Muhlenberg College
First-Year Seminars

Class of 2018
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First-Year Seminars at Muhlenberg

What are First-Year Seminars?
First-Year Seminars are small, discussion-oriented courses that introduce students to what it means to think deeply, to talk, read and write critically about ideas. Required of all first-year students, First-Year Seminars provide the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member and to read and write about a topic in depth.

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

All First-Year Seminars are designated writing-intensive, and therefore, require frequent writing and reading. Seminars teach students how to formulate a thesis and develop an argument or an interpretation. In addition, students learn how to collect, evaluate and cite evidence that supports and qualifies a thesis. With the help of professor’s comments on preliminary drafts, students also learn how to revise their work.

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 (WAs) are highly motivated Muhlenberg students; all are skilled writers. They attend seminar classes and arrange one-on-one and small group conferences with students. Because WAs and professors work together closely, these peers provide first-year students with a writing specialist who understands the course material and the expectations of the seminar.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 103: Mad Men, Geniuses and Nerds
Dr. Mary Bryne
Scientists have been admired, lofted to celebrity status, cursed as heretics, portrayed as madmen and considered 'nerds'. Societal pressures can greatly impact scientific inquiry. Should politicians decide what research is 'hot' and what is taboo? Should religious doctrine dictate scientific theory? Do scientists have an obligation to adhere to the wishes of society? How do personal experiences affect the choices that scientists make? This seminar will explore these questions through reading and writing about the lives of scientists - both biographical and fictional - and medical ethics and the philosophy of science.

FYS 105: The Rise and Fall of the Modern Self
Dr. Alec Marsh
Suppose the Self as we know it was invented, probably in the 17th century. If so, it flourished in the 18th through 20th centuries. Now the “post-modern” age of neuroscience, the Self threatens to become an effect of “brain-chemistry.” Can concepts like the individual, consciousness, the rational and irrational, will and desire; the so-called “three dimensional character” in fiction and even “the soul” change and evolve over time? Let’s talk about it. In this course we will begin with Descartes’ Meditations, a work that lies near the heart of so-called Western civilization then we’ll explore an 18th c. novel—possibly the scandalous Les Liaisons Dangereuses—(which we will read in English) and move towards the present via Whitman’s Song of Myself and the psychology of the unconscious –Freud. We fetch up with a contemporary self in a contemporary novel, striving for realization in a world where ‘normality’ can be prescribed by psychiatrists—the world of neuroscience.

FYS 108: All You Can Eat?: Media, Marketing and the Food Industry
Dr. Susan Kahlenberg
This first-year seminar is interested in why and how food companies market, brand, and advertise their products. How should food marketing be regulated, if at all? How does food marketing affect food choices and preferences? We will examine how media have assumed a socializing role in shaping what we eat, and therefore, our health. We will investigate how food companies use political processes, economic pressures, and marketing imperatives to produce, manufacture, label, and sell food and beverages. In exploring the history, regulation, dietary, and nutritional information of food, in addition to media representations of food/food culture, students will develop a critical understanding of the U.S. food industry. Course work will include analysis of popular and scholarly texts, governmental hearing proceedings and policies, television programs, web sites, print and digital marketing campaigns, and user-generated content, to name a few. This course is writing intensive with students completing in-class writings and activities, short analytical essays, and a longer research paper developing from peer and faculty review.

FYS 111: Competition and American Culture
Professor Jeffrey Peterson
This seminar examines the extent to which Vince Lombardi’s famous quote “Winning isn’t everything - it’s the only thing” is the dominant attitude in American culture. Does it bother you when someone merges in front of you on the highway? Were you chosen (first or) last for kickball in gym class? Did you pay close attention to class rank in high school? Competition infiltrates our everyday lives: little league players burst into tears upon losing, workers compete against each other for “friendliest employee,” and millions tune in to see which real people on TV “are out” or have to “sashay away” each week. This course will grapple with the ramifications of the competitiveness of American society. We will analyze the impact of competitiveness on child development, sports, dance, and other elements of contemporary culture. We will consider the causes and the effects, as well as the pros and the cons of competition as a cultural value—compared, for example, with collaboration. We will work through, and regularly write about a range of readings by writers such as Malcolm Gladwell, Alfie Kohn (No Contest: The Case Against Competition), and Isaac Kramnick ("Equal Opportunity and “The Race of Life”"). In addition, seminar members will engage in role-play: observing, participating, and adjudicating competitive sports, dance, and marching band.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 112: The Psychology of Choice
Dr. Linda Bips
Making decisions is part of one’s every day experience but how does one choose a major, lunch, a new coat, or even a partner for life? This course will examine decision making through many different lenses -biology, intuition, emotion, logic. Do we make choices that conform to the norms of others or that are innovative and uncommon? Are we making decisions consciously or unconsciously? Do the best decisions result from blending both feeling and reason and how do we know the ideal contribution of each? We will also examine the impact of culture, media, the environment, and our personal history of choices on our everyday decisions. Our primary text will be The Art of Choosing by Iyengar but we will also examine decision making by reading other authors. We will look at how our choices construct our identity and impact our own happiness. Ideally as a result of understanding choice, we will become better decision makers.

FYS 113: Quentin Tarantino, Film Geek
Dr. Franz A. Birgel
Quentin Tarantino, whose fast talking, super violent films helped to reinvigorate American cinema, was largely an autodidact who learned his craft watching films while working in a video store. Like Tarantino, we will watch films closely and analyze their themes and structures. This seminar will examine Reservoir Dogs, Pulp Fiction, Jackie Brown, the two-part Kill Bill, Inglourious Basterds, and Django Unchained as well as some of the many disparate films that influenced him. Excerpts from selected French New Wave and Asian films, The Killing, Coffy, The White Hell of Piz Palu, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, the original Django as well as others will also be screened. Course readings will consist of some screenplays as well as secondary literature on Tarantino and postmodern popular culture. Since this is a writing-intensive course, students will write short weekly essays as well as some longer essays during the semester. The seminar will meet one evening per week from 6 to 10 p.m. and one evening from 7 to 9 pm. Films will be screened during the evening meetings.

Please note: These films contain scenes of very graphic violence and vulgar language. If you feel uncomfortable watching these films, you should choose another seminar. Students participating in varsity sports will probably have a time conflict and be unable to register for this course.

FYS 119: Representing the Body in Art
Dr. Pearl Rosenberg
How do creative representations of the human body invite us to imagine our idealized selves, as well as reflect back to us information about ourselves within social, political, and historical contexts? In this seminar we explore how the notion of the human body has been conceptualized by the language of the arts. Through a variety of encounters with works of art by iconic figurative artists (Michelangelo, Frida Kahlo, Egon Schiele to start), as well as more contemporary visions of the body (in performance, photography, film, literary fiction, essays and memoir), we will explore themes of idealism, vanity, power and various forms of distortions, projections, and scapegoating. This seminar is considered to be a writing-intensive class where students will be asked to participate in critical reading, writing, and research activities in addition to having encounters with a variety of art forms.

FYS 123: What is Normal?
Prof. Wendy Cole
In this seminar, students will explore such questions as ‘is there a “normal”? Do we need normalcy? What is normal in a free society? Do we strive to be normal? Who or what is abnormal? Who defines normal? How do we qualitatively and quantitatively measure normal? What about a 95 year old Poet Laureate? A competitive skier with no legs? Students will look at the concept of normal from a historical, cultural, and psychological perspective. Readings will come from the fields of social, developmental, clinical, and humanistic psychology, and literature. Texts may include The Bell Curve, chapters from The Tyranny of Normal, Cultural Conversations, and Abnormal Psychology texts. This course will require weekly writing.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 132: Thinking Like a Writer
Dr. Jill Stephen
The aim of the seminar will be to turn you into a writer—not just a person who writes, but a person who reads, thinks, and sees in the ways that writers do. The seminar’s guiding premise is that all of us, in a sense, write our lives—that writing is a way not only of discovering but of inventing our “selves.” A related premise is that the thing we call “style” in writing is not just cosmetic—a way to make our ideas look and sound good—but is directly related to who we are and how we typically think. Together we will read, analyze, and experiment with writing a range of contemporary non-fiction forms. Over the course of the semester, you will learn how to learn from other writers, especially how to use others’ writing to generate your own ways of thinking on the page. The seminar is aimed at writers, which is to say people who tend to approach life through writing, but it is really for anyone who would like to learn more about using writing as a means of becoming a more observant and more resourceful thinker.

FYS 134: American Utopias
Dr. Lynda Yankaskas
What would a perfect society look like? How could we create a perfect community? How have Americans’ answers to these questions changed over time? What have been the results of attempts to put utopian ideas into practice in American life? How have dreamers and dissenters been received by the wider public? This writing-intensive seminar will examine how Americans in a variety of times and places have imagined a “more perfect union,” and how some of them acted on their ideas. We will investigate the ways that the pursuit of perfection has been shaped by historical and social context, and ask what utopianism can tell us about broader currents of American life. We will proceed chronologically from the Puritans’ “community of saints” to the 20th-century Disney-planned community of Celebration, Florida. Readings will include both texts produced by utopian thinkers and experimental societies (Edward Bellamy’s 1888 novel Looking Backward, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1915 novel Herland, records of the 18th- and 19th-century Oneida and Shaker communes, and others) and scholarly studies of utopian experiments.

FYS 135: Persuasion, Manipulation, Deception
Dr. Tad Robinson
How do other people try to influence our beliefs and our actions, and where is the line between persuasion, manipulation, and outright deception? We are continually subject to the persuasive efforts of others who want us to think and act in conformity with their wishes, e.g. to buy their product, to vote for their candidate, or merely to lend them the keys to the car. Similarly, we are continually engaged in persuasive efforts of our own. In this seminar we will be concerned with persuasion as it occurs both in interpersonal communication and through the mass media, and will consider persuasive techniques, whether such techniques should be as persuasive as they are, and the extent to which such techniques may be manipulative or deceptive. Exploring these questions will involve readings from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, communications, and political science. This seminar is writing-intensive.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 136: Bread, Circuses, and American Electoral Politics
Dr. Lanethea Mathews-Schultz

“The people that once bestowed commands, consulships, legions, and all else, now meddle no more and longs eagerly for just two things—bread and circuses.” So wrote the Ancient Roman satirist, Juvenal, who lamented the populace’s growing addiction to mass distraction—gladiatorial and other games of death—and unflinching obedience to civil authority. Diverted by spectacle, the Roman people lost the capacity to govern themselves. Commentators have noted that American elections resemble our own extended circus, one defined by reality TV, late-night laughs, scandal, confessions, denials, gaffes, bloodlust, and elaborate media games measured by a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down,” perpetually reported on, debated, displayed, and replayed. At the same time that we have developed an insatiable appetite for the permanent campaign, we have grown disenchanted with the American republic itself. Have mass distractions of contemporary elections obliterated our capacities for democratic citizenship, the very capacities upon which American democracy rests? This writing intensive seminar considers the bread and circuses of the 2014 congressional elections and of the American electoral process more generally. In other words, it considers what, if anything, do American elections have to do with democracy?

FYS 140: Exploring Anarchy
Dr. Brian Mello

This writing-intensive first-year seminar explores popular and philosophical interpretations of anarchy and anarchism. Anarchy is, at its root, the absence of authority. For some, this means anarchy is tantamount to chaos, violence, immorality; in the words of Thomas Hobbes, anarchy leads to a life that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” From AMC’s *The Walking Dead* to William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, to Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, we are repeatedly informed that mankind does not function well in the absence of authority and order. This course seeks to challenge these beliefs by seriously engaging the works of anarchist political thinkers. We will ask how the philosophical writings of anarchists cause us to challenge or rethink some of the assumptions behind our popular, literary, and philosophical fears of anarchy. In addition, we will explore whether and how anarchist thought can provide a critical lens for thinking about our contemporary world from wars and prisons to education and the response to Hurricane Katrina. Students will engage in daily informal writing, which will be used to generate three formal analytical essays over the course of the semester.

FYS 142: Who Controls Your Digital World?
Professor Tina Hertel

Digital technologies are closely integrated in how we learn, work, socialize and collaborate in an ever-connected digital culture. Alongside these opportunities are challenges and realities in how these digital technologies intersect with our everyday lives. This course examines the cultural impact of digital technologies, how an individual can actively and effectively participate in these digital cultures, and what external forces, policies, and institutions may influence control over these digital environments. This seminar will explore contemporary online behaviors and the challenges associated with them and will give students exercises to mindfully observe, understand, reflect, and take control of these information technology practices.

FYS 143: Musical Revolutions
Dr. Ted Conner

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*. 
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FYS 146: On Interwoven Lives: Linked Stories
Dr. Dawn Lonsinger
Being neither novels nor classic short story collections, linked narratives are strange hybrids that define a world, delivering disparate narrative pleasures—“the novel’s long immersion into a character’s world and the short story’s energetic (and mortal) brevity.” We will consider how linked collections—such Kingston’s The Woman Warrior, Torres’s We the Animals, and Calvino’s Invisible Cities—uniquely draw into focus the ways our layered lives are ruptured by and wedded to other people’s narratives. Central to our conversation will be thinking deeply about the relationship between identity and narrative. The individual stories in these books remind us how quickly everything we are can be upended, while what develops across stories reveals the evolution of our lives. Through a series of critical essays and creative reflections, we will investigate how our individual stories are linked by place, events, or shared experience, and explore what this reveals about being simultaneously alone and in community, essentially the protagonist of our own lives and minor characters in others’ stories. In what ways are we wedded to our origins, and in what ways do we travel, literally or imaginatively, far from those beginnings? We will also examine how large social narratives and individual stories complicate and intensify one another.

FYS 154: Now I Am Become Death: Brains, the Bomb, and the Bellicose
Dr. Brett Fadem
The gathering of intellectual talent for the construction of the atom bomb was attended by many of the world’s most creative scientists. The product of their labors, however, was the most destructive weapon yet assembled. This seminar will explore the lives of these geniuses, the environment of the Manhattan Project, and the ethical issues that wove their way through the daily existence of scientists both in the United States and Europe. While some of the major players appeared to be deeply engaged with the ethical minefield that surrounded them, others seemed oblivious, and a few went so far as to adopt an attitude of active disengagement. We will explore these issues both from a modern perspective and that of the participants. The Making of the Atomic Bomb provides an excellent history of the Manhattan Project and its scientists. American Prometheus focuses on the life of the scientific leader of the effort to create the bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, while Uncertainty: The Life and Science of Werner Heisenberg explores the decisions of Oppenheimer’s counterpart in Germany.

FYS 157: Moving in the Movies
Professor Corrie Cowart
What do the feel-good song and dance moments in movie musicals tell us about American Culture? How do the popular dance forms highlighted in these films reflect and challenge social trends of the twentieth century? These are some of the questions this course seeks to explore by investigating how dance both perpetuates and challenges social and cultural issues of power, class, gender, sexual orientation and race. We will view iconic classics such as West Side Story, Singin’ In the Rain, and Cabaret, looking for the words to analytically describe the cultural and aesthetic significance of the dance and the dancers, to the overall film experience. Each week students will watch a film and read related articles connected to the historic and aesthetic factors of the film. Ultimately cinematic dance serves as a fascinating platform for developing analytical writing and thinking skills to investigate the significance of cultural and artistic products. Come and be moved!
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FYS 158: Art, Experience, and the Irrational
Professor Kevin Tuttle
Artists and writers work at the limits of understanding. As they struggle with experiences that seem beyond language, possibly in realms that appear irrational, how do artists and writers invent the language they need to reveal these experiences? What is the nature of language and what is its potential for newfound experience? In what ways have artists and writers created new structure in order to describe their experience? Picasso said "There is no such thing as 'feet' in nature." The French artist Matisse, as an old man, said with satisfaction "At last I've forgotten how to draw." What can these statements have in common? We will examine these and other unusual statements that artists have uttered and analyze how artists think, how they work, and investigate the paradoxical worlds they inhabit. Through reading, weekly informal writing to extended written analyses, discussion, drawing, and working in a sketchbook/journal we will analyze these issues; issues which haunt artists and may propel their work in unexpected directions. Some of the readings will come from John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, Charles Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*, Suzuki *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, Rudolph Arnheim *Art and Visual Perception*.

FYS 176: Road Trip: American Literature & Film
Professor Susan Clemens
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 books, short stories, and articles about other people’s journeys. We will see films, listen to the music of the road, take a short road trip, and connect the intellectual with the actual wherever possible. In the past, core readings have been chosen from the following: Water for Elephants, On the Road, Into the Wild, The Motorcycle Diaries, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, The Glass Castle. We will watch a number of films that deal with road experiences, for example: Oh! Brother, Where Art Thou, Thelma and Louise, Big Fish, Little Miss Sunshine, Elizabeth Town, and even Up! From our readings and film, we will explore the lessons learned on and from the road, including personal growth and new ways of thinking.

FYS 205: Cuisine as Culture: Exploring Allentown’s Hispanic Immigrant Communities
Dr. Erika Sutherland
Humans have always thought about food as something much more than physical sustenance. In this course we will explore the concept of food most specifically as a cultural marker. In the local Hispanic immigrant communities food may be a marker of assimilation or socioeconomic status or it may be a nostalgic link to a distant homeland or disappearing culture. Looking at food through the eyes of filmmakers and the words of poets, historians, visionaries, and activists, we will consider food as an object of study and a lens through which broader issues can be analyzed. Exploring the area’s diverse Hispanic communities, you will be able to add your own sensorial and analytical impressions to this mix.

This course is writing-intensive. In it you will develop a set of tools to help you navigate each of your academic pursuits: you will be learning about cuisine and immigrant communities, but you will also be acquiring tools that will go far beyond this course. The work you will do here – reading closely, honing your powers of observation, conceptualizing essays, applying criticism, revising, and revising again—will provide you with a solid base for growing as a reader, thinker, and writer.

FYS 225: Think Like Leonardo Di Vinci
Professor Tim Averill
This writing-intensive seminar will be an exploration in learning how to think creatively and critically about everything. This seminar will ask you to expand your imaginative powers and become a Renaissance woman or man. We will use the recent bestseller *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci* by Michael Gelb to fuel your ‘everyday genius’. Students will learn Gelb's seven da Vincian principles: curiosity, demonstration, sensation, embracing ambiguity, balancing art and science, self-awareness of one’s body, and the interconnectedness of all things. Work will include daily notebook entries, short analysis papers, and a final project using writing and visual collage. Readings may include excerpts from Leonardo’s *Notebooks* and books on creativity, design, cooking physics, drawing and fencing. Students might also learn the beginnings of how to draw, mind-map, cook, and fence.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 229: Endangered Writers
Professor Linda Miller
This first-year seminar focuses on the first amendment of our Constitution, which states, “Congress shall make no law….abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...” Our seminar will focus on what “freedom of speech” means. We will begin our investigation by analyzing various theories on the extent to which freedom of speech is important. We will read various essays by philosophers like J.S. Mill and constitutional scholars like Cass Sunstein. Once we have a handle on the core debate, we will turn to novels, perhaps by Milan Kundera and Nora Gold, and films, such as “The Lives of Others,” which place into context what’s at stake when writers put unpopular or controversial words to the page.

FYS 234: Writing Meditation
Dr. Kammie Takahashi
“Reduce Stress!” “Discover Inner Peace!” From Tazo’s Zen Tea to Google’s “Search Inside Yourself” seminars, modern Western references to traditional meditative techniques are everywhere. What are the traditional, often religious, referents of these modern expressions, and what elements of those practices are common across traditions and historical periods? What role do these practices and references to them play in today’s American culture? This seminar explores the wide variety of traditional and modern contemplative techniques, as well as their contemporary implementations in the diverse spheres of the visual and performing arts, education, business, exercise, psychology, environmental ethics, medical science, and activist practices. How is meditation understood as process? As performance? As expression? In reading authors who have written about meditation, or have used it in their own writing, we will also experiment with various contemplative writing exercises to explore their possible contributions to our own writing process.

FYS 237: The Nuclear Genie
Dr. Joseph Keane,
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.

FYS 241: Why Race?
Dr. James Bloom
This seminar takes its cue from historian Jacques Barzun’s 1937 book, Race: The Modern Superstition, which appeared at a time when, thanks to Hitler's Nuremberg laws and the pervasiveness of lynching in America's Jim Crow South, the supposedly "civilized world" was simultaneously perpetrating history's most egregious racist crimes and beginning to recognize the tragic impact of the very concept of race. Eighty years on, the concept of race has been entirely discredited by both history and science. Nevertheless, Americans persist in talking about race as if it actually exists. (Ask anyone who has submitted a college application or completed a census form.) This seminar will ask why Americans, liberals as well as conservatives, progressives as well as reactionaries, remain so addicted to this "vulgar superstition," as Barzun called race-thinking so long ago. Readings will include bureaucratic documents, works of fiction, newspaper and magazine articles, sociological, political, and historical studies.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 243: Murder Ink
Dr. Francesca Coppa
"Murder Ink" will explore an immensely popular fictional genre: the detective story. We will examine its evolution out of the 19th century gothic and its evolving techniques, as well as its impact on literary and popular culture. We will also study the methods of the detective and use them in our own critical thinking and writing: we will ask questions, gather information, evaluate and interpret evidence, and construct compelling arguments. We will be reading primary sources - mystery novels, short stories, plays – as well as history and theory; we may also look at some filmic adaptations. Writers studied will include Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, G.K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler.

FYS 245: Vive la Différence: Selfhood and the Embodiment of Individuality
Professor Troy Dwyer
This seminar explores what it means to have a “self” by considering the nature of identity, as well as how people experience and articulate their own senses of individuality. By investigating works of art and literature (including fashion, music, plays, films and other media), as well as scholarly thought about how selfhood is defined, we will construct a critical framework to guide a series of “lived” self-expression projects. These will reflect upon our own identities, styles, experiences and perspectives, especially as we envision what it means to begin a four-year journey as college students at Muhlenberg. Where do we get the information that sculpts our senses of self? Do we define ourselves, or are we defined externally? Why are there differences between the way we think of ourselves and the way we may be regarded socially, culturally or historically? And what does the experience of the body have to do with any of this? A strong emphasis on practicing college-level analytical reading and writing supplements our reflective study as we practice critical tools for successful scholarly work as undergraduates, and beyond. (The course title “Vive la Différence,” pronounced ‘veev la dif-fair-awns,’ is a French expression that literally means “live the difference.” It’s usually understood as an exclamation valuing individuality and diversity. But there’s no French in this course!)

FYS 248: Happiness: The Philosophy and Science of Human Flourishing
Dr. Daniel Doviak
Happiness is something most of us want more than anything else. But what exactly is this thing we want? Is happiness simply a matter of experiencing pleasure or is it something psychologically deeper like feeling fulfilled or being driven by a sense of purpose? How do conceptions of happiness vary between persons, and how do these differences impact our lives both socially and politically? Can happiness be measured and meaningfully compared across persons? Or is human well-being too subjective to be quantified in any precise way? Does genuine happiness require reciprocity and altruism? Or can humans flourish without morality? To what extent do genes and early upbringing determine our prospects for subjective well-being? What political, social, and economic factors influence human welfare, and how do these factors limit or enhance a person's ability to achieve his/her vision of the good life? In this writing intensive seminar we will explore these and related questions about the nature and determinants of human happiness, critically investigating what philosophers and scientists have said about the attitudes, practices, and social structures thought to be conducive to optimal human flourishing. Readings will draw from a number of different disciplines including philosophy, psychology, political science, behavioral economics, and neuroscience, among others.

FYS 249: Sounding Green: Music & the Art of Environment
Dr. Timothy Cochran
What is the relationship between music and the environment? How have composers imagined the environment in music throughout history? What does it mean to be responsible music consumers in an era of climate change? This interdisciplinary seminar examines the complex relationships between music, culture, and environment. Students will analyze diverse representations of natural and urban settings in music by Beethoven, Mos Def, Schubert, Björk, Messiaen, and others. Interspersed throughout the course will be opportunities to critique the way sound defines the spaces in which we live and to explore sustainability issues in relation to music production and consumption.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 252: Arabian Nights, Disney Days
Professor Sharon Albert
Aladdin. Sinbad the Sailor. Ali Baba. We all know the Disney versions, but what are the real stories? Where do they come from? How did they reach us? And how have they affected our perceptions of Arabs, Islam, and the exotic, mysterious, and potentially threatening East? This course will focus on the collection of stories known as the Arabian Nights. We will begin by examining the stories themselves and how they reflect the medieval Middle Eastern societies in which they were first compiled. We will then consider the translation and transmission of these stories to the West. Finally we will investigate how these stories have shaped and how they continue to inform our perceptions and responses to non-Western societies. Readings will include a variety of translations of the Arabian Nights, secondary studies of the Nights, and works assessing how Western conceptions of the East have been constructed, including Edward Said’s Orientalism. We will particularly focus on the presentation of images of the Nights as seen in popular films, including Disney’s Aladdin, Michael Powell’s Thief of Baghdad, Valentino’s The Sheik, and The 7th Voyage of Sinbad.

FYS 254: Springsteen’s America
Dr. Christopher Borick
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
In this seminar we’ll explore how inspiration and group dynamics play a role in the creative process and learn to write and think about something we love: making music. There is nothing more satisfying than being creative in community when everyone is actively collaborating with each other. In exploring our “creative muses”, we’ll look at various areas of musical performance including singing, instrumental work, soloing, dancing, accompaniment, songwriting and musical theater. We’ll read about how creative people have gone about their work and examine the factors that enhance musicality and our ability to create with others. Finally, we’ll 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 becoming a performance ensemble, writing and performing an original ensemble show for the Muhlenberg Community. Students should have an interest in musical performance and sing or play a musical instrument.

FYS 258: Performing Identity
Dr. Beth Schachter
This FYS will explore how defining an individual or theatrical character as "She" or "He" or (the gender defying) "Ze" complicates the ways in which we perform gender in our daily lives. The class will attend the mainstage productions at Muhlenberg as well as take trips to NYC or Philadelphia for outside performances. We will read plays and study them through the analytic approaches offered by essays in cultural studies. Kate Bornstein's Gender Outlaw and Maurice Berger's White Lies, for example, will help us watch performances with new questions about how gender and ethnicity define characters. Onstage or off, we are defined by our histories, our bodies, who and how we love, where we work, what we write. Theatre offers us an arena in which we can see how our ideas about "normal" are being informed. What are the ethical implications of labeling certain people "freaks", or simply "not like me"? This class explores the personal, aesthetic and political actions called for if we dare to look deeply - and discuss openly - the ways in which we see and define one another.
First-Year Seminars — 2014-2015

FYS 287: Middle Earth Stories
Dr. William Tighe
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 purified 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 290: Representing Italians: Family, Community and Ethnicity in American Films
Dr. Jack Gambino
From Reginald Barker’s silent film *The Italian* (1915, originally entitled *The Dago*) to MTVs 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: *Golden Door, Christ in Concrete, The Godfather, Household Saints, The Rose Tattoo, 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 advertising in shaping Italian ethnicity as the alter-ego to American modernity.

FYS 295: Reading Lolita In Allentown
Dr. Tom Cartelli
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 efforts to censor or condemn artworks in our own country, and the fact that serious reading in particular is fast becoming an endangered practice, this seminar undertakes a similar project with books—and at least one film—that test the limits of permissible language, thought, and behavior. Various demonized and applauded, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* - a novel presented from the point of view of a charmingly predatory pedophile which has long catalyzed debates about freedom of expression and art's alleged advocacy of illicit behavior--serves as the pivot around which our examination of other works will be assembled. These other works—most likely Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Robert Stone’s *Children of Light*, Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*, and *Blue is the Warmest Color* in its film and graphic novel formats--offer different kinds of challenges, both to mainstream middle-class values and to the pieties of the so-called politically correct. Designed to enlarge our range of responsiveness to human experience and artistic representation, this seminar will subject more than a few received ideas to critical challenge and scrutiny.
FYS 299: Neurofuture: Mind, Brain, and Society
Dr. Jeff Rudski
Our understanding of the brain is progressing at breakneck speed, but is all this acquired knowledge helping us to better understand the mind? What exactly is the relationship between the two? Are we nothing more than our neurons, our thoughts nothing more than patterns of brain activity, or are other ingredients necessary to define us? Furthermore, advances in brain sciences open up a Pandora’s nesting-doll of ethical issues. If we could enhance or erase memories, should we? Do psychotropic medications alter our authenticity, or provide us with opportunities to flourish? Might brain-scanners eventually read our minds, threatening our cognitive liberty? Are people using sex differences in the brains of men and women to promote equality, or to maintain the status quo? Might criminals who have “bad brains or genes” be less responsible for their crimes, and consequently deserve lighter sentences? Through readings spanning fiction to non-fiction to journal articles, as well as classroom presentation and small-group research projects, this course will explore these and other emerging social and philosophical questions stemming from the rapid progress in the neurosciences.

Scholar Seminars — 2014-2015

DANA 116: Speak My Language?
Dr. Jeremy Teissere
This sentence introduces the theme of this first-year seminar and is composed of words strung together using the rules of English grammar. On second glance, the sentence not only contains words, but also meaning, content, reference, figurative language, an implied audience, and a winking meta-awareness. Where did all of these other elements arrive from and how do they function (more or less) seamlessly together to comprise what we call ‘language’? How does one use language to create ‘understanding’? And what is happening, down at the level of words and their translations, when we don’t understand one another? Our conversations in this seminar will be guided by the premise that language reflects and is in turn shaped by thought, culture, and experience. We will consider how language constructs social identities, how languages are ‘built’, problems of translation, the relationship of syntax to semantics, and the intersections of power and ideology with language. Our raw data will include fiction, memoirs, media, critical theory, and speech acts in art and performance.

DANA 117: The Politics of Memory
Dr. Marcia Morgan
What role does individual memory play in carving out the future, both for individuals and for society as a whole? What obligation do we have as individuals in questioning and remembering the past to live our lives ethically? In this course we will explore multiple aspects of memory understood both from individual and societal perspectives. We will look at various ways in which individuals and societies have shaped their future in positive and negative ways. For example, we will view diverse representations of reparative memory from around the globe, including cases in South Africa, Taiwan, the US, and Europe. Like other FYSs, writing is a core value of this course. Our readings and discussions will focus on works by St. Augustine, Paul Ricoeur, and Tzvetan Todorov. In addition, we will consider examples by architects, artists, journalists, and other thinkers who help us understand some of the most profound historical moments of the recent past. Our investigations will also include listening to political speeches, reading personal memoirs, and viewing some documentaries.
RJF 107: Arabian Nights, Disney Days
Dr. Mark Stein
Aladdin. Sinbad the Sailor. Ali Baba. We all know the Disney versions, but what are the real stories? Where do they come from? How did they reach us? And how have they affected our perceptions of Arabs, Islam, and the exotic, mysterious, and potentially threatening East? This course will focus on the collection of stories known as the Arabian Nights. We will begin by examining the stories themselves and how they reflect the medieval Middle Eastern societies in which they were first compiled. We will then consider the translation and transmission of these stories to the West. Finally we will investigate how these stories have shaped and how they continue to inform our perceptions and responses to non-Western societies. Readings will include a variety of translations of the Arabian Nights, secondary studies of the Nights, and works assessing how Western conceptions of the East have been constructed, including Edward Said’s Orientalism. We will particularly focus on the presentation of images of the Nights as seen in popular films, including Disney’s Aladdin, Michael Powell’s Thief of Baghdad, Valentino’s The Sheik, and The 7th Voyage of Sinbad.

MBS 101: How to Think About Weird Things
Dr. Ted Schick
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.