FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

FYS 100 My Music: Writing Musical Lives (4 Credits)
This first-year seminar begins with an exploration of students’ own musical lives. What does the particular constellation of material that one calls “My Music” tell us about who one is, where one comes from, and how one relates to the world? After analyzing and comparing musical lives within the class, students read selected case studies and collaboratively design a musical biography project. Each student curates one person’s musical life story, gathering data through one-on-one interviews, weaving together their interlocutor’s words with their own interpretations, and ultimately reflecting on what they have learned from the experience. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 102 Psychology and Comic Books: The American Experience (4 Credits)
What do autobiographical, fantasy, horror, romance, superhero and war comics tell us about the human condition? Students read scholarship in psychology and the humanities to set the stage for exploring various topics in comic art and storytelling. How might psychoanalysis explain the popularity of superhero and romance comic books? Is there a link between pressures to conform and countercultural interest in horror comics? How might psychological theories of development inform our understanding of autobiographical graphic novels? Students use graphic novels and comic books as raw material to make sense of life in America in the 20th and 21st centuries. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (S)
Fall

FYS 109 Exobiology: Origins of Life and the Search for Life in the Universe (4 Credits)
This course explores interdisciplinary approaches to the search for life in the Universe by using the Earth as a natural laboratory. The class addresses fundamental questions surrounding the formation of the solar system and the first appearance of life, the definition of life and how it can be searched for elsewhere, and the biases introduced by using Earth as a model system. The goal of this class is to present a multidisciplinary view of exobiology by integrating geology, chemistry, biology, astronomy and physics. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 110 A Century of Revolutions in Latin America (4 Credits)
This first-year seminar offers a multidisciplinary study of three major revolutionary processes in Latin America’s past century. Through the examination of the Mexican Revolution (1910), the Cuban Revolution (1959) and Sendero Luminoso’s insurrection (1980), this course explores regional trajectories of failed modernizations, social unrest, state transformations and post-revolutionary reconfigurations. Discussion are of bibliography and the analysis of primary sources, including documents, fiction writings, visual arts, films, music and other materials. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 112 #FlipTheScript: Hot Topics in African Feminism(s) Today (4 Credits)
Does affirmative action in politics improve human rights conditions for African women or lead to tokenism? Are the decisions of religious African feminists to submit to their husbands or wear head coverings, choices that display female agency or choices steeped in oppression? This course considers some of the most controversial and hotly debated topics relevant to feminism in Africa today. In doing so, it aims to teach students how to identify both the core issues and points of divergence underpinning these debates and to be able to analyze and articulate their own positions on controversial issues. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 113 Mineral Resources and Sustainability (4 Credits)
Where do cell phone batteries come from? This first-year seminar explores a variety of mineral resources, their uses in modern society and their impacts on the environment. Minerals have always held economic and social value, but as society works to switch to green technologies the need for mineral resources, such as rare earth metals for batteries and turbines, has increased. This course takes an interdisciplinary approach applying geology, economics, policy, human health and environmental sciences to the lifecycle of mineral resources. The goal of this class is to build a fundamental understanding of ore deposits, evaluate the impacts of mineral extraction on the environment and to society and consider how society’s need for minerals can be regarded as sustainable. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (N)
Variable

FYS 114 Ordaining Women in America (4 Credits)
In the 1970s, many Christian, Jewish and Buddhist communities in America began ordaining women as ministers, rabbis, priests and teachers. This change in policy provided women long-denied vocational paths, necessitated new theological self-understandings and ritual forms, and served as a proxy for larger culture war divisions in America. While focused on the last fifty years, this course provides a wider historical narrative for these developments, from the bold revivalism of colonial-era women preachers to anti-racist activism by contemporary Zen senseis. As part of a class project, students conduct interviews with ordained women and construct podcast episodes from these interviews. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 117 The Bible and the American Public Square (4 Credits)
This course examines what the Bible (and to some extent the broader Jewish and Christian traditions) have to say about controversial issues that have divided Americans in the past (e.g., slavery) and present (e.g., abortion). The aim is to give students the skills to assess critically various arguments that invoke the Bible or religious tradition and authority, wherever they come from on the political spectrum. Students are introduced to the Bible and biblical scholarship, as well as learn about different understandings of biblical authority and views of applying the Bible to contemporary political and ethical debates. This course counts toward the Jewish studies and religion majors. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)(L)
Fall, Spring, Variable
FYS 118 Curry: Gender, Race, Sexuality and Empire (4 Credits)
As one early currency in the global trade of food, the spices in curry have sustained empires and built hybrid cultures. The circulation of food and food cultures has shaped normative gender and sexual relations and influenced how work is racialized. In South Asia, environmental questions about how to cultivate foods sustainably and how to distribute food equitably are vital components of the food security movement. In this course, students study histories of curry in Empire, watch comedy sketches, read novels, and investigate social movements around agriculture and food allocation in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora. This course counts toward the study of women and gender major. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (E) WI {L}
Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

FYS 119 Performance and Film Criticism (4 Credits)
A philosophical exploration of humor and laughter. How do audience members form their critical responses to performances and films? The students attend live performances and film screenings, and write their own reviews and critical responses. This course counts toward the theatre major. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (A) (L)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 120 Philosophical Explorations of Humor and Laughter (4 Credits)
Closely examining texts from a variety of philosophical perspectives, this course explores some of the ethical, social and political issues raised by humor and laughter. Humor can be a forceful instrument, often deployed by the powerful in their attempts to control the powerless and by the powerless to topple the powerful. Its effects, intended or unintended, can be benign or hurtful. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (M) {S}
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 127 Entangled Lives: Trees and Forests in Contemporary Literature and Art (4 Credits)
Trees and forests occupy prominent places in cultural imaginaries. While stories across the globe often stress kinship between humans and trees, European and US writers only recently began to explore narratives of interdependence. There is now a real paradigm shift, with books on the "wood-wide-web" and networks of reciprocity featured in bookstores and on bestseller lists. This course uncovers the sophistication of arboreal organization and forests’ renewed powerful presence in storytelling, while asking critical questions: What lessons, if any, can be drawn from these accounts? Is the “tree-genre” an elegy to a burning world? Do the texts engage with questions of racial, environmental and economic justice? And, maybe most importantly, how can humans relate to the forest with awe AND accountability? Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (L)
Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

FYS 128 Ghosts (4 Credits)
This course explores what Toni Morrison in Beloved calls “the living activity of the dead”: their ambitions, their desires, their effects. Often returning as figures of memory or history, ghosts raise troubling questions as to what it is they, or we, have to learn. We shall survey a variety of phantasmagorical representations in poems, short stories, novels, films, spiritualist and scientific treatises and spirit photography. This course counts towards the English major. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 129 Tierra y Vida: Land and the Ecological Imagination in U.S. Latino/a Literature (4 Credits)
Tierra y Vida explores the ecological imagination of U.S. Latinos/as as expressed in narratives from the early 20th to the 21st centuries. Expanding beyond dominant tropes of land/farm worker as the core of Latino/a ecological experience, students consider a range of texts that depict the land as a site of indigenous ecological knowledge; spiritual meaning; and ethnic, racial and gendered belonging. In dialogues between Latino/a writers and theorists students also explore the possibilities of ecological futures rooted in emancipation and liberation as alternatives to ecological imaginaries still fraught with colonial desires. Students in this course participate in a digital atlas and story-mapping project. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 131 Paris: City of Light (4 Credits)
Urban, architectural and cultural history of Paris, from its founding some 2,000 years ago through the twentieth century. This course explores the layout of streets and parks; the provisioning of infrastructure (water, sewers, public transportation); building typologies; châteaux and country houses in the capital's environs; the social, economic, political and aesthetic contexts of architectural patronage; and how the built environment carries decipherable symbolic meaning. Paris as a subject in the visual arts—in the Impressionist era in particular—is examined, as is the city's status as a perennial crucible of fashion, avant-gardism and modernism. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (A) (H)
Fall

FYS 132 Girls Leaving Home (4 Credits)
This course explores how literary writers from various times and places have addressed the topic of girls leaving home. What are the risks and benefits for young (usually single) women who leave a place of origin, temporarily or permanently, with or without families, to make new lives? What do they flee or seek? How do gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class complicate their stories? How is “home” understood or redefined in these narratives? Readings include Shakespeare's As You Like It, Austen's Northanger Abbey, and immigrant American narratives The Road from Coorain, The Woman Warrior and Americanah. Our primary methodology is literary analysis. Recommended for students considering the English major. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)
Fall, Spring, Variable
FYS 134 Satire (4 Credits)
This course examines the myriad forms satire has taken in the West, from the mists of antiquity (when satire meant a form of verse that could actually kill or maim its victims) until recent times. Students hone their skills in close reading and writing about literature. Though some satires (especially in the tradition of Juvenal) simply and straightforwardly bludgeon their targets—so violent did these become in 1590s England that for six years publication of satire was illegal—the course focuses on the more enjoyable ironic varieties—more enjoyable but also more demanding, since these make readers do most of the interpretive work. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)

Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

FYS 136 The Art of Gossip (4 Credits)
“No gossip, no interiority,” writes novelist Cynthia Ozick, who provocatively reminds us of word-of-mouth’s close relationship to storytelling itself. We know that gossip can be toxic, immature, and dangerous—but can it have other, more complex purposes and effects? In this course, we’ll examine inside jokes, open secrets, call outs, and speculation in literature, art, music, film, and popular culture. From novels about manners and the sustaining (or, tearing down) of communities to chatty, genre-defying poetry and films, documentaries, and song lyrics, we’ll engage in a wide-ranging meditation on gossip as an art, a weapon, and an imaginative inter-relational tool. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)

Alternate Years

FYS 138 Democracy in America: From the Revolution to Trump (4 Credits)
This course explores the history of democracy in America. Students examine how political leaders and social movements have fought to expand the bounds of democratic citizenship ever since the American Revolution, and how others have fought to restrict it. Students trace the evolution of both defenses and critiques of democratic self-governance and consider how polarization, inequality and globalization strain modern democracy. The class reflects critically on what exactly democracy has looked like—and can look like—not only in formal politics, but also in economic and social life more broadly. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (H)

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 141 Reading, Writing and Placemaking: Landscape Studies (4 Credits)
Landscape studies is the interdisciplinary consideration of how humans view, define and use the land, whether it be a backyard, a moonscape or a national park. How does land become a landscape? How does space become a place? Scientists study and manipulate landscapes as do politicians, builders, hunters, children, artists and writers, among others. In this course, students examine how writers, in particular, participate in placemaking, and how the landscape influences and inhabits literary texts. The course includes some landscape history and theory, visits by people who study landscape from nonliterary angles, and the discovery of how landscape works in texts in transforming and surprising ways. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 142 Reacting to the Past (5 Credits)
In this course, students learn by taking on roles, in elaborate games set in the past; they learn skills—speaking, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork—in order to prevail in complicated situations. Reacting roles do not have a fixed script and outcome. While students adhere to the intellectual beliefs of the historical figures they have been assigned, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas in papers, speeches or public presentations. Class sessions are run entirely by students; instructors guide students and grade their oral and written work. It draws students into the past, promotes engagement with big ideas and improves intellectual and academic skills. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 24. WI (H)

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 143 The Mind of Plants: A Journey into Plant consciousness and the human relationship to plant life (4 Credits)
Plants are perhaps the most necessary form of life, providing nutrition and thus allowing life for all animals, including humans. Yet, humans have oftentimes a predilection for animals over plants. However, the idea that plants have a mind of their own has been a core element of indigenous stories, literary works, poetic imaginings, philosophical systems and experimental investigations worldwide. This course examines a series of lyrical, reflective, experiential and personal evocations of plant minds and their connection to humans. The class looks to literature and visual art, which have long been particularly attentive to the plant world, to answer the question, “How can we de-objectify plants and restore their dignity?” Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (L)

Fall, Alternate Years

FYS 144 Science and Society (4 Credits)
The importance science plays in the health of humans and of this planet has never been more urgent. Unfortunately, the complex language of science has made its presumed accuracy a weapon against those unable to interpret scientific truths. In this course, we will explore four main areas where science and society meet for better or worse. Students will study and write about the science of superheroes, abortion policies, climate change and the pandemic. Students will maintain a personal journal, write in diverse styles, and use quantitative information. A final project will serve to educate an audience outside of smith college. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI

Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

FYS 145 Life in the Classroom-Narratives of Teachers and Students in Context (4 Credits)
This course inquires into the day-to-day lives of teachers and students in U.S. K-12 classrooms, specifically through the lens of narratives. Students engage with works of ethnography and portraiture that reflect a range of school settings and student developmental levels. Further insights are derived from guest speakers, classroom observations, documentaries and other resources. Course readings, discussions and assignments facilitate in-depth explorations of real-world school contexts—considering the implications of these past and present accounts for the future. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (S)

Fall, Spring, Alternate Years
FYS 147 Power Lunch: The Archaeology of Feasting (4 Credits)
Throughout history, food and dining have formed some of the most
fundamental expressions of cultural identity—in a very real sense, people
are what they eat, and how they eat. This cross-cultural examination of
the topic begins by exploring the various roles that feasting played in the
world of the ancient Mediterranean, particularly the cultures of Greece
and Rome. The class examines comparative material from contemporary
societies. How does food define and create culture? In what ways does
dining express or reinforce inequalities? These and other questions are
tackled through the use of primary literature, anthropological studies and
archaeological material, along with hands-on approaches. Restrictions:
First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment
limited to 16. WI (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 148 Pleasures, Politics and Power: Food in Literature and Culture (4
Credits)
This first-year seminar examines the pleasures, passions, politics,
economics and toxicities of food through the works of writers, chefs,
artists and critics who celebrate and critique how food heals, harms,
nourishes and pleases. Food plays a critical and dynamic role in fiction,
poetry, mystery, memoir, film and recipe books. This course analyzes
literary portrayals of and engagements with a range of foods, including
fast food, desserts, holiday feasts, haute cuisine, street food and “junk
food,” as well as issues involving abundance, scarcity and nutrition.
Through study of food in literature and culture, this course also considers
concerns central to critical food studies, including power, colonialism,
capitalism, identity and the environment. Restrictions: First years only;
students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
(A)(H)(L)
Fall

FYS 149 The Big Bang and Beyond (4 Credits)
What is all the stuff in the night sky, and where did all this stuff come
from? How old is the universe? Is it going to be here forever? How do
astronomers know all of this? These are some of the questions this
course explores in "The Big Bang and Beyond," an introduction to what is
known about the universe and how it is known. The course requires no
math or physics background. Students practice reading and writing about
scientific ideas. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one
first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (N)
Fall, Variable

FYS 150 Writing and Power in China (4 Credits)
This course examines the many ways in which writing has been used to
gain, maintain and overturn power throughout Chinese history, from
the prognosticating power of oracle bone script to the activist potential
of social media. We examine writing as a tactic of agency, a force for
social change, and an instrument of state power; analyze the changing
role of literature; and consider the physical forms of writing and the
millennia-long history of contemporary issues like censorship and writing
reform. Finally, students work to make their own writing as powerful as
possible. No knowledge of Chinese required. Restrictions: First years
only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to
16. WI (L)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 151 Our Mill River (4 Credits)
The Mill River flows through campus and connects the landscapes
upstream and downstream of Smith. From its headwaters in Goshen, MA,
to its mouth where it joins the Connecticut River on the Northampton/
Easthampton line, the Mill River defines a region of communities that
are all here as a result of its waters. Students gain important insight into
Smith’s context by exploring and reflecting on the natural and cultural
landscape of the Mill River. Weekly field experiences are complemented
by readings, map work, historical collections, a sampling of local
delicacies, guest experts and class discussions. This course is writing
intensive and based in field experiences. Restrictions: First years only;
students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 152 Thinking Through Sappho (4 Credits)
The ancient poet Sappho from the Greek island of Lesbos is the
founding figure of female artistic genius and sexual deviance in Western
civilization. Yet surprising little is known about the historical Sappho,
whose work survives only as fragments. Scholars are unanimous on her
influence, but differ significantly on the subjects of her sexuality, politics,
class-background and race. This course reads Sappho’s fragments in
English and analyzes how remediations of her work, and speculations
about her life, have inspired generations of artists, animating significant
debates about female authorship and sexuality across literature, theatre,
painting, sculpture and cinema. Restrictions: First years only; students
are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (A)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 153 The Muslim World in the Age of the Crusades: Encounters,
Influences and Lasting Legacies (4 Credits)
This course explores the religious, political, social and cultural impacts
of the Crusades on the Muslim World from 1095 CE until today. Special
attention is given to the variety of Muslim reactions to the Crusades,
including cross-cultural interactions and influences. It also considers
the Crusades’ enduring legacy and effect on Islamic history and religious
thought. Materials used include religious and historical texts, travelogues
and biographies, films, novels, etc. The course concludes with an
examination of how the exploitation of history by hate groups (such as
White Supremacy and Islamic Jihadism) continues to shape political and
social realities today. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited
to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)
Fall, Variable

FYS 154 The World of Anna Karenina (4 Credits)
This course explores the social, cultural and political history of late
imperial Russia through Leo Tolstoy’s iconic novel Anna Karenina.
Students will learn about the production of the novel but also focus
on such themes as modernization and industrialization, gender and
sexuality, social construction of family and marriage, empire and
colonialism. They will also study the rise of realism in art and the ways
in which the Russian educated classes used the new style as a form of
social critique. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one
first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)
Fall, Spring, Variable
FYS 156 Global Existentialism (4 Credits)
Freedom and angst, affirmation and despair, life and decadence, authenticity and meaninglessness—these and related dimensions of the human condition are explored in this course through philosophical texts across the globe from antiquity to the contemporary world. Through this exploration, students engage European, African and Asian precursors to existential thought, turn to the European development of existentialism, and conclude with the postcolonial global response to existentialism and the specter of nihilism. On this journey, students closely examine texts and, through writing, engage with questions that address the search for meaning within the human condition. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (H)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 160 The End of the World as We Know It: The Post-Apocalyptic Novel (4 Credits)
This course explores a wide range of literary scenarios that depict the collapse of civilization in the wake of plague-like disease or nuclear war. The motif of the post-Apocalyptic novel has become common, yet its roots go back as far (and further than) Jack London’s The Scarlet Plague and Mary Shelley’s The Last Man. In the works the class examines, students witness the attempts of the few survivors of catastrophe to create a new world or merely to live in a world in which the past casts a vast shadow over the present. The society that comes forth from these worlds can be anarchic, dystopic, utopian or a combination of these. Some works we explore include Alas, Babylon; On the Beach; Riddley Walker; The Postman; A Canticle for Leibowitz; The Chrysalids; The Road and others. Film adaptations are shown as part of the course. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 162 Ambition and Adultery: Individualism in the 19th-Century Novel (4 Credits)
This course looks at a series of great 19th-century novels to explore a set of questions about the nature of individual freedom, and of the relation of that freedom—transgression, even—to social order and cohesion. The books are paired—two French, two Russian; two that deal with a woman’s adultery, and two that focus on a young man’s ambition—Balzac’s Père Goriot; Flaubert’s Madame Bovary; Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment; Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. There are some additional readings in history, criticism and political theory. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 165 Childhood in African Literature and Film (4 Credits)
A study of the theme of childhood in modern African literature. The course explores how representations of childhood in African literature are tied to gendered social, political and cultural histories; and to questions of self and of national identity. Discussions are informed by several questions: How do African narratives of childhood help to understand the shifting historical, political and cultural landscapes in contemporary Africa? How does the enforced acquisition of colonial languages and cultures affect children as they attempt to master the codes of alien tongues and cultures? How do narratives told from the point of view of children represent and deal with such complex issues? What are the relationships between childhood narratives and autobiographies? Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 166 Mammalian Reproduction: A Female Perspective (4 Credits)
This course explores the diversity of reproduction in mammals from genetics to environmental adaptations, but all from the perspective of female mammals. How does the female perspective change the way one thinks about reproduction? For instance, conception vs. fertilization; embryo rejection vs. miscarriage. The course covers basic concepts as well as the biases and assumptions present in the study of mammalian reproduction. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 167 Viking Diaspora (4 Credits)
The Norse colonies of Iceland and Greenland and the attempted settlement of Vinland in North America were the first European societies of the New World, revealing patterns of cultural conflict and adaptation that anticipated British colonization of the mid-Atlantic seaboard seven centuries later. This course compares the strengths and weaknesses of the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth, founded in 930, with the 1787 Constitution of the United States, both political systems facing serious crises within two generations. Sources for these experimental communities are the oral memories of founding families preserved in the later Íslendingasögur (Sagas of Icelanders) of the 13th century. This course counts toward the world literatures, English and medieval studies majors. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 168 Damaged Gods: Myth and Religion of the Vikings (4 Credits)
A reading of poems and sagas about the Old Norse gods and their cults during the Viking Age (ca. 800-1100 CE) as these were preserved mainly in Icelandic manuscripts of the 13th century, but also in Arabic, Latin, Old High German and Anglo-Saxon texts and runic inscriptions. This course explores the dark world-view and desperate religion of the Vikings from the creation of the world to the end of time, including relations between living and dead, male and female, animals and humans, gods and giants, Æsir and Vanir—a crowded universe of trolls, elves, witches, dwarfs, Valkyries, berserkers, shapeshifters and various kinds of human being. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI
Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 173 Domestic Workers Make History: Storytelling and Organizing (4 Credits)
This course is an introduction to U.S. women’s history with working-class immigrant women and women of color at the center. Domestic work – housekeeping and care work in private households – has historically been done by women of color and has been among the lowest paid, most vulnerable and exploited forms of labor. The class studies histories of labor relations and conditions as well as resistance, collective action and organizing among domestic workers. Since storytelling has been a main way that domestic workers have built their movement overtime, the course centers on domestic workers’ stories of their own lives. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (S)
Fall, Spring, Variable
FYS 176 Existentialism (4 Credits)
The term "existentialism" refers to a nexus of twentieth-century philosophical and literary explorations focused on themes including human freedom, responsibility, temporality, ambiguity and mortality. Existentialists Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre oppose a longstanding philosophical view that human beings flourish by understanding themselves and the cosmos in rational terms. In addition to exploring assigned readings in depth, the course addresses broader questions: "Are there insights involving existentialist themes that literary works are in a distinctive position to convey?" "Is there an existentialist ethics?" and "Do existentialists' realizations about living well continue to have resonance today?" Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 178 Ecological Crisis: the Green New Deal, Degrowth and Eco-Socialism (4 Credits)
This course explores the causes of the multi-front ecological crisis that faces us and evaluates various suggested solutions from a political economy perspective. It addresses real-world problems, setting aside conventional models based on unrealistic assumptions, and alerts to the complex interrelationships between nature, economic motivations, social structures and political processes/institutions. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (S)

Fall

FYS 179 Rebellious Women (4 Credits)
This course introduces students to the trailblazing women who have changed the American social and political landscape through reform, mobilization, cultural interventions and outright rebellion. The course uses a variety of texts: No Turning Back by Estelle Freedman, primary sources from the archives and the SCMA, films, a walking tour and local events. The intention of this seminar is threefold: (1) to provide an overview of feminist ideas and action throughout American history, (2) to introduce students to primary documents and research methods, and (3) to encourage reflection and discussion on current gender issues. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H) (S)

Fall, Spring

FYS 180 Japan Less Known: Heterogeneous Japan?! (4 Credits)
Japan is portrayed as a homogeneous country where "Japanese people" live and speak the "Japanese language". This course aims to challenge this perception of Japan as monoethnic, monolingual and monocultural. The course examines everyday language and cultural practices through various texts such as popular media, manga, films, linguistic landscapes and academic papers. The course is conducted in English, and knowledge of Japanese is not necessary. Cannot be taken S/U. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (S)

Fall, Spring

FYS 181 Screening Shakespeare (4 Credits)
This course focuses on plays by Shakespeare, and what people have made for the screen from his plays. Students read five of Shakespeare's plays. After reading and discussing each play, the class watches multiple screen works created from that play. The course investigates the choices made by directors, adapters, actors, designers and other artists involved. What matters to them about the play? What doesn't? Do they approach Shakespeare with reverence? Do they admit to their source? How do politics, ideology, period, national or international film and television traditions, genre and individual artistry change, uphold, re-alchemize the original material? Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)

Fall, Variable

FYS 182 Fighting the Power: Black Protest and Politics Since 1970 (4 Credits)
This course examines the various forms of black "politics," broadly conceived, that emerged and developed in the wake of the modern civil rights movement to the present time. Major topics of concern include: black nationalism and electoral politics, black feminism, resistance to mass incarceration, the war on drugs, black urban poverty, the rise of the black middle class, reparations, the Obama presidency, Black Lives Matter and other contemporary social movements. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 183 Geisha, Wise Mothers, and Working Women (4 Credits)
This course examines images of Japanese women that are prevalent in the West, and to some extent Japan. The focus is on three key figures considered definitive representations of Japanese women: the geisha, the good wife/wise mother and the working woman. The class reads popular treatments including novels, primary sources and scholarly articles. The task is to sort through these images, keeping in mind the importance of perception versus reality and change over time. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI

Fall, Spring, Variable

FYS 188 Indigenous Peoples and the Environment: Myth and Reality (4 Credits)
This course examines the stereotype of the "ecological Indian"—a racial trope that has perpetuated the idea that Native North Americans are naturally closer to nature or are natural conservationists. The class looks at how this stereotype has shaped non-Native ideas about Indigenous peoples in what is now the United States and has affected Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. This course also examines the varied ways Indigenous peoples have thought about ecological relationships and the strategies they developed to live in relation with the environment. The class critically examines the relationship between settler colonialism and the environment and considers contemporary and historical case studies in which Indigenous peoples have fought to protect and care for their lands and waters in the face of the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. Restrictions: First-years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (H)

Fall, Variable
FYS 189 Data and Social Justice (4 Credits)
Students examine sociopolitical forces that impact the availability, structure and governance of data regarding various social justice issues. Students learn techniques for presenting data in ways that foreground the contexts of data production and remain accountable to diverse communities. Datasets about health equity, housing justice, environmental justice and carceral justice are studied, analyzed and visualized. Students identify institutions and stakeholders involved in data production, unpack the vested interests animating data semantics, consider what people and problems get erased in data structuring and evaluate ethical tradeoffs that data scientists grapple with as they plan for data presentation. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (S)

FYS 190 Borders, Identity, and Justice (4 Credits)
As the mobility of information, goods, capital and people has increased worldwide, so has the backlash against migration. This course examines contemporary bordering principles and practices in, and asks moral questions about citizenship, mobility and identity. The class investigates principles of inclusion and exclusion and asks how borders define moral status. The class then investigates bordering practices through social theory, ethnography, human geography and art. Should democratic societies adopt more open or closed policies toward immigration? How should nations conceive of the rights of climate refugees? Should territorial bordering practices be subject to international law and scrutiny? Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (H)(S)

FYS 192 America in 1925 (4 Credits)
Readings, discussions and student projects explore the transformation of a "Victorian" America into a "modernist" one by focusing on forms of expression and sites of conflict in 1925—the year of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Bessie Smith's "St. Louis Blues," Alain Locke's The New Negro (the foundational text of the Harlem Renaissance), Chaplin's The Gold Rush, the Scopes evolution trial, and the emergence of powerful new ideas in the social sciences—towards just a few examples. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (H)(L)

FYS 194 Making Meaning from Material Lives (4 Credits)
This class considers the numerous ways in which human beings engage with material culture, that is artifacts, things or stuff. How does material culture give meaning to lives, and how does it help mediate lived experiences for both individuals and members of society? The course seeks to examine how a variety of cultures, including American, make sense of things through the ways in which material culture is created, consumed, defined and valued. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI

FYS 195 Literary Borders (4 Credits)
This course examines the imaginative possibilities of the border in literary and visual texts. The class considers how writers portray cultural, national, temporal and linguistic frontiers; how literature embodies the experience of crossing or dwelling within borderlands; how texts reinforce or transgress the boundaries at which readers are positioned; and how writing itself can construct and bridge differences. Reading poems and stories of liminal figures, the class analyzes how the border challenges ideas about place, body, identity, language and text. In encounters with new expressive forms that disrupt the way literature is read, the class explores the edges of language. For a broader picture of the border in the imagination, the class also examines film, music, theatre and other arts. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. (E) WI (L)

FYS 197 On Display: Museums, Collections and Exhibitions (4 Credits)
Why do people collect things and what do they collect? Students explore these questions by focusing on local museums and exhibitions. From a behind-the-scenes look at the Smith College Museum of Art to an examination of hidden gems like the botanical sciences herbarium collection or that cabinet of curiosities which is Mount Holyoke's Skinner Museum, students research the histories of these collections and analyze the rationale of varying systems for ordering objects. By learning the critical skills of visual analysis and by grappling with the interpretations of art historians, anthropologists and psychologists, students attempt to come to an understanding of how knowledge is constructed in the context of display and how visual juxtapositions can generate meaning. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI

FYS 198 The Coming Apocalypse (4 Credits)
It's boom time for the End Times. Millennials state with confidence that the world's final hour is approaching: the signs are everywhere, for those who know how to see them. Eschatological scenarios abound, ranging from climate change desolation and nuclear annihilation to alien invasions and zombie uprisings. Every ending also heralds a new beginning, though; every apocalypse gives way to a post-apocalypse. By focusing on apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic stories across a variety of media and genres, this course considers the significance of the human predilection for telling stories about the end of humanity. Restrictions: First years only; students are limited to one first-year seminar. Enrollment limited to 16. WI (L)