Dietrich College First-Year Seminars

SPRING 2021

Course #	Course Times	Departments	Seminar Course Name	Instructor(s)
66-118	TR 10:40–12:00	STA HIS	Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Thinking With Evidence	Joel Greenhouse Christopher Phillips
66-122	TR 4:00-5:20	STA PHI	Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Beyond Earth	Peter Freeman Tom Werner
66-128	TR 2:20-3:40	ML HIS	Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Palestinian and Israeli Food Cultures	Nevine Abraham Michal Friedman
66-129 99-129	TR 4:00-5:20	DC CS IDeATe ETC	Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Unreality: Immersive and Spatial Media	Lauren Herckis Tom Corbett
66-131	TR 12:20-1:40	ML ENG	Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Conflict and Culture in Sports	Stephen Caspar Korryn Mozisek Sebastien Dubreil

66-118, Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Thinking With Evidence

Joel Greenhouse
Christopher Phillips

In a time of big data and widespread skepticism of science, it is crucial to understand how data and facts can be turned into conclusions, and then into public policy. Using topics from medicine, epidemiology, and public health, this course provides students an introduction into the grand challenge of understanding how evidence is used (and abused) in support of scientific conclusions. Questions of health and disease are particularly important areas for thinking about facts and figures because many life-or-death decisions have to be made on the basis of fragmentary and unreliable evidence. Every trip to the doctor, illness, and vaccination involves a complicated mix of public policy, scientific evidence, and emotional and historical factors. This course helps students understand the sciences and the humanities as united in their desire for rigorous argumentation rather than as competing or incompatible ways of thinking. Moreover, by taking a wide-angle lens to the topic, students will see how and why standards of scientific proof have changed over time, and track what these changes mean for thinking about evidence. Co-taught by a statistician and historian, this course draws on many different disciplines, providing students a broad introduction to reasoning across the humanities and social sciences. Students will be required to participate in written and oral arguments, read scientific articles as well as political, historical, and legal documents, and prepare a capstone project in which they will be asked to weigh real-life evidence and recommend a course of action to the Food and Drug Administration. Other topics may include vaccination controversies, regulation of carcinogens and toxic chemicals, mammography screening standards, and the treatment of infectious diseases in global health settings.

66-122, Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Beyond Earth

Peter Freeman
Tom Werner

Space, as a television series once told us, is the final frontier. But what lies out there? It could be that the billions of rocky planets and moons in the Milky Way are just inert and ready to be terraformed and colonized...but what happens when we encounter life, intelligent or otherwise? In Beyond Earth, co-taught by an astrostatistician and a linguist, students will consider the various rationales for engaging with the rest of the galaxy...and the potential consequences of doing so. Why should one consider leaving the Earth, and where would he or she go? Just to Mars, or to other planetary systems? How long would it take to get to these other systems? The distances involved in space travel are immense, and we cannot rely on warp drives. Inter-generational space travel is a possibility, but who is willing to leave Earth and spend the rest of his or her life on board a spaceship? When one's descendants finally arrive in a suitable planetary system, what happens if they find life? If so, what should they do - communicate with it, control it, or fly away from it? Perhaps these are the wrong questions...perhaps we need to ask if humans have the right to occupy other planets and moons in the first place. But even if we choose not to leave Earth, there will still be the issue of communication: from radio signals to satellites leaving the Solar System to proposed light sails that will be pushed to the nearest stars, we are making ourselves known. Should we do this? And if we send signals into space, how should we design them to make ourselves understood? What should we talk about? Just how should we go about engaging with the rest of our galaxy? By the end of the course, every student will be able to make an informed and dispassionate decision: stay on Earth and improve what we all have, or strike out into the great Beyond?

66-128 Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Palestinian and Israeli Food Cultures

Michal Freedman
Nevine Abraham

In a region beset by conflict, how do food cultures allow us to approach cultural intersections and connections? This course is designed to provide students with a historical, cultural, and linguistic understanding of the hybrid nature of Jewish and Arab cultures, and the multiple ethnic contributions to local food cultures in Israel and Palestine. The two instructors, from the fields of Jewish history and Arabic Studies, will introduce students to the history, literature, film, and languages of the region, as well as to critical scholarship on food and “foodways” in the Palestinian and Israeli context. Students will have the opportunity to engage in cooking either locally or in Philadelphia - subject to travel restrictions - and to learn from Michael Solomonov and Reem Kassis, two award-winning US-based celebrity chefs and authors of Israeli and Palestinian cook books respectively. Throughout the semester we will also host a range of guest speakers who will deliver lectures on our course topic in the classroom and in the community.

6-129 DC Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Unreality: Immersive and Spatial Media

Lauren Herckis (Dietrich and SCS)
Tom Corbett (IDeATe and ETC)

Virtual news stories and game worlds are accessible by putting on cardboard goggles, theme parks are engineered to provide convincing multisensory experiences, and workforces are reliant on augmented views of factory floors. Immersive and spatial media constitute a suite of emerging technologies that offer the opportunity to expand arts, entertainment, science, design, commercial enterprises and countless other domains in ways that were previously limited to science fiction. The potential for augmented reality to disrupt our current technological ecosystem is tremendous. Many of these technologies are now 50 years old and just starting to enter the commercial realm. As immersive experiences and augmented realities become more integrated into our work and leisure,

do we need to worry about the ways that unreality affect our experiences of reality, or our interactions with each other? How do we know that we can trust our senses to tell us what is real? How do we begin to grapple with the ethical, cultural, social, technological, and regulatory implications of this shift?

66-131 Grand Challenge First-Year Seminar: Conflict and Culture in Sports

Stephan Caspar (Modern Languages)
Korryn Mozisek (English)
Sebastian Dubreil (Modern Languages)

Sports have been celebrated for bringing people together; yet, sports have also been a locus of tensions and conflict that most of us only experience from the sidelines. We understand sports, the people, and their cultural impact through the stories that we tell about them in such places as museums, stadium tours, and Halls of Fame as well as in books, documentaries, and podcasts. Through immersive technologies, these stories are brought to life and bring fans to the heart of the action.

In this course, students and faculty together will seek to achieve two main objectives: (1) examine ways in which cultural and societal values are reflected in sports and (2) how Virtual Reality (VR) technology can help design experiences that enhance the user's awareness of these issues by engaging with these cultural and societal perspectives.
We will first unpack sports stories that are squarely situated at the crossroads of sports and culture(s) (e.g., racism, human rights, and the role of government and/in national politics). Then we will explore the role of VR technology to help craft these narratives. Students, then, will discover what it means to write stories for VR experiences. The course will culminate in students designing an immersive experience about a sports conflict of their choice, which will be developed more fully to be displayed in the Askwith Kenner Global Languages and Cultures Room.