In the United States, we have a very particular view of the self as highly individual, inherent to the person, and the prime driver of our lives, distinct from the social order that surrounds it. We attribute how a person relates to others and their life trajectory and outcomes to *who they are*—good, bad, intelligent, hard-working, caring, selfish—and we assume that the self is coherent, continuous, and with a life of its own independent of situations. In this theoretical course, we will question these assumptions and ask: what is a self really? Are you fixed or fluid, singular or multiple? Are you your memories, your biography, your traits? Are you the sum of your social identities? How you present or see yourself? Or are you something else, something more? We will delve into these big questions through texts and experientially using social-psychological, philosophical and religious conceptualizations of selfhood to investigate just who you really are.

**Learning Goals for the Course. Students will:**
1. identify, analyze, and critique basic assumptions underlying contemporary understandings of selfhood and of how people become who they are;
2. distill, compare, critique, synthesize, and apply arguments from texts (and other sources) that make a variety of theoretical claims regarding the nature of the self;
3. investigate these arguments experientially through a variety of individual or group exercises;
4. learn the basics of conducting empirical qualitative research—recruitment, interviewing, coding and analyzing data—investigating the contemporary nature of selfhood;
5. facilitate the class at least twice in an experiential way that draws out other students’ insights and active participation;
6. communicate your arguments, explorations, and research findings effectively both orally and in writing; and
7. delve into your own life narratives, presentations of self, identities, etc., to understand how the concepts and arguments we are learning about play out in your own lives.

**Laptop and cell phone policy:**
Sorry guys. I love my devices, too, but aside from presentations to the class as a whole, we will be a technology-free zone. This will not only serve to minimize distractions and focus our attention, but it will also create a different sort of experience from your everyday life.

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations**
If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please see me this week and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation so I can provide the appropriate support for your success in this class.

**University Policy on Academic Integrity**
You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai ).
COURSE CALENDAR

WHAT SELVES ARE AND HOW THEY ARE CREATED

WEEK 1: Jan 13, 15 (44 pages)
The Emergence and Historical Development of Selfhood

  Chapter 1: “The Self-Aware Animal,” 3-24

WEEKS 2 & 3: (MLK Jan 20, no class), Jan 22, 27, 29 (90 pages over 2 weeks)
Theories of the Self

**Jan 22-Components of Self/Illusion of Self**
  Chapter 11: “Sigmund Freud’s Theory of Human Nature,” 170-172

**Jan 27-Socialization, Situations, and the Question of Human Freedom**

**Jan 29-Questioning the Agentic Self**
► Closely read ONE of the three dense theoretical reads below, and create a novel style of report on it for the other students. (Note: readings below are from *Identity: A Reader*, du Gay & Evans, eds., Los Angeles: Sage, 2000.)
IDENTITIES: WHO WE THINK WE ARE

WEEK 4: Feb 3, 5 (51 pages)
Narrative Identity: (Selective) Memories and Stories We Tell About Ourselves


WEEK 5: Feb 10, 12 (52 pages)
On-Line Identity: A Packaged “Front” or Liberated Selfhood?

► Lovaglia, Michael (2000). “Self-Serving Bias…” Knowing People, 29-33

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY BREAK

WEEK 7: Feb 24, 26 (55 pages)
Social Identities & Stereotypes

► Howard, Judith A. and Ramira M. Alamilla, “Gender and Identity,” Gender Mosaics: Social Perspectives, Dana Vannoy (ed.)*, 189-197
► Snow, David and Leon Anderson, “Salvaging the Self” (excerpted from Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless People), Ferguson reader, 207-216

(I gratefully acknowledge Susan Ferguson from whose Identities and Inequalities course, taught at Grinnell in Fall of 2012, I borrowed both readings and inspiration for this week’s topic.)
THE AMERICAN SELF

WEEK 8: Mar 3, 5 (22 pages) (MIDTERM March 5)
American Self-Obsession


WEEK 9: Mar 10, 12 (49 pages)
The Achievement-Defined Self-as-Product (The Case of College Applications)

► Levine, Madeline. (2006) *The Price of Privilege*
  Chapter 1: “The Paradox of Privilege,” 3-15
  Chapter 4: “What is a Healthy ‘Self’?” 63-70, 88-92

WEEK 10: Mar 17, 19 (56 pages)
Self-Blame: The Dark Side of the U.S. Self-Help & Self-Empowerment Rhetoric


***Thursday, March 20, 3:30-5pm***
  Note: MIT Professor Ofer Sharone (author of *Flawed System, Flawed Self*) will be speaking at the Brandeis Sociology colloquium series in Pearlman Lounge.

FALSE SELF/ TRUE SELF

WEEK 11: Mar 24, 26 (45 pages)
Masquerading as Yourself: Performances, Self-Branding and The Fraud Complex

WEEK 12: Mar 31, Apr 2 (53 pages)
Are You So Busy Performing that You’re Missing Your Life?


WEEK 13: Apr 7, 9 (55 pages)
Authenticity: Is there a “Real You” Underneath it All?


WEEKS 14 & 15: Apr 14, Apr 23 (Spring Break April 16 & 21)
Selfhood in Religion

Question: How have certain world religions understood “the self”?

April 14 (40 pages)
► JUDEO-CHRISTIAN, scriptural source text excerpts
  Genesis (Bereshith), Ecclesiastes (Kohelet)
  Books of Mark, Luke & John, and 2nd Corinthians
► TOLTEC WISDOM TRADITION (Native Mesoamerican)

April 23 (28 pages)
► BUDDHISM
► HINDU
  Bhagavad Gita (scriptural source text)
  Maharji, Ramana. “Who Am I?”

WEEK 16: Apr 28 (Research Papers Due)
Wrap Up
EVALUATION OF PROGRESS
Your grade will be based on the following:

Research Paper 25%
In lieu of a final examination, you will conduct your own field research (interviews with 3 or more people who can give you insights into their own experience of “who they are” as it relates to their construction of a coherent self) and write a 7 to 10 page paper exploring your findings. The paper will use concepts from the course as tools to analyze what your interviewees have to say and to speculate on what seems to be going on. This paper will occur in stages, and I will walk you through the whole process step by step. For past students, this has often been the most eye-opening experience of the class. Part of your grade on this will include a formal research presentation to the class during the last two weeks of the semester. Your research paper itself is due the last day of class, on April 28.

Midterm 20%
The midterm, March 5, will be a closed-book in-class essay exam over the course readings as well as over what came to light in class (lectures, discussions, films, etc.).

Assignments 20%
This category includes various assignments throughout the course, most significantly the weekly reflections on the readings. These reading reflections should be posted to Latte by Sunday at midnight before the week we will discuss them (you may choose one busy week in the semester when you do not want to send these, and you will not be penalized). Reading reflections are designed to encourage students to see the readings as a group or “set” in relation to the weekly course topics and should cover: (1) the most significant themes addressed in the readings, (2) the differences between the arguments in the various readings and nuances in that week’s readings and also in relation to prior readings during the course, and (3) the points of particular interest, concern, curiosity, or confusion to the student. You should include ALL of that week’s readings in your reflection in a way that communicates your understanding of each reading. These reflections should be about a single spaced page, and submitted on time (they lose 20% for every day late).

Self Journal 15%
You will keep a weekly journal in this class in which you process your experiences in the class, reflect on how they pertain to your life, and complete any personal writing prompts intended to go in your journal.

Participation and Facilitation 20%
Participation includes your co-facilitation of two class sessions as well as your day-to-day engagement during class time. Everyone’s full participation is needed to get the most out of the course and each of us (including YOU) has something to offer the rest of the class. Forms of participation can include active listening, thoughtful preparation for class, sharing a well-formulated idea after a long pause for thought, off-the-top-of-your-head reactions to new ideas, helping a classmate understand a difficult concept, asking interesting questions, engaging with another student who has made a comment, coming to office hours, bringing relevant news or magazine articles to class to share, and engaging with the various assignments. While participation can take many different forms, it cannot take any form if you are not present! Thus I expect you to make every effort to attend all classes and to arrive on time for all class meetings. If you miss three classes, your participation grade will go down 5% and an additional 5% for each additional absence (by contrast, if you miss less than two classes, your participation grade will get a 5% boost!). I know this is an early class and I feel your pain, especially if you are a night owl, yet three tardies count as one absence as well in this formula—so please be on time!

Note: I invite you to drop by my office hours in Pearlman 208 any time, even if just to stop by for five minutes to say hello and see where the office is. And during the semester, don’t be shy about coming in regularly to hash out what you’re learning in class or from the readings, or to share your personal responses to and experiences with the course. That’s what I’m here for!