



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Honors College

Course Descriptions
Spring 2026

The Honors College Spring 2026 course descriptions packet includes:

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HONORS 101 First-Year Seminars for Spring 2026

PLEASE NOTE: All Honors College students are required to take an HONORS 101 first-year seminar, except for those students who transferred at least 30 credits into UMass Boston at the time that they matriculated to the university.

Honors 101 (1): Lyricism (#1506)

MW 4:00 - 5:15pm

Jason Roush, Honors College

What makes song lyrics poetic & lyrical? Where exactly do songwriting & poetry intersect? We'll consider these deep & intricate questions to plumb the depths of the mysteries & rewards of music & music-making, as well as the pleasures of simply listening to music, while also analyzing, critiquing & enjoying a wide array of well-crafted songs together (along with a few smart but silly ones, too). How can musical lyrics both illuminate and emotionally sustain our everyday lives?

Readings from two critical texts will help to inform our initial analyses of individual song selections: *Equipment for Living: On Poetry and Pop Music* by Michael Robbins (Simon & Schuster, 2017) & *The Poetry of Pop* by Adam Bradley (Yale University Press, 2017). Brief excerpts from the books are provided during class to illuminate lyrics & structures of certain songs, so you won't have to purchase any textbooks at all for this course. Our analyses of songs will consider lyrical & poetic devices such as: rhyme, metrical patterns, anaphora/repetition, consonance & assonance, metaphor & simile, innovations surrounding the traditional verse/chorus/bridge/refrain structure of popular songs, etc., to determine the many ways in which songcraft & lyricism can be both traditional and innovative at once.

No experience with songwriting, song analysis, or poetry is required for this course! We will learn together throughout the term. Some artists whose songs & lyrics we'll explore include: Tori Amos, Kate Bush, Tracy Chapman, Cocteau Twins, Lana Del Rey, Ani DiFranco, Eminem, Patty Griffin, Michael Jackson, Rickie Lee Jones, Nik Kershaw, Kendrick Lamar, Cyndi Lauper, Joni Mitchell, Prince, Scritti Politti, Bruce Springsteen, Taylor Swift, Allee Willis & others. Each student will present in class at least 1-2 songs by any artist(s) & on themes of their own choosing, to help diversify our listening throughout the course.

Assignments include short in-class written responses (1-2 pages), 1-2 song presentations during class, and active engagement via our listening exercises (but if you're more of just a listener than a speaker, that's totally fine, too). Mainly, this course will focus on critical appreciation & fun, while deepening your engagement with the art of music & lyricism.

Honors 101 (2): Unequal Colleagues: A History of Women in the Sciences (#1507)

MWF 12:00 - 12:50pm

Lynne Byall Benson, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies

According to historian Margaret Rossiter, "(A) woman scientist was a contradiction in terms—such a person was unlikely to exist, and if she did..., she had to be "unnatural" in some way... Women scientists were thus caught between two almost mutually exclusive stereotypes: as scientists they were atypical women; as women they were unusual scientists" (Rossiter, Margaret W.; *Women Scientists in America. Struggles and Strategies to 1940*. (1982: xv).

This course examines, from a feminist perspective, the history of women's struggle to attain entry in the male-dominated field of the so-called "hard" sciences in the United States; among them those fields referred to at STEM: Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Special attention will be paid to the connections between society's assumptions regarding the purpose of women's education, and societal barriers, including race, faced by women who aspired to careers in scientific fields. Seminar participants read, discuss, debate, and make up their own minds on these issues.

Honors 101 (3): Troublemakers: Political Subversion in American Literature & Film (#2114)**MW 2:30 - 3:45pm****Christopher Craig, English**

Novels & films have always been political, especially when they claim that they are not. They necessarily reproduce some of the cultural and political ideology that informs them. As commodities, for example, they advance the priorities of consumer capitalism and contribute to the hegemonic imperatives of the ruling class. How, then, do we interpret novels and films that criticize the economic and political system that produces them? Can novels and films that challenge dominant political assumptions become legitimate vehicles to engender social change? If so, what does this capability say about the socio-cultural power of subversive texts and the relationship between political ideas and literary and visual aesthetics? This course will consider these questions, along with many others, from a variety of theoretical perspectives, as it examines American novels and films that interrogate the complexities of life in the United States of America. Course materials may include novels by Leslie Marmon Silko, William Kennedy, Ann Petry, and Helena Maria Viramontes, as well as films directed by Ava DuVernay, Barry Jenkins, Martin Ritt, and John Sayles. Theoretical material will also be assigned.

This is a reading, writing, and discussion-based course. It requires active daily participation, along with two formal presentations. Students will write three essays. Essays one and two will range from 750 to 1,000 words in length. Essay three will include a research component and will not exceed 2,500 words. In preparation for essay three, students will submit a prospectus and annotated bibliography.

Honors 101 (4): Exploring Psychological Identities in Film & Television (#2292)**TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm****Roxann Harvey, Honors College**

In our rapidly changing cultural landscape, popular movies and TV series serve as powerful mirrors reflecting societal values, norms and struggles. This course examines the psychological themes present in contemporary media, including reality television, K-Pop dramas, modern series and popular movies. Through the lens of psychological theory, we will explore the practical implications of character portrayals, emphasizing how they can inform our understanding of real-world issues such as social influence, stigma, identity formation and mental health challenges. By critically analyzing peer-reviewed research articles and media examples such as *Bridgerton*, *Sex Education*, and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, students will explore the intersection of psychology and culture, enhancing their ability to connect psychological theories to everyday scenarios. These analyses offer insights into how media shapes perception of self and society, providing valuable lessons on the psychological processes that govern human behavior.

This course encourages students to become more discerning consumers of popular culture, equipping them with the tools to analyze and interpret the psychological narratives embedded within entertainment. Students will gain a multifaceted understanding of how media both reflects and shapes societal and individual identities, enhancing their ability to apply psychological concepts to real-world contexts.

Course Requirements:

- Attendance and participation
- Weekly 1-page reflections on the psychological concepts discussed in class, with a focus on connecting one related peer-reviewed article to the media example.
- One 5-page paper with a minimum of 3 citations not used in class analyzing one of the weekly psychological topics.
- Final Project: Students will work in small groups to choose a popular TV show or movie not covered in class. They will create a 7 to 10-minute presentation that explains how psychological themes are represented in their chosen media and relate the analysis to concepts from at least three research articles and class discussions. Each group member will need to submit an individual short individual reflection of the group project describing their specific contribution and what they learned from the project.

Honors 101 (5): Innovators, Their Creativity, and Their Loneliness (#2475)**TuTh 12:30 - 1:45pm****Steve Ackerman, Honors College**

Most people assume innovation occurs only in science and technology. We will discuss men and women who had creative genius in business, invention, science, technology, music, recreation, etc. These discussions will include investigative student research prior to each session.

We will discuss the innovations that Michael Jackson introduced into music, that Clarence Birdseye brought to food, the prescience/innovation of Franz Boas to mentor women and together they invented cultural anthropology, Effa Manley, the first woman to own baseball clubs and innovate baseball marketing, Henry Ford's & Walt Disney's false claims of innovation, how innovative decisions are made (Daniel Kahneman & Amos Tversky: thinking, fast and slow), Barbara McClintock (one of the greatest scientists of the 20th century) for her inventing techniques used in cytology and genetics and her intellectual leap about mobile elements, Rachel Carson who summoned the environmental movement, Jane Goodall/Dian Fossey who fomented animal science, Ada Lovelace who helped develop the computer forerunner, Grace Hopper who developed computer programming/languages, Charles Darwin who explained evolution, Lise Meitner who discovered nuclear fission, Mary McMillan who invented Physical Therapy, Rosalind Franklin/Florence Ball who refined X-ray crystallography, Frank Ramsey who revolutionized economic thinking, Mammie Smith who invented the blues, etc.

There are no exams in this course. Writing assignments include three response papers and three short research essays. Grades will be based on attendance, submission of materials (topic, writing) on time, and participation.

Honors 101 (6): Black Writers & Social Change (#3260)

TuTh 2:00 - 3:15pm

Joseph Ramsey, English and American Studies

African American writing offers a critical window into the fundamental workings of U.S. society. Emerging from conditions of historic oppression, black authors often make available suppressed knowledge and radical critique, freedom dreams, and reflections on collective attempts to change the world. How have the literary and political strategies of such writers evolved over time in relation to changing social conditions, as well as different waves of popular movements? What can those seeking justice and equality today learn from the texts they've left us?

In this course, students will study a range of classic African American literary works in relationship to the evolving historical conditions that helped give rise to them. Readings will extend from the 18th century to the present, including work by Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, and Richard Wright, as well as contemporary voices, from Cornel West, to Bryan Stevenson, Kenan Malik, Adolph Reed Jr., Cedric Johnson, Porsha Olayiwola, and Ava DuVernay. We will examine a range of critical perspectives—from black nationalism to intersectionality to Marxism and Afro-Pessimism—engaging ongoing debates about the evolving status of race, class, gender, and anti-racism in U.S. society.

As this will be a discussion-based course, rooted in student writing and reflection, students will be expected to produce a regular critical response paper (roughly 2 pages each), and to help lead class discussion. There will be two additional formal essay assignments: a short essay (1,500 words) and a final research paper (2,500 words).

HONORS 210G Intermediate Seminars for Spring 2026

Honors 210G (1): "The Personal Is Political": Reproductive Justice on Film (#7366)

MWF 11:00 - 11:50am

Carney Maley, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies

The reproductive justice movement was developed by a group of Black women activists in the 1990s as a way to merge their advocacy for both reproductive rights and social justice issues. Using this intersectional framework, we will examine how ideas about reproduction have evolved in the U.S. from pre-*Roe v. Wade* to the overturning of the Supreme Court case in 2022, to today. Reproductive Justice allows us to explore not only the evolution of abortion rights, but also the right for people to have children and to parent them in a safe environment. Therefore, we will investigate topics such as maternal healthcare, foster care, LGBTQ+ family building, new reproductive technologies, sterilization, and contraception. Students will read the works of legal scholars, activists, historians, and journalists to chart how people's reproductive decisions are shaped not only by gender identity but also race, socioeconomic class, and sexuality.

The course will also focus on how issues of reproductive justice are represented in contemporary American film. Analyzing both narrative and documentary films from the 21st century provides us with insights into how society views certain reproductive choices (i.e. what is considered socially acceptable, legal, desirable, etc.), and how these individual and structural decisions change over time. Assignments will include written analyses of contemporary documentary and

narrative films and a final research project that investigates a current activist organization committed to one of the reproductive justice issues covered in the course. *This course fulfills the Intermediate Seminar (IS) distribution requirement.*

Honors 210G (2): How to Build a Biotech Company (#7367)

TuTh 9:30 - 10:45am

Steve Ackerman, Honors College

In order to build a biotechnology company, there are many considerations. The goal of this course is to provide an interdisciplinary vehicle to bring together different branches of science and business to allow students to gain a perspective on how and why a biotechnology company must include more aspects than either a science or business background can furnish.

This course may appeal to both the science major and the business major and will provide insight to what additional background they need to be successful in a biotech company. One of the primary deliberations is what research path to choose. How does one decide the research avenue to pursue? What new technology can result from the research avenue chosen by each company, and will this lead to obtaining patents? As one example, can drugs be produced with plants and, if yes, are they less expensive and of higher purity with fewer side effects compared to animal-produced drugs?

Some other topics to be discussed are: How is market/product assessment conducted and evaluated? How does the business select its site, and how is this influenced by the company's goals in research vs. manufacturing? How does site selection impact the success of the company? How does one "set up" the laboratory facilities? What is the business model, and how does one implement the business model to have a successful research endeavor? How is venture capital procured? How does the company develop a plan/model? How are bank loans procured?

Also, what is required for quality control and assessment? (The quality control aspect determines the constancy of the product for the consumer. There must be assessment of the product using research techniques that meet standards.) What is the importance of customer service to the clientele? How is the engineering infrastructure (facilities) established and maintained? Each of these considerations and others will be discussed via use of experts in individual areas.

There will be numerous guest speakers who will visit the class to discuss topics and provide insights into each theme. Students will write short response papers, one short essay (2 pages) and one longer essay (5 pages), as well as giving an oral presentation. The 2-page and 5-page papers are topics chosen by the student and should reflect their area of interest. *This course fulfills the Intermediate Seminar (IS) requirement.*

HONORS 290-level Courses for Spring 2026

Honors 291 (1): Optimism! (#2577)

TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm

Avak Hasratian, English

In "Of the Logic of Practice, or Art; Including Morality and Policy," John Stuart Mill writes: "I have observed that not the man who hopes when others despair, but the man who despairs when others hope, is admired by a large class of persons as a sage" (469). Pessimists and cynics, whose ideas we'll cover, become rich and famous by motivating others through fear. To their disappointment and our delight, this course's wager is that nothing has happened that can't be made better. The twin mediators in such improvement are *technical innovation and artistic inspiration*. Viewed through the lens of cool reason (thinking like a Stoic) rather than hot catastrophism (acting like a politician or journalist), both can improve our responses to stressors, whether these stressors are subjectively personal or objectively affecting the planet. There is nothing that art and innovation cannot try and do. To see how this is both possible and desirable, we'll intensively discuss masterpieces of sculpture and architecture (from glorious sports venues to gargantuan figures); read two novels that will change how we view spirituality, history, and humanity (Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and James McBride's *The Good Lord Bird*); and view a film that shows how hope can heal us in remarkable ways (Pedro Almodóvar's *Volver* or *All About My Mother*). Down with the Doomsayers and "No" to the negative Nancys! It's right to feel good in a time when plenty is wrong. Requirements include short response papers and small group presentations on sources of inspiration.

This course fulfills an Arts (AR) distribution requirement.

Honors 291 (2): Literary Translation and Interpretation (#2578)**MW 2:30 - 3:45pm****Patrick Barron, English**

This course is an introduction to the theory and practice of translating literature, emphasizing short fiction, drama and poetry. It starts from the idea that literary translation is both a creative and a scholarly process that involves juggling a range of elements, from the linguistic and cultural to the stylistic and historical. Translation is at once playful and rigorous, often asking of the translator something that seems just out of reach but that later appears, born as much of study as of adventure. Fluency in another language is not a requirement of the course. What is needed is a strong curiosity in other forms of language and expression, and the desire to venture into new linguistic realms.

Students will study the elements of creative writing essential to the translation of literary works, compare different published translations of the same texts, and also generate their own translations of various works, including some written in older forms of English. In our discussions we will reflect on the particular demands imposed by the aesthetics of literary texts. Additionally, we will ponder translatability, fidelity, and relations of power affecting the translation process. Attention will also be given to how the practice of translation has influenced the work of many well-known writers working in English. Without translation, a critical activity that connects otherwise separate languages and cultures, readers and writers would be left in relative isolation, unaware of wider trends in world literature. With thousands of languages used worldwide, all of us, even multilingual readers, are ultimately dependent on the work of translators to read more widely. Translators can be viewed as artists working between one language and another, recreating texts.

This course fulfills an Arts (AR) distribution requirement.

Honors 292 (1): Why Is There Always War? (#2924)**TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm****Nir Eisikovits, Philosophy**

This course asks the question “why is there always war?” through exploring the topic of ancient wars, in relation to ongoing conflicts in our contemporary world. Our readings, discussions, and writing assignments will focus primarily on the ancient Athenian historian and general Thucydides, specifically his history of the Peloponnesian War, and how this 5th-century B.C. fight between Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece still shapes our understandings of modern conflicts today. Because we will be examining these historical periods and issues in great depth and detail throughout the semester, no previous knowledge of these subjects will be required at all, just a general interest in the history and ideology of the struggles of ancient Greece, as well as a curiosity about how to apply those fields of knowledge to wars and intercultural conflicts in our current-day societies.

This course fulfills a Humanities (HU) distribution requirement.

Honors 292 (2): Does College Matter? Access and Opportunity in American Higher Education (#4328)**TuTh 4:00 - 5:15pm****Diane D'Arrigo, Honors College**

Who can afford a college education, and who can't? Who gets to go to college, and who doesn't? What gets taught in college, and what doesn't? What is the value of a college degree and how is that measured? These are all issues with a broader social, cultural, historical, political, and economic context. Come explore the great transformation of American higher education since WWII and discuss the more recent evolution of colleges and universities, as well as many current hot topics.

Some specific topics will include a review of major societal changes and their influence on the increased democratization of higher education such as: the impact of the GI Bill, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, student protest movements, and changes in public policy. Using both primary and secondary sources, we will discuss these topics as well as relevant court rulings, state and federal legislation, and various institutional histories. Additionally, we'll explore the origins of UMass Boston, and students will consider its place within the broader history of the American higher education system. Finally, we will review current trends and debates taking place in higher education such as: college rankings, affirmative action, free speech on college campuses, the value of a college degree, higher education funding, student debt and the financial aid system, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and current public policy proposals that impact a variety of these issues.

This seminar type course will emphasize lively intellectual discussions, including an in-class debate and individually chosen research topics with both individual and group support. Grading criteria will include attendance, class preparation and participation, and a variety of writing assignments and research projects including: reflection papers, an oral presentation, and a final research project.

This course fulfills a Humanities (HU) distribution requirement and can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.

Honors 293 (1): Economics of Education (#2576)

MW 9:30 - 10:45am

Dania Francis, Economics

Why do people choose to go to college? Is it worth it? Why do some high schools have state-of-the-art facilities while others have fallen into deep disrepair? Is education the great equalizer? These are some of the questions we will explore in this course as we examine the role of education in the economy. First, attention is given to the historical development of US public education and to different theories trying to explain that development. Then, we will turn our attention to particular topics, including (but not limited to), equitable access to education, teacher selection and evaluation, school choice and charter schools, debt forgiveness, and school finance reform. Course requirements include active participation, problem sets, midterm exams, and a cumulative written project.

This course fulfills a Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement and can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.

Honors 293 (2): The Future of Water (In)security (#2665)

TuTh 12:30 - 1:45pm

Jiedine Phanbuh, Global Governance & Human Security

Water security is human security. Water is fundamental to human survival and one of the most critical resources for life on earth, yet billions worldwide now face the acute public health crisis of water scarcity & insecurity. Access to clean and sustainable water is increasingly under threat due to climate change, pollution, over-population, geopolitical conflicts, and mismanagement of resources.

This course examines the critical role of water in human security and global governance, with an interdisciplinary perspective on water sustainability issues, incorporating policy, science, and governance perspectives. Students here on our oceanfront campus will develop analytical skills to assess regional and global water challenges and propose sustainable solutions for human security. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze key water sustainability challenges from interdisciplinary perspectives;
2. Evaluate global water policies affecting security using case studies;
3. Engage in informed discussions about water access, scarcity, and governance;
4. Develop policy recommendations for sustainable water management;
5. Strengthen critical thinking and negotiation skills through a crisis simulation.

Assignments will include class readings & discussions, short written responses on assigned readings, a water crisis simulation policy response, and a final research paper on global water policy analysis.

This course fulfills a Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement.

Honors 294 (1): Women & Community Building (#2575)

TuTh 9:30 - 10:45am

Jyoti Sinha, Honors College

Sociologists who study gendered approaches to social movements have found that low-income women and women of color tend to approach community organizing, leadership development, and resident empowerment differently. The course will also look at the classic definition of community building: leadership development as a pursuit of solidarity and agency by adhering to the principles of self-help, felt need, and voluntary participation. Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker describe such

a model as women-centered and collaborative, one that focuses on community building and self-transformation, while also recognizing structural barriers to equality and striving for equitable access to power for everyone.

We will study various forms of collaborative women's leadership globally, from the movement for justice in El Barrio in New York City to the Zapatistas movement, from the Combahee River Collective to Black Lives Matter. We will also consider local groups like the South Asian Workers' Center in Boston, which is mainly comprised of immigrant and low-income women who use a participatory democratic model. Comparative analysis with Global South movements will explore SEWA Bharat and Grameen Bank. Students will write three short essays of at least 5 pages each on relevant themes or organizations of their choice; a brief class presentation (10 - 15 minutes) on an organization or social event will also be required. This is an interactive course, so students will be expected to take an active part in class discussions, responding to both critical readings and documentary film viewings.

This course fulfills a World Cultures (WC) distribution requirement and can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.

Honors 294 (2): Taiko: The Makings of a Japanese Drumming Tradition (#7368)

TuTh 2:00 - 3:15pm

Connie Chow, Honors College

Taiko, traditional Japanese drumming, has both long and recent histories. With roots and traditions in different regions in Japan, taiko performers and ensembles have proliferated around the world, each adopting different missions and styles, sharing common repertoires and creating and exchanging new music. This course focuses on kumi-daiko, or ensemble drumming, to explore several interwoven themes: 1) the evolving and multiple natures of culture and "traditional" art forms; 2) the complexity of and relationship between cultural expressions and (perceived) identity; and 3) cultural practices as the political practice of resistance, reclamation and representation. We will explore these themes through academic texts, guest speakers and artists, documentaries and concert videos/attendance. Taiko is also physical and choreographed, so our time together will include listening to, playing with and creating sounds, rhythms and movements with our voices, bodies and instruments.

In addition to short in-class reflections, you will conduct research on a musical tradition resonant with your cultural experience and relate it to one or more of the themes in the course. The final will be *an invite-only concert*, where you will perform for each other the ensemble creations that have been workshopped with a guest or the instructor. The research will be incorporated into the concert program, in a format of your choosing. Your final grade will also be based on attendance and participation, demonstration of effort, growth, and willingness to take artistic and intellectual risks.

This course fulfills a World Cultures (WC) distribution requirement.

Honors 295 (1): Pseudoscience: Mysteries, Hoaxes, and Conspiracies (#7369)

TuTh 12:30 - 1:45pm

Kaitlyn Dorst, Tufts Visiting Fellow/Honors College

Have you ever questioned why we still haven't found the Loch Ness Monster, or how can we worship the flying spaghetti monster and increase global pastafarianism? Are pigeons a product of the U.S. government? What can I fully believe on the interwebs...and what *is just total BS*? In this course on the widespread conspiracies and dangers of pseudoscience, we will take a deeper dive into the mysteries surrounding our world and determine if they remain mysteries, or are simply hoaxes. We will cover various topics that range from UFOs and the paranormal, to alternative medicine and environmental scares.

This small Honors Seminar on pseudoscience will equip students with a foundational understanding of the scientific method, even if they have no previous background with science or scientific practice. We will then analyze how these steps are not used, or are misconstrued, in various pseudoscientific practices. Additionally, students will learn about some of the neuropsychology that contributes to things like conspiracies, belief, and false memories, to name only a few. What makes us more prone to "influencer" followings? What about cult leaders? Are they actually the same thing?

We will interact with diverse media, which include: scientific research articles, book chapters, journalistic press articles, podcasts, film, and social media. Assessment in this course will be based on weekly class activities, a midterm report, and a final oral presentation. Students can pick their pseudoscientific topics for projects and relate them to science and society.

This course fulfills a Natural Sciences (NS) distribution requirement.

HONORS 380 Junior Colloquia for Spring 2026

Students can take the HONORS 380 Junior Colloquium after completing at least two of their 200-level Honors requirements.

Honors 380 (1): Human Rights & Migration in Mexico (#2202)

TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm

Luis Jimenez, Political Science

This course is an in-depth exploration of the very timely topic of human rights and migration in relation to Mexico. In our current era where immigration debates have taken center stage in the culture, this course has rapidly become even more timely and relevant to our contemporary history and intercultural politics. A class trip to Mexico over spring break is a pivotal component of this course, and attendance for the entire length of the trip to Mexico is a fully required aspect of this junior colloquium. The trip to Mexico will be heavily subsidized by the Honors College, but each student will be required to cover a small fraction (around \$800) of the trip cost individually per student. Students will write and present a final research essay of roughly 10-15 pages on the topic of human rights and migration in Mexico. Interested students should be certain to register for this course as soon as their enrollment opens because any remaining seats will be opened up to eligible non-Honors College students in mid-November. *This course can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.*

Honors 380 (2): The Ghost in the Machine: Consciousness, A.I. and the Future of Civilization (#2476)

TuTh 2:00 - 3:15pm

Todd Drogy, English

What is consciousness? Where does it reside? Can it be created, artificially? What can we do to prepare ourselves for advanced AI, as we anticipate massive technological change and its impact on various existential threats posed to human civilization?

In *The Ghost in the Machine: Consciousness, AI, and Future of Civilization*, we will explore and endeavor to understand the origin and nature of consciousness. By looking back toward ancient texts and forward toward the edges of contemporary science and philosophy, we will engage with several models of consciousness. Then, we will seek to extrapolate and apply such models to the great ethical and technological challenges confronting our civilization.

To what degree might AI transform the psycho-social domains of relationship, community, sex, labor, gender, health, and war? If AI becomes conscious, how might we incorporate it into our rituals, laws, and the protection of natural rights? Academic texts will play an important role in this course, but we will also look to popular culture—TV, film, music, and social media—as we seek to grapple with ethical dilemmas posed by AI and its multiplicity of effects on human civilization.

This is a discussion-based class, with a strong emphasis on class participation. We will compose three (500-600 word) Mini Essays on readings/films/discussions. You will also keep a journal of reflective, informal writing. A thesis-driven research paper (12-14 pages) will be due at semester's end.

Honors 380 (3): Multilingual Societies (#4329)

MW 4:00 - 5:15pm

Len von Morze, Interim Dean of the Honors College

How do nations organize the diversity of the languages their citizens speak and write? The ties between language and nationhood are deep, but never simple. Linguistic and national borders have never perfectly aligned in any nation or at any time, but the division of languages along lines of “public” and “private,” official and domestic, has been a constant in many of the multilingual societies that have resulted from the rise of the nation-state as the primary way of organizing human societies over the past 375 years. The result of such divisions—whether it is bilingualism, creolization, or language death—is a result of public planning (or its absence), and of attitudes toward language justice that inform such planning (or don't).

This seminar will look to the past few centuries for guidance as we think about the future of language planning in one of the most linguistically rich places in the world, the United States. We will explore 250 years of changing immigration patterns,

bilingual educational efforts, and code-switching in this country. We will look at the American Enlightenment's dreams of overcoming the Tower of Babel and supporting a nation of polyglots, and the historical realities of setting up schools for speakers of many languages. We will think about why an Honors education came to emphasize "foreign" languages, and consider how multilingual awareness can open our minds to alternative public spheres and forms of transnational belonging that may inspire us at a time when the Anglophone public sphere may seem damaged beyond repair.

Our major learning goal is to refine our research methods and to pay closer attention to the function of language in generating knowledge. We will welcome sociological, historical, and fieldwork approaches to the final project, which will consist of 10-15 pages. Other requirements will include:

- Attendance and participation in class discussion;
- Journal of informal notes on our readings;
- Leading class discussion of two readings;
- Presentation of the final research project;
- Short reflective papers to help us move toward the final project.