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First-Year Seminars at Muhlenberg

What are First-Year Seminars?

First-Year Seminars are small, discussion-oriented courses that introduce you to the life of the mind — to what it means to think deeply, to talk, read and write critically about ideas; seminars introduce you to what it means to be a college student. Required of all first-year students, First-Year Seminars provide new students with the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member and to read and write about a topic in more depth than typical introductory courses allow.

Taught by full-time faculty from departments throughout the college, seminars vary in their subjects. Some examine a topic from an interdisciplinary perspective; others focus on particular questions or issues within a discipline. What all First-Year Seminars share is an emphasis on writing, reading, and thinking critically about the values and assumptions underlying various approaches to knowledge.

All First-Year Seminars are designated writing intensive, and, therefore, will require weekly writing and reading. Seminars will teach you how to formulate a thesis and develop an argument. In addition, you will learn how to collect, evaluate and cite evidence that supports and qualifies a thesis. With the help of the professor’s comments on preliminary drafts, you will also learn how to revise your work. In sum, First-Year Seminars provide the basis for success in all college courses, no matter your field of interest.

What distinguishes First-Year Seminars from other courses at Muhlenberg?

First-Year Seminars are limited in size to fifteen. This small size creates a community of inquiry where participants share ideas. Often the professor serves as the academic advisor to the seminar participants. This arrangement enhances the effectiveness of the advising process and helps ease the transition to college life.

In addition, first-year seminars are assigned a writing assistant, a trained writing tutor who assists first-year students with their writing, reading and critical thinking skills. Writing assistants are highly motivated Muhlenberg students; all are skilled writers. They attend seminar classes, arrange one-on-one conferences with students and conduct workshops on writing and reading issues. Writing assistants help you throughout the writing process, encouraging you to read carefully and to think long and hard about ideas for written assignments. Because writing assistants and professors work together closely, assistants provide first-year students with a writing specialist who understands the course material and the expectations of the seminar.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 114: Border Crossings
Dr. Pearl Rosenberg
Sean Heron ’12, writing assistant

This course is intended to introduce students to ways of looking, thinking and writing about other people in near and distant locations. We will consider the importance of not just what we say about others, but how and why. Students will be asked to read some fiction early in the term to begin conversations about the construction and maintenance of exclusion and group identities. Some of these stories involve cultural or political themes of idealism, vanity, power, and various forms of distortions, projections, and scapegoating. We will move from fictional accounts to a variety of narrative forms that will take us through a range of lived experiences.

Students will be asked to participate in reading, writing, and research activities in order to address the following questions:
- 1) How do we construct others based on our own situations, context?
- 2) How does the study of other people reflect back to us information about ourselves?
- 3) How do master narratives preserve the social order?
- 4) How do we know what we know?

FYS 124: The Phenomena of Genius
Dr. Diane Follet
Cara Lemire ’12, writing assistant

Historical figures, including musical geniuses, come alive in print and on film. This writing-intensive course examines music’s foremost genius, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Our discussion begins with a viewing of the 1984 Academy-Award-winning film, Amadeus. Using Mozart’s life to initiate debate, we then move to the larger questions: What is genius? Are geniuses born or made? How do composers create? Are geniuses mad? Drawing from Mozart’s letters and selected readings on genius, madness, and music, we will make thoughtful analyses of the issues as we strive to understand Mozart, his family dynamic, his life and death, and his amazing creative output.

FYS 143: Musical Revolutions
Dr. Ted Conner
Emily Stockton-Brown ’12, writing assistant

What makes Nietzsche think that "God is Dead"? How is Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro related to the French revolution? What’s so earthshaking about Darwin’s Origin of the Species, and why did Marx write the Communist Manifesto? Revolutions in music, politics, science and literature are often intertwined. We will read books and listen to music that shook the very foundations of Western culture. Through class discussions and writing explorations, we will see what kinds of connections can be made between these works and how they affect us today. Other possible texts for the seminar may include Freud’s On Dreams, Berlioz’s The Damnation of Faust, Nietzsche’s The Gay Science and Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 144: Subcultures and Style
Dr. Francesca Coppa
Sara Romanello ’12, writing assistant

First coined in the 1940s, the term "subculture" has been applied to many of society’s most interesting, most inventive elements. In this course, we will survey a number of subcultures, from drag to punk, hip-hop to Star Trek, and beyond. What exactly is a subculture? What cultures do subcultures define themselves against? Do people consciously join subcultures, and if so, who? why? and how? Do subcultures have rules? How do members know one another? Is a subculture a community, and if so, to what extent? When can a subculture be considered to have "gone mainstream"--or, to put it another way, when does subculture become culture?

FYS 176: The Great American Road Trip
Professor Susan Clemens
Luke Lischin ’12, writing assistant

Road Trip! The excitement of dropping everything and taking to the road is an American joy. We love the road, and the freedom and adventure it represents, whether by automobile, train, bicycle, or on foot. In this seminar, we will read literary excerpts, short stories, and books about American road trips. We will watch a number of films that deal with road experiences such as: Thelma and Louise, Big Fish, Boys on the Side, Elizabethtown, Duets, and National Lampoon’s Vacation. Core readings may include: Water for Elephants, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Into the Wild, and The Dharma Bums. From our readings and films, we will explore the lessons learned on and from the road, including personal growth and new ways of thinking.

FYS 180: Living in Nature
Dr. Lisa Perfetti
Jessica Harris ’13, writing assistant

Hiking a mountain, fishing in a backcountry stream, watching redtailed hawks circle gracefully overhead--these are the kinds of images that likely come to mind when we think of nature. Nature is a place we go for quiet contemplation or for the thrill of escaping “civilization.” This view of nature is deep-rooted in us, seems "natural" even. But such a view of nature has been shaped by our culture: people in different places and different times have not all valued nature in the same way. In this seminar, we read essays, short stories, and documentary films to reflect on the differing ways humans have understood living in nature. We will consider not only the majestic vistas of our national parks and why “getting back to nature” has become so important to us, but also places we often ignore: the wildlife that makes its home in the concrete of our cities, the farms that provide our food but also make up the quality of our local communities. We will also explore how environmental organizations appeal to diverse perspectives to “save nature” and why environmental debates are often so heated. Through field trips, discussion, in-class exploratory writing, summaries of readings, and several analytical essays (4-6 pages), you will develop a deeper awareness of what living in nature means to you.
FYS 188: Thinking Visual Arts

Professor Raymond Barnes

This seminar will combine a studio art experience, primarily exercises in drawing and painting, with the act of writing. The focus of the seminar, however, will be on our work analyzing and then writing about our creative process and our own creative work. We will think about our written work as if it is a visual one — learning how the language of the visual arts can help our development as writers. In addition, we will learn skills in art criticism. Several guest artists and critics will participate in the seminar, and, if possible, we will take a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Dara Rosenblatt ’12, writing assistant

FYS 195: A House is Not a Home

Dr. Linda Bips

Katie Finkelstein ’13, writing assistant

How do you conceptualize home? Is it your room at Muhlenberg, your parents’ home, your community? In this seminar we will explore the practical and the symbolic meaning of home to you and to others. For our practical exploration, we will participate as volunteers with a variety of social services that work with individuals and families in need of homes. For our symbolic exploration we will read and write extensively about home from a variety of perspectives. What does it mean to be homeless because of poverty and/or oppression? Is home defined by our community? How does your transition from hometown to Muhlenberg College affect your sense of self? As we explore the multiple definitions of home and what makes a house a home, we will attempt to better understand ourselves and others.

FYS 205: Cuisine as Culture

Dr. Erika Sutherland

Daina Nanchanatt ’12, writing assistant

If you were stranded on a desert island, which foods would you want left with you? That simple question takes on powerful consequences when it refers to immigrants in a new country. The foods that immigrant bring with them --and then adapt to new geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic realities-- become both a personal lifeline and a community line of demarcation. In this course we will explore different aspects and ways of considering food in Allentown’s large and diverse Hispanic communities, with three central foci: food history and nostalgia; immigration, assimilation, and concepts of authenticity; and practical issues of local socioeconomics. As a writing-intensive course, weekly brief essays and two longer research-supported essays will be assigned. A food and culture course cannot be complete without food, and so there will be regular class and individual excursions to the many restaurants and food stores serving the Latino and Hispanic immigrant communities of Allentown. Students should be prepared to spend about $75 over the course of the semester in restaurant and market visits. Texts include Felipe Fernández-Armesto’s food history Near a Thousand Tables and Donna Gabaccia’s essay on immigrant foodways in the US, We Are What We Eat.
Not a day goes by without a local newspaper reporting, albeit briefly, a recent scientific discovery. These articles usually address health and medicine topics and often the information is controversial or contradictory to earlier reports. One example is the recent discovery that although hormone replacement therapy eases menopausal symptoms and osteoporosis, it is also associated with an increase risk of heart attack and breast cancer. What should an interested consumer do after reading this in the newspaper? We all need to be aware of science’s strengths and weakness in order to make practical and important decisions about our health or how we want to lead our lives. This seminar will focus on how science works. The various types of research paradigms will be studied in light of several current topics such as: does vitamin C prevent cancer? and is the ozone layer disappearing? The role of science in society will be covered later in the semester. Students will read newspaper articles and complementary primary literature from scientific journals, as well as chapters from a new book “How Science Works.” Student writing will include short weekly assignments critiquing newspaper articles, a position paper addressing a controversial medical discovery, and a case study.

Nuclear energy has been described as the ultimate Faustian bargain, awesome in both its beneficial and destructive potentials. In this seminar we will consider some of the ethical questions that pervade the history and current discussions of nuclear energy. Looking back at the twentieth century, should we view the initial discovery of nuclear energy as a curse, a blessing, or something in between? Is nuclear power safe, and what role should it play in our current energy policy? How should US foreign policy address nations that have recently developed nuclear technologies and those that may seek to do so? Readings will include historical texts, scientific papers, current media articles, and opinion pieces. Through in-class discussions and extensive writing, students will attempt to arrive at defensible positions on some of the big questions surrounding nuclear energy.

What are we doing here? What are we doing here? What am I doing here? These are basic existential questions. They apply simultaneously to your existence on Earth and your experience of college. Any answers you may find will only be provisional, if only because your “here” – your situation – changes. The course will take up all three themes suggested by our guiding question: meaning, acting, and situation. That these can be serious questions at all is a relatively recent phenomenon, less than 200 years old. Modern societies are relatively fluid compared to traditional ones. This could mean more “opportunity;” it could also mean more choices, more anxiety, more alienation and uncertainty. We will read Shakespeare’s great and enigmatic play, *King Lear* and work by the major voices of existentialism: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Sartre, and Camus. Aside from generous doses of philosophy, we’ll read at least one short novel, perhaps Voltaire’s *Candide*, or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, or Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground.*
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 244: Body Dialogues
Professor Sarah Carlson
Samantha Briggs ’13, writing assistant

Culturally determined ideas of the body influence our notion of the physical self from the very day we are born. From MTV to billboards to the neighborhood Cineplex, we are constantly bombarded by larger than life depictions of physical “beauty” and bodily “perfection”. Two dimensional, air brushed images, however, can hardly capture our physical identity in all its profundity. How do we navigate through this labyrinth of visual stimulus to see beyond the image to the reality of our being? What can we learn from how the body has been conceptualized differently in other cultures? In what ways can the body be considered both a mask to hide or a canvas to display the inner self? Film, advertising and various forms of art will be critically analyzed in an effort to better understand this problem. Readings from authors including Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Terrence Turner, and Shaun Gallagher will serve to examine this question through philosophical, anthropological, and sociological lenses. Intensive writing, discussion and embodied learning-through-doing exercises will be critical components in our treatment of this issue.

FYS 254: Springsteen’s America
Dr. Christopher Borick
Joseph Fielding ’12, writing assistant

Few artists are more associated with America than Bruce Springsteen. For nearly 35 years Springsteen has been hailed as the heir to a great tradition of musicians that have used their art to define the promise and perils of the nation. From Woody Guthrie and his Depression Era ballads to Bob Dylan and his 1960s folk critiques of a society in turmoil, artists have helped define America through their lyrics and music. Since his arrival on the scene in the early 1970s, Springsteen has used his music to portray America in a manner that shows both the beauty and ugliness that is found in his native land. In this course we will use Springsteen’s work as a point of departure for an examination of contemporary culture. Topics will include war, economic displacement, racial tensions, urban decline and immigration. The course will also examine Springsteen’s focus on the importance of place in the American consciousness, with an emphasis on New Jersey and the northeast corner of the United States.

FYS 256: Finding Your Muse
Dr. Michael London
Emily Wolff ’12, writing assistant

There is nothing more satisfying than to sing, play, act, dance or communicate with others, when everyone is being creative and collaborating with each other. And, the quality of a creative performance does not always depend on the training or experience of the performer, but is often the result of the unique chemistry of people working together and the dynamics that result from efforts to bring out the best from all involved. In this seminar we consider why and how group dynamics play a role in the creative process and learn to write and think about something we love; the creative act. We begin by looking at various performance areas such as music, theatre, dance and poetry, and read about how the most creative people have gone about their work. We examine the factors that strengthen the ability to create with others and apply theory toward analyzing performance groups of many kinds. Finally, we engage in active learning through small group discussions, collaborative writing, reflection and improvisation as we study our own efforts to create together and learn to analyze the factors that bring success. We’ll end the term by writing and performing an original ensemble piece for the Muhlenberg Community.
Why do we work? How do we work? What role will work play in our lives when we graduate from Muhlenberg? For some, working implies spending time doing a job to earn money to buy things or pay for services—a necessity to make possible the real aspects of living. Others treat work as an end in itself. For most of us, work includes more than time spent to earn money or to escape from the rest of life. Work also includes a venue for creative and professional expression, a means for self-fulfillment, an outlet for social contact, and a way to help others. Work (and unemployment) also can create tensions that affect family life and induce stress—it can be an anchor keeping us down or a liberating force lifting us up. In this seminar, we will investigate work’s place in our lives through oral histories, novels, articles, autobiography, and films. Our goal is to understand more clearly how work affects us and to develop a perspective to analyze our actions and the actions of others.

In the late 1970s, writers bombed the New York City subways with their tags and ‘pieces until they fairly exploded with color. While the trains were eventually buffed clean, subway graffiti originated an art movement celebrated in galleries and museums, and provided the graphics for global hip-hop culture today. Thinking about and talking about graffiti art raises important questions about what art is and who can be an artist: How do we judge aesthetic quality? What is the role of an artist in society? How do race and class influence the reception of art? How does art establish a subcultural or cultural identity? Students will explore these and other questions in lively class discussions centered on examples of graffiti and related texts, and writing assignments that enhance their skills in visual analysis, critical reading, and developing a thesis.

How do we know what we know? How do we know ourselves? Our world? How do we think? What do we base our knowledge on? Facts? Ideas? Beliefs? Emotions? And how certain are we of our answers? In this seminar, we will try and tackle these huge questions by reading some classics texts, such as Sophocles Oedipus Rex, Plato’s The Meno, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, parts of Descartes’s Meditations., Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents and Eric Hoffer’s The True Believer. In addition, we will read more current works, such as John Bath’s The End of the Road and Jonah Lehrer’s How We Decide. In addition to weekly reading, we will write weekly, both formal essays and informal personal pieces, both in-class and out. Our readings will inform our writing and discussions, and help us become much more insightful thinkers.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 271: Reinventing Jane
Dr. Barri Gold
Anna Whiston ’12, writing assistant

Novels and screen plays, sequels and countertexts, adaptations and analyses, mini-series and musicals: In this seminar, we investigate the legacy of Charlotte Brontë’s 1842 masterpiece, *Jane Eyre*. After revisiting this classic in surprising new ways, we turn to its literary successors, including Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (which gives us the story of the madwoman, 1966) and Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair* (featuring literary detective Thursday Next, 2001). In this reading and writing-intensive course, we will also consider key critical essays, such as Gilbert and Gubar’s “The Madwoman in the Attic” (1979), thematically related literature including Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), as well as two film adaptations (1944 and 1996). In this way, we may explore the larger question of how literature serves within a culture—both Brontë’s and our own—to explore its most worrying concerns, among these, questions of individuality and isolation, gender, sexuality, race, and nation.

FYS 277: Exploring Meaning
Dr. William Gruen
Rachel Kitch ’11, writing assistant

By bringing incompatible elements together, mythmakers and entertainers alike are not usually attempting to provide answers, but they are trying to create an opportunity for thought. In this seminar, we will consider examples from both mythic texts and popular culture that seek to stimulate conversation and speculation about meaning, values, and reality. Why is comedy funny? Why is horror horrific? What makes myths endure? We will explore these questions using theoretical models from several disciplines to delve deeply into both ancient and contemporary expressions of human culture; from Gilgamesh and the Bacchae to the Marx Brothers and Marilyn Manson.

FYS 278: Diagnosing Health Care
Dr. Paul Meier
Sabrina Kamran ’13, writing assistant

This course explores the policy issues and implications associated with health care in the United States. We will explore the social, economic, organizational and institutional contexts of health care and medicine to answer questions such as, who is healthy in American society and who is not? How is our health care system organized? And why is it different from those of most other industrialized nations? How does the organization of medical care affect the quality and cost of that care? Our goal will be to gain a deeper understanding of the organization and delivery of health care in the U.S., and to appreciate some of the relevant policy issues. The course is designed to develop critical thinking and analytical skills. To reach those goals, we will read portions of books and articles from scholarly and popular sources. Readings will serve as the basis for class discussions and writing.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 279: Memory
Professor Amra Brooks
Ann Hoelscher '11, writing assistant

This course will be an interdisciplinary study on the different ways that contemporary artists, writers and filmmakers work with memory. We will focus primarily on writing (both fiction and non-fiction/memoir) and on determining what separates fiction from non-fiction. We will also analyze film, video and visual art to see how different voices approach the complicated process of retelling and depicting something as elusive and subjective as memory. How do we as writers and artists do this “accurately,” and how does the idea of “truth” relate to work made from memory. The students will each have an opportunity to do both critical and creative work in this course. We will read, look at, watch, and discuss work by: Alison Bechdel, Nick Flynn, Eileen Myles, Marcel Proust, Joel Agee, Joe Brainard, Haruki Murakami, Chris Markeer, Francois Truffaut, Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, Gerhard Richter, TJ Wilcox, Mike Kelly, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Maureen Gallace.

FYS 282: Coffee: The Great Soberer
Dr. Keri Colabroy
Anne Bertolet '13, writing assistant

The sale and consumption of coffee is a billion dollar industry, making it the second most traded commodity around the world (behind petroleum). The coffee bean was first discovered in the mountains of Ethiopia and treasured for its psychoactive properties. This powerful elixir has fueled political, cultural and economic revolutions since its discovery in the 6th century. Today growing and exporting coffee employs some of the world’s most impoverished people, while the urban chic flock to a new generation of coffeehouses. Did coffee really shape world history? Why are so many of the world’s poor tied to the economy of coffee farming? Why do we think of coffeehouses as places of comfort and conversation? Can coffee really break down social barriers? In this seminar, we will explore the globalization, economy and culture of coffee and the coffee industry. Course work will include analysis of short stories, other narratives, essays, and film. Students will visit local “coffeehouses” and reflect on the experience. Students should expect analyze through writing and improve that analysis with revision and peer editing.

FYS 284: Cosmopolitans
Dr. Jim Bloom
Erin Litsch ‘13, writing assistant

A study of cosmopolitanism, a concept both honored, even in the names of mass-circulation magazines and colorful cocktails, and vilified at least as often. Stalin introduced the phrase “rootless cosmopolitans” to denounce (in order to imprison and often kill) perceived enemies. Nationalists and fascists have habitually masked attacks on impure or subversive outsiders as denunciations of cosmopolitanism. Both enthusiasts and vilifiers are responding the same phenomenon, summed up in Edward Said’s declaration that “I have no patience with the position that ‘we’ should only or mainly be concerned with what is ‘ours.’” Cosmopolitans, in this view, skeptically distance themselves from their origins, question custom, and set out to remake the world by remaking oneself. Readings may include excerpts from Marx’s German Ideology and Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals; Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism, David Harvey’s Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom; Cather’s “Coming Aphrodite”; Wharton’s The Age of Innocence; Somerset Maugham’s The Razor’s Edge; Berlin’s “The Hedgehog and the Fox”; Nabokov’s Laughter in the Dark; Roth’s Human Stain; the Letters of Transit anthology, which includes work by Andre Aciman, Eva Hoffman, Charles Simic, et al. Hollywood movies by refugee and immigrant directors and writers such as Lubitsch, Lang, Hitchcock, Wilder, Schlesinger. Writing-intensive.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

FYS 285: Imagined American Cities

Professor Susan Clemens

Gabrielle Capozzoli ’12, writing assistant

Americans imagined cities in places and ways that defied logic and tradition. Imagine a rationally planned city in the 1600s—Philadelphia. Imagine trekking across a continent into a desert wilderness to build a city for religious freedom—Salt Lake City. Imagine the crazy dream to promote a green city with orange groves by building a 223 mile aqueduct from the Colorado River in 1913—Los Angeles. Perhaps the largest leap of imagination grew out of a desert spring developed into the largest and most spectacular American city established in the twentieth century—Las Vegas.

We will explore these cities in documents, books, articles, and films to discover their audacious magic. In addition, we will incorporate some of the ingenious planners who inspired the dreamers, including the architects of the city beautiful movement at the 1893 Worlds Columbian Exposition, the technological visionaries of the 1939 World of Tomorrow, and the Imagineers of Disney World and Celebration, Florida.

FYS 286: Scandals, Lies and Videotapes

Dr. Cathy Ouellette

Caroline Aiken ’11, writing assistant

This seminar examines popular and collegiate scandals, lies, and deceit through the words, text, and film of the accused and the accusers, who include Ellen DeGeneres, Oprah Winfrey, James Frey, and Rigoberta Menchú. Who is lying—about what—and for what purpose? How do public reputation and image affect cultural performance? Through a look at multiple scandals, students will better understand the complexities of searching for a universal “truth,” and comprehend the motivations behind thievery of ideas and language. We will study how public and personal image and societal expectations create overwhelming burdens that can result in deliberate deception. Topics addressed consist of: cheating, stealing, exaggeration of the truth, outright lying, and plagiarism. Course materials include popular music and film, academic texts, and newspapers and journals. This course is writing-intensive and encourages students to move away from personal feelings into critical thought in written analysis.

FYS 287: Middle Earth Stories

Dr. William Tighe

Sarah Lawrence ’12, writing assistant

J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy became something of a craze in the 1960s, and has maintained its popularity ever since, and in recent years became the subject of a film trilogy which attracted a vast audience. Tolkien’s trilogy actually emerged as almost a by-product of his professional (and professorial) interest in language, philology (the study of words, their origins and changes in meaning), myth and legend and Anglo-Saxon England and its literature. In this course we will study the sources of Tolkien’s creative imagination and its origins in his own life experiences, and how it has been received and purveyed as a work of popular culture, working our way backwards from the films through the stories to their sources and origins. We will also look at the historical and biographical contexts of LOTR (and ancillary works), and at Tolkien’s own ideological, cultural and aesthetic commitments.
FYS 288: Of Kings and Queens: Drag Performance in Theory and Practice

Professor Troy Dwyer
Justine Brannon '11, writing assistant

This course explores the politics, pleasures, and perils of crossing gender in both theatrical performance and in everyday life. Merging a consideration of contemporary theories of sexuality, the history of drag on the stage, and the nuts-and-bolts reality of performing across genders, "Of Kings and Queens: Drag Performance in Theory and Practice" not only studies what it means to transgress gender in performance, but also what it's like. What does sex have to do with social power? Is gender innate, or is it a performance? What happens when the rules of gender are bent and broken, on the stage and on the street? Is the function of drag in traditional theatre different than in other kinds of performances? And what exactly is challenged when a woman puts on a suit and impersonates Kanye West, or when a man dons high heels and lip syncs to Lady GaGa? There are 2 things you should note if you're considering this seminar: (1) it's intended for women, men, and everyone in between, regardless of sexual preference, or gender identity and (2) the course will conclude with a live drag cabaret show in which all students perform. You don't have to have performance experience of any kind to take this class…you just have to be up for an adventure that includes performing!

FYS 289: An American Idol

Dr. Kate Richmond
Larissa D’Andrea '13, writing assistant

Since its debut in 2002, American Idol has evolved into one of the most popular television shows in American history. The coveted prize of the “American Idol” raises important questions related to identity, nationalism, power, and transition. Our seminar will begin with several crucial questions: Who is an American and how do factors such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic status inform the development of a so-called American identity? We will then explore America’s fantasy with the teen idol -- an adolescent in transition who is left to negotiate identity issues in a storm of celebrity under the watchful eye of the media. By critically evaluating historical and current depictions of American identities, in a variety of forms, including essays, bibliographies, television, cinema, magazines, novels, and politics, students will have the opportunity to discuss and write extensively about the many tensions related to identity and power.

FYS 290: Representing Italians: Family, Community & Ethnicity in American Films

Dr. Jack Gambino
David Cooper '11, writing assistant

From the Reginald Barker’s silent film The Italian (1915, originally entitled The Dago) to MTV’s series Jersey Shore, which features self-proclaimed Guidos and Guidettes, Italians and Italian Americans have been the subject of various film and TV representations. This seminar explores the various portrayals, sometimes stereotypical and sometimes complex, of Italians and Italian Americans in American movies, TV shows, and commercial advertisements. Most often, these portrayals have focused on Italians as gangsters, uncouth immigrants, and prizefighters, but they have also shown Italians as ethnics with strong values of community, work and family that have challenged the highly individualistic character of the American modernity. By exploring the representations of Italian ethnicity in American films, students will be asked to examine the peculiar polarity between ethnic-traditional-communal values on the one hand, and the [white] modern-individualist-rationalist values on the other. Among the possible films considered in the seminar are the following: Babylon, The Golden Door, Christ in Concrete, The Godfather, Household Saints, The Fugitive Kind, Marty, A Bronx Tale, Mean Streets, The Big Night, Jungle Fever and Do the Right Thing. We will also consider the impact of TV series such as The Sopranos and the use of Italian ethnicity in commercial advertizing (for example, the Olive Gardens claim: "When you’re with us you're family") in shaping Italian ethnicity as an alter-ego to American modernity.
Happiness is something most of us want more than anything else. Yet only some of us are successful in finding it. But what exactly is this thing we want? What is its nature? Is happiness simply a matter of feeling good or having your desires satisfied? Or is it something deeper like inner peace and tranquility? Can an immoral person be happy? Or does happiness require being morally virtuous? Can a person who is poor or friendless be happy, or are material comfort and companionship essential to happiness? In this seminar we will examine questions such as these and we will search for ways that will increase our chances of leading happy lives. In addition, we will explore the social dimensions of happiness and investigate whether certain economic and political structures are more likely to promote happiness than others. Readings will draw from a number of different disciplines including philosophy, psychology, religion, economics, and neuroscience. This seminar is writing intensive.

Martin Scorsese is one of cinema’s most acclaimed living directors. While he is often associated with films about violent men, his oeuvre is broader than that. In this course, we will watch a variety of films by Scorsese to explore his central themes and cinematic style. We will also read scholarly criticism of the director and consider the issue of auteurism, or the degree to which a film director can be considered the “author” of a film. Scorsese is a student of film history and so we will pair his films with clips of others to see the echoes of classic genres, directors, and movements like the gangster film, the Western, the French New Wave, and Alfred Hitchcock. Thus the class provides an introduction to fundamental issues in film studies in addition to teaching the analytical and writing skills that are the core of all First Year Seminars. Students can expect to watch a film most weeks, read academic essays, and complete weekly writing assignments. Films will include Mean Streets, Taxi Driver, Raging Bull, The Last Temptation of Christ, Goodfellas, and The Age of Innocence.
FYS 294: 1-in-6 Billion? Individuals in the Social World

Dr. Aaron Passell

Davis Alaniello ’13, writing assistant

How should we understand the emergence of odds-defying, outstanding individuals like President Obama? To what degree does one create one’s destiny? Can we find evidence of broad social forces in the lives of particular people? We constantly make choices in our lives and exercise free-will, but are also caught up in complex social structures like race, gender, and nationality that influence what we think, feel, and do. This course will explore the problem of understanding self in terms of our own experience and from the perspective of social theory and research. What is self? We will approach these questions and others through key social theoretical texts, but also by bringing them into conversation with multimedia resources like The New York Times’ "One in 8 Million" series, novels, and biographic narratives. Moreover, we will wrestle with the possibility that this is an irresolvable set of questions, of the sort that we sometimes confront in college. Students will write frequently, both as a way of exploring personal experience and critically engaging with the work we encounter.

FYS 295: Reading Lolita in Allentown

Dr. Thomas Cartelli

Allison Prince ’12, writing assistant

This seminar is modeled on Azar Nafisi’s Reading Lolita in Tehran, a book that describes a literature professor’s effort to offer her students a free space to discuss novels considered scandalous by Iranian religious authorities. In the face of recent efforts to censor books in our own country, and the fact that serious reading is fast becoming an endangered practice, this seminar undertakes a similar project in the All-American city of Allentown with books that test the limits of permissible language, thought, and behavior. Variously praised and condemned, demonized and applauded, Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita — a novel presented from the point of view of an often charming but predatory pedophile — has long catalyzed debates about freedom of expression and art’s alleged advocacy of illicit behavior. The other novels we will read — which will likely include Grace Paley’s Enormous Changes at the Last Minute, Philip Roth’s The Human Stain, and Martin Amis’s Money — offer different kinds of challenges, both to mainstream middle-class values and to the more upscale pieties of the so-called politically correct. Designed to enlarge our range of responsiveness to human experience and artistic representation alike, this seminar will also subject more than a few received ideas and cherished beliefs to critical scrutiny and satiric treatment.

FYS 296: Sustainability: Digging Deeper!

Professor Timothy Averill

James Patefield ’13, writing assistant

SUSTAINABILITY IS GOOD! Right! So why is it so difficult to achieve? This course will explore unresolved issues and the complications and problems that fuel the debate about sustainability. Our readings and research will focus on food and health issues, the importance of gardening and the impact of the organic/localvore movement. A series of various writing assignments will improve your critical thinking skills. Our class is slated to participate in the Muhlenberg College Community Garden, where we will integrate our study with praxis in the garden. You will never look at food the same way again!
Governments killing civilians in mass. US corporations destroying the homes and livelihood of indigenous people. Families forcing their female children to undergo genital mutilation. Parents selling their children to serve as sex slaves. What are the basic rights that human beings are entitled to? Who guarantees and protects those rights? Why aren’t more things being done to stop these atrocities? Why don’t we hear and know more about these crimes against humanity? What does it take to make far-reaching changes in governments and society so that this brutality can cease? In this seminar we will analyze human rights abuses on a global level, including some occurring right now, here in our own country. We will think, discuss, and write about the lives of people who have been the victims of human rights violations and how they fought against the systems and traditions that subjected them to abuse. We will also discuss how we, individually, can begin to effect change both locally and globally. This course involves reading books and articles, watching videos, listening to speakers, and doing research on global human rights topics; this course is also writing intensive.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

**MBS 101:**
**How to Think About Weird Things**

Dr. Theodore Schick

*Frank Cabrera ’12, writing assistant*

(Open only to Muhlenberg Scholars)

It's the dawning of a new age. TV shows about mediums, ghosts, and the supernatural abound. People are making millions talking to the dead, running psychic hotlines, and peddling alternative medicines. What's a reasonable person to believe? Are we entering a brave new world or, as Carl Sagan suggests, has our educational system simply failed to provide us with adequate "baloney detection" skills? In this seminar, we will examine a number of "fringe" claims in an attempt to determine what makes a claim worthy of belief. Is creationism as plausible as evolution? Can people survive the death of their bodies? Is what people say about alien abductions, psychic powers, near death experiences, etc. true? How can we tell? When are we justified in believing something? Answering these questions will require thinking critically and writing intensively. Readings will include selections from: Schick and Vaughn, *How to Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age*; Sagan, *A Candle in the Dark*, and Humphrey, *Leaps of Faith*.

**RJF 106:**
**What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?**

Peter Bredlau

*Amy Asendorf ’13, writing assistant*

(Open only to RJ Fellows)

Using readings, writings, and a partnership with the Career Center, this seminar will explore what sort of work you want to pursue, and, more importantly, what sort of person you want to be. We'll look at questions like “What is the good life?,” “What is my responsibility to the community?,” “What do I feel called to be?,” and “How do I make a plan for achieving my goals?” This seminar is writing intensive, so writing and reviewing your writing will be major components of the class work.
First-Year Seminars — 2010-2011

DNA 112: 1968

Dr. Jefferson Pooley

Gina Zelko '11, writing assistant

(Open only to Dana Scholars)

In this course, we will explore a single, extraordinary year in world history: 1968. From violent protests in Chicago to the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy; from the Prague spring to France’s near-revolution in May; from the counterculture to college students’ seizure of campus buildings across the country; from the “silent majority” to the musical “Hair”—1968 was a watershed moment in U.S. (and world) history. The course traces back a few of the trends and movements that, in 1968, would crescendo: the civil rights and student anti-war movements, Cold War tensions, the nascent counterculture, black militancy, and the rise of rock ‘n roll. The course also explores the lasting influence of the year’s events in the decades to follow, for the American political conflict, for the “culture wars,” and for popular culture. As a first-year seminar, the course aims above all to impart college-level writing skills, and the 1968 material that we explore will be harnessed to that end.

DNA 113: The Wire: Representations of Inner City Life

Dr. Brian Mello

Adam Beal '11, writing assistant

(Open only to Dana Scholars)

This seminar utilizes works of sociology, political science, and political philosophy to provide critical lenses for examining and evaluating the representations of the urban experience depicted in The Wire. The Wire is not a documentary, but the creators of the series hoped it would restart a conversation about problems and concerns affecting American cities. This course will use season 3 of the series as a representation and critique of the state of life in America’s urban neighborhoods. We will examine what assumptions are made by, and what implications should be drawn from the representation of socioeconomic concerns in The Wire? Students will watch (out of class) one episode per week, which will stand as the guidepost for readings and class discussion. These episodes will serve to focus issues in the readings, which will concentrate on the status of the war on drugs, persistent socio-economic problems, pathways and impediments to social mobility, and the dynamics of race.
First-Year Seminar Registration Form

(Will Be Assigned Later)

Muhlenberg ID Number

Last Name

First Name

Middle Initial

Please circle your top 8 choices.

(Before you complete this form, please read all the seminar descriptions, listed in this brochure. Make sure that you are interested in all 8 of your choices. As a member of the Class of 2014, you will take one seminar, either in the fall or spring.)

2010-2011 First-Year Seminars

FYS 114  Border Crossings
FYS 124  The Phenomena of Genius
FYS 143  Musical Revolutions
FYS 144  Subcultures and Style
FYS 176  The Great American Road Trip
FYS 180  Living in Nature
FYS 188  Thinking Visual Arts
FYS 195  A House is Not a Home
FYS 205  Cuisine as Culture
FYS 208  Nature of Science
FYS 237  Dancing with the Nuclear Genie
FYS 240  What Are We Doing Here?
FYS 244  Body Dialogues
FYS 254  Springsteen’s America
FYS 256  Finding Your Muse
FYS 267  Why We Work
FYS 268  Graffiti Art
FYS 270  How Do We Know What We Know?
FYS 271  Reinventing Jane
FYS 277  Exploring Meaning
FYS 278  Diagnosing Health Care
FYS 279  Memory
FYS 282  Coffee: The Great Soberer
FYS 284  Cosmopolitans
FYS 285  Imagined American Cities
FYS 286  Scandals Lies and Videotapes
FYS 287  Middle Earth Stories

FYS 288  Of Kings and Queens: Drag
FYS 289  Performance in Theory and Practice
FYS 290  An American Idol
FYS 291  Representing Italians: Family, Community & Ethnicity in American Films
FYS 292  Happiness: The Philosophy and Science of Human Flourishing
FYS 293  Individualism, Faith, and Violence in the Films of Martin Scorsese
FYS 294  1-in-6 Billion? Individuals in the Social World
FYS 295  Reading Lolita in Allentown
FYS 296  SUSTAINIBILITY: Digging Deeper!
FYS 297  Genocide, Destruction, and Human Trafficking

2010-2011 Scholar Seminars

MBS 101: How to Think About Weird Things
(Open only to Muhlenberg Scholars)
RJF 106: What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?
(Open only to RJ Fellows)
DNA 112: 1968
(Open only to Dana Scholars)
DNA 113: The Wire: Representations of Inner City Life
(Open only to Dana Scholars)