



RUTGERS

School of Arts and Sciences

Fall 2022

Signature Courses



About the School of Arts and Sciences Signature Courses

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



The American Dream

Professor Louis P. Masur
American Studies and History

01:050:210 (4 credits)

Core: CCD, AHP

Everyone talks about the “American Dream” and everyone wants to live it, but what, exactly, is the “American Dream”? Does it divide us or unite us? Can it still be achieved in the 21st century?

In this dream, America is a special place. A place of self-improvement, upward mobility, and rags to riches. A place in which hard work and education are rewarded with economic security. A place of hope, of opportunity, and of freedom. A place of happiness and belonging. A place where the individual can control his or her lot in life. The “American Dream” is not one dream; it is many.

The American Dream takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of American culture and society. By reading widely and examining sources as diverse as memoirs, essays, novels, images, music, and film, this course probes the meanings and uses of the “American Dream” in the life of the nation as well as in each of our own lives. The “American Dream,” and its meaning, continues to shift as it collides with changing social realities as each generation projects its hopes and anxieties into its fabric. The history of the evolving “American Dream” provides the building blocks of our own dreams, aspirations, and expectations for life in the 21st century.



Banned Books

Professors Preetha Mani and Samah Selim
AMESALL

01:013/195:206 (4 credits)

Core: CCD, AHO

Books have been censored and banned throughout history and around the world. Why? What makes a book so powerful?

Why have works of imaginative literature been banned throughout history? What is so powerful about literature to make people and governments fear it? What are the meanings that are constituted by this mode of erasure? How have these questions played out as specific historical moments in the modern and contemporary world?

Together, we will explore the global history of censorship and discuss how individual texts fit into that larger history by focusing on the political and cultural contexts that produced censorship. We will examine the political and cultural contexts of countries like the USA, Niger, Egypt, and India through 20th- and 21st-century works of fiction, graphic novel, poetry, essay, and film that have been censored or banned for reasons of political dissidence, obscenity, and blasphemy. And, we will look at the ways in which these categories intersect with questions of class, caste, race, religion, and gender.



Black Lives Matter

Professor Tiffany Gill
History

01:512:264; 01:014:264 (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.



Data 101

Professor Amélie Marian or Samaneh
Gholizadeh Hamidi, Computer Science

01:198:142 (4 credits)

Core: CCO; QQ or QR

“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.



Extinction

Professor 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 in places such as Darfur? 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.





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? 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 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 "supers" to modern day heroes.



Rhymes and Reasons: Hip Hop and Philosophy

Professor Derrick Darby
Philosophy
01:730:256 (3 credits)
Core: CCD

Hip hop is great for partying but what can we learn if we study the rhymes?

Chuck D—pioneer from the hip hop group Public Enemy—once said that “rap is black America’s CNN.” In addition to insights into life in America’s dark ghettos, studying rap rhymes can aid philosophical reflection and reasoning about identity, injustice, and inequality in these impoverished and racially segregated spaces. Why do ghettos exist? What problems do ghetto dwellers face and how should society deal with them? What do we owe ghetto residents and what do they owe each other? What lessons do ghettos offer about our racial, gender, and sexual identities?

Through readings, lectures, interviews, music clips, and guest speakers, including hip hop artists and prominent scholars, we will contemplate philosophical questions raised by the existence of dark ghettos with the help of beats and rhymes. Students will: (1) sharpen critical reasoning skills, (2) share and acquire knowledge of hip hop, and (3) gain deeper insight about race, racism, and poverty in America.

