Humanities Fellowship Seminar: EPIC LITERATURE
**SAMPLE SYLLABUS**

This course zeroes in on the most foundational of “foundational” texts. It will study the evolution of the epic, beginning with its solemn ancient origins, in *Gilgamesh* and the Bible, following through with the panoramic martial epics of Greece and Rome, and then investigating how Dante, a Christian Medieval poet, adapts his “pagan” predecessors to tell the story of his voyage through Hell, in *The Inferno*. At the end we will turn to Milton’s engagement with the entire tradition - in his epic treatment of the story of the Fall - and then to the 18th-century “mock-heroics” that parodied them all. The course will necessarily touch on wide-ranging interdisciplinary aspects of history, anthropology, comparative religion, philosophy and myth. But it will focus on intertextuality: it will scrutinize the ways in which later authors reframed, reshaped, honored and challenged the work of their predecessors.

Syllabus:

**Week 1:** *Gilgamesh*

**Week 2:** The Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, the story of the Flood

**Weeks 3-5:** Homer, *The Iliad*

**Week 6:** The Bhagavad Gita

**Weeks 7-8:** Vergil, *The Aeneid*

**Weeks 9-10:** Dante, *Inferno*

**Weeks 11-13:** Milton, *Paradise Lost*

**Week 14:** Dryden, “MacFlecknoe”
Pope, “The Rape of the Lock”
Pope, *The Dunciad* (excerpts)
Anne Finch, “The Answer”

Writing: Three papers: a 4-5pp. close reading paper, a 5-7pp. comparative (or “intertextual”) paper and an 8-10pp. critical essay incorporating secondary sources. There will be a set of individual conferences with the professor after which students will write a revision of the second paper.