

First-Year Topic Seminar Course Descriptions **Fall 2023**

UNCS2245.01 Eat This, Not That...No Wait. The Biology of Nutrition and Health.

Lynn DiBenedetto (Biology), Monday Noon – 1:15pm

How is your diet different from your nutrition? Does it matter? Are your food choices influenced by history, family, government, culture? This seminar course will survey several of these questions and leave lots of time to explore other avenues such as health, nutrients, and the science of nutrition. We will base much of this course around the book, *In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollen and supplement with other materials.

UNCS2245.02 How to Do Things with Words: Loaded Language and the History of English

Robert Stanton (English), Monday 3:00pm - 4:15pm

This seminar will help you to understand and use language more effectively by examining the hidden history behind the words we use. English words come from many languages: Primitive Germanic, Latin, Old Norse, French, Italian, Spanish, Irish, Yiddish, and many others. The force and effectiveness of every word we speak or write depends on where it came from and how it has been used in the past. Each week, we will look at a current piece of English text such as a newspaper editorial, a presidential speech, a standup comedian's monologue, or an influential website, and discuss it on the level of its words and how they work.

UNCS2245.03 Imagining the Impossible

Joseph Nugent (English), Wednesday 2:00 - 3:15pm

Technology's not just for geeks! In this one-credit Cornerstone course we'll explore tomorrow's world – today. The course offers you a friendly and exciting introduction to the ways that technology is changing your life – and your new campus. (And by explaining Canvas and BC's own in-house technology, this course will ease your transition through the weeks ahead.) Explore everything from the delights of social media to the Oculus Rift to the uses of a drone. Along the way, this course will offer a supportive experience where you'll get to know other students and faculty, thus building confidence and direction. The course is designed to pique your interest in the world around you, and the technology that's changing it. Release your inner nerd!

UNCS2245.04 Art in Math and Math in Art

Ellen Goldstein (Math), Wednesday 3:00pm - 4:15pm

Is mathematics an art form? Is there beauty in mathematics? This class will explore the ways that mathematics appears in beautiful art forms, including dance, music, visual arts, and material arts. Art will be our catalyst for discovering, crafting, and playing with (beautiful) mathematics that is often omitted from a more practically-oriented curriculum. In turn, we will apply mathematics to enhance art, including through a self-selected creative project. By the end of the semester, I hope you too will see the art and beauty of mathematics.

UNCS2245.05 Inclusive Prosperity

Can Erbil (Economics), Wednesday 12:00pm - 1:15pm

As the "Economics for Inclusive Prosperity" platform states "...*We live in an age of astonishing inequality. Income and wealth disparities between the rich and the poor in the United States have risen to heights not seen since the gilded age in the early part of the 20th century. Technological changes and globalization have fueled great wealth accumulation among those able to take advantage of them, but have left large segments of the population behind.*"

This seminar explores the concept of "inclusive prosperity" and investigates the roots of increasing inequality in the US, as well as across the globe. We will discuss several policy briefs from the EfIP platform and other brand new research and data-driven analysis. Whenever we can, we will try to brainstorm on policy recommendations. Every week one student will lead the discussion on a topic of their choice beginning with a brief presentation. Topics will need to be connected to concepts of economic inequality, racial and gender inequality, opportunity inequality, equity and economic justice, economic growth, economic development, poverty and distributional justice - all leading to the same goal of inclusive prosperity. Students are encouraged to draw connections to the topic of their choice and their own personal experiences. The presentation will be the catalyst for class further debate. All students are expected to actively engage and participate in this seminar. As an added bonus, we will focus on how to prepare and make an effective presentation and some of the basics of public speech.

UNCS2245.06 The History of The Present

Julian Bourg (History), Thursday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

The world today can appear overwhelmingly complex and chaotic. From Covid-19 to climate change, from political anger to social anxieties to economic uncertainty, we seem carried along by uncontrollable events and forces. One basic way to make sense of such confusing times is to think historically: contextualizing our circumstances and anchoring them within broader storylines. We will discuss current events--terrorism, financial crisis, social media, school shootings, populism and white supremacy, social movements, and the pandemic--in historical perspective. How did we get here? What are possible ways forward?

UNCS2245.07 War in the Western World

Devin Pendas (History), Thursday 3- 4:15pm

"You can't say that civilizations don't advance," Will Rogers once said, "for in every war they kill you in a new way" (New York Times, Dec. 23, 1929). War is — tragically — perhaps one of the most universal of human experiences. Yet at the same time, it is deeply historical. Every war is different and not just in the obvious sense that each war involves different combatants and different winners and losers but also in the sense that the experience and meaning of war itself changes over time. This seminar will focus on the history of war in the Western world from ancient times to the present, asking in particular how war has changed over time. We will look at both the way war was understood (what it was felt to be and why it was thought to be justified) and how it was experienced (how men, and increasingly women, killed and died).

UNCS2245.08 Using Economics to Challenge Intuition

Geoff Sanzenbacher (Economics), Tuesday 1:30 - 2:45 pm

Could a good growing season actually *decrease* farmers' revenue? Could an increase in the minimum wage somehow *increase* employment? And, could a policy designed to make it harder to discriminate against one group actually make discrimination more likely? This course will discuss how economics can predict things that run counter to intuition, with a special eye on issues related to inequality.

UNCS2245.09 The Freshman International Student Experience

Adrienne Nussbaum (Office of International Students & Scholars), Tuesday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

Coming to Boston College and to the U.S. to study as an international student can be both an exciting and challenging time for freshmen. This achievement is perhaps the fulfillment of a dream that you and your family have had for many years and so there are many high expectations for success. All freshmen go through significant adjustments their first year, however international students also must acclimate to a different educational system, as well as many cultural differences that may impact both your academic and social life without the support of family and close friends nearby. This goal of this seminar is to help international freshmen better adjust to B.C. and the U.S. It will cover cross-cultural topics such as how values and communications styles can vary across countries, and practical skills for managing expectations and adjustment. It will also include guest speakers from throughout the University who will introduce you to the many resources available to freshman international students to help you succeed both in and out of the classroom. This section is open only to International Students and requires department permission.

UNCS2245.10 The Freshman International Student Experience

Adrienne Nussbaum (Office of International Students & Scholars), Thursday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

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UNCS2245.11 Music and...

Jeremiah McGrann (Music), Monday 3:00pm - 4:15pm

Of themselves the simple physical vibrations of music have no meaning, but somehow people have ascribed the most important values to the experience of music: its importance in cognitive development, its ability to shape and influence society or simply to process human experience. Through a series of readings and a wide range of musical examples—classical, traditional, popular—we will explore what a musical composition is and what people have thought about music and its effects with a focus on its role in society and in shaping the person. Participants

will be asked to explore the place of music within their own life and to possibly encounter music styles they don't immediately understand.

UNCS2245.12 Engaging Difference & Justice at Boston College
Brian Gareau (Sociology), Tuesday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

In this seminar, we will explore the meaning of the Engaging Difference & Justice core requirement, its connection to BC's mission, and the part that students must play to make it a success. What does it mean to "engage" issues around the difference and justice at BC? This course will challenge students to envision societies in which all can flourish in freedom, integrity, and fullness of life through the mutual respect their members show to one another in their interactions and relationships.

UNCS2245.13 A College Student's Guide to the Science of Memory
Elizabeth Kensinger (Psychology), Tuesday 3:00pm - 4:15pm

How are memories formed, stored, and retrieved? When do these processes lead to forgetting, and why? Can we – as individuals, or as a society – forget information that we don't want to remember? Can we improve our ability to hold onto memories that we want to retain? In this seminar, we will delve into these questions, using the study of memory from psychological and neuroscience perspectives as our guide. This seminar is designed to foster scientific thinking and to enhance each student's communication and critical thinking skills, all while discussing a topic (how memory works) of high relevance to college students.

UNCS2245.15 Seeing is Not Believing: Propaganda in the 21st Century
Thomas Kaplan Maxfield (English), Monday 3:00pm - 4:15pm

This course will focus on the ways in which we live in a world filled with various forms of propaganda, from advertising to political campaigns, all of which contain presuppositions and assumed premises that greatly affect how we think. At a certain level, all thinking is a belief system based on particular assumptions, but this class will examine, via readings and films, many ways in which forms of propaganda operate in our society to produce specific and sometimes extreme forms of belief.

Subjects that will be considered include the corporation, the official story of 9/11, and the NSA. For example, the Iraq invasion was the first time in our country's history that the military built and used a media center to control what was shown and how. Reporters were "embedded" in military units as a way of controlling reporting on the invasion. Pictures of flag-draped caskets of American war dead returning home were forbidden, unlike during the Vietnam conflict in which they were regularly shown.

UNCS2245.16 Theatre: Onstage and Off
Patricia Riggin (Theatre), Monday 2:00pm - 3:15pm

Theatre's roots are deeply embedded in the art of storytelling, and in our digital age with its abbreviated means of communication, the power of the story, the full story, remains a rich resource for exploring our shared humanity and as a means of individual discovery. By attending theatre in Boston and on campus, we will encounter people, places, and ideas that will delight and provoke; in a fun and supportive atmosphere, the class will enjoy acting exercises that develop

your self-expression, creativity, and ability to live in the moment. Our seminar will be a place to play, de-stress, and connect with others.

UNCS2245.18 Monsters and the Monstrous

Jason Cavallari (University Fellowships Office), Monday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

Vampires. Werewolves. Witches. From dragons to mad serial killers, history is full of the weird, the dark, and the scary. Every society learns to fear someone or something in order to protect us from the unfamiliar, the impermissible, or the Other. Knowing what scares us, however, also tells us more about ourselves, our desires, and that which we cannot tolerate. This course uses monsters and the idea of the monstrous to introduce students to the study of history through experience with historical sources, pop culture sources, and in conversation with historical scholarship on things that go bump in the night.

UNCS2245.19 First Gen Students: Using Our Strengths to Succeed in College

Dacia Gentilella (Learning to Learn Program), Tuesday 1:30pm - 2:45pm

Arriving on campus for the first weeks and months of college can be both a thrilling and daunting time. Questions race through our heads: What are the rules, spoken and unspoken? What are the best classes to take? Should I let anyone know that I have questions? What will they think of me, if I don't understand everything? These questions often have a different impact on first generation college students, who are trailblazers for themselves and their families. First gen students often carry themselves and all of the hopes and dreams of their friends and families into their college experience, without the benefit of advice from those who have struggled with the academic and social demands of the world of the university. This seminar will be a place for first gen students to explore their new lives as college students, while embracing their past and pursuing their dreams for the future.

UNCS2245.20 Justice, Law, and the Common Good

Greg Kalschauer, SJ (Dean, Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences), Monday 4:00pm - 5:15pm

In this seminar we will explore the distinctive vision of the person, of the relationship between the person and society, and of the requirements of the good or just society that flow out of the Catholic social thought tradition. This tradition includes a distinctive way of thinking about the nature and purpose of law and the relationship between law and morality. We will also try to think in a sustained way about justice: what do we mean when we use the word justice, what does justice require, how might we understand justice as a virtue rather than as an abstract idea, what is the relationship between legal justice and social justice, between a biblical understanding of justice and philosophical or legal understandings of justice? A Boston College education strives to prepare students for meaningful lives oriented toward service of the common good -- how might we understand what service of the common good asks of us?

UNCS2245.21 Seeking to Understand Innovation and Creativity

Charlie Hoffman (Biology), Thursday 1:30pm - 2:45pm

Make no mistake about it, I do not have the answers, but in this seminar we will explore the characteristics of people deemed exceptionally creative and innovative. We will look into the lives of people recognized this year by MIT's 35 Innovators Under 35 and recent MacArthur Genius Fellows, including people working in a wide range of disciplines. We will also look at puzzles or brainteasers to develop our own skills.

***UNCS2245.22 Core Conversations In/Justice**

Elizabeth Shlala (University Core and History), Monday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

AND

***UNCS2245.23 Core Conversations In/Justice**

Elizabeth Shlala (University Core and History), Wednesday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

"No one is saved alone: either we are all saved as a community or we are not saved." Pope Francis and other leaders across the world call out to us in the midst of grief and human suffering to leave no one behind. This seminar is a one-credit advising course based on the themes of Justice and the Common Good. In our class, we will tackle difficult topics together as we try to find solutions in our everyday lives on campus. It will set you on a path to know yourself better, and to create a community of hope for the future. **These sections are limited to students enrolled in the Justice & The Common Good Living Learning Community (JCGLLC)*