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!
“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.

The Arts of Power
Professor Alastair Bellany, History
01:510:245 (4 credits)
Core: HST, SCL

Power. How is it constructed and exercised? What legitimizes 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 de-legitimate, the exercise of power in the world around us.

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 time 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. 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.

Sea Change: The Rise and Fall of Sea Level and the Jersey Shore
Professor Kenneth Miller
Earth and Planetary Sciences
01:460:110 (3 credits)
Core: CCO, NS

What do woolly mammoths and the Jersey Shore have in common? How long until your dorm room has an ocean view? Why is sea level rising? Is it our fault? Can we stop it? Should we? What are the economic, ethical, and political realities of dealing with rising sea level? Viewing modern sea-level and climate change through a 100-million-year geological perspective, in this course you will reconstruct sea-level changes using different geological methods and try to predict the future, the impact on the Jersey Shore, and our options to fight back.

Designed not just for the environmentally conscious but also for skeptics and those simply curious about where we have been and where we are going, this course employs basic science concepts and helps nonspecialists build the scientific literacy needed to confront the economic, ethical, and political challenges of sea change in the 21st century. Leave your preconceived notions behind!

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

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 US and abroad; to the impacts of global climate change on human settlement patterns; to the causes and consequences of suburbanization and gentrification.