Signature Courses and the Core Curriculum

School of Arts and Sciences Signature Courses are foundational courses covering engaging topics of grand intellectual sweep and enduring importance. They are designed and taught by our renowned scholars and scientists who are not only recognized for their specialized research but are also eloquent and demanding award-winning teachers. Each course is made up of a combination of capacious lectures by faculty and small discussion sections led by graduate students from our nationally ranked graduate programs. They establish a common basis for intellectual exchange and define us as the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) community of students and scholars working together.

The Signature Courses are specially designed for the innovative new Core Curriculum, which consists of three groups of learning goals that form the core of a modern liberal arts and sciences education at a leading public research university:

- 21st Century Challenges [21C]
- Areas of Inquiry
  - Natural Sciences [NS]
  - Social [SCL] and Historical [HST] Analysis
  - Arts and Humanities [AH]
- Cognitive Skills and Processes
  - Writing and Communication [WC]
  - Quantitative and Formal Reasoning [Q]
  - Information Technology and Research [ITR]

The Core opens the door to new worlds of intellectual adventure, advanced study in particular majors, and success in a wide variety of postgraduate programs and careers. Developing a range of critical thinking skills, students build their capacity to face the public and private challenges of local and global citizenship and develop the habit of questioning the known and exploring the unknown. The Core Curriculum and our Signature Courses prompt students to examine both what they want to be and who they want to be, by discovering their values, talents, and passions. Learn more about the Core at sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/core.

View our videos at sas.rutgers.edu/signature.
Do you worry about nuclear annihilation? Does the possibility of bioterrorism scare you? Are you dismayed by growing political violence and ongoing cultural genocides in places such as Darfur? Are you concerned about habitat destruction, catastrophic climate change, widespread famine, or newly drug-resistant diseases? Ever wonder what it means to be a species that can imagine its own demise, understand its role in the demise of another, or contemplate the end of all life?

“Extinction” takes a multiperspective, interdisciplinary approach to understanding extinction as a biological and cultural process, and probes the meaning and significance of such processes for humans around the globe in the 21st century.

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in anthropology, various area studies, biological sciences, ecology, geography, history, linguistics, philosophy, political science and public policy, religion, sociology, and women’s and gender studies. It can be used to meet the SAS Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C], Natural Sciences [NS], and Social Analysis [SCL].
ONCE UPON A TIME: WHY WE TELL STORIES
01:350:200 (4 credits) Core: AHp
Professor Barry Qualls, English

Tell me a story.

Why is storytelling a nearly universal human phenomenon? Is a world without stories human at all? We use stories to explain our beginnings, memorialize our past, and discover meaning—including our own. We begin our lives hearing stories, and we live our lives by understanding the stories of others and creating new ones. Yet, as Thomas Carlyle once proclaimed, storytelling has “an alarming relationship to lying”; parents, wanting to teach honesty, caution their children, “Don’t tell stories.”

“Once Upon A Time” probes the tensions in this paradox. We have a deep need for stories to help us discover meaning, even our own meaning, in life and in our relations with others. At the same time, we are deeply skeptical about stories, which often seem merely fanciful and unlikely to lead us toward truth.

Focusing on stories from Genesis and Homer to 21st century best sellers, this course considers why we need stories and how we tell them. Why is the journey home such a frequent motif? How is storytelling used to create, instruct, and transform societies? How is it used to sell products? Why and how have genres like the detective story and emergent forms like graphic novels conformed to or challenged the conventions of storytelling?

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in anthropology, classics, communication, comparative literature, criminal justice, English, history, journalism, any language and literature program, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, and women’s and gender studies. It is also appropriate for life sciences and physical science majors seeking Core or elective credit. It can be used to meet the SAS Core Curriculum goals in Arts and Humanities [AHp].
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
01:556:143 (4 credits) Core: 21C, NS
Professor Alan Goldman, Chemistry, with Faculty from Marine Science, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Physics, Planning and Public Policy/Economics, and Environmental Sciences

Wondering what the “energy” problem is all about? Here is your chance to learn what energy is, where it comes from, how we make it, how we use it, and how we will have to change the way we make it in the coming decades. “Energy and Climate Change” introduces nonscience majors to science and scientific method in the context of one of the most critical challenges facing us today: society’s need for energy and the resulting impact on climate and the environment. The course surveys climatology, physics, chemistry, biology, engineering, economics, and public policy as they relate to energy and sustainability considered from a global perspective.

This course is particularly recommended for students pursuing majors or minors in the social sciences and in areas of the humanities impacted by energy and climate, and it is of interest to students in engineering and the natural sciences. It can be used to meet the SAS Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Natural Sciences [NS].
**CONSERVATION**

01:450:214 (4 credits) Core: 21C, SCL  
Professor Richard Schroeder, Geography

What do we owe the future? The amount of land contained in conservation areas has more than tripled worldwide over the past three decades, now enclosing roughly 12% of the earth’s land surface. Despite this massive intervention, countless species of plants and animals are rapidly declining to the point of extinction, as are valuable habitats that support human populations.

Why do parks and protected areas so regularly fail in their mission to protect the environment? Are they just poorly designed, or do they suffer because of local resistance? Do we need more parks, or fewer? What else can be done? And, who should do it? Global organizations? Governments? Environmental organizations? Local people? Is stewardship a moral obligation? Is conservation necessary? Should we focus on human needs, or on nature’s? Which humans? Which nature? Can we afford not to do both?

“Conservation” considers the scientific, moral, political, and economic dimensions of the 21st century global challenge of balancing nature conservation and human needs, and the debates surrounding whether and how to do this.

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in geography, anthropology, area studies, biological sciences, chemistry, ecology, economics, geological sciences, philosophy, political science, and public policy. It can be used to meet the SAS Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Social Analysis [SCL].
NORMALITY AND ABNORMALITY
01:920:240 (4 credits) Core: 21C, SCL, WCd
Professor Deborah Carr, Sociology

Am I normal?

Human conceptions of normality and abnormality pervade social life, shaping expectations about physical appearance, eating habits, sexuality, gender, mental illness, and happiness, among other things. Individuals use ideas about what is normal and abnormal to judge and modify their own behavior. And, so does society.

But, what is normal? How do we know? And, is normal something worth being?

Do definitions of normality stem from people’s own experiences, from science, from social definitions, or from universal standards of morality or human nature? What does normal mean in different cultures and historical eras? To what extent is it possible to change deviations from normal and is it desirable to do so? Who decides?

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in anthropology, area studies, business, criminal justice, history, life sciences or premedicine, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, studies of race and ethnicity, and women’s and gender studies. It can be used to meet the SAS Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C], Social Analysis [SCL], and Writing and Communication [WCd].
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RU-1314-0344/10M