

## MONTSERRAT SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS

2013-2014

The Montserrat Program is grouped into five different thematic clusters: Core Human Questions (C); The Divine (D); Global Society (G); The Natural World (N); and The Self (S). Each cluster contains seminars examining the theme from a variety of perspectives.

### ↻ Core Human Questions ↻

MONT 100C

#### **Matters of Time & Matter** (fall)

In this course we consider what cannot be controlled by science. First, what about time itself? Why does time seem to flow and to flow in only one direction (towards the future.) Another aspect of reality that seems out of scientists' control includes apparently random events occurring continually at the atomic and subatomic levels of matter. Finally, science does not control what types of behavior the various forms of matter are capable of. Throughout the semester, we will be considering what impact, if any, what we are learning has on the question raised in the theme of our Core Human Questions cluster—*how then shall we live?*

MONT 101C

#### **Modern Technology & Us** (spring)

In this course we will examine several questions related to the pervasive phenomenon of modern technology. What is technology? Does it give humans more or less control in their lives? Is the question of control a technological question? Are technology's unintended side effects chance events or something else? Is there any technological innovation that does not have unintended side effects? Are there other cultures in the world in which people live with technology differently than we do? Can technology change what it means to be human or what it means to live meaningfully? Can we find a better way to live with technology?

MONT 102C

#### **Destiny, Chance, Virtue** (fall)

Sometimes chance or fortune seems able to frustrate even our most conscientious attempts to control our lives and our world; while other times our lives seem to be directed by fate or God's Providence which lead us to destinations--figurative and literal--we would never otherwise choose. This seminar examines literary and philosophical works that address the interplay between fate and fortune, with special interest paid to the possibility of human freedom and virtue, which exists in the space between these two inexorable forces. Potential texts include: Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Augustine's *On the Freedom of the Will* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

MONT 103C

#### **Control, Contingency, Meaning** (spring)

The systematic attempt to control chance or contingency through science, technology, and political institutions is one of the distinguishing characteristics of modernity. Nevertheless, contingency and necessity appear persistent, leading many to the conclusion that the desire for control is quixotic. Indeed, our understanding of what things, if any, are "necessary" or "contingent"--what, in other words, we can control or change, and what we cannot--remains in flux. This seminar examines books which try to discern the possibilities for, and limitations of, human control, and the potential sources of meaning when control is impossible. Potential texts include: Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Arendt's *The*

*Human Condition*, and Fincher's film *Fight Club*.

MONT 104C

**Crime and Punishment** (fall)

Narratives about “perfect crimes” often begin with belief in the potential for controlling all aspects of human activity within a carefully plotted period of time and space, so as to attain, with reliable certainty, a desired, transgressive outcome: a theft, a heist, a murder. Yet something unanticipated and incriminating often occurs—within the crime’s fixed period of time, or else in the uncertain time afterward, of guilty feelings and looming punishment. We’ll be studying how crime narratives place characters in positions wherein the desire for control proves overwhelming, the likelihood of “one false move” in the face of chance proves inevitable, and the aftermath of criminality entails pondering how to live within the punishing confines of everyday life. Reading-intensive. Authors may include Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Raymond Chandler, Patricia Highsmith, Graham Greene, Truman Capot

MONT 105C

**Risk, Suspense, Games, Luck** (spring)

Joseph Conrad once argued that “it is not their own deserts that men are most proud of, but rather of their prodigious luck.” Why do we feel pride in our own positive encounters with luck and chance, instead of our encounters with what we earn, believe that we “deserve,” and exert effort to control? Chance presents a curious paradox to a narrative’s plot: it can pose either an unforeseen, undeserved, and fortuitous opportunity (the “chance of a lifetime”), or else throw an unforeseen, undeserved hazard into life, putting at grave risk a character’s best-laid plans, efforts, and accomplishments. We’ll be studying this paradox, and its formal consequences upon the making of life choices, in literary narratives focused upon games (baseball), gambling and suspense.

MONT 106C

**Control to Chance!** (fall)

One of the main philosophical implications of the Newtonian revolution was that science was on the path to the complete prediction and control of nature. However, the later developments that eventually gave rise to modern physics forced scientists to accept that chance and uncertainty are fundamental to nature and nature’s laws. In this first semester we will trace the historical and conceptual understanding of these laws. No previous background in physics is required.

MONT 107C

**Chance to Control?** (spring)

One of the main achievements of our current understanding of science is that chance and uncertainty are integral to the laws of nature. However, by finding patterns in the interplay between the nature of probability, human nature, and the nature of matter, we have wrested back a measure of control. In this second semester we will trace the historical development of the idea of chance, and then examine how scientists, engineers and social scientists use chance in their thinking, and evaluate the degree to which they succeed or fail.

MONT 108C

**Staging Chance, Destiny & Fate** (fall)

The classical drama of the Greeks and the masterpieces of the English Renaissance share a singular obsession with finding humanity's place in a hostile and terrifying universe. The impossibility of the task led to tremendous artistic achievements that celebrated human limitations and the necessity to surrender control to higher powers. We will examine plays by Sophocles, Euripides, Marlowe and Shakespeare and re-trace the intellectual developments that spurred the creation of these works.

MONT 109C

**Staging Illusion & Control** (spring)

Modern European drama and its American derivatives are permeated with the hubristic notion that we can discover the underlying causality of human behavior. The tremendous theatrical creativity of the past century is reflective of the on-going tension between our collective compulsion to control our lives, the environment and the future and the sheer impossibility of the task. The great works of modernism—ranging from Ibsen to Beckett—are infused with this anxiety, reflecting the illusion of control and the reality of chance.

MONT 110C

**Risk and Reward** (fall)

If we desire control, why do we gamble? This course will examine the mathematics, history, psychology and economics of games of chance. We'll take a broad view of gambling, encompassing not only casinos, lotteries and the racetrack, but also other forms of risk-taking and its regulation, such as the stock market and insurance, that are deeply imbedded in our economy. The importance of a realistic mathematical understanding of risk will be illustrated by both resounding successes and spectacular failures. The mathematical prerequisites for both semesters are minimal – high school algebra should suffice.

MONT 111C

**Chaos and Control** (spring)

When we are confronted by chance, how do we impose control? Remarkably enough, the disorder that seems to surround us can be described mathematically, and patterns can be discerned in the fog of chaos. From one point of view, much of our uncertainty about the future is a result of our imperfect knowledge of the present, which masks as chance. This is the essence of the mathematical definition of chaos – small changes in our assumptions about today may lead to drastically different scenarios for the future. This definition will help us understand the possibilities and limitations of control.

MONT 112C

**Music Performed and Recorded** (fall)

What is the power of music? Why do the children in the fairy tale follow the Pied Piper? Why does Orpheus believe that music can bring the dead back to life? For centuries poets have told us that music raises the passions and expresses the inexpressible. In our world of iPods and YouTube, we are surrounded by music all the time. But what role does it play in our lives? We have the illusion that we control our musical environment, but do we? This course will explore the power of music by focusing on the phenomenon of live performance in a technological age. The emphasis will be on Classical music and coursework will include attending several concerts. No previous experience in music required, just the ability to listen attentively and an interest in thinking and writing about music.

MONT 113C

**Love and Destiny In Music** (spring)

Music is a powerful form of expression, one that can transcend barriers of language, time, and place. At the same time, music is often confronted with something unpredictable or a circumstance impervious to music's power. In this course we will explore moments in song, stage, and film where desire and design are thwarted by the unpredictability of human events. Ironically, these moments are among the best loved and most famous in music—the sad love songs, tragic ballads, and tragic endings of operas and musicals. Why are we drawn to these moments and what do we learn from them? Why is the love song such an enduring tradition? Why do characters in musicals and operas express their feelings in song? Why do protest movements have anthems? No previous experience in music required, just the ability to listen attentively and an interest in thinking and writing about music.

❧ THE DIVINE ❧

MONT 100D

**Community and Conviction** (fall)

Service, Community, Faith, and the relationships among them: this course is a "hands on" experience of the life of a faith community near campus serving inner-city populations in Worcester. Students get to know members and participate in activities of the parish, while studying materials in history, sociology, ethics, and theology to develop an understanding of the community and its faith response to the needs of its people.

This semester we focus on learning both background and concrete reality of our host parish. How did it form? What institutions and convictions have shaped it? What can it teach about broader realities of community, faith, and the city? Students attend activities at the church each week (choices ranging from choir to food pantry) and look for a "niche" for ongoing involvement. Personal blogs and discussions, "practical" and "theoretical reading," will help construct a "big picture" understanding.

MONT 101D

**Faith and Response** (spring)

This semester, knowing the community a bit better, we focus on "why they do what they do." What's the relationship between members' beliefs and the activities they organize and support? How relevant is the church here? What is it trying to do, and is it succeeding? What are its special challenges, and gifts? Continued reading, discussing, and writing will put our ongoing parish experiences into the larger context, moving toward a concluding assessment of the community and our own involvement in it.

MONT 102D

**Transcending Self-Reflection** (fall)

Socrates' admonition, "Know thyself" challenges us to understand and articulate our identity, our origins and our ultimate purpose and destiny in relationship to the transcendent. We will examine how ancient authors employ epic, lyric and epinician poetry, drama, historical narrative, philosophical reflection, letters and memoirs to shape "self" image in light of this tripartite goal. The critical lens of transvaluation will help us consider how various cultures offer contemporary interpretations of that reflective process as expressed through gesture, masks, tests, disguises and artistic depiction and in both personal friendship and more corporate social endeavors. Creative and critical assignments will help students engage in the reflection process.

MONT 103D

### **Model Christian Discerners** (spring)

“Discernment of spirits” is central to St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises where he invites retreatants to deepen their relationship with God through a series of meditations divided into four “weeks.” Rooted in the biblical and pagan traditions of self-reflection, “discernment” remains a central concern throughout two millennia of Christian experience. St. Ignatius’s writings will serve as our critical lens for examining how authors ranging from St. Augustine and Theresa of Avila to Therese of Lisieux and Thomas Merton, employed varied genres while contemporary artists use film and other media to enhance our understanding of “discernment.” Students will engage in the process of “discernment” through critical and creative assignments.

### MONT 104D

#### **Looking at the Divine?** (fall – 2 sections)

So much of intellectual history has been concerned with our relation to the Divine. This semester explores what it means/has meant to 'look' at the Divine--with the eyes of individuals? With 'collective sight?' With the mind's eye? We will make use of philosophical, literary, and scriptural texts in order to think about this issue. They will include texts by figures such as Plato, Descartes, Genesis.

### MONT 105D

**The Divine Looks Back?** (spring) What happens when we shift our focus from our own ability to relate to the Divine, to the Divine's relation to us? This question has historically been coextensive with that of our Fall semester. It opens up our inquiry onto questions concerning ethics, psychology, development and politics. As with the Fall Semester, we will make use of philosophical, literary and scriptural texts including Augustine, Maimonides, and Exodus.

### MONT 106D

**Relationships: Humans and God** (fall) During the first semester we will study friendship: within the family, with other human beings we experience as “friends,” and with God. We will explore how friendship has found expression in the language of symbol, in literature and in music, from ancient to modern times. We shall examine the relationship of friendship to faith, hope, and love, but also to infidelity and sin, and to forgiveness. The seminar will explore how the relationship of God to human beings is incarnated in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and how human beings’ relationship to God is expressed in covenant, in prayer, and in vocation. How hierarchy and mutuality function in relationships will also be considered.

### MONT 107D

**Connections: Interdependence**(springs) During the second semester we will study the connections between the Divine and creation-- animals, human beings, plants and the earth. We will examine how interconnectedness has been depicted in biblical texts and later Christian literature, and in symbols, art and science from ancient through modern times. We shall pursue “appropriate” relationships in and toward the environment (e.g., biodiversity and stewardship), while also considering abuse and excessive consumption as sin. Finally, we will ask, "If interdependence is a given, and stewardship a responsibility, how can sustainability be attained?" This course counts toward the Environmental Studies concentration.

## ↻ GLOBAL SOCIETY ↻

MONT 100G

### **Viet Nam: the Country** (fall)

This course explores the ways wars obscure our understanding of the people with whom we share the planet, and with whom we must ultimately make peace. In the first semester we consider Viet Nam, a country that was the site of a past war. During the first weeks of the term we will sample American representations of Viet Nam in film and story, before turning to Vietnamese film and literature, which will be the main focus of the course. We will explore similarities and contrasts as we develop a more complex understanding of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese as both beyond and enmeshed in these various depictions. This course counts toward the Peace and Conflict Studies concentration or Asian Studies concentration.

MONT 101G

### **Muslim Worlds** (spring)

In the second term of this year-long course, we will bring the questions and insights we have developed in looking at the past to bear on looking for the human face obscured by the headlines of the present wars in the Islamic Middle East. Through ethnographies, poetry, film, literature, and brief histories, students will be introduced to the lands and peoples of the region. They will bring this background knowledge to a term-long project examining news sources from and about four countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. This course counts toward the Peace and Conflict Studies concentration.

MONT 102G

### **Ciphers and Heroes** (fall)

How are secret codes constructed? What weaknesses allow many of them to be cracked by clever analysts? Welcome to *cryptology*, the scientific study of encoding and decoding secret messages. We will explore the mathematics behind several cryptosystems, while investigating their strengths and weaknesses, and surveying their historical developments, setbacks, and implications. This semester we focus on cryptosystems such as the shift ciphers used by Caesar, the Vigenere cipher used during the Victorian era, and most thrillingly, the ENIGMA cipher used during World War II. Along with the mathematics of these ciphers, we will discover fascinating facts about their creators and the clever analysts who crack the codes, including the Polish and British heroes who cracked the seemingly unbreakable ENIGMA.

MONT 103G

### **Privacy in the Internet Age** (spring)

How does Amazon.com keep your credit card information secure when you order online? What weaknesses can hackers exploit, in their quest to steal your identity online? Secure electronic communication is vital to today's society, and modern cryptosystems are at the heart of this enterprise. Most of these systems are based on the mathematics of elementary number theory, and the stunning development of *public key cryptography*, a revolutionary concept born in the computer revolution of the 1970s. This semester we focus on these modern cryptosystems, the visionaries who created them, and the advances in computing that have made them secure.

MONT 104G

**I Mean, Therefore I Eat** (fall)

'We are what we eat' – what does this really mean? In what ways does eating contribute to the making of a self or a group? The course explores how specific dietetic decisions reflect a detailed and comprehensive image of a person or a community. We will start by considering the different ways in which foods can mean something to us: how particular foods can be associated with an occasion, a person, a place. Next on the menu will be the ethical, environmental, and political values that our diets reflect. The class will draw upon a wide range of resources, including classical and contemporary philosophical texts, food essays, magazine and newspaper articles, videos and images.

MONT 105G

**I Esteem, Therefore I Eat** (spring)

The recipe for creating pleasure through food is complex. Start with the palate. Americans hold food experts in high esteem; Italians do not. Are some experts more right than others? Is the quality of a food objective or is it simply a matter of personal taste? Add a dash of art. Some chefs aspire to impress their table guests. But can food be art? Could a cook ever compare to Michelangelo or Leonardo? Stir food's effect on the body into the mix. Most food labels display nutritional "facts." We use them to seek the "mental pleasure" of a healthy diet. But how should we interpret these facts? Is nutrition a science like – say – cell biology?

MONT 106G

**Boccaccio and the Middle Ages** (fall)

In 1348, the disease that would be called the Black Death quickly annihilated up to one third of Europe's population in one year. The effects of the plague on the social life were considerable and the intellectual and artistic world felt compelled to attempt to understand what plague was, as well as its grander philosophical and moral implications. This course will study Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* as a response to the 1348 plague and the political and economic effects caused by the disease.

MONT 107G

**Manzoni and the Modern Age** (spring)

Alessandro Manzoni's masterpiece, *The Betrothed* (1840), tells the story of Renzo e Lucia, a young couple who wishes to marry. The novel is set in the 1600s in Spanish-occupied northern Italy during an outbreak of the plague. Manzoni's interest in the plague, a topic that he explores in depth in another of his works, informs the mostly fictitious plot of *The Betrothed*, altering the course of the characters' lives. More importantly, the epidemic, as both historical occurrence and literary device, reveals the author's views on literature, religion, and politics in nineteenth-century Italy.

MONT 108G

**Travel across Time** (fall)

From the beginning of time, compelled by material necessity, religious duty, or pure curiosity, people have left familiar environments behind to embark on voyages to distant and uncharted lands. Adventurers, pilgrims, and sightseers produced a wealth of textual and graphic material that provides the basis for our course. Surveying a wide range of sources, from Homer's ancient *Odyssey* to contemporary *Let's Go* guidebooks, from early maps of the New World to episodes of *Star Trek*, we will explore how travelers transmitted their experiences, and how this continuing quest into the unknown offers a metaphor for the human search for knowledge.

## MONT 109G

### **Worcester Sketchbook** (spring)

This course will serve to use Worcester as both a muse and a resource for travel and observation. We will use sketchbooks to analyze, reflect on and transmit each student's journey and experience of event and place. This hands-on studio course will put the student into the role of traveler as they embark on weekly visits to sites of architecture, landscape and history that will be the inspiration for a variety of drawing processes and techniques. We will also research artist sketchbooks which have served throughout history as documents of the maker's inner vision, reaction to environment and events, collections of ideas, as well as places to practice close observation and experimentation.

## MONT 110G

### **Into the Unknown** (fall)

Improvements in transportation technology have allowed us to travel to distant parts of the globe and to encounter peoples and places far removed from our own homes. Why is a person driven to venture into new and foreign places? What do they discover along their journey? How does the experience of the voyage challenge how they think about their world and their place within it? We will address these sorts of questions as we examine, through literature, historical travelogues, and film, stories of the journeys taken by a variety of people to unfamiliar regions of their world.

## MONT 111G

### **Exotic Encounters** (spring)

Objects, ideas, and traditions travel across the globe much like, and often accompanied by, people. What happens when the unfamiliar appears close to home? Why do some individuals embrace the new while others shun what is alien? How does the arrival of the exotic shape the people among whom it is found, and how might these people, in turn, re-imagine the unfamiliar? In this course, we will examine the movement of unfamiliar objects, traditions, and people to the United States. We will investigate the influence of Indic thought on American writers like Thoreau and the encounters of Beatniks, like Kerouac, with Buddhism. We will also study the trials and successes of Asian immigrant communities. This course counts toward the Asian Studies concentration.

## MONT 112G

### **Bridging the Gaps Between Us** (fall)

Have you ever known someone so well that you know what they're going to do before they do it? What does it mean to really understand another person? It's usually more difficult to get to know someone who is significantly older or younger, or who belongs to a different religion or culture.

Why do these differences make a difference? In this seminar, we will think about what it means to understand another person, and whether and how we can bridge the gaps between us. The course will draw on a wide range of resources, including philosophy, literature, and film.

## MONT 113G

### **Talking Across Differences** (spring)

One important way we get to know each other is by talking. But is language as good a tool of communication as we think it is? Sometimes, putting your thoughts into words seems to distort them. And when it comes to trying to understand someone who speaks a foreign language, is translation really adequate? Philosophers and psychologists have argued that different languages imply different ways of seeing the world. If so, understanding the way another sees the world may require learning her language. In the second half of this course, we will focus on the role of language in understanding each other.



## ↻ THE NATURAL WORLD ↻

### MONT 100N

#### **Drug Design, Action and Abuse** (fall)

People use drugs to cure infection, to alter perception, and to influence cellular pathways. We will explore the fundamental biochemistry and pharmacology of drug design and action and examine the regulatory process of drug approval. Through readings and class discussions, we will explore related societal issues such as insurance coverage for prescription drugs, the design of clinical trials, the use of drugs in religious ritual, and how and why a society chooses to control the use of some substances by making them illegal or under physician control, but to promote the use of others. Throughout the course we will develop our ability to read, write and argue about topics of scientific relevance.

### MONT 101N

#### **Biotechnology and Ethics** (spring)

Advances in technology have changed how we can control our health and bodies, as well as that of our offspring. Is this a blessing or a curse, or a combination of both? We will examine contemporary issues of bioethics through a case study approach. We will begin by grounding ourselves in the language of ethics with critical readings of notable thinkers such as Kant, Hume, Mill and Rawls. We will then draw on our biochemical knowledge from the fall to discuss both the scientific background and ethical implications of topics including informed consent, genetic testing, gene therapy, stem cell research, surrogacy and assisted reproduction, and the allocation of health-care spending and resources.

### MONT 102N

#### **Justice in Theory** (fall)

We certainly have a problem: the way we live is damaging the environment, and we *need* that environment if we're going to keep living satisfying lives. This problem seems to require government action, but ... what should the government do? Do we just worry about existing people? Future generations? Or also about animals, or ecosystems, or "the environment itself," whatever that is? And how do we even *begin* to answer those questions in meaningful and respectful ways? We'll study two political theories (liberalism and conservatism) and four theories of the environment to see how other people have answered those questions, then work on developing our own answers. This course counts toward the Environmental Studies concentration.

### MONT 103N

#### **Justice in Practice** (spring)

The US has one of the most extensive environmental regimes in the world, and we've certainly made progress over the last 40 years, but we still have so many environmental problems. What can we *do*? In this course, we'll look at three examples of what "we" can do, and talk about the costs and benefits of each: government regulation, business innovation, and grassroots protest movements. In the end, each of these options leads us back to a slightly different question: what can *we* do? Us, you and me – what can *we* do? It's worth asking ... and answering. This course counts toward the Environmental Studies concentration.

## MONT 104N

### **Our Bodies** (fall)

Across the globe, from prehistory to the present, humans have depicted themselves in art. The image has changed with the aspirations of the society and the materials available, such as wood, bronze, marble or paint. Societies developed rituals of food and drink that affected the body. Often they imagined their gods as enhanced people. With scientific advancements, including human dissection, artists acquired an understanding of the physical body; a wide range of personality types and human conditions (gender distinctions, childhood, old age, obesity, or madness) were introduced in art. Both seminars will encourage students to actually participate in making and manipulating imagery through Photoshop and other new technologies. Works of art and landscape on campus, the Worcester Art Museum, and in Boston are part of both semesters.

## MONT 105N

### **Our World** (spring)

Nature is, indeed, all around us, but we see it selectively. What a society values invariably appears in its art. Landscape was a rare subject in medieval society; it developed only as the age of discovery brought exploration of new worlds. The growth of science in the 15th century made possible the technique of mathematical perspective that dominated painting until the 20th century. A little more than a century ago, our country's political ideology of Manifest Destiny appeared in paintings of huge panoramas of the American West. Photography vastly changed our view of nature. Contemporary artists create installations that become a part of the natural environment sometimes for periods as brief as a day, or they may permanently alter the environment. The class will actually create an installation piece set in the landscape at Holy Cross.

## MONT 106N

### **Acting Natural** (fall)

We are told it is good to “act natural,” but it is easier said than done. Why is that? It seems that our relationship to nature—our own nature, and nature itself—is not always a comfortable one. Acting “in accordance with nature” was thought, by some ancient philosophers, to be the key to a virtuous and happy life. Modern ways of thinking tend to differ, suggesting that “nature” is something that needs to be overcome, or controlled, if we are to live free and well-ordered lives. Does nature interfere with our freedom, or is it the very source of that freedom? Is being free the same as “going wild”? Is there a tension between living a “natural” life and living a civilized life in society? Does “going back to nature” make us more, or less, human? These are some of the things we shall wonder about as we explore philosophical and literary sources from the ancient and modern worlds.

## MONT 107N

### **Creatures and Creators** (spring – 2 sections)      **MONT 107N-01 & 02**

This semester's course continues to explore the question of whether and how human beings can live freely and meaningfully in relation to the natural world. While we are a part of nature, and our lives are shaped by it, we also find ourselves standing apart from it. Often the relationship is one of opposition, but it can take other forms. We are natural creatures, but we are also creators. As such, we have the power to reshape nature and ourselves. How are we to respond to the possibility that, in exercising this power, we may ultimately *destroy* nature and ourselves? In this course, we shall consider different ways of understanding our role as creatures and creators of our world, and what it would mean to live as both. Technology, art, and religion will be among the topics we address.

MONT 108N

**The Stem Cell Machine** (fall)

What are stem cells? Are they the holy grail of medicine, or snake oil? In this course we will explore the biology of stem cells, both in embryonic development, and in the adult and aging organism in the maintenance and repair of tissues. We will discuss why scientists use model organisms to study stem cell biology and how this affects what we know about stem cells. We will develop tools to assess scientific and popular media claims about stem cells, and to enhance our abilities to think critically and evaluate scientific evidence in scientific research. The readings in this seminar will be a combination of textbooks, scientific articles, and popular media.

MONT 109N

**Stem Cells in Medicine** (spring)

How can we inform the public debate on ethics and stem cells, and what are the roles of stem cell therapies in medicine? We will discuss the beneficial and malevolent roles of stem cells in medicine. We will examine the ethics surrounding the study and use of stem cells in biomedical research and medical therapies. We will also discuss the technology of artificially derived stem cells and the utility of these cells in medical therapies. Finally we will discuss how the general public makes health care choices based on media reports of scientific discoveries in stem cell biology. The readings in this seminar will be a combination of textbooks, scientific articles, and popular media.

MONT 110N

**The Idea of Wilderness** (fall)

Wilderness, whether understood as a concept in the American imagination or as the reality of a resource-rich hinterland, is central to the American experience. This semester will trace the incorporation of wild, ostensibly unsettled, lands into the expanding American republic from the first European settlements to 1940. Originally viewed with ambivalence by the early colonists for the dangers and challenges it held, wilderness was reconsidered over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It came to be embraced as the ultimate manifestation of God's handiwork. Integral to the narrative of the European settlement of North America was the progressive displacement of the original inhabitants and the destruction of the Indian way of life.

MONT 111N

**Environmentalism, 1940-2010** (spring)

An expansive environmental movement emerged in the United States in the years after World War Two, one that addressed issues related to quality of life, species preservation, and the effects of human activity on the natural world. The growing appreciation for the remaining wild lands culminated in the 1964 "Wilderness Act" which insured that significant tracts of land would be preserved in their natural condition. We will examine, as well, the contemporary lives of Native Americans in North America, and as a powerful counterpoint to the first semester's reading of *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, will read an account of a 2001 expedition in search of the Amazon's last uncontacted tribes. This course counts toward the Environmental Studies concentration.

## ❧ THE SELF ❧

### MONT 100S

#### **The Meaning of Birth** (fall, spring)

What is the American way of birth? How does it shape birth practices, outcomes and experiences? What are the personal, social and ethical implications of hospital births? What role do alternative birth narratives play? How might giving birth impact one's sense of self? How does infertility influence social and personal selves? Why do some people choose to be child-free? Is it possible to mourn in the face of birth? What is the social significance of deaths from miscarriage, still birth, or sudden infant death syndrome? Drawing from history, anthropology, and sociology, students will learn to view birth as a social process, consider the politics of post-modern births and birthing, and give thought to their own assumptions about and encounters with birth.

### MONT 101S

#### **The Meaning of Death** (fall, spring )

What is death, and is it the same for everyone everywhere? Do people in the contemporary West live in denial of death? What is it like to have a job that surrounds you with people who are dead or dying? Why do some people want to die? How do close encounters with death change people's notions of self? Is it possible to laugh in the face of death? What is the social significance of deaths from miscarriage, still birth, or sudden infant death syndrome? Drawing from history, anthropology, and sociology, students will learn to view death as a social process, consider the politics of post-modern death and dying, and give thought to their own assumptions about and encounters with death.

### MONT 102S

#### **Competing Visions of Freedom** (fall)

Americans have long cherished freedom as one of the core ideals of their democracy. Yet from the very earliest days of European colonization right up to the present day, Americans also have fought over the meaning and definition of the word. Who is entitled to freedom? Is every citizen of a republic entitled to the same measure of freedom? Is freedom centered on the self/individual, or must it take into account the common good? This course will examine several key moments in the nineteenth century when different factions of Americans challenged each other's definitions of freedom and in the process, redefined its meaning. These moments include the abolitionist crusade against slavery, the labor movement and its fight to gain economic justice for workers, the women's rights movement's efforts to secure the vote, and the struggle of Native Americans to preserve their way of life in the face of western expansion. This course counts toward the Peace and Conflict Studies concentration.

### MONT 103S

#### **Struggles for Justice** (spring)

Building on our work in the first semester, this course will examine several social justice movements in the 20th and 21st centuries, including those for African American Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, Gay Rights and the Protection of the Environment. Much attention will be paid to the life stories of people involved in these movements, especially the development of their self-awareness as members of an oppressed group and commitment to bringing about social and political change in the service of justice. As part of this study, students will also engage with local social justice initiatives in the Worcester area such as those focused on education, poverty, refugee services, domestic violence, and the environment. This course counts toward the Peace and Conflict Studies concentration.

#### MONT 104S

**Visions of Difference** (fall) One of the most important tasks for the human person as a moral being is to come to “know thyself,” as the ancient philosophers recommend. But how do we do this? The African ethic of Ubuntu suggests that persons come to know themselves through other persons, that is, through relationship within diverse communities. Our willingness to place ourselves “outside our comfort zone” and compassionately encounter difference, disability, and “otherness” may paradoxically lead us to a more honest and merciful knowledge of self. Through film, literature, and theology, we will consider difference and disability and how such encounters with others in their “otherness” bring us to a more challenging and deeper knowledge of ourselves.

#### MONT 105S

##### **Differentiating Technologies** (spring)

The second half of the year will focus on the ways in which advances in modern western reproductive and genetic medicine and technologies challenge our notions of “normal” and “disabled.” As these advances bring us the hope of cure as well as more choice and control over our bodies and minds, what might be lost with the diminishment of difference and diversity? With the help of readings in bioethics and social ethics we will consider the following question: Can the human community thrive while those who are outside the “norm” are increasingly stigmatized, isolated and perhaps eliminated?

#### MONT 106S

##### **Your Digital Self** (fall)

With each status update, tweet, digital photo, blog post, and forum comment, we continue the ongoing construction of our digital selves. Rarely do we stop to think: what is the relationship between my digital and non-digital selves? In the fall semester, we’ll closely examine our digital footprints as we think more deeply about the role of technology in our lives. Our class materials will include a range of sources — books such as *The Medium is the Message* and *Born Digital*, scholarly articles in a range of disciplines, and digital materials from YouTube channels and blogs. Throughout the year students will develop their reading, writing, and public speaking abilities and classes will often be held in a computer lab.

#### MONT 107S

##### **Cyber Community and Activism** (spring)

The digital age hasn’t only changed how we capture our personal memories and how we represent our selves, it has also revolutionized our social interactions and the ways that we form community. Our focus throughout the spring semester will be on online community formation and cyber activism. How has cyberspace changed the notion of community? How do digital technologies facilitate civic engagement? What new possibilities for social connection and collective action have become possible with the Internet? This course will require you to become enmeshed in an online community and many of your assignments will be “published” in cyberspace. Readings will include *Here Comes Everybody*, *Civic Life Online*, and *Tweets and the Streets*.

#### MONT 108S

##### **Medicine, Society, and Self** (fall)

This course examines through a series of “cases”, e.g., the AIDS epidemic 1980-present, the recent passage of the Affordable Care Act, the recent revision of Medical School and Premedical Curriculum, and through a series of memoirs, plays, and reflections of doctors and patients, the relationship between the practice of medicine, social context, and the social identities of individuals who provide and receive care. This course will be particularly useful for those planning a career in the health professions

MONT 109S

**Brain & Self** (spring)

What can dementia, stroke, and neurological and psychiatric disorders teach us about how the brain creates personal identity and a unified sense of self? This course will explore the neurobiological origins of the self. By examining what goes wrong with the sense of the self in individuals with brain dysfunction, we will explore the link between brain and identity. From remarkable cases of patients who deny parts of their body are their own, to patients failing to recognize their own images in the mirror or thinking their relatives have been replaced by exact duplicates, we will begin to unravel the perplexing question of how the brain shapes the individual's identity and consciousness. This course will be particularly useful for those planning a career in the health professions.

MONT 112S

**Brain: Peaking Under the Hood** (fall)

The brain is an amazingly complex organ, yet follows some simple biological rules. This neuroscience course will examine the working parts of the brain. Neurons similar to other cells in the body, yet are specialized for the processing of information. We will examine how these exquisite machines accomplish the many tasks that make up our everyday experiences. How do neurons create and store memories? A major project will focus on the loss of memory in Alzheimer's disease How do the evolutionary origins of the brain inform the strategies humans use to solve problems? How do genes and the environment interact to develop brains with a common architecture, but where each one is unique?

MONT 113S

**Brain: Taking It On the Road** (spring)

In the second half of the year, we will examine how the human brain interacts with the world. Our interpretation of the world around us is shaped by the human senses. The visual system provides more than a camera on the world. What features of the world does the brain highlight? The attention mechanisms of our brains structure and limit our sensory experiences. What are the experiences that our brains think are most important? How does sleep and stress affect the abilities of the brain? How do sex and gender shape the brain? Can the findings of neuroscience give us insight into our understanding of the world around us?

MONT 114S

**Adolescent Resilience** (fall) The fall semester will focus on how family, peer, and neighborhood environments affect adolescents' social and identity development in urban schools. That is, we will examine how adolescents' search for self is nested in the social context of urban life. The class will consider how family and neighborhood stressors, labeling and barriers in the classroom, and peers pose risks to youth development and how adolescents exhibit educational resilience in the face of these challenges. Through examination of the psychological literature on adolescence as well as papers, discussions, and community-based experiences, students will pay particular attention to the roles that relationships, achievement, and engagement play in promoting identity development and success among youth in urban schools.

MONT 115S

**Context and Consequence** (spring)

The spring semester will take a closer look at the urban school environment. The urban school, like all schools, is complex and chaotic. During the first semester of this yearlong course students examined the many factors that impact the adolescent as he or she navigates these complex institutions. This seminar will examine the broader contextual factors that impact the structure of the urban school and the adolescents that live within its walls. Through an examination of variables such as the neighborhood, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity and school funding we will explore both the positive and negative

consequences on the urban school and its students. The work in this course will culminate with the question: How does schooling impact the development of self?