

Spring 2009 University Seminars (USEM) Descriptions

USEM 4a Literacy and Development

Tuesday, Friday 10:30-12

Ms. Hale (Romance Studies)

Studies various definitions and forms of literacy across cultures and eras as depicted in literature and social science texts. Students' personal literacy stories are part of the curriculum. Requires 10 hours of volunteer service to a literacy program.

USEM 5b Conceptions of the Good Life

Monday, Wednesday 5-6:30

Ms. Hayim (Sociology)

Explores competing conceptions of the "good life" and of moral right and how these conceptions vary within different cultural periods in history; also explores standards for what is good and for justifying claims that one way of life is better than another. Included are conceptions of the "good life" as pleasure (Epicurus), as virtuous activity (Aristotle), as renunciation, as reason (Kant), as utilitarianism (J. S. Mill), as self-assertion (Nietzsche), as faith (Kierkegaard), as aesthetics, and as spirituality.

USEM 6a Anatomy and Gender: Early to Modern Times

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Ms. Kelikian (History)

Traces changing perceptions of the body and sexual difference from the Enlightenment in Europe to contemporary America. Examines relations between men and women, concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the social construction of decent and indecent behavior in Western culture.

USEM 10b Youth and Democracy

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Mr. Sirianni (Sociology)

Examines the roles that youth can play as active citizens in public problem solving, and social action in schools, communities, universities, politics, NGOs, and a range of other institutional settings.

USEM 14a Imagining the Other: Encounters in North America from Columbus to the Revolution

Tuesday, Friday 1:30-3

Ms. Kamensky (History)

Using the Americas after Columbus as a case study, examines the challenge of understanding and representing people across cultural frontiers. Focuses on the various ways authors defined and contested boundaries of nation, ethnicity, and gender.

USEM 16b Ten Masterworks of Western Classical Music

Tuesday, Friday 9-10:30

Mr. Stepler (Music)

Live performance of five important solo and chamber works, and listening assignments of ancillary orchestral, operatic and choral works. Performers and students will discuss the music in question and their responses to it. Readings and listening assignments will provide the focus for discussion.

USEM 19a Dangerous Beauty

Monday, Wednesday 5-6:30

Mr. Yourgrau (Philosophy)

What is the relationship of the beautiful to the good? Is our culture's preoccupation with physical beauty--in movies, television, magazines--a principal source of its dilemmas? Or is beauty itself a moral force rather than the handmaiden of sex and violence? These and related questions are pursued in this seminar, using as the principal text the recent study by Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, in which she argues that the beautiful should be enlisted as a powerful ally in the fight for justice.

USEM 22b War and Revolution in the Middle East

Tuesday, Friday 9-10:30

Mr. Makiya (Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)

Considers the impact of war and revolution in the shaping of the modern Middle East starting with the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Focuses

on the violent turning points that have changed the lives of millions of people.

USEM 23a Opera as Drama

Tuesday, Friday 10:30-12

Mr. Keiler (Music)

Explores the literary, theatrical, and musical dimensions of opera. The course may be organized in one of several ways, e.g., by historical period, by thematic considerations, by composer or group of composers, by librettist or librettists, or by literary sources.

USEM 26b Maps of Hidden Worlds: From the Cosmos to the Human Genome

Monday, Wednesday 2-3:30

Mr. Kondev (Physics)

Explores the science behind making maps of worlds that we cannot perceive with our senses. In particular, this seminar examines maps of the universe around us and maps of the cells within us. The approach is historical, covering the great discoveries that have culminated in the mapping of the cosmic microwave background radiation, and the sequencing of the human genome. Some of the questions considered are: How does one measure the distance to a galaxy far, far away? How do we know the age of the universe? What does it mean to sequence the human genome? What is nature's nanotechnology and how do we discover it?

USEM 27a Ancient Mysteries, Cults, and Myths

Monday, Wednesday 2-3:30

Ms. Johnston (Classical Studies)

An investigation of the phenomenon of the ancient mystery cults as preserved in the surviving art and literature of antiquity.

USEM 30b Development of Play, Art, and Creativity

Tuesday, Friday 1:30-3

Mr. Watson (Psychology)

Are there relations among intrinsic motivation, play, art, and creativity? This seminar explores these possible relations and how creativity develops, especially among artists. Ideas and writings from developmental psychology, theories of creativity, and the arts are used.

USEM 36a Romanticism in Nineteenth-Century Music

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Mr. Chafe (Music)

An exploration of the ideas that inspired nineteenth-century composers. Music listening is complemented by reading poems, novels, essays, and plays to help gain an understanding and an appreciation of Romantic ideas about nature, love, genius, heroism, the supernatural, nationalism, and (especially) music.

USEM 37b Art and Memory

Monday, Wednesday 2-3:30

Ms. Scott (Fine Arts)

Studies works of art and architecture, grounded in the discipline of art history, that either create collective memory or demonstrate the distillation of memory from landscapes or travel. The curriculum explores the myriad ways artists as diverse as Daniel Libeskind and Maya Lin, Henri Matisse and Giorgio de Chirico, and Wassily Kandinsky and Georgia O'Keeffe work with memory and imagination.

USEM 42b China in the Western Imagination

Monday, Wednesday 3:30-5

Mr. Platt (History)

An exploration of the many meaning of China to Western observers from Marco Polo to the present day. Materials include writing by philosophers and missionaries, diplomats and travelers, journalists, poets and fiction writers, each of whom found China--whether by means of investigation or purely by imagination--a civilization that stood as the antithesis of the one from which they came. The class seeks to understand not only what these writers had to say about China itself, but also (and perhaps more importantly) how they used

the contrasting example of China to critique or otherwise illuminate the European or American culture in which they themselves lived.

USEM 47b Growing Up Male: The Boy Culture

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Mr. Holmberg (Theater Arts)

Men are made, not born. A male baby identifies with his mother. How is a male identity created? Using primarily movies, but also short stories, poems, and plays, this course explores the twisting and turning road to manhood with insights from psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

USEM 48b The Rational and Irrational

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Mr. Hirsch (Philosophy)

Rationality has often been viewed as humanity's most distinctive and prized possession. Reason is said to elevate us above other living things and to make human existence especially valuable. Critics and detractors, however, have held that there is at bottom a core of irrationality that is indispensable to the meaning of our lives. Explores the scope and limits of human reason from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, and literature.

USEM 54a Ideas of Equality, Systems of Inequality

Tuesday, Friday 3-4:30

Mr. Parmentier (Anthropology)

Examines classic and contemporary accounts of equality and inequality in Western and non-Western societies. We first read influential philosophical texts on human equality and inequality and then confront these speculative accounts with empirical and cross-cultural evidence from "egalitarian" and "hierarchical" societies. In subsequent units we read several historical, sociological, and autobiographical texts that enable us to compare systems of inequality based on various combinations of dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, rank, and class. The origins of an ideology of individual equality in the Western tradition and ways that obvious evidence of inequality is "naturalized" and "rationalized" in contemporary American culture are examined. Finally, we consider the issue of equality and inequality in the context of recent debates about, for example, intelligence testing, affirmative action, gender discrimination, the death penalty, and the distribution of wealth.

USEM 57b Why Work?

Tuesday, Friday 10:30-12

Ms. Carter (Economics)

Mankind has always "worked," but the tasks and their material and social significance have evolved, and this evolution is accelerating. Considers how societies in different times and places view work, how different societies parcel out the tasks that individuals perform, how technology and specialization interact, and how work is related to experience beyond the workplace. Why do members of affluent societies work as long and as hard as we do?

USEM 64a True Crime and American Culture

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 12-1

Mr. Doherty (American Studies)

This seminar explores a series of enduringly fascinating cases from the true-crime files of American culture. Our crime-scene investigations will range from 1692 Salem to 1994 Brentwood; our lineup will include witches, outlaws, kidnapers, gangsters, murderers, and serial killers; and our evidence will be drawn from literature, film, and television.

USEM 66a The "West" through "Eastern" Eyes: Modern

Chinese and Japanese Travels Abroad

Tuesday, Friday 1:30-3

Mr. Fraleigh (German, Russian, and Asian Languages and Literature)

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a profusion of Japanese and Chinese works about life in the "West." This seminar considers diaries, reports, literary travelogues, and works of fiction set abroad, and examines the significance of their authorship, genre,

audience, and narrative structure. All readings are in English.

USEM 67b Public Intellectuals in American Life

Tuesday, Friday 12-1:30

Ms. Farrelly (American Studies)

This course examines the role and influence of public intellectuals in American society. The primary focus is on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, although students explore the work of some of America's first "homegrown" public intellectuals in the nineteenth century as well. Students are asked to consider what constitutes an "intellectual" body of work, and how and why that work might be rendered relevant to a mass audience. They explore the ideas put forth by some of the most influential public intellectuals in American life, and they are challenged to consider the impact the modern university has had on public intellectualism.

USEM 69a Human Movement and the Sense of Self

Monday, Wednesday 5-6:30

Mr. DiZio (Psychology)

The capacity to move reflects and governs self-identity. How would being unable to move affect your experiences and others' experience of you? What can be learned about human adaptability and volition from movement problems in space flight or from robotic prostheses interfaced to the human brain? Is "The Matrix" possible? These questions are analyzed through discussion of laboratory demonstrations and texts in neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy.

USEM 73a Thinking about Infinity

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 1-2

Mr. Flesch (English and American Literature)

Explores the attempts of the finite human mind to think about infinity. Readings in mathematics, history of science, philosophy, literature, and art, including Euclid, Plato, Cantor, Poincare, Einstein, Pascal, Kant, Hegel, Wordsworth, Shelley, Joyce, Beckett, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael.

USEM 87b Seeking Justice: Jews and Germans

Tuesday, Friday 3-4:30

Ms. von Mering (German, Russian, and Asian Languages and Literature)

The relationship between Jews and Germans is defined by the most horrific crime against humanity, the Holocaust. How could a modern civilized nation like Germany perpetrate the Nazi crimes? What led to Hitler's success and how have Jews and Germans overcome a history of injustice since 1945?