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!
American Topics: Black Lives Matter at Rutgers
Professors Erica Dunbar and Tiffany Gill, History
01:512:264 (3 credits) Core: CCD

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.

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.

Famous Trials
Professor Paul G. E. Clemens, History
01:220:120 (4 credits)
Core: CCO, SCL

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, Lambda 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.

Understanding COVID-19: Interdisciplinary Perspectives
Professor Nathaniel Gabriel, Geography
001:450:280 (4 credits)
Core: CCO, tentatively certified (to be formalized by the SAS faculty April 2021)

Pandemic.

Until 2020, that sounded like a word for the history books. We might have asked ourselves: could there be another worldwide epidemic spread over multiple countries and continents?

Now, we know we have so much to learn about what creates the conditions for a pandemic.

COVID-19 is a virus. We know the coronavirus is a biological, or even an ecological, phenomenon. Yet understanding a pandemic takes an interdisciplinary lens that incorporates biology, ecology, politics, economics, and culture, among other disciplines. To understand the pandemic is to explore how economic structures and relationships influence disease transmission and treatment; how politics influences science communication and public response; how culture shapes our perception of risk; and how global trade influences virus evolution.

This course explores the coronavirus pandemic as a socioecological phenomenon that incorporates both the biophysical nature of the disease and the social conditions in which it emerges and proliferates.