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 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.

This year’s courses on the next page! sas.rutgers.edu/signature-courses
American Topics: Black Lives Matter at Rutgers
Professors Erica Dunbar and Donna Murch, History
01:512:191 (3 credits)
Core: CCD, tentatively certified (to be formalized by the SAS faculty December 2020)
In the summer of 2020 centuries of frustration and rage spilled into the streets of large cities and small towns across America and the globe. What was known as a movement to protest police killings in the United States has become a global reckoning with racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. In this course we will explore the development of the #BlackLivesMatter movement beginning with the colonial era and ending with the contemporary moment. We will be inviting an array of prominent scholars and activists as guest speakers who will speak directly to the theme of Black Lives Matter through different historical moments and geographies.
Topics explored will include enslavement, racial violence, forced labor and extraction, criminalization of Black, Brown and Indigenous others, the take off of mass incarceration in the 1970s, and the war(s) on drugs and gangs. This class will focus not only on top down repression, but also on the manifold forms of black resistance and collective mobilization throughout US history from slave rebellion and self-emancipation to Black Power, Black Feminism and the “the herstory” of the Movement for Black Lives.

Heroism
Professor Wendy Swartz
Asian Languages and Cultures
01:098:255 (4 credits)
Core: CCO, Ahp
What makes ordinary people do extraordinary things? What defines a hero or heroine, and are they defined differently? What roles do culture and history play in these definitions? How do fictional and historical heroes and heroines compare? What turns rebels, agitators, iconoclasts, or even fools into heroes?
This course examines heroism across cultures, time, and gender. Shrines and monuments, epics and songs, paintings and films extol heroic figures—real, idealized, or legendary. What can heroes or heroines tell us about a culture? What motivates someone to sacrifice for a community, country, or humanity? We explore the cultural conditioning, ethical reasoning, and moral compass of great heroes and heroines in history and literature, from Greek epic heroes to Chinese assassin-retainers, women warriors to samurais, Shakespearean tragic heroes to the real-life Game of Thrones in medieval Europe, civil rights leaders to women’s rights crusaders, and comic superheroes to modern day heroes.

Inequality
Professor Colin Campbell
Economics
01:220:120 (4 credits)
Core: CCO, SCL
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 examine the evidence of its increase and set it in international context. We 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 look into why this surprising pattern persists and how it raises income inequality. We also explore differences between rich and poor in voting power and political voice and participation—and 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.

Extinction
Professors Rob Scott and David Hughes
Anthropology
01:070:111 (4 credits)
Core: CCD or CCO; NS
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.