom of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Brooklyn Congress on Racial Equality, students will conduct oral history interviews of local civil rights activists and observers. These oral histories will then be contributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society’s oral history collection and to the LIU Brooklyn Library, thus entering into the historical record.

Cohort 8, Sections 21 & 22: Professors Isaac and Vak

The Art of Horror

Horror is one of the most enduring themes in art, from the Greek myths of giants and cannibalistic gods, to the Faust legends in which demons rise up to claim souls,

to the contemporary popularity of zombies and vampires. In our course we will address horror as one of the essential human experiences shaping the individual and her relation to the world. We will concentrate on horror art as a response to horrific experiences, as an art that deals with life and with the process of becoming human. We will examine the contradictory force of horror art as that which both repulses and attracts, and as a core force in shaping our relations with another human being. We will study politics as a reaction to the horror of human existence, and reflect on our own experience of the horrible by watching horror movies, reading horror stories, and viewing art that deals with horror.

Cohort 9, Sections 23 & 24: Professors Nash and Schrynemakers

The Self and The Other: Imagination as a Bridge to Understanding (Prof. Nash)

In this section of Core Seminar, we will attempt to understand our own reality and to move beyond the boundaries of our limited experiences into the realities of others. In this investigation, we will pay particular attention to the imaginative capacity of humans, exploring the possibilities offered by the imagination and the ways in which it is limited, internally and externally, physically and politically. Certainly, we won't be able to settle the central question of the course: what does it mean to be alive? Still, through our focus on the role of imagination as a central tool in empathizing with other people, we will learn to think about it deeply, write about it, and engage with the ways that others have thought and written about it. In short, we will use our personal imaginations to help us understand our collective imagination as humans. By doing so, we may be able to see beyond our own eyes to become more thoughtful, articulate, critical, and compassionate individuals.

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 also interact with others, and it is the nature of that interaction that will be explored.