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 community of students and scholars working together.

The Signature Courses are specially designed for the innovative 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.
CITIES

01:450:250 (4 credits) Core: 21C, SCL
Professor D. Asher Ghertner, Geography

The 21st century is an urban century.

More than half of the world’s population now lives in cities. The United Nations estimates that net global population growth henceforth will take place entirely in cities, meaning the rural population has reached its historical maximum. Cities also now dominate the economic output of most nations and have become the most dynamic sources of ideas, opportunities, and dreams. Yet, cities are also where inequality is most visible, making them contested territories where different classes and interest groups jostle for space and influence.

This course examines what makes cities contradictory spaces of work, residence, and play that at once enable the release of creative energies, aspirations, and economies yet simultaneously restrict, control, and confine. It does so by using cities to explore the most pressing social concerns of our times: from the urbanization of terrorism and security, to the enduring effects of housing segregation in the United States and abroad, to the impacts of global climate change on human settlement patterns, to the causes and consequences of suburbanization and gentrification.

Students from all schools and disciplines are welcome to sign up for this course. The course carries credit toward the major and minor in geography, and the minor in international and global studies. Cities can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Social Analysis [SCL].
Today it is easier than perhaps at any other point in human history for peoples to know about each other and connect with each other. Yet we live in a time of violent divides and confrontations. What is at the root of these divides? And what resources are there to overcome the destructive effect that some of them have?

This class will examine the power of “color-lines” in producing divisions among peoples and individuals as well as explore the possibilities to cross borders of separation and create new forms of human connection in the 21st century. We will explore “color-lines” and “borderlands” through the work of a wide range of intellectuals, artists, and social activists and explore theories of blackness, Chicana feminism, Native American hip-hop, Afro-Asian connections, and artistic work related to the Black Lives Matters movement, among others.

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in Africana studies, American studies, anthropology, comparative literature, English, Latino and Caribbean studies, political science, and sociology among other fields in the humanities and social sciences. This course carries credit toward the major and minor in Latino and Caribbean studies, and it is appropriate for students across the humanities and sciences, including life and physical sciences, seeking to fulfill Core requirements. Color-Lines and Borderlands can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Arts and Humanities [AHo].
DATA 101

01:198:142 and 01:960:142 (4 credits) Core: 21C, QQ or QR, ITR
Professor Tomasz Imielski, Computer Science

“Big Data,” algorithms, and statistics are everywhere today.

How do you tell good data from bad? Misinformation from useful analysis? And who owns the information about our lives and decisions?

Data 101 will help you improve your data literacy and develop a healthy skepticism about empirical claims presented in the popular media. We will explore examples of erroneous, rushed, and ad hoc conclusions based on so-called “big data,” and you will get hands-on experience analyzing and using data to make persuasive arguments. You will also learn to make more informed decisions about what you find and share online. Along the way, you will learn fundamental concepts in statistics and probability and acquire basic programming skills that will benefit you in your future coursework and beyond.

Students from all schools and disciplines are welcome to sign up for this course. The course does require placement into Intermediate Algebra or above, or credit for 01:640:025. Data 101 can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C], Quantitative and Formal Reasoning [QQ or QR], and Information Technology and Research [ITR].
THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

01:195:220 (4 credits) Core: 21C, AHo
Professor Jorge T. Marcone, Spanish and Portuguese, Comparative Literature

The mainstream media and popular culture represent indigenous and aboriginal communities as models for reimagining our own relationship with nature. Yet, these stories can’t help but be melancholic: the damages brought by modernization seem to be unstoppable; progress is always desirable even if it disappoints us; and indigenous and aboriginal cultures apparently have no choice but to adapt or to protect their way of life by heroic means.

In this course we will explore this conundrum from below. How are indigenous/aboriginal peoples impacted by planetary and local environmental changes? How are they reacting to them? And how are their lives changed by their own responses and activism? We will focus on feature films, documentaries, fictions, and testimonies produced by indigenous or aboriginal intellectuals, or by authors in close collaboration with such communities. Their stories take place in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Haiti, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, Peru, and South Africa. We will learn about the conflict but also the confluence between traditional aboriginal and indigenous beliefs of the human and the nonhuman, on the one hand, and modern economic development, scientific knowledge, and Western environmentalism, on the other.

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in African, Latin American, or South Asian studies; anthropology; cinema studies; communication; comparative literature; economics; English; environmental studies; geography; journalism and media studies; political science; religion; Spanish and Portuguese; and sociology. Students from all schools and disciplines are welcome to sign up for this course. This course carries credit toward the comparative literature major and minor, and the environmental studies minor. The Global Ecological Imagination can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Arts and Humanities [AHo].
RUSSIA: BETWEEN EMPIRE AND NATION

01:860:272 (4 credits) Core: 21C
Professor Edyta Bojanowska, Russian Literature

Russia—America’s global rival yet again?

Russia’s sudden interventions in Ukraine and Syria have flummoxed the West. Are we witnessing a revival of imperial aspirations? Or did the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s create a fundamentally different background for current conflicts? What assumptions, historical traditions, and cultural patterns influence popular domestic support for Russia’s expansive foreign policy? Is Russia an empire or a nation? Or is it something in between?

“Britain had an empire, but Russia was an empire—and perhaps still is.” These words by the famous historian Geoffrey Hosking point to a unique feature of Russia’s history: empire was not a set of distant and detachable possessions but an essential aspect of Russian identity from early times. Like the United States, Russia expanded across a continent and developed its own version of Manifest Destiny. It extended its rule over hundreds of ethnic groups. To this day, as a result of these processes, the Russian Federation remains a multiethnic state and, territorially, the biggest country on earth.

We will explore Russia’s imperial culture, history, and politics from the 19th century to the present day as a window onto these 21st century challenges. The course will focus on the representations of this distinctively Russian version of empire in literature, painting, and film. All readings, films, and class discussions are in English.

Students from all schools and disciplines are welcome to sign up for this course. This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in anthropology, area studies (especially American, European, and Jewish studies), history, journalism and media studies, English, any language and literature program, political science, and sociology. The course carries credit toward the majors and minors in Russian and comparative literature. Russia: Between Empire and Nation can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C].
THE ARTS OF POWER: RITUAL, MYTH, AND PROPAGANDA FROM THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS TO THE WORLD OF WIKILEAKS

01:510:245 (4 credits) Core: HST or SCL
Professor Alastair Bellany, History

Power. How is it constructed and exercised? What legitimates the use of power and what makes for effective acts of resistance and revolution? What do the conceptual tools of historians, anthropologists, literary critics, and art historians reveal about the cultural construction of political power? What light do the complex experiences of the past throw on our turbulent present and future?

From the cult of the Roman emperor to the sacral kingship of the middle ages; from Renaissance courts to revolutionary cities; from the propaganda image of the totalitarian leader to the tabloid celebrity of the modern princess; from the imperial colony to the surveillance state and WikiLeaks, myths, rituals, and the arts have created and sustained (and, at times, resisted) many different forms of political authority.

The Arts of Power explores how religious beliefs and legends, art and movies, revolutionary hymns and street posters, dissident rock bands and poets, public executions and political advertisements, and coronations and festivals shape and legitimate, or delegitimate, the exercise of power in the world around us.

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors in American studies, anthropology, area studies, art history, business, cinema studies, classics, communication, comparative literature, criminal justice, English, European studies, history, journalism and media studies, languages and literatures, medieval studies, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, theater arts, and visual arts. This course carries credit toward the major and minor in history. The Arts of Power can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in Historical Analysis [HST] or Social Analysis [SCL].
NORMALITY AND ABNORMALITY

01:920:240 (4 credits) Core: 21C, SCL, WCd
Professor Allan Horwitz, 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. This course carries credit toward the major and minor in sociology. Normality and Abnormality can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C], Social Analysis [SCL], and Writing and Communication [WCd].
GLOBAL EAST ASIA

01:098:250 (4 credits) Core: 21C, HST or SCL
Professor Paul Schalow, Asian Languages and Cultures

It touches your life every day, yet how much do you really know about East Asia—home to three of today’s most powerful nations and over a fifth of the world’s population?

China, Korea, and Japan are major economic, political, and cultural players in an increasingly global 21st century. At the same time, the push for globalization within East Asia is being met with an equally powerful resurgence of nationalism and regionalism. How do media empires, international sporting events, and regional flows of Japanese and Korean pop culture shape relations among East Asia’s people? How are the rise of China and the U.S. strategy to focus more diplomatic and military attention to Asia creating political divisions in the region even as it integrates economically? Can complex questions of Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s autonomy, Korean reunification, and conflicting territorial claims be resolved peacefully, or could a geopolitical crisis lead the region into war in the 21st century?

This course is particularly recommended for students who intend to pursue majors or minors in anthropology, area studies, Asian languages, business, economics, geography, history, journalism and media studies, political science, public policy, religion, sociology, and women’s and gender studies. It carries credit toward the major and minor in Asian languages and cultures. Global East Asia can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in 21st Century Challenges [21C] and Historical Analysis [HST] or Social Analysis [SCL].
About the School of Arts and Sciences

The School of Arts and Sciences is the academic heart and soul of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and provides the only comprehensive undergraduate liberal arts and sciences experience at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. Students engage with an education of uncommon breadth and depth, acquiring the tools and knowledge necessary to pursue a wide variety of career and life paths and equipping them with the intellectual and practical skills to successfully meet the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century. The School of Arts and Sciences combines superb teaching with world-class research in an environment of remarkable cultural diversity.

Students fashion an undergraduate course of study that combines our bold Core Curriculum with deeper explorations of particular areas of interest through study in a major, a minor, and other elective courses. The School of Arts and Sciences is home to more than 30 academic departments ranging from the biological and physical sciences to the humanities, mathematics, and the social and behavioral sciences. Our departments, centers, and interdisciplinary programs offer more than 70 majors and minors, providing multiple opportunities for students to explore and understand our increasingly diverse world. Students study and actively join with our world-class research faculty in following their curiosity to the creation of new knowledge and understandings of the natural world and human behavior, belief, culture, and society.

The School of Arts and Sciences’ exciting Core Curriculum embodies our belief in and aspirations for our diverse and growing student body and reflects the mission of Rutgers as a comprehensive public research university for the 21st century.

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