AS.300 (COMPARATIVE THOUGHT AND LITERATURE)

AS.300.102. Great Minds. 3 Credits.
Introductory survey of foundational texts of modern philosophy, social and political thought, and literature. This semester will include works by Plato, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Virginia Woolf, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch, Cora Diamond, Judith Butler, Kwame A. Appiah, Jacques Derrida, and others. The course is taught in lectures and in seminar discussions.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.104. Freshman Seminar: High School on Television. 3 Credits.
Education has always played an important role in popular culture, but High School Musical's premiere on Disney Channel in 2006 ushered in a new era of TV set in schools. In this course, we'll ask how recent depictions of high school on television captured the collective imagination and what they might be able to teach us about the purpose of school in society. Students will get the most out of the course if they are eager to learn about the philosophy of education; willing to critically reflect on their own experiences of schooling both inside and outside the classroom; and excited about watching TV shows such as Love, Victor; Euphoria; 13 Reasons Why; All American; Sex Education; Riverdale; Derry Girls; Elite; Merli; Glee; and Friday Night Lights.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.114. Emotions: An Interdisciplinary Perspective. 3 Credits.
What are emotions? Do they have a history? Can they be studied scientifically? The study of emotions is a newly emerging field that does not belong to a single discipline. Exploring this field form an interdisciplinary perspective, we will read texts by psychologists, biologists, philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians from the nineteenth century to the present, including, among others, Charles Darwin, William James, Lucien Febvre, Martha Nussbaum, and Ruth Leys.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.129. Capitalism and Tragedy: From the Eighteenth Century to Climate Change (Freshman Seminar). 3 Credits.
In contemporary discussions of climate change, it is an increasingly prevalent view that capitalism will lead to the destruction of civilization as we know it. The notion that capitalism is hostile to what makes human life worth living, however, is one that stretches back at least to the early eighteenth century. In this class, we will examine key moments in the history of this idea in works of literature, philosophy, and politics, from the birth of bourgeois tragedy in the 1720s, through topics such as imperialism and economic exploitation, to the prospects of our ecological future today. Authors to be studied: George Lillo, Balzac, Dickens, Marx and Engels, Ibsen, Weber, Brecht, Arthur Miller, Steinbeck, Pope Francis, and contemporary fiction, politics and philosophy on climate change.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.139. Introduction to Intellectual History. 3 Credits.
This course offers a conceptual and historical introduction to Intellectual History. What makes the "history of ideas" different from the history of other objects? What, if anything, distinguishes the history of ideas from the history of philosophy? What is it exactly that we call "ideas"? In what sense do they have a history? These are examples of the kind of questions addressed in the course.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.145. Humanities Collaboratory. 3 Credits.
The Humanities Collaboratory is designed for new researchers from across the humanities as they gain the applied skills and experience to conduct their own independent research projects in the humanities. The Humanities Collaboratory model uses a high-tech classroom to allow students and instructors to work, learn, and research together. Three sections of this course will share a core list of materials focused on humanities research techniques, but your primary course materials will be individually selected. Students will have the unique opportunity to participate in a humanities lab section where all three course sections merge for discussion. You will choose your own topic to research with no limits of time period, subject, or genre, and through constant collaborative and independent research, each student will develop the expertise in that topic to both write a research paper and create a final oral presentation.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.203. Freshman Seminar: How Literature Works: Narrative Imagination from Ancient to Modern Times. 3 Credits.
Is storytelling part of human nature? Do myths and legends have a universal structure? As a bridge between experience and language, narratives inform the way we understand history, gender, politics, emotion, cognition and much more. This course will explore how narratives are composed, how they are experienced, and eventually, how they evolve throughout history. We will be reading a diverse selection of ancient and modern texts, including selections from Plato and Aristotle, the Odyssey, the Hebrew Bible, as well as 19th- and 20th-century authors such as the Brothers Grimm, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The second part of the course focuses on philosophical and critical approaches to narrative in arts and media, concluding with the evolving concept of narrative in the digital age. Theoretical readings include selections from Karl Marx, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. All readings will be in English.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.219. Freshman Seminar: Babblers, Mumblers & Howlers: Languages of Modernist Fiction: Freshman Seminar. 3 Credits.
Does literature represent reality or create it? Is language just a tool we use to communicate, or is it shaped by our culture, or indeed, is our culture—and even our own experiences—shaped by our language? Modernist writers at the turn of the 20th century grappled with these questions, concerned that literature and in fact language itself was ill-equipped to face the changes occurring at the beginning of a new era of modernity. From symbolist and sound poetry to innovations in stream of consciousness narration and non-syntactic fragmentation, the literature of the time reflected a receding faith in the ability for ordinary spoken language to communicate feeling, meaning, and the authentic self. The task of modernism in turn became the reinvention of a new literary language that could either capture this condition of crisis or seek to overcome it. This course will investigate the various responses and solutions to the crisis of language in Anglo-American and European modernist fiction. Authors to be studied: Virginia Woolf, Andrei Bely, Franz Kafka, Jean Toomer, Filippo Marinetti, Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bakhtin, Yuri Olesha, et al. All readings will be in English.
Area: Humanities
AS.300.223. Philosophy and Infinity. 3 Credits.
What is the infinite? Can we comprehend it? Can we experience it? In this course we will explore various ways in which philosophers in the western tradition have answered questions such as these. In the first half of the semester, we will examine theoretical treatments of the infinite that inform how we understand the fabric of our world, from the ordinary objects around us to more sublime concepts of God, space, time, and mathematics. In the second half, we will turn to arguments in aesthetics and ethics that reveal an interplay between infinity and finitude occurring before our very eyes. Philosophers we will cover include Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Russell, Levinas, and Arendt. Throughout, we will ask such fundamental questions as, what is the starting point of philosophy? what is its methodology? what can it achieve in terms of knowledge? and in terms of practice?
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.227. Business Fictions. 3 Credits.
When you are working for a company, how do you distinguish your ideas, actions, and responsibilities from the firm’s—if that is even possible? What is corporate culture or a corporate person, and how is it similar or different from any other kind of culture or person? These and related questions inspired and fascinated writers from the nineteenth century through the present. By reading and thinking about short stories, novels, film, a television series, and a play, we will explore these issues and potential resolutions to them. The course especially considers how problems of action, agency, and responsibility become an intriguing challenge for writers of a variety of modern and contemporary fictions of the business world. Texts will include short stories by Herman Melville, Alice Munro, Ann Petry, and John Cheever; novels by Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Lydia Millet; films, plays, and television by Charlie Chaplin, David Mamet, and Dan Harmon (Community).
Area: Humanities

AS.300.237. Freshman Seminar: Tolstoy’s War and Peace. 3 Credits.
Leo Tolstoy’s monumental novel War and Peace, which the author Henry James called “a loose baggy monster,” is a sui generis work of modern literature that offered a response and challenge to the European Realist novel and founded a Russian national myth. We will read the novel in translation, alongside its adaptations into opera, film, and Broadway musical.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.304. Hopkins/Memes/Lost Hopes and Dreams. 3 Credits.
Find your lost hopes and dreams, through memes. This class is about why we can come to feel lost or disillusioned in the course of our educational journeys and about how we might begin to find our way again. We’ll use memes as a window into our everyday experiences at Hopkins and think about how digital platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and Tinder might be sources of and/or responses to our modern sense of alienation. The course will be discussion-based and shaped by the interests of those in the class.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.309. The Contemporary Philosophical Novel. 3 Credits.
What can literature offer to philosophical reflection? Can literature address experiences that evade theoretical philosophy? Or, does fictional writing conflict with rigorous philosophical inquiry? The long-standing separation of philosophy and literature begins when Plato bans poetry and tragedy from the ideal city in the Republic. This seminar focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers that challenge the predisposition against literature through different attempts to write the "philosophical novel." In this seminar, we will take seriously the philosophical stakes of literary texts, and investigate how and why literature offers a unique perspective for philosophical reflection. We will read texts by Plato, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Iris Murdoch, and David Foster-Wallace.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.310. Imagining Social Change in TV Series. 3 Credits.
How can the imagined worlds of television help us critically reflect on the social and political realities of modern life? This class will look at TV series that offer different ways for their viewers to consider the question: What are the possibilities and limits for social change in the twenty-first century? Each week, selections from a TV series will be paired with a reading from philosophy, literary theory, media studies, political science, theology, or another related field that responds to similar themes and concerns. Our seminar will be discussion-based, and the TV series we watch will be determined by the interests of those in the class, but may include: Atlanta, Euphoria, The Handmaid’s Tale, Black Mirror, House of Flowers, Dear White People, The Good Place, and BoJack Horseman.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.311. Introduction to Intellectual History. 3 Credits.
This course offers a conceptual and historical introduction to Intellectual History. What makes the “history of ideas” different from the history of other objects? What, if anything, distinguishes the history of ideas from the history of philosophy? What is it exactly that we call “ideas”? In what sense do they have a history? These are examples of the kind of questions addressed in the course.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.312. Imagining Revolution and Utopia. 3 Credits.
What form should revolution take, and what should society look like after the revolution? What would happen to the state, family, home, status of women, human interrelations, and everyday life? These questions consumed radicals in 19th century Russia and Europe, and their answers helped to shape the political culture of the 20th century. This course examines theories of revolution and utopia and responses to them in literature, art and film. Primary case study is Russia and the Soviet Union, with a comparative look at influential European works.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive
AS.300.313. Maintaining Social Order: Elements of Conservative Political Philosophy and its Critics. 3 Credits.
The seminar will discuss (primarily German) political philosophy of a broadly “conservative” orientation in relation to three key periods of social and political upheaval: the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the crisis of parliamentary democracy in the Weimar Republic. Readings from these periods of European history will be approached under the common heading of “conservatism” for their shared preoccupation with how traditional sources of social unity are to be replaced following times of dramatic change and conflict. We will explore why different political crises have always led philosophers to reiterate the fundamental question of what binds political communities together. This preoccupation distinguishes the philosophical currents of conservative thought surveyed in this course from other, more familiar conservatisms with purely reactionary agendas that reassert the superiority of a particular religion, culture, or ethnic group, the rule of elites, or the dismantling of the state in favor of free market forces. Each section on conservative thought will conclude with the most relevant critiques from Leftist political opponents. Readings include Hobbes, Burke, de Maistre, Herder, Hegel, Nietzsche, Schmitt, Kant, Marx, Marcuse.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.315. Philosophical Conceptions of the Infinite. 3 Credits.
What is the infinite? Can we comprehend it? Can we experience it? In this course we will explore various ways in which philosophers in the western tradition have answered questions such as these. In the first half of the semester, we will examine theoretical treatments of the infinite that inform how we understand the fabric of our world, from the ordinary objects around us to more sublime concepts of God, space, time, and mathematics. In the second half, we will turn to arguments in aesthetics and ethics that reveal an interplay between infinity and finitude occurring before our very eyes. Philosophers we will cover include Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Russell, Levinas, and Arendt. Throughout, we will ask such fundamental questions as, what is the starting point of philosophy? what is its methodology? what can it achieve in terms of knowledge? and in terms of practice?
Area: Humanities

AS.300.317. The Russian Novel. 3 Credits.
This course introduces students to the nineteenth century Russian novel and considers its lasting impact on world culture. We will read classic masterpieces of the psychological and philosophical novel, and their experimental forerunners. Short lectures on historical and cultural context and on methods of literary analysis will be combined with intensive group discussion. Novels include Anna Karenina, Crime and Punishment, Eugene Onegin, Dead Souls, and Hero of our Time.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.318. Creating the Jazz Image. 3 Credits.
What is jazz? What do we think of when we hear the term “jazz culture”? Where does it stand and how does it function in American culture and social history? In this course, we will look at ways in which jazz and one of its fundamental elements, improvisation, influence and is influenced by other forms of art. We will look at both at the history of the music and its relation to painting, design, photography, poetry, fiction, dance and film, as well as its impact on forming identities, social structures and political questions. We will discuss the role of jazz within the wider frameworks of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality, as well as its status as an entertainment and art form up until late-60s.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.319. The Modernist Novel: Mann, Woolf, and Joyce. 3 Credits.
In this course, we will survey the major works of three of the greatest, most relentless innovators of the twentieth century – Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce – who explored and exploded narrative techniques for depicting what Woolf called the “luminous halo” of life.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.320. Lover’s Discourse. 3 Credits.
Much of what we know about love and desire we owe to fiction’s ability to evoke these experiences. Consider for example that the publication, in Germany, of The Sorrows of Young Werther inspired young men across Europe to dress and behave just like him. We will study in this course a selection of love stories chosen because they break the mold and question their conventions. Taking a critical distance from these tales of seduction, we will examine not only the manifestations and meanings of love, but also the configurations of gender they inspire and reflect. Indeed, just as nowadays film and television represent, as well as mold, our identities as desiring subject, fictions from the eighteenth-century onwards have shaped our current understanding of gendered subjectivities. The readings for this seminar (all available in English) include: Austen, “Persuasion”; Balzac, “The Girl with the Golden Eyes” and “Sarrasine”; Barthes, “Lover’s Discourse”; Goethe, “The Sorrows of Young Werther”; Mann, “Death in Venice”; Rousseau, excerpts from “Julie or The New Heloise”; Sulzer, “A Perfect Walter”, Winterson, “Written on the Body”.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.321. Rise of the Modern Short Story. 3 Credits.
A comparative tour of examples of short stories from three continents that emerged from earlier narrative forms in the 19th and 20th centuries. Attention will be given to new structural, rhetorical, and thematic concerns including the development of new sub-genres, e.g. fictions of detection, case histories, portraits of the artist, and the adaptation of several stories to newer media [at least 2 of the longer narratives translated to film will be screened]. A detailed syllabus of our readings will be available later in the summer; because there is no anthology that quite fits our needs, all the texts or translations, as well as critical and contextual notes will be supplied in digital forms. Note: there will also be an optional hour for questions & discussion TBA.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.322. Lu Xun And His Times: China’s Long 20th Century And Beyond. 3 Credits.
The “founding father of modern Chinese literature,” Lu Xun (1881-1936) saw himself as a contemporary of writers like Gogol, Ibsen, and Nietzsche in creating his seminal short stories and essays, and likewise, he has been seen by numerous Chinese, Sinophone, and East Asian writers as their contemporary since his lifetime until today. In this course, we will survey Lu Xun’s canonical works and their legacies through a comparative approach. What echoes do Lu Xun’s works have with the European and Russian texts he engaged with? Why did his works manage to mark a “new origin” of Chinese literature? How were his works repeated, adapted, and appropriated by Chinese writers from the Republican period through the Maoist era to the post-socialist present, even during the Covid-19 pandemic? How do we assess his cross-cultural reception? Are his times obsolete now that China is on the rise? Or, have his times come yet? Through our comparative survey, Lu Xun’s works and their afterlives will offer us a window onto China’s long twentieth century and beyond in a transnational context. All materials are provided in English translation.
Area: Humanities
AS.300.323. Shakespeare and Ibsen. 3 Credits.
William Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen are the two most frequently performed playwrights in history, and both have been credited with reinventing drama. Shakespeare for the Elizabethan stage and Ibsen for the modern. In this course we will pair together plays by each author – those that stand in an explicit relation of influence as well as those that share a significant set of concerns – in order to investigate how each takes up and transforms key problems in the literary, political, and philosophical tradition for their own historical moment. Plays to be studied: by Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, The Tempest, A Winter’s Tale; by Ibsen, St. John’s Night, Hedda Gabler, Rosmersholm, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder, When We Dead Awaken.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.324. Cinema of the 1930s: Communist and Capitalist Fantasies. 3 Credits.
Comedy and musical comedy film flourished in the USA during the Great Depression as well as in the USSR during the Stalinist Great Terror. This course will compare films of the era in a variety of genres (musical, epic, Western, drama), examining the intersections between politics and aesthetics as well as the lasting implications of the films themselves in light of theoretical works on film as a medium, ethics and gender.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.328. Contemporary Sinophone Literature and Film. 3 Credits.
A survey of contemporary literature and film from the peripheries of the Chinese-speaking world, with a special focus on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe. We will not only examine literary and filmic works in the contexts of the layered histories and contested politics of these locations, but will also reexamine, in light of those works, critical concepts in literary and cultural studies including, but not limited to, form, ideology, hegemony, identity, history, agency, translation, and (post)colonialism. All readings are in English; all films subtitled in English.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.329. Literature of the Everyday. 3 Credits.
The ordinary, the common, the everyday: why does literary realism consider the experiences of the average individual to be worthy of serious contemplation? In this course, we will read closely a set of novels by Flaubert, Mann, Dickens, Zola, Tolstoy, and Woolf from the period between 1850 and 1950 in which the development of realism reaches its climax. These novels explore the nature of work, family, the body, consciousness, and the changing relation between individual and tradition in modernity. We will situate these novels in their social,historical, and literary contexts, and establish a set of terms for the formal study of the novel as a genre (plot, character, setting, narrative, etc).
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.330. Modern East Asian Literatures Across Boundaries. 3 Credits.
Modern literature in East Asia is as much defined by creation of national boundaries as by their transgressions, negotiations, and reimaginings. This course examines literature originally written in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in light of contemporary understandings of political, social, and cultural boundary demarcation and crossings. How do experiences of border-crossing create and/or alter literary forms? How, in turn, does literature inscribe, displace, and/or dismantle boundaries? Our readings will include, but not limited to, writings by intra- and trans-regional travelers, exiles, migrants, and settlers; stories from and on contested borderlands and islands (e.g. Manchuria, Okinawa, Jeju); and works and translations by bilingual authors. All readings are provided in English translation.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.331. The Authoritarian Image: Russian Cinema from Stalin to Putin. 3 Credits.
Vladimir Putin’s charismatic authority has a deep history in Russian culture. We’ll investigate that history through cinema, which Lenin called “the most important of the arts.” While Soviet cinema often served as immersive propaganda, directors also found ways to question authority and power. Films to be screened range from Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible (1944) to the 2013 documentary Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer. This course will combine study of Russian and Soviet culture from the end of World War II to the present with study of film history, style, and technique.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.332. From Chekhov to Chernobyl: Russian Literature of Environmental Catastrophe. 3 Credits.
Environmental degradation and disaster offer a steady backdrop to the 20th century in Russia and the Soviet Union. While the Soviet regime promised mastery over the environment and Russian culture valorized the harmonization of humans with the natural world, environmental catastrophe proved the folly of those dreams. We will read works by authors who have grappled with this ongoing catastrophe and its implications for relations between human beings and the world. Texts range from short stories and novellas to modernist experimental fiction and documentary prose. We will also engage with materials in special collections and screen selected films. Authors include: Chekhov, Bulgakov, Platonov, Solzhenitsyn, Rasputin,Petrushevskaya, and the Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexieivich.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive
AS.300.334. Love and its maladies. 3 Credits.
Much of what we know about love and desire we owe to fiction's ability to evoke these experiences. Consider for example that the publication, in Germany, of The Sorrows of Young Werther inspired young men across Europe to dress and behave just like this lover. Just as nowadays film and television represent, as well as mold our conceptions of love, love-stories from the eighteenth-century onwards have given shape to gendered subjectivities in ways that still matter now. As, intriguingly, illness is a recurrent theme in many modern love stories, we will be prompted to decipher signs and symptoms in the bodies of mind of our protagonists. Why is it that in Western cultures, passion is tightly interwoven with a landscape of pain, suffering, and disease? In studying texts that represent major aspects of a romantic sensibility, we are indeed invited to trace the steps of a history of the body increasingly defined by gender and by medical knowledge. The readings for this class (all available in English) include: Austen, Persuasion; Balzac, The Unknown Masterpiece; Barthes, Lover’s Discourse; Goethe; The Sorrows of Young Werther; Mann, Death in Venice; Winterson, Written on the Body.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.336. Forms of Moral Community: The Contemporary World Novel. 3 Credits.
Literary and philosophical imaginations of moral community in the post-WWII period. Texts include: Coetzee, Disgrace; McEwan, Atonement; Achebe,Things Fall Apart; Ishiguro, An Artist of the Floating World; Roy, The God of Small Things; Lessing, The Grass is Singing; Mistry, A Fine Balance; Morrison, Beloved; and essays by Levi, Strawson, Adorno, Murdoch, and Beauvoir on the deep uncertainty over moral community after the crisis of World War II. Close attention to novelistic style and narrative will inform our study of the philosophical questions that animate these works. What does it mean to acknowledge another person's humanity? Who are the members of a moral community? Why do we hold one another responsible for our actions? How do fundamental moral emotions such as contempt, humiliation, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, and regret reveal the limits of a moral community?
Area: Humanities

AS.300.337. The Tragic Tradition. 3 Credits.
This course offers a broad survey of tragic drama in the Western tradition, from its origins in ancient Greece to the twentieth century. In weekly lectures and discussion sections, we will study the specific literary features and historical contexts of a range of different works, and trace the continuities and transformations that shape them into a unified tradition. Key questions and themes throughout the semester will include what counts as tragic, the tragedy of social and political conflict, the bearing of tragedy on the meaning and value of life, the antagonistic relation between world and humans, the promises and dangers of tragedy for contemporary culture. Authors to be studied: Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekov, Brecht, Pirandello, and Beckett.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.339. Introduction to Comparative Literature. 3 Credits.
This course offers an introduction to the history, theory, and praxis of comparative literature. We will read texts from some of the founding figures of the discipline and look at the most recent debates in the field, including translation studies, literary theory, and world literature, among others. Particular attention will be given to the methodologies and problems of studying literatures in different linguistic traditions and the relation between literature and other areas of thought and culture, such as philosophy, art history, and psychoanalysis. Case studies in comparative approaches to literature will provide concrete examples to our discussions.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.340. Literature and Film of Unintended Consequences. 3 Credits.
Sometimes brilliant ideas and plans don't work as anticipated, or go very badly—for example, empowering the “invisible hand” of the market, building a huge hydroelectric dam, or plotting a double murder by two strangers. This course explores these and other fascinating literary instances of unintended consequences—the unanticipated results of actions that people planned ending up in a very different way. Reading or watching mainly twentieth-century American literature and movies, as well as some essays and poetry, we will follow a range of different creators as they think about unplanned effects and why they matter. What can these works tell us about how we intend, act, or make meaning at the limits of our control? Texts will include films by Charlie Chaplin, Billy Wilder, and Alfred Hitchcock, poetry or fiction by Wallace Stevens, Patricia Highsmith, and Zadie Smith.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.341. Transwar Japanese and Japanophone Literatures. 3 Credits.
A survey of Japanese and Japanese-language literatures produced in Japan and its (former)colonies during the “transwar” period, or the several years before and after the end of WWII. This periodization enables us to take into account the shifting boundaries, sovereignties, and identities amid the intensification of Japanese imperialism and in the aftermath of its eventual demise. We aim to pay particular attention to voices marginalized in this political watershed, such as those of Japanese-language writers from colonial Korea and Taiwan, intra-imperial migrants, and radical critics of Japan’s “postwar” regime. Underlying our investigation is the question of whether literature can be an agent of justice when politics fails to deliver it. We will introduce secondary readings by Adorno, Arendt, Levinas, Derrida, and Scarry, among others, to help us interrogate this question. All readings are in English.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.343. The Cinema of Revolution. 3 Credits.
This course examines global political revolutions through cinema and the ways in which cinema helped to make political revolutions. Early cinema was intimately intertwined with the Russian revolution, and Russian revolutionary cinema had a profound impact on the ways in which media was used for revolutionary purposes through the 20th century and around the world. Students will be introduced to films from a number of different countries, and the history and context of their production and reception. They will also learn methods of film analysis and produce their own video essay.
Area: Humanities
AS.300.344. Literature and the World. 3 Credits.
This course interrogates how modern literature not simply reflects the
world but functions as world-making power. What is a world? How
do we conceive of, live in, and change it? What if there are multiple
worlds? How are literature and other aesthetic forms crucial to tackling
these questions? We will survey literary and philosophical texts in a
comparative setting, engaging examples from both Europe and East Asia.
All readings are in English. Open to graduate students.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.345. Narrative Imagination in Philosophy and Literature. 3 Credits.
We are constantly immersed in narratives or, as Roland Barthes said,
narrative “is simply there like life itself. . . international, transhistorical,
transcultural.” As a bridge between experience and language, narrative
informs the way we understand history, gender, politics, emotion,
cognition and much more. Through reading a series of philosophical
and literary texts, this course will provide a systematic understanding of
how narratives are composed, how they are experienced, and eventually,
how they evolve. The first part of this course will focus on building a
foundation in the formal study of narrative, focusing on elements such
as genre, plot, character, narrator and reader. We will start with a brief
consideration of ancient approaches to literary narrative in Aristotle’s
Poetics and Plato’s Republic. From there, we will engage with a wide
range of readings in narrative theory. The second part of the course will
focus on critical approaches to narrative, such as gender and narrative,
social and political critique of narrative, narratives in the age of artificial
intelligence, and conclude with the evolving concept of narrative in the
Anthropocene.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.348. Modern Drama. 3 Credits.
This course offers a survey of modern drama, from the mid nineteenth
century to the present. We will sample a broad range of dramatic styles
and movements in order to uncover the variety of ways theatre has made
sense of the human experience over the past two hundred years.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.349. Capitalism and Tragedy: from the 18th Century to Climate
Change. 3 Credits.
In contemporary discussions of climate change, it is an increasingly
prevalent view that capitalism will lead to the destruction of civilization
as we know it. The notion that capitalism is hostile to what makes human
life worth living, however, is one that stretches back at least to the early
eighteenth century. In this class, we will examine key moments in the
history of this idea in works of literature, philosophy, and politics, from
the birth of bourgeois tragedy in the 1720s, through topics such as
imperialism and economic exploitation, to the prospects of our ecological
future today. Authors to be studied: George Lillo, Balzac, Dickens, Marx
and Engels, Ibsen, Weber, Brecht, Arthur Miller, Steinbeck, Pope Francis,
and contemporary fiction, politics and philosophy on climate change.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.353. Present Mirth: Stages of Comedy. 3 Credits.
A comparative survey of presentational comedies from Aristophanes
to Beckett on stage and screen, with some attention to to to the vexed
question of theories of comedy [no laughing matter].
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.366. Russian Avant-Garde Cinema. 3 Credits.
Russian cinema was born out of the intense artistic experimentation
of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde and developed in a climate of dramatic
political and cultural change in the twenties and thirties. While subject
to draconian censorship in the Soviet period, it nonetheless engaged in
active dialogue with the film industries of Western Europe and America
and had a lasting impact on world cinema. This course examines the
extraordinary flourishing of avant-garde cinema in the Soviet Union in
the 1920s and 30s including films by Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin, and
Dovzhenko, their theoretical writings, and their far-reaching influence on
film and film theory. All readings are in English, films subtitled in English.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.367. Seeing Like a Woman. 3 Credits.
What does it mean to “see,” think, desire, feel, speak, act, or write “like a
woman”? Gendered notions of seeing have had an impact on politics and
society long before the #metoo movement and far beyond debates about
women’s rights in isolation. This seminar examines the issues of female
desire, subjectivity, spectatorship and performance in fiction, poetry,
memor and film from a variety of cultures and theoretical perspectives.
This is not a course on “the image of the woman” in literature, film or
politics, but a course in which we examine the ways in which both male
and female theorists, novelists, poets, and filmmakers have imagined how
women “see,” feel, think and behave.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.399. Cinema and Philosophy. 3 Credits.
What do films and philosophy have in common? Do films express,
with their own means, philosophical problems that are relevant to our
experience of ourselves and the world we live in? This term we will study
such issues with a particular focus on questions of justice, truth, revenge,
forgiveness, hope, hate, and fear.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.402. What is a Person? Humans, Corporations, Robots, Trees. 3
Credits.
Knowing who or what counts as a person seems straightforward, until
we consider the many kinds of creatures, objects, and artificial beings
that have been granted—or demanded or denied—that status. This
course explores recent debates on being a person in culture, law, and
philosophy. Questions examined will include: Should trees have standing?
Can corporations have religious beliefs? Could a robot sign a contract?
Materials examined will be wide-ranging, including essays, philosophy,
novels, science fiction, television, film. No special background is required.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.410. China in Imagination. 3 Credits.
What is China? This question has gained new relevance amid the nation’s
recent rise as a global power. We survey how China was imagined,
represented, and conceptualized in literature, film, and philosophical
writings from mainland China, overseas Chinese communities, East
Asia, and the West from the late nineteenth century to the present.
Through exploring this complex history, we aim to understand China and
the contemporary world in a diversified, historically self-reflective way.
Topics of discussion include, but not limited to, representation, identity,
form, allegory, exile, diaspora, modernism, translation, world history, and
universality. All readings are in English; all films subtitled in English.
Area: Humanities
AS.300.418. The Modernist Novel: James, Woolf, and Joyce. 3 Credits.
In this course, we will survey the major works of three of the greatest, most relentless innovators of the twentieth century – Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce – who explored and exploded narrative techniques for depicting what Woolf called the “luminous halo” of life.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.421. Introduction to Concepts and Problems of Modern Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Critical Theory. 3 Credits.
This seminar is addressed to first and second year graduate students as well as to advanced undergraduates. It aims at providing a survey of some fundamental concepts and problems that shape modern and contemporary debates in philosophy, literary studies, and the humanities at large. This term we will study in particular notions of existence, language, truth, power, otherness, race, gender, and reality.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.425. Modernities and Comparison. 3 Credits.
Comparative survey of literary modernities in Europe and East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea). We will study works of modern literature as well as critical and philosophical texts from these civilizations in each other’s light. We will, as a working hypothesis, begin our examination by bracketing off the conventional center-periphery (Europe-Asia) scheme and considering literary modernities to be singular and contested, yet mutually resonating attempts at reconstruction, restoration, and revolution vis-a-vis the deconstructive forces of capitalist modernity. Ultimately, we will interrogate how we should understand literary modernities in the plural, as they emerged in distant civilizations. Topics of discussion include decadence, repetition, the trope of the human, ideology, the sublime, ritual, and translation. Readings in Hegel, Nietzsche, Mann, Benjamin, Baudelaire, Proust, Breton, Soseki, Kobayashi, Wang Guowei, Lu Xun, and Yi Kwangsu. All readings are in English.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.437. Literature and Philosophy of the Everyday. 3 Credits.
The ordinary, the common, the everyday: why does literary realism consider the experiences of the average individual to be worthy of serious contemplation? In this course, we will read closely a set of novels by Flaubert, Mann, Dickens, Eliot, Zola, Tolstoy, and Woolf from the period between 1850 and 1950 in which the development of realism reaches its climax. These novels transform the conventions for the representation of lives of lower and middle class subjects, revealing such lives as capable of prompting reflection upon deep and serious questions of human existence. Theoretical and philosophical texts on the everyday by Auerbach, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, Lefebvre, Certeau, and Wittgenstein will accompany our discussions.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.439. Stories of hysteria. 3 Credits.
Many are the stories that recount episodes of hysteria, and we owe them not only to medicine. To the modern observer, they are a puzzle, involving strange beliefs about wandering wombs, demonic possession, and female virtue (or lack thereof). Closer to our time, contemporary media, as well as accounts in the social and clinical sciences have evoked cases of “mass hysteria” in America and across the globe. Marriage, it was thought for a long time, might be the best cure, which might be the reason case-studies of this illness can be as intriguing and troubling as novels. Against a backdrop of medical and historical materials, we will examine a selection of stories, from the 17th century onward, that evoke aspects of hysteria. They serve as our case-studies and as prompts to study an illness born at the convergence of histories and myths, of medical science, and of cultural and gender assumptions. Among the notions we will explore: The birth of psychoanalysis, trauma and PTSD, the concept of repression, the visual aspects of an illness and its spread in the arts, including cinema.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.501. Independent Study. 3 Credits.
Prerequisite(s): You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration &gt; Online Forms.

AS.300.508. Honors Seminar. 3 Credits.
The Honors Seminar is a mandatory component of the Honors Program in Humanities, which offers qualified undergraduates the possibility of pursuing an independent research project in their Junior and Senior years in any humanistic discipline or combination of disciplines: intellectual history, comparative literature, philosophy, critical theory, psychoanalysis, religion, film, etc., as well as points of intersection between the arts and the sciences. Sophomores who plan to study abroad in their Junior year should also consider applying to the Program. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the Seminar will focus on a close reading of Homer’s Odyssey and associated texts.
Prerequisite(s): You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration &gt; Online Forms.
Writing Intensive

AS.300.511. Independent Study. 3 Credits.
Independent study, no structured hours
Prerequisite(s): You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration &gt; Online Forms.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.601. How to Read Proust?.
Given the difficulty of his prose, closely and patiently would seem the best way to read Proust, but who has time – time to read a book that, ironically, begins with “Longtemps” and ends with “le temps”? This course will offer for critical examination surgically selected passages of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu as a training ground for the (lost?) art of close reading and as entry points into wide-ranging aspects of literary criticism and theory. Open to advanced undergraduates with permission of the instructor. Taught in English. Knowledge of French is desirable, but not required.
Area: Humanities
AS.300.608. The Physics and Metaphysics of Handwriting.
When word processing machines that can be held in the palm of a hand, why use pen and paper? Handwriting — and its juxtaposition against digital forms of communication — offers a unique approach to studying human interactions and the ways in which meaning, truth, intimacy, and agency are shaped by our changing technologies. At a time of exponential growth in machine writing, a study of this older form of communication enables a comparative approach that, perhaps surprisingly, opens up what are contemporary political questions. Centered on a few case-studies involving works by Sand, Chopin, Manet, Giacometti, Mallarmé, and Proust, this course takes a backward glance at a culture of written expression at a great remove from our word processing world and yet explicitly vested in an aesthetics of free expression. This modern graphological culture saw in the tracings of the hand, the uniquely personal marks of an intertwining of mind, body, and of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty and recent word on embodiment will provide us with critical tools for our investigations into the “physics” of this activity, as well the methods of textual criticism and the new domain of creativity studies. The “metaphysics” of handwriting call, meanwhile, for a return to Heidegger, to Derrida and other major contemporary theorists of writing. They will help us see how hand and digital writing emerge as fundamentally different modes of human expression — philosophically and politically. Knowledge of French is not required for this course.
Undergraduates accepted with the permission of the professor.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.609. Bildungsroman, Vollendungsroman: Novels of Youth and Old Age.
This seminar explores the Vollendungsroman, or novel of age, as a twentieth- and twenty-first-century counterpart to the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bildungsroman that Moretti and others view as the symbolic form of modernity. We will examine how Vollendungsromane broach the relation between subjectivity and “age” (not only in the sense of individual maturity, but also in the sense of historical epoch); how they bring into question traditional conceptions of growth, authority, interiority, body-soul, authenticity, and reconciliation; how they represent alternatives to the modes of moral response and being valorized in the Bildungsroman; and how, in and through their very form, they meditate upon the philosophical significance of the classic phase of the novel. Selected novels by Goethe, Austen, Brontë, Joyce, Woolf, Coetzee, Ishiguro, and McEwan. Open to qualified undergraduates.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.614. The End of Art.
In this course we will examine Hegel's seminal claim that art has come to an end in the modern world. In addition to Hegel's original argument, readings will include important elaborations of the idea by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Adorno. In a final section of the course, we will relate these texts to reflections on the function and prospects of art under the unprecedented condition of the Anthropocene.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.618. What is a Person? Humans, Corporations, Robots, Trees..
Knowing who or what counts as a person seems straightforward, until we consider the many kinds of creatures, objects, and artificial beings that have been granted—or demanded or denied—that status. This course explores recent debates on being a person in culture, law, and philosophy. Questions examined will include: Should trees have standing? Can corporations have religious beliefs? Could a robot sign a contract?
Materials examined will be wide-ranging, including essays, philosophy, novels, science fiction, television, film. No special background is required.
Area: Humanities
Writing Intensive

AS.300.620. Cosmopolitanism: Conflicted Legacies, Potential Futures.
In its modern version cosmopolitanism is a defining aspect of Enlightenment that bespeaks its emancipatory aspirations as well as the shortcomings of its Eurocentric and gendered presuppositions. In our time of resurgence of violent nationalism and mass refugees crises, this seminar aims at reassessing the conflicted legacies of cosmopolitanism and its critical value for the present. Authors studied include: Montaigne, Kant, Marx, Derrida, Lévinas, Kwame A. Appiah, Seyla Benhabib, and others.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.621. Immersive Poetics and Permeable Screens.
Victor Shklovsky claimed that the art exists “to return sensation to life, to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony.” This seminar examines various ways of understanding Shklovsky’s concept of ostranenie (“enstrangement”) across media (literature, art, cinema, and beyond) and in comparative perspective, considering the problematics of politics, philosophy, and aesthetic form. Students will be encouraged to present on texts in their own area of expertise over the course of the term.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.622. The Concept of World: From Descartes to the Apocalypse.
In this course we will examine the idea of the world as it operates in a range of different literary, philosophical, and theoretical contexts. Beginning with the birth of the modern world in texts like Camões’s “The Lusiads,” Descartes’s “Le Monde,” and More’s “Utopia,” we will pursue its evolution through Baumgarten’s invention of aesthetics, Kant’s critique of dialectical reason, Husserl’s phenomenology, and Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, to the rise of world literature and the study of indigenous cosmologies in contemporary anthropology. We conclude with reflections on the end of our world in the Anthropocene and its implication for the humanistic disciplines. This course serves as the proseminar in methods and theory for graduate students in Comparative Thought and Literature but is open to students in all departments.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.624. Logics of Recognition.
Since the publication of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, the struggle of consciousness for recognition has played an important role in moral and political philosophy. This seminar aims at studying Hegel’s account of subjectivity and its antagonistic encounter with the other as well as the responses and critiques it has elicited in contemporary philosophy. Readings include Foucault, Butler, Derrida, Lévinas, Cavell, Honneth and others.
Area: Humanities

AS.300.625. Russian Literary and Critical Theory.
Close reading of major authors from the Russian literary theoretical and critical tradition including Bakhtin, Eikhenbaum, Jakobson, Lotman, Shklovsky and Tynianov. Student will present primary sources or case studies from their own fields and research.
Area: Humanities

This seminar is addressed to first and second year graduate students as well as to advanced undergraduates. It aims at providing a survey of some fundamental concepts and problems that shape modern and contemporary debates in philosophy, literary studies, and the humanities at large. This term we will study in particular notions of existence, language, truth, power, otherness, race, gender, and reality.
AS.300.629. Theory, Now and Then: Autonomy, Form, Critique.  
This course explores recent developments and disputes in critical  
theory in relation to their longer philosophical genealogies. The three  
topics—form, autonomy, and critique—have been the subject of much  
recent debate, contention, and new analysis, yet each was also a source  
of critical and philosophical interest in years past. Our aim will be to  
make sense of today’s interventions in conversation with earlier theory.  
“Historical” theory writing will include Adorno, Lukács, Cavell, and  
Jameson; contemporary theory will include Nicholas Brown, Rita Felski,  
Caroline Levine, Mark McGurl, and Toril Moi.  
Area: Humanities

AS.300.638. Happy and Unhappy Words: Austin, Wittgenstein, and  
Cavell.  
This seminar studies how words help shaping the world we inhabit and  
how the power and limits of language affect the possibility of living in a  
shared world in the works of Austin, Wittgenstein, Cavell and others.  
Area: Humanities  
Writing Intensive

AS.300.639. Literature and Philosophy of the Everyday.  
The ordinary, the common, the everyday: why does literary realism  
consider the experiences of the average individual to be worthy of serious  
contemplation? In this course, we will read closely a set of novels by  
Flaubert, Mann, Dickens, Eliot, Zola, Tolstoy, and Woolf from the period  
between 1850 and 1950 in which the development of realism reaches it  
climax. These novels transform the conventions for the representation  
of lives of lower and middle class subjects, revealing such lives as  
capable of prompting reflection upon deep and serious questions of  
human existence. Theoretical and philosophical texts on the everyday by  
Auerbach, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, Lefebvre, Certeau, and  
Wittgenstein will accompany our discussions.  

AS.300.647. Comparative Methods and Theory: Formalism and  
Materialism.  
This pro-seminar provides a brief overview and map of the theoretical  
and philosophical positions in the major debate, still ongoing, between  
formalism and materialism. Its aim is both theoretical and historical:  
to help graduate students understand the range and depth of these  
positions as well as their development over time, continuing to this  
day. We will study fundamental philosophical works (Kant, Hegel,  
Marx, de Beauvoir), classic theoretical texts (Propp, Lévi-Strauss,  
Foucault, Derrida), and contemporary variations on these debates (Fish,  
McGurl, Moi, Allen), to name a few. The course fulfills the pro-seminar  
requirements in comparative methods and theory for CTL but is open to  
all graduate students.  
Area: Humanities

AS.300.666. Russian Avant-Garde Cinema.  
Russian cinema was born out of the intense artistic experimentation  
of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde and developed in a climate of dramatic  
political and cultural change in the twenties and thirties. While subject  
to draconian censorship in the Soviet period, it nonetheless engaged in  
active dialogue with the film industries of Western Europe and America  
and had a lasting impact on world cinema. This course examines the  
extraordinary flourishing of avant-garde cinema in the Soviet Union in  
the 1920s and 30s including films by Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin, and  
Dovzhenko, their theoretical writings, and their far-reaching influence on  
film and film theory. All readings in English, films subtitled in English.  
Area: Humanities  
Writing Intensive

AS.300.800. Independent Study.

AS.300.801. Ind Stdy-Field Exams.