

2015-2016 First Year Preceptorial Courses

FALL 2015 FYP COURSES

1. Remembering War: Myth, Monument and Media (Prof. Sara Watkins)

At one point in Homer's legendary tale of fantasy and adventure, the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is overwhelmed with emotion as he listens to the story of the sack of Troy. As he recalls the conflict, Odysseus's "heart melts and tears wet his cheeks," and the poet likens the hero to a widow whose husband has been killed in battle. As Odysseus's example shows, how we choose to remember war can, and has had, a powerful effect on human society from the ancient world to modern times. In this section of the Preceptorial, we will examine how humans have struggled to understand, remember, and learn from war. Beginning with the realm of myth itself, we will study the legend of the Trojan War and then expand the scope of our inquiry to a variety of historical conflicts, including the American civil war and Vietnam. Our evidence will range from literary narratives and physical monuments to photographs and films. Throughout the term, we discuss how war has been memorialized, by whom, and to whose benefit; the politics involved in crafting our collective memory of war; and whether, as the journalist and war correspondent Chris Hedges has argued, war is a "force that gives us meaning."

2. Hegemonies: From Gramsci to Chomsky (Prof. Robert Hislope)

This class is about how and why citizens consent to conformity, control, and sometimes, coercion. In other words, how and why does *hegemony* happen? Hegemony describes a situation in which free people, with rational means at their disposal, embrace social conformity, support policies contrary to their interests, and consent to their own repression. The autonomy (free will) they exercise as citizens thus gives way to heteronomy (subjection to the will of others). We will examine multiple, interdisciplinary examples of this problem that cover the fields of domestic and comparative politics, popular culture and the media, music, personal style (clothing, hair, fashion), and international relations.

3. Media Accuracy, Credibility, Fairness and Reliability (Prof. Mohammad Mafi)

According to a published report by The American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Seventy-eight percent of U.S. adults believe there's bias in the news media." In order to carry out our social responsibilities, we ought to be able to think critically and evaluate the information we get through the media: radio, TV, Internet, movies, books, newspapers, and magazines.

4. Technology: Bane, Boon, or Both? (Prof. Bradford Bruno)

Does technology free us from our base needs so we can pursue our higher callings? Or does it dehumanize us, reduce us into "cogs in the machine," and isolate us? What is technology likely to do for (or to) us next? How can varied perspectives and habits of thought contribute to our understanding of these questions? We will discuss works of fiction written at different stages of technological development (e.g., H. G. Wells, Kurt Vonnegut, and George Saunders). We will also explore several disciplinary perspectives, recognizing that social scientists have come to grips with these questions as society has changed, and that biologists and psychologists have worked to identify constant features of our relationship to technology.

5. Art and Ethics (Prof. Katherine Tullmann)

Every art form, from film to photography, has the power to move us. Because of this, art is the perfect medium for promoting moral values and raising awareness about immoral issues. This course explores the relationship between art and ethics. We will consider such questions as: what is the relationship between the quality of art and its portrayal of morality? Can artworks teach us about how to be better people? Is it ok for us to feel sympathy for fictional "devils," such as Walter White or Dexter Morgan? Students will be asked to explain their own examples of artworks that raise ethical issues and watch morally significant films and TV shows. We will read both historical and contemporary work by artists, art theorists, and philosophers of art on the topic of morality, and write about topics like the connection between art and religion, portrayals of race and violence in film, and the ethical implications of pornography.

6. Being Muslim (Prof. Arsalan Khan)

This class examines Islam as a way of life. Islam, like the other Abrahamic faiths, exists in key texts like the Qur'an and the hadiths (reported words and deeds of the prophet Mohammed). But Islam also exists as a set of practices that share some similarities in different areas of the world but also differ across cultures. This class provides an ethnographic perspective on Islam and Muslim life. We will proceed on the premise that Islam is a discursive tradition with some internal coherence, a tradition that comes together around a set of interrelated debates. These debates include the legitimacy of saints and other religious intermediaries between an individual and God, the importance of family and genealogy in a person's identity, the meaning and form of ritual, the significance of Islamic law, and the value placed on ethnic, national and Islamic community. In this class, we look at how these debates manifest in various ethnographic settings leading to very different ways of being Muslim in different areas of the world, informed by the same textual tradition. The goal of the class is to move crass generalizations that characterize discourse about Islam and Muslims in a post-9/11 world by showing the rich variety in Muslim ways of life.

7. Living Through Troubling Times (Prof. Jeannette Sargent)

We'll take a close look at how people deal with the big and little disasters of life by examining works of literature from as far back as ancient China (Tao Te Ching) to the futuristic novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Winnie the Pooh turns out to be a model Taoist who lets his life be guided by the Tao Te Ching, while Atwood gives us a glimpse of the future we may be creating for ourselves as we try to figure out how much we want technology and marketing to control our lives. Rabbi Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* asks us to consider why people believe in divine intervention in human affairs, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* gives us entertaining insight into how people dealt with the Black Death in Florence in the fourteenth century. The short stories of Raymond Carver show how easy it is to be overwhelmed by in the modern world and the dangers of isolation, while the contemporary David Sedaris offers humorous takes on serious problems like death and political correctness.

8. What Is the Avant-Garde? (Prof. Janelle Troxell)

Perhaps the most famous piece of avant-garde art is Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, which was just a regular urinal displayed as art. This intentional transgression of the "normal" boundaries of art, literature, and film is at the heart of the avant-garde. But what exactly are these boundaries, how do they get established and what does it mean to transgress them? Over the course of the semester, we will explore the transnational, interdisciplinary aims of the avant-garde, focusing on the avant-garde's rhetoric of shock, its pervasive DIY ethos, and its critical stance towards the culture industry.

9. Human/Nature (Prof. Andrew Burkett)

The categories of "human," "nature," and "human nature" are, it is safe to say, extremely complex and interrelated. In this seminar, we will investigate various representations (literary, scientific, theoretical, religious, artistic) of the natural world, on the one hand, and on the "nature" of what it means to be a human being, on the other. While the natural world – the world "out there" – will be continuously set in contrast to the nature of humanity, we will also certainly be careful to explore in our readings and discussions the ways in which these ostensible opposites intersect and overlap. In effect, we will examine the ways that human nature and the natural world are always already deeply interconnected categories.

In this class you will grapple with these and other related issues both in class discussion and in your writing (and revising) of course papers. Students will submit four (4-5 page) papers throughout the course of the term. Each of these four paper projects asks that you examine a particular critical, theoretical, or historical controversy regarding or in relation to at least one of the texts at hand from course readings. These texts will provide the impetus for your production of a written response to each controversy. One of the controversies involves disagreements about the ways we define the relationship between humans and what may be called "non-humans" (e.g., "androids," "animals," or "monsters"). Another involves a controversy about the ways in which human beings interact with the natural world and how humans both shape and are shaped by nature. A third set of texts centers on disagreements about how human beings should properly relate to urban and other human-built environments. And a final coupling of readings involves the margins or limits to which we may possibly expand the category of "human nature."

Class discussions will focus on and rehearse the disagreements that have emerged in both academic and public discourses in an effort to help you to become supremely familiar with the issues and claims that you'll need to wrestle with as you draft and revise your arguments on these subjects. Drafts of course papers will go through a series of

revisions. In addition, short writings will be assigned and collected. Finally, class attendance and participation will be crucial to the determination of final grades for this course.

10. Dangerous Liaisons (Prof. Charles Batson)

In this course, we will look closely at several of the troubling, if fascinating, creations that present what have been called "dangerous liaisons." Some of the world's most striking and provocative explorations of such themes come from writers, directors, and artists in France and other French-speaking cultures, whose work we will examine through their English translation. From the highly celebrated scandalous novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* to the still-shocking short stories of the strip-tease-artist-turned-writer Colette, these works put into play questions of power, appearance, gender, control, and agency that call for our attention. In our discussions, we will examine notions of what is dangerous and what composes a liaison as we seek to understand what these artists tell us about desires that mark and make particular relationships. What might make the dangerous sexy and/or attractive, for example? Are all dangerous liaisons necessarily sexual or romantic ones? Our readings and viewings, including a close look at the recent award-winning Québécois film *Mommy*, should guide us to expanded notions of such categories and impulses.

11. Religion Is Natural, Science Is Not (Prof. Kirk Wegter-McNelly)

What does it mean to think like a human? Millions of years of evolutionary pressure have shaped our brains for the basic and nontrivial task of survival, but as a species we seem equipped for so much more. Where did this extra computing power come from, and how do we use it? How should we use it? Both the religious and the scientific dimensions of human life benefit from the remarkable cognitive surplus we carry around inside our heads, but religion is the more natural, stable beneficiary. Science is precarious, counter-intuitive endeavor that poses no threat to the continued existence of religion. At least, this is the argument developed by Robert McCauley in his recent book, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford University: 2011). Students in this course will undertake a close reading of McCauley's book and investigate the debate it has generated. We will conclude our explorations by considering the relevance of McCauley's argument to the current debates within higher education over the relative value of the humanities and the sciences.

12. Science, Morality, and Meaning (Prof. Chalmers Clark)

In this course we will look first at the genesis of moral philosophy and natural science (natural philosophy) as they emerged in ancient Greece. The first Western philosophers were concerned with the origins of things and they speculated about how the world in all its variety came into being. In the 500s BCE, a thinker named Thales is generally given the nod as the first Western philosopher. He speculated that the origin of all things was "water." But how did it go from here? How did we get from such humble beginnings to the dramatic advent of atomic theory?

While such naturalistic speculations were evolving, another Greek named Socrates emerged on the scene. Socrates spurned considerations of the natural world and focused on the inner moral world. The world of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. As Cicero would put it centuries later, "It was Socrates who brought philosophy down from the sky." These were brilliant beginnings. Science and moral theory were thriving and firmly in place.

Yet beneath the surface lurked the seeds of deep human conflict. The scientific world picture that came about threatened to make morals, values, and what matters in our lives part and parcel of the unfolding scheme of scientific cause and effect. Bertrand Russell once put it this way: "Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief... That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms."

It certainly *seems* that we have a distinct freedom and dignity to make moral choices; But do we really? If we take the scientific world picture described by Russell as valid, would that imply that our values, our sense of human dignity and freedom of the will, are finally false and illusory assumptions? Are such matters merely a special case of the deterministic cause and effect scheme that natural science has presented to us?

These topics will be discussed and argued both pro and con in this course. Some basic logic too will part of our efforts to analyze and articulate the impact that science has had on our view of nature, human nature, and the human condition.

13. College and Community (Prof. Ellen Foster)

Think about your four years at Union College. You will, of course, be a member of an “academic community” and a “campus community.” You may be involved with a number of other campus-centered “communities” as well—a Minerva House, athletic team, debate club, dance ensemble, fraternity or sorority, service organization... the list goes on. Union College is also part of the broader Schenectady community.

What do we mean by a community? What are the rights and responsibilities of being part of a community? What happens when the demands of different communities conflict? This course will be divided into two parts. In the first part, we’ll explore what it means to be part of an academic community and a campus community. In the second part of the course, we’ll examine the “town-gown” relationship, with a particular focus on the relationship between Union College and the city of Schenectady.

14. Poetry, Vision, and Social Impact (Prof. Erika Nelson)

W.H. Auden wrote at the dawn of World War II that “poetry makes nothing happen,” while Percy Bysshe Shelley asserted that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Poetry has always pushed against traditional norms and social boundaries, but can it affect meaningful change in society? This course sets out to explore this question, as well as many others in order to better understand the connections between poetry, artistic vision, creative expression, and social change. We will examine the role, if any, poetic vision has in our modern world and contemporary society, which is most often characterized as being fractured and fragmented. Our own isolation and estrangement from nature, from society and from each other often leaves us feeling powerless to affect change. We distance ourselves further from life by objectifying and thus reducing everything, even people, to numbers and things: victims of war are presented as statistics, and we are numbed to individual realities of unspeakable suffering and grief. We’d rather text than talk. Yet it is believed that when the spirit of poetry lives within us, objects no longer appear merely as things. Through the eyes of a poet, one can rediscover a sense of our humanity and awaken to a shared responsibility in the goings-on in our world.

15. The Rules of Madness (Prof. Patrick Singy)

You often feel sad – do you suffer from depression? You are obsessed with not eating too much – are you anorexic? You cannot concentrate – do you suffer from ADHD? In the last two centuries, moral flaws, existential difficulties, and idiosyncratic traits have regularly been reinterpreted as psychiatric diseases. But are these diseases real, and in what sense of “real”? Have they been discovered or invented? And how do we draw the line between the normal and the pathological? History shows that this line has been constantly redrawn under the influence of broad cultural changes, business decisions, or personal interests. After a brief general introduction on the history of psychiatry, from Philippe Pinel in the early nineteenth century to the recent DSM-5, this course will focus on a select number of psychiatric diseases and debate the proposition that they are historically constructed.

16. Love in the Japanese Imaginary (Prof. Kristina Vassil)

Romantic, platonic, courtly, unrequited, obsessive, triangulated, twisted... These are among the kinds of love that we will explore in the context of the Japanese imaginary. Working through a diversity of representations of love in some of Japan’s best-known works of literature and film, we will broaden our knowledge of Japanese society and culture through topics such as traditional courtly love and aesthetics, samurai legacy and ethos, encounters with the West and rapid modernization, wartime activity and postwar recovery, and transnational media cultures. Specific texts/films to be covered include classics such as Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji* and the warrior epic *The Tale of the Heike*, as well as Yamada Yiji’s award-winning samurai drama *Twilight Samurai* and Miyazaki Hayao’s *Spirited Away*. In addition to learning about Japanese society and culture, we will also develop and hone our skills as learners—becoming sharper readers, more incisive questioners, better discussants, and more informed interpreters of materials about Japan and in the humanities in general.

17. Do We Control Technology or Does Technology Control Us? (Prof. Douglass Klein)

The theme of this section of First-Year Preceptorial is the relationship between humans and technology. William Wulf, past President of the National Academy of Engineering, has asked, “What is it that identifies humans?” and offered the answer, “The use of tools. For that reason, perhaps engineering is the most human of studies.” Humans make tools and humans use tools, but do humans control tools? That is the question we will address. This course will examine the relationship between humans and technology through film, literature, history, as well as the work of contemporary scientists, engineers, and futurists.

WINTER 2016 FYP COURSES

1. What We Know... or Think We Know: The Marketplace of Ideas (Prof. Denis Brennan)

The vast networks (traditional and electronic) which provide news, intelligence, perspective, and gossip enlighten our lives, and we believe that what we know (or think we know) provides a critical foundation for how we live. Information drives society today unlike ever before and the free exchange of information, uncensored expression of beliefs, and open competition between perspectives (i.e., the “marketplace of ideas”) is essential for an energetic democracy like the United States. Today, however, the “marketplace of ideas” is endangered by the variety of perspective, the speed of information exchange, the drive to limit access to certain information, and the rhetorical transformation of the marketplace to talking points, headlines, and slogans. Teaching ourselves to read beyond the “lede” has perhaps become more important than ever. While inclined to view this as a modern phenomenon, information’s use (and misuse) has a long and rich lineage. This course will use a variety of texts to study several critical past events and to examine what people knew, how they knew it, and evaluate the reliability of the information on which they depended. We will then use that knowledge to seek a better understanding of information’s application in our own lives.

2. An Eye for An Eye: Retribution, Retaliation and Justice (Prof. Peter Bedford)

In ancient and medieval societies it was commonly thought that justice was best served by punishing the perpetrator exactly according to the crime committed (literally, ‘an eye for an eye’; *lex talionis* in Roman law), although monetary compensation to the victim might be allowed. In modern society different principles of justice prevail, although we occasionally hear calls for a return to a regime of punishment more in line with these earlier notions of retaliation. This class examines the history of the ‘eye for an eye’ theory of justice and compares it to other views, inviting critical reflection on how we conceptualize the notion of ‘justice’.

3. Laughter and Literature at Wit’s End (Prof. Nicole Calandra)

In this course we will examine the extremes of the human condition through a comic lens. Placing psychoanalytic, anthropological, and philosophic observations next to works of literature, we will ask what special insights might emerge from reading texts that portray comic visions of colliding horizons, clashing perspectives, social disorder, and, of course, people at their wit’s end. Literary authors read may include Kurt Vonnegut, Eugène Ionesco, Zadie Smith, Zora Neale Hurston, and Italo Calvino.

4. Revolution, Democracy and The Game of Politics (Prof. Cigdem Cidam)

After the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, which put an end to the bi-polar world, many scholars began to talk about the “end of history.” Capitalism, and democracy, they argued, won over the only other alternative, Socialism. They claimed that from now on, we will not see any major radical upheavals; revolutions have become a thing of the past. That claim has lost its appeal after Arab Spring in 2011/2, major anti-government protests in Turkey in 2013, and the uprising in Ukraine, which brought thousands of people to Kiev’s Maidan, where they remained, risking their lives, till the government was toppled down. And yet, questions remain: Can we really call these events revolutions? What makes a revolution a successful one? Do revolutions come to an end when masses leave the streets and go back to their everyday lives? How long does a revolutions take? This course aims to address these questions with the help of a role-playing game. The game we will be playing this quarter is Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France, 1791. It will offer the opportunity to learn about the French Revolution, what the revolution was “about,” the ideas that inspired the revolution, and the conflicts that arose as participants tried to implement those ideas.

5. What’s College For? (Prof. John Cramsie)

Why do colleges and universities exist and why do women and men seek them out? Do they exist to nurture our humanity, moral imagination, and ethical sensibilities? Are they businesses that sell student-customers the essential credentials for lucrative employment in an entrepreneurial economy? Are they institutions that protect and renew essential human qualities against the fads, fashions, and fanaticisms of any particular moment in time? Do they exist to provide a ‘college experience’ in which socializing, career networking, and extracurricular activities are really more important than education? Are they the crucial rung on the ladder of social mobility? Do they exist to serve the public good or simply private, personal gain? Why are you here? We think this is a modern debate, but teachers, students, and

citizens have wrestled with similar questions for centuries and they continue to decisively affect colleges and universities around the globe. We can say for certain that the founding principle of colleges and universities concerns education, to teach and learn certain ‘ways of knowing’. So, they exist to educate, but precisely what kind of education, for what purpose, for whose benefit, and paid for by whom? This Preceptorial will debate questions like these. In doing so we will examine how individuals inside and outside colleges and universities have grappled with such questions, from historians and teachers to novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers. We will critically read ‘texts’ (broadly defined), discuss with each other the insights to be found in them, and develop sound evidence-based and aesthetically pleasing written arguments about their meaning and value. Why are you here?

6. Creativity and Culture (Prof. Chris Duncan)

How important is individuality? Should art represent society’s values, or must it challenge them? Does art progress? Is it a social product? Or just a product? Do artists have an obligation to be for or against something? Who cares? Contemporary figures in literature, music or the visual arts often cultivate attitudes of detachment from and critique of society. This course will look at ways in which artists themselves conceive their roles, and how those roles are shaped by their times and societies. We’ll read first hand source material, biographies, fiction, and critical works about significant historical and contemporary figures. We’ll try to get inside the creative process, looking at the artist’s life as they lived it; and we’ll examine the making of art from the outside, as critics, dealers, and cultural observers see it. Sources will include Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto”; Vertov’s film “Man With A Camera”; Zamyatin’s dystopic sci-fi novel “WE”; excerpts from Renaissance sculptor Benvenuto Cellini’s autobiography; the script for the Broadway hit “Red”; the autobiography of Miles Davis; and novelist Rachel Kushner’s “The Flamethrowers”. Some of the issues that might come up as we read: the nature and definition of art, its relationships and responsibilities to society...and progress, politics, morality, sexuality, money, sanity.

7. U.S. Anglophone Latino/a Literature (Prof. William Garcia)

~~This course is an introduction to contemporary US Latino/a literature written in English, with a focus on Mexican-Americans/Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and Dominican Americans. We will read representative works of various genres within a cultural context: drama, poetry, narrative (short story and novel), and film. Topics to be covered: individual and group identity in relationship to race/ethnicity/nationality, social/economic class, gender, being multicultural versus “living on the margins,” the struggle for self-determination, and notions of transnationalism and its impact on cultural production. The goals of the course, in addition to acquainting students with significant works of US Latino/a literature, include strengthening reading ability and sharpening writing and critical thinking skills.~~

7. Airports, Tourists, and Borders (Prof. William Garcia) REVISED 08/08/15

The course invites students to engage on a critical exploration through spaces and attitudes affecting our new world order: globalization, migration and immigration, cosmopolitanism and global citizenship, nationalisms, transnational subjects, border demarcations, and cultural identity. The texts and films selected—by authors from Antigua, France, Ghana, Haiti, India, Mexico, Thailand, and the United States—are meant to serve as platforms from which we will depart on a critical reflection about what does it entail to be a global citizen.

8. Reason and Passions in the Ancient World (Prof. Tommaso Gazzarri)

This course is concerned with the archetypal categories of reason and passion. A number of texts crucial to the classical tradition will be analyzed, and for each one we will try to assess how they contributed to the constitution of arguments that are still relevant to the modern discussion of the topic.

What follows is a partial list of the many issues that will be targeted:

- Reason and emotions are opposite or conciliable categories?
- The creation of orderly systems can be seen as a product of cold reason or is it rather a balanced regimentation of emotions?
- Are passions detrimental or beneficial for the individual? And for the collectivity?
- Is beauty something that can be created and fully experienced by reason, or does it pertain and involve solely our emotions?
- What do atomic theories have to do with fear and emotions?
- What is madness?

Regular discussions will develop from the problems presented by the texts at hand. Participation and attendance in class are therefore of paramount importance. Participation will be assessed on the basis of reading assignments (with quizzes), in-class discussions and in-class presentations.

The student will be responsible for writing 4 papers concerned with a range of themes targeted in class. For each paper the student will be provided with extensive feedback.

9. Animals and Humans (Prof. Peter Heinegg)

This course is a historical, scientific, and philosophical study of the ways we have thought about and treated our fellow creatures. It focuses in particular on the narcissistic human domination of nature-supported by both religious and secular traditions-that has brought us to the desperate ecological crisis now threatening the world. It reflects on what, if anything, can be done about all this.

10. Culture, Gender, and Performance: Professional Wrestling (Prof. Jen Mitchell)

Through theoretical, historical, and cultural readings, as well as the viewing of representative performances, this course will examine how wrestling reflects and responds to cultural politics. Transdisciplinary course materials, including wrestling performances and documentaries, will enable us to explore issues including gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, violence, national identity and the construction of popular culture.

11. On Travel (Prof. Stacie Raucci)

This course will explore the concept of travel in literature, film, and culture. We will consider why people travel and the possible effects of encountering difference. We will also discuss what it means to be a reader/watcher of someone else's travel narrative and what it is like to "travel" the world from the comfort of your sofa. The course will begin with an overview of the concept of travel before setting off on adventures with various people over a range of time periods and locations. We will start our wide-ranging journey with Homer's *Odyssey*, find ourselves in the 1950s with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and study abroad with the cast of *L'Auberge Espagnole* (2002), among others.

12. Living Through Troubling Times (Prof. Jeannette Sargent)

We'll take a close look at how people deal with the big and little disasters of life by examining works of literature from as far back as ancient China (Tao Te Ching) to the futuristic novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Winnie the Pooh turns out to be a model Taoist who lets his life be guided by the Tao Te Ching, while Atwood gives us a glimpse of the future we may be creating for ourselves as we try to figure out how much we want technology and marketing to control our lives. Rabbi Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* asks us to consider why people believe in divine intervention in human affairs, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* gives us entertaining insight into how people dealt with the Black Death in Florence in the fourteenth century. The short stories of Raymond Carver show how easy it is to be overwhelmed by in the modern world and the dangers of isolation, while the contemporary David Sedaris offers humorous takes on serious problems like death and political correctness.

13. Cross Cultural and Contemporary Homeless Experiences (Prof. Timothy Stablein)

In this course we will explore the emergence of homelessness in contemporary society and its consequences to human life, wellbeing, and health. To do this we will explore the lived experience of homelessness gleaned from observational studies and research on adolescents and adults alike to understand the strategies they have historically employed to counter situations of alienation, isolation, and deprivation. Attention will also be paid to understanding the history of homelessness both in the United States and abroad and representations in contemporary literature, film, and research. Juxtaposing contemporary assessments and portrayals of homeless people's lives will allow us to disentangle fact from fiction and consequently build a more accurate assessment and understanding of this difficult human dilemma.

14. Boldly Exploring Close and Far Frontiers (Prof. April Selley)

~~*Star Trek* has probably been the most successful media phenomenon of the past (almost) sixty years, spawning five live-action and one animated television series, twelve feature films (with a thirteenth to be released in 2016), and countless video games, books, and collectibles. Perhaps its success is due, in part, to the fact that all *Star Trek* series have incorporated commentary on political, social, and moral issues of their times. This course will pair selected episodes from the five *Star Trek* live-action television series with works of literature that explore similar themes. The~~

more general theme of responsibility (to oneself, to others, and/or to the divine) will also be explored in relation to some of the works.

Although some of the *Star Trek* episodes proposed here for the syllabus are likely to change, the printed works probably will not: “Cogenitor” (*Star Trek: Enterprise*) will be paired with Matheson, “Button, Button” and LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”; “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield” (*Star Trek: The Original Series*) will possibly be paired with Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*; “Who Mourns for Adonais?” (*TOS*) will possibly be paired with Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (translated by Robert Fagles, Penguin Classics); “This Side of Paradise” (*TOS*) or another Paradise-themed episode will be paired with the Eden narrative of The Book of Genesis (from the Bible); a yet-to-be-decided episode will be paired with Chabris and Simons, *The Invisible Gorilla*; “A Private Little War” (*TOS*) or another war-themed episode will be paired with Veal, *Gods Go Begging*. Other episodes and literary works will be added, probably pertaining to feminism and to the question of whether artificial life forms are, in fact, persons. Students might also be asked to read some literary criticism about the different *Star Trek* series. If Union invites a noteworthy speaker to campus while the course is being taught, a work by that speaker might also be added to the syllabus.

This course will train students for college-level reading, analysis, writing, and class discussion. Students will write approximately four essays, give at least one oral report, and take quizzes and a final exam. The *Star Trek* episodes will be viewed outside of class, so all students must have a Netflix account (or access to Netflix) for the three months of the course. (Episodes of *TOS* are on YouTube, but the other series’ episodes are not.) It is not absolutely necessary to have any previous acquaintance with *Star Trek*, but a knowledge of *TOS* in particular will be helpful.

14. Emerson’s Circles (Joseph Johnson) UPDATED 03/22/16

In his essay “Circles,” Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) writes that “our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another circle can be drawn.” As a generative force around which literary, philosophical, social, political, and intellectual circles have been drawn for close to two centuries, Emerson’s essays and addresses have been a source of inspiration and provocation unparalleled in American history. In this course, we will read some of Emerson’s most important works alongside a range of interlocutors — thinkers and writers who Emerson responded to, in other words, and those who respond to Emerson’s own ideas. We will study some of the circles in which Emerson traveled (the Unitarian church; transatlantic romanticism; American transcendentalism; the abolition movement). We’ll pay special attention to the ripples Emerson generated in the work of other thinkers and writers — past and present.

15. Remembering War: Myth, Monument and Media (Prof. Sara Watkins)

At one point in Homer’s legendary tale of fantasy and adventure, the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is overwhelmed with emotion as he listens to the story of the sack of Troy. As he recalls the conflict, Odysseus’s “heart melts and tears wet his cheeks,” and the poet likens the hero to a widow whose husband has been killed in battle. As Odysseus’s example shows, how we choose to remember war can, and has had, a powerful effect on human society from the ancient world to modern times. In this section of the Preceptorial, we will examine how humans have struggled to understand, remember, and learn from war. Beginning with the realm of myth itself, we will study the legend of the Trojan War and then expand the scope of our inquiry to a variety of historical conflicts, including the American civil war and Vietnam. Our evidence will range from literary narratives and physical monuments to photographs and films. Throughout the term, we discuss how war has been memorialized, by whom, and to whose benefit; the politics involved in crafting our collective memory of war; and whether, as the journalist and war correspondent Chris Hedges has argued, war is a “force that gives us meaning.”

16. Religion Is Natural, Science Is Not (Prof. Kirk Wegter-McNelly)

What does it mean to think like a human? Millions of years of evolutionary pressure have shaped our brains for the basic and nontrivial task of survival, but as a species we seem equipped for so much more. Where did this extra computing power come from, and how do we use it? How should we use it? Both the religious and the scientific dimensions of human life benefit from the remarkable cognitive surplus we carry around inside our heads, but religion is the more natural, stable beneficiary. Science is precarious, counter-intuitive endeavor that poses no threat to the continued existence of religion. At least, this is the argument developed by Robert McCauley in his recent book, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford University: 2011). Students in this course will undertake a close reading of McCauley’s book and investigate the debate it has generated. We will conclude our explorations by considering the relevance of McCauley’s argument to the current debates within higher education over the relative value of the humanities and the sciences.

