About the School of Arts and Sciences

The School of Arts and Sciences is the academic heart and soul of Rutgers University–New Brunswick, providing a comprehensive undergraduate arts and sciences experience. 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 Core Curriculum embodies our belief in and aspirations for our student body and reflects the mission of Rutgers as a comprehensive public research university for the 21st century.

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Rutgers 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. 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 Core Curriculum, which consists of three groups of learning goals that form the core of a modern arts and sciences education at a leading public research university:

- Contemporary Challenges [CC]
  - Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD]
  - Our Common Future [CCO]
- 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]

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.
The U.S.-Mexican border is a potent political symbol.

Today, Americans are deeply divided in their assumptions about it. But it has not always been this way. Where did such strength of feeling come from? And what should we do about it?

This course examines changing American understandings of our border with Mexico.

In the early 1800s, the Southwest, including most of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas, was Mexican territory. Many Americans wanted to move the U.S. border south and take this area from Mexico. Once that happened after the Mexican American War, American conceptions of what our border meant underwent significant change: where once people had wanted to cross the line and move onward, they now began to imagine the line as something to be defended. Yet in the first half of the twentieth century, the U.S. government worked hard to encourage the migration northward of many thousands of needed workers. It was only in the second half of the century that the government’s goal shifted to stopping the migrations that had been started. How and why did popular conceptions in North America change? Were these feelings related to changes in government policy?

This course is particularly recommended for students considering majors in American studies, anthropology, comparative literature, economics, history, journalism and media studies, Latino and Caribbean studies, Latin American studies, political science, psychology, sociology, or Spanish language and literature. Wars, Wayfarers, and the Wall can be used to meet Core Curriculum Goals in Contemporary Challenges: Our Common Future [CCO] and Historical Analysis [HST].
HEROISM

01:098:255 (4 credits) Core: CCO, AHp
Professor Wendy Swartz, Asian Languages and Cultures

What makes ordinary people do extraordinary things?

What defines a hero or heroine? Are heroes and heroines defined differently? What role do cultural and historical contexts play in these definitions? How do fictional heroes and heroines compare with historical ones? What turns rebels, agitators, iconoclasts, or even fools into heroes?

This course offers a comparative examination of conceptions of heroism across cultures, time, and gender. Since the beginning of written records, heroic acts and gestures have had an enduring appeal. Shrines and monuments, epics and songs, paintings and films have been dedicated to extolling heroic figures—real, idealized, or legendary. What can a culture’s heroes or heroines tell us about its values, expectations, and ideals? What motivates someone to go beyond the individual and ordinary to sacrifice for a community, country, or humanity?

We will explore the cultural conditioning, ethical reasoning, and moral compass behind some of the greatest heroes and heroines in history and literature, from Greek epic heroes to Chinese assassin-retainers, women warriors to samurais, Shakespearean tragic heroes to contestants in the real-life Game of Thrones in medieval Europe, civil rights leaders to women’s rights crusaders, and comic superheroes to modern day heroes.

Students from all schools and disciplines are encouraged to enroll in this course. The course carries credit toward the major and minor in Asian languages and cultures. Heroism can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in Contemporary Challenges: Our Common Future [CCO] and Arts and Humanities [AHp].
What accounts for the striking increase of economic inequality over the past four decades in the United States? Does it have parallels in earlier times or in other advanced countries? Has political inequality increased too? Do Americans care about growing inequality? Should they? What might we do to reduce inequality?

After an initial look at how we measure economic inequality, we will examine the evidence of its increase and set it in international context. We will then embark on a tour of some leading economic hypotheses for the rise in inequality, ranging from immigration and globalization to superstars and winner-take-all markets. Only part of our answer can be found here, for as Edward Tufte has observed, “economic life vibrates with the rhythm of politics.”

The economy’s performance varies systematically with which political party is in power. We will look into why this surprising pattern persists and how it raises income inequality. Party politics is hardly the whole story, though. We will also explore differences between rich and poor in voting power and political voice and participation—and whether these differences matter in the extent to which average citizens or elites get their way in the making of public policy. Our path toward answering these questions touches on many disciplines in the arts and sciences, including anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology.

This course is particularly recommended for students pursuing majors or minors in Africana studies, American studies, anthropology, business, communications, criminal justice, economics, geography, Latino and Caribbean studies, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, and women’s and gender studies. It is also appropriate for humanities, life sciences, and physical sciences majors seeking Core or elective credit. This course carries credit toward the major or minor in either economics or political science. Inequality can be used to fulfill the Core Curriculum goals in Contemporary Challenges: Our Common Future [CCO] and Social Analysis [SCL].
FAMOUS TRIALS
01:512:216 (3 credits) Core: CCD, HST
Professor Paul G. E. Clemens, History

How do courts balance the rights of citizens with the security of the nation? If justice is blind, how can this balance change over time? What can we learn about justice from famous trials: trials that capture national attention and are debated beyond the courtroom in the court of public opinion while being covered relentlessly in the press? How and why do the ways courts, law enforcement, judges, and juries deal with such questions as free speech, racial justice, national security, and appropriate punishment change? What social, political, and economic forces shape the possibilities of legal justice?

Famous Trials provides a historical and global perspective on the role of trials in defining our conceptions of rights and liberties. We will focus on several landmark American cases from the colonial period through the late 20th century. Each of these cases will be paired with a contemporary trial receiving intense public scrutiny that raises parallel issues about rights, liberties, politics, and punishment. For example, Lambdin Milligan’s Civil War-era trial before a military tribunal and his Supreme Court appeal provides historical context for examining the situation of Guantanamo detainees today. The Scottsboro case in Depression-era Alabama raises issues about racial injustice in 21st-century murder trials. Additionally, trials from 17th-century England, 19th-century Africa, and British colonial India, among other jurisdictions, will allow us to develop a global context to examine how contemporary legal notions of rights and justice differ from, and are similar to, traditions in other cultures. We will explore these issues by examining trial transcripts; responding to documentary and feature film clips about trials; reading literary depictions of cases; examining the media coverage of cases and its impact on justice; and considering constitutional arguments advanced about individual rights.

This course is particularly recommended for students thinking about majors or minors in American studies, criminal justice, history, political science, sociology, and women’s and gender studies. The course carries credit toward the major and minor in history. Famous Trials can be used to fulfill the Core Curriculum goals of Contemporary Challenges: Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] and Historical Analysis [HST].
ONCE UPON A TIME: WHY WE TELL STORIES
01:358:200 (4 credits) Core: AHp
Professor Christopher Iannini, 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. Once Upon A Time can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in Arts and Humanities [A Hp].
COLOR-LINES AND BORDERLANDS

01:595:202 (4 credits) Core: CCD, AHo
Professor Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Latino and Caribbean Studies and Comparative Literature

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 Contemporary Challenges: Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] and Arts and Humanities [AHo].
EXTINCTION

01:070:111 (4 credits) Core: CCD or CCO; NS
Professor Rob Scott, Anthropology

Do you worry about nuclear annihilation? Does the possibility of bioterrorism scare you? Are you dismayed by growing political violence and ongoing cultural genocides such as the Rohingya crisis? 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. This course carries credit toward the major and minor in anthropology. Extinction can be used to meet the Core Curriculum goals in Natural Sciences [NS] and either Contemporary Challenges: Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] or Contemporary Challenges: Our Common Future [CCO].