

# MONTSERRAT COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Fall 2025 – Spring 2026

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

### ACCESSIBILITY & ABLEISM

Common Area Designation: Literature

#### Disability Histories & Futures (fall):

This course will introduce students to the history of disability activism and theories in the United States as they take shape in literature, media, and the arts. We will approach disability with a definition that encompasses emotional, mental, and physical disability; distress or “madness”; as well as chronic illness and health conditions. Our course materials will encourage us to think about disability intersectionally, as both an embodied and sociopolitical experience, with the understanding that our society restricts disabled people through limited accessibility, militarization, and the law. This course prioritizes shared knowledge-building through discussion, alongside mini lectures, writing, group work, and experiential learning with Worcester organizations. *This course entails a commitment to [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL).*

#### Accessing Higher Education (spring):

In this second-semester course, students will refine their knowledge about disability and ableism by examining contemporary conversations around accessibility in higher education. Our course materials will include nonfiction and fictional texts by disabled writers, digital media geared toward college faculty and students, and institutional policies outlining the responsibilities and priorities of college administrations. We will then turn our attention to Mount St. James to investigate how access and care function in academics and student life here at Holy Cross. *This course entails a commitment to [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) through a semester-long project.*

### DILEMMAS OF SCHOOLING

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### School Daze (fall):

The public school is a bedrock institution onto which we have continually projected our hopes and fears as a society. But despite the school's central role in our lives, we seldom question its purposes and practices. So often we go through the motions in classrooms and corridors, as if in a daze. This fall installment of *Dilemmas of Schooling* invites students to question school and its competing goals. Students will explore why we do what we do in schools and consider alternatives. Throughout, students will critically examine their own school days in light of what they are learning.

#### Curriculum Wars (spring):

Battles over school curricula may be especially fierce today, but we have long fought over what should be taught in schools. This spring installment of *Dilemmas of Schooling* builds on students' fall semester learning by zeroing in on a single contentious issue: the curriculum. Students will critically examine what is taught—or not—in schools and why. They will investigate contemporary curriculum wars across the four core subjects taught in American schools and put these controversies into historical perspective. *The course additionally includes a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component in local schools.*

### HOME & AWAY

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### Making Identities in Limbo (fall):

Idealized images of “home as a purified space of belonging” constructs the opposite of home—being away from home or leaving home—as opening oneself up to “dangers,” encountering with “strangers,” and/or becoming a stranger and losing one's identity. The absurdity of such narratives is that they neglect possibilities for new identities in the making. What does it mean to belong to a place? What must people have in common to belong together? What is the relationship between being at home and being a citizen? Who is excluded from frames of citizenship and nationhood? Or, as Hannah Arendt asks, “who has the right to have rights?” This course focuses on migration, identity, memory and narrative as psychological concepts.

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## **All of Us or None** (spring):

Migrants are often imagined as either vulnerable victims, dangerous criminals, or assets to the nation. These three wildly different social representations are each intentionally curated in order to reduce migrants' humanity, remapping borders onto bodies. In this course, we will explore questions such as what do human demographic flows mean for politics, globally and in our local Worcester community? How do contemporary migration regimes work towards the creation of a de-politicized refugee figure while re-establishing relations of power? What shapes migrants' (un)changing relationship to politics in their adopted and home countries? What potential do solidarity-based politics and mutual aid with migrants offer in our current polycrisis? *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component.*

## **MUSIC AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Common Area Designation: Arts

### **Music, Protest, and Power** (fall):

Music has long played an important role in social and political movements. Musicians have called attention to human rights abuses and social inequities in song, financial support, and direct action. At the same time, protesters and activists have adapted texts and adopted techniques from music to aid in their organizing, recruitment, and commentary. This course examines the stakes and mechanisms at play when music is centered in movements for social justice. We will develop vocabularies for discussing social movements and musical sound through investigation of social scientific and musicological scholarship. We will learn to listen to musical texts for their meanings and debate our interpretations in collective discussion. No prior musical training is required.

### **Music and Global Protest** (spring):

Musical protest has played a significant role in myriad social movements. From Chilean *nueva canción* to the music of the Arab Spring, musicians have called attention to human rights abuses and social inequalities in song and direct action. Activists have adapted texts and adopted techniques from music to aid in their organizing, recruitment, and commentary. In this course, we will deepen our understanding of musical sounds and performances in specific cultural and historical circumstances. Class meetings will center on discussion of scholarship and collective analysis of audiovisual materials. Students will complete a group project in which they demonstrate how they would intervene artistically in a social movement of their choice.

## **SHAPING TODAY: LOCAL HISTORY AND GLOBAL TRENDS**

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies

### **Heart of the Commonwealth** (fall):

Explore the rich and diverse history of Worcester and Central Massachusetts as your home away from home for the next four years. Delve into the region's iconic contributions, from world-changing inventions like the smiley face and medical breakthroughs to cultural staples such as classic diners and local comic legends. Examine the importance of historic venues like Mechanics Hall and the Hanover Theatre; explore the city's murals and their meanings; and learn how local businesses and industries shaped the social and economic landscape. Through interactive discussions, curated readings, outings, and guest speakers, you'll gain a deeper understanding of Worcester's evolving identity. Embrace opportunities to engage with the city's dynamic present while uncovering stories from its inventive, influential past.

### **Threads and Trends** (spring):

Explore the life cycle of a T-shirt within the context of global trade and fast fashion. Analyze the impacts of clothing production on economies, environments, and communities worldwide. Through case studies and discussions, students will critically assess consumer culture, the consequences of fast fashion, and sustainable alternatives. By tracing the journey of a T-shirt—from raw materials to disposal—participants will gain valuable insights into the global impact of fashion choices. This course will examine the complexities of the fashion industry, exploring issues such as labor conditions, environmental degradation, and consumer responsibility. Students will leave with a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of fashion, society, and sustainability in a globalized world.

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### SOCIAL CHALLENGES & 21C CINEMA

Common Area Designation: Literature

#### **Realism & Contemporary Issues (fall):**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, movies are a key site where we wrestle with issues of race, colonization, gender, or climate change – to name only a few. Therefore, this course will study 10 recent films that discuss societies' contemporary challenges. Further, we will look at how different film realism – i.e., genres grounded in a realist aesthetic, even when incorporating elements of fantasy – spurs audiences to think about these issues in particular ways. Ranging from award-winning films such as *Moonlight*, big budget action films like *Logan*, or low-budget independent films such as *Night Raiders*, we will study how different genres offer different modes of tackling these issues. Students will focus on their analytical writing through film this semester.

#### **Fantasy & Social Challenges (spring):**

Stories are often about how societies imagine both challenges but also possibilities. In contemporary film, various fantasy genres, from superheroes to horror to science fiction, tackle the challenges of the past to move forward into a brighter future. Ranging from science fiction films such as *Interstellar*, to socially conscious horror like *Get Out*, or bombastic action films like *RRR*, this course will examine how 10 films from different fantasy genres help us imagine the world around us and the challenges posed by modern societies. Students will focus on research skills and oral presentation skills in this course.

### THE ACADEMY

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### **Principles of Higher Education (fall):**

This seminar provides an overview of the institutions, people, and issues that shape higher education in the United States. Students will explore the history of higher education, including its purpose and evolution over time. We will examine the extent to which colleges and universities are inclusive learning spaces, and consider the changing needs of the student population in recent years. Throughout the semester we will explore the challenges and opportunities that higher education faces today, including access and equity, community relations, online learning, and artificial intelligence. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\)](#) component.*

#### **College Student Well-Being (spring):**

This seminar focuses on the holistic development of college students, with an emphasis on learning and well-being. During the first half of the semester we will examine the extent to which classrooms create an equitable learning environment for diverse learners and consider pedagogical approaches to creating more inclusive learning environments. The second half of the semester will focus on college student well-being. We will explore issues related to student physical health, mental health, personal relationships, and identity development, and identify campus resources designed to support student well-being. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\)](#) component.*

### WORCESTER: A CITY OF IMMIGRANTS

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### **Crossing Borders, Making Home (fall):**

This course investigates the tensions, contradictions, and contested meanings of immigration, with a focus on Worcester—a city shaped by successive waves of global migration. Students will explore how immigrants contribute to the city's cultural, political, and economic life, while critically examining the discontents that arise around race, labor, immigration status, and national identity. Grounded in anthropological methods and critical migration theory, the course asks why and how people move, how policies shape immigrant experiences, and how individuals navigate belonging amid exclusion. Drawing on historical and contemporary sources, oral histories, and ethnographic accounts, students will uncover often-silenced stories and consider how immigrant communities shape the cultural fabric of Worcester.

#### **Belonging & Becoming (spring):**

This course explores immigrants' lived experiences in Worcester through an anthropological lens, focusing on how migration shapes everyday life in a mid-sized American city. Students will examine the structures of opportunity and constraint—including legal status,

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labor markets, and local policies—that influence immigrant lives, as well as the creative strategies individuals and communities use to navigate these challenges in their search for belonging. A key component of the course is a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\) project](#). Students will collaborate with local organizations that support immigrant communities, gaining hands-on experience in community engagement, participant observation, and ethnographic research while contributing to efforts that center immigrant voices and promote social inclusion.

## CORE HUMAN QUESTIONS

### BIOLOGY OF AGING

Common Area Designation: Natural Science

#### Understanding Aging (fall):

We all age, but why? And how? In this course, we will explore the different evolutionary, physiological, and molecular theories of aging and how they apply to modern human societies. We will also consider the diseases of age, including Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes. Aging and diseases of age are influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, and we will consider how to evaluate risk. We will discuss how scientists conduct studies on aging and analyze how citizens make health care choices based on media reports of scientific discoveries.

#### Combating Aging (spring):

We all age, but why? And what can we do about it? In this course, we will evaluate the therapies that are being developed to combat aging, and the research that led to those discoveries. Scientists study aging by studying people that age slowly (centenarians), people that age rapidly (those with progeric diseases), or non-human model organisms. Each of these systems has led to fundamental changes in the way we understand aging and the diseases of age. We will also consider the business of science, and how research funding and pharmaceutical profit margins drive discovery. Each student will choose a topic in the Biology of Aging for a research paper and presentation.

### BODY STORIES NOW & THEN

Common Area Designation(s): Arts or Social Science

#### Bodies in Motion (fall):

This course explores how bodies move, who is allowed to move, and how movement is valued across cultures. Students will examine how bodies communicate meaning and how cultural norms shape ideas about ability, freedom, and expression. Through readings, presentations, discussions, reflections, and creative responses to videos, students will engage critically with cultural perspectives on the body. Practical components will deepen students' understanding of their own bodies through experiential anatomy, yoga, creative movement, and movement improvisation. This course encourages self-awareness while inviting students to imagine new possibilities for movement, meaning-making, and personal expression.

#### Bodies of Difference (spring):

This seminar interrogates notions “healthy/unhealthy” and “young/old” by examining social norms about bodies in health, illness, youth and old age. You will be asked to consider how and why we “other” those who are differently abled, aging or ill. You will be challenged to imagine yourselves as old, ill and differently abled to reflect upon how framings of “personal responsibility” teach us difference is a moral failing and stigmatize particular bodies. To understand systemic inequities in America that elevate young, fit, and healthy bodies, we will participate in [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\)](#) with local elders. Questions about what makes a life worth living and who can or should be able to make such determinations are central to this course.

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## DOES THE FUTURE MAKE US HUMAN?

Common Area Designation: Social Science

### **The Future as a Social Fact** (fall):

"Without new knowledge there can be no new futures." -- Arjun Appadurai, *Making the Future* The future exerts considerable influence over the way we live our lives in the present. When we try to study the future, however, it becomes slippery, almost impossible to define or pin down. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try! In this course, we will use sociological methods and theoretical approaches to think critically and creatively about the future. We will consider how the future is socially constructed, how societies have historically projected their hopes and anxieties onto the future, and how our individual and collective lives are shaped by imaginaries of the future.

### **Futures Worth Wanting** (spring):

"We need to desire, not fear, the future." -- Sarah Jaquette Ray, *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*

In the spring semester, we won't be focusing on *the* future, but rather on *futures*, plural. One of the analytical frameworks we will apply in our inquiry suggests that there is not a single, predetermined future but rather many probable, possible, and preferable futures. The questions we will ask in this class include: Who owns these futures? Whose futures matter? And how might we imagine and create futures worth wanting? Drawing on methods and approaches from various disciplines, we will analyze alternative futures in art, film, fiction, and social activism and practice envisioning the futures we desire.

## DOING BIRTH & DEATH IN AMERICA

Common Area Designation: Social Science

### **Laboring Under Illusion** (fall):

In this seminar, we will explore the American way of birth. How do we "do birth"? What roles do mass media and biomedicine play in birth and what are the personal, social and ethical implications? We will examine such questions and consider the influence of birth, infertility, and choosing to be child-free on our sense of social and personal selves. We will attend to the question of which social forces serve as the cultural authority on birth and why that matters. Drawing from popular media, history, psychology, anthropology, and especially sociology, students will learn to view birth as a social process, consider the politics of postmodern births and birthing, and give thought to their own assumptions about and encounters with birth.

### **The Art of Dying Well** (spring)

Starting from a framing of death as the opposite of birth, not life, we will explore what death and dying mean, how they are experienced, and the role of rituals and/or cultural scripts in helping us make sense of them. By tracing our socialization about death and dying, we will examine how the Hippocratic oath and assumptions of personal responsibility for health shape dying in America, whether we in the contemporary West live in denial of death, and what "dying well" means for each of us. Using a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) experience in local hospices and nursing homes, we will bear witness to how people experience and give meaning to death.

## FANTASTICAL FICTIONS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

Common Area Designation: Literature

### **Welcome to Omelas** (fall):

What if a perfect society could only exist at the cost of one person's suffering? What if you could no longer tell the difference between a human and a highly advanced machine? This semester, we'll explore these dilemmas by diving into the mind-bending realms of science fiction and fantasy. Through landmark films like "Blade Runner" and "The Matrix" and classic novels like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, you will analyze how authors and filmmakers construct realities that push the boundaries of what it means to be human. Our goal is to see what these imagined utopias and dystopias reveal about our own world, challenging us to think critically about the future we want to create.

### **Strange Encounters** (spring):

This semester, we ask what happens after "we are not alone." What if we finally made contact, but "hello" was the hardest word in the universe to translate? What if our most cherished beliefs were challenged by life from another world? This spring, we will explore the complex realities of first contact. Through powerful novels and films, we will investigate how these encounters force us to

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question the very foundations of our own identity, language, and faith by asking: How can we communicate with beings whose perception of reality is different from our own? What happens when a well-intentioned mission leads to devastating misunderstanding? What can an alien visitor teach us about our society's own compassion and corruption? Ultimately, this semester uses these "strange encounters" as a mirror: by exploring the alien, we hold a lens up to ourselves, discovering what truly makes us human.

## GOD AND THE BOMB

Common Area Designation: Studies in Religion

### Nuclear Weapons & Human Limits (fall):

Nuclear weapons are back in the news—*Oppenheimer* won several Academy Awards, the violent campaigns in Ukraine and Gaza have elicited fears of nuclear weapon use, and Pope Francis condemned their very possession in 2017. Taking a step back from questions of deterrence, this seminar investigates the racialized, gendered, economic, and technological impacts of nuclear weapons. What does it mean that humans have developed the technology to create such destruction? We will analyze accounts from religious and secular perspectives on the impacts of nuclear weapons, as well as from the victims of the nuclear weapons industry. Through an exposure to various sites of nuclear activities, students will consider what it means to be human, and how humans have responded, in an increasingly insecure world.

### Peace & Security? (spring):

In the spring, we will consider the relationship between peace and security. Proponents of nuclear weapons claim that nuclear weapons provide security to nations and their allies in the global arena. Anti-nuclear activists argue that these weapons provide nothing but a false sense of security. Who or what do nuclear weapons secure and protect? Why have faith or no faith in such weapons? This seminar will investigate the approaches to peace and security of both nuclear weapons proponents as well as secular and faith-based anti-nuclear activists. Students will develop research, oral communication, and writing skills on the rhetoric that motivates the possession of and resistance to nuclear weapons, from secular and religious standpoints.

## UNSETTLING HOSPITALITY

Common Area Designation: Philosophical Studies

### Receiving the Self (fall):

The Socratic imperative to "know myself" implies I am, as yet, a stranger to myself. This class asks whether, and in what ways, a radical hospitality toward the other might disclose what it means to be *me*. The class will start with Plato and the Socratic task, and then turn to the practices of hospitality both in the Greek tradition and in others from around the world, reading Homer and Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*. We will continue to look at the ways in which philosophers have conceived of the "self" not merely as an autonomous unit free to have "interests" and take "control," but as a radical gift from the other. In support of this philosophical exploration, students will study and practice hospitality in concrete in the Worcester community, through a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\) placement](#).

### Care and Cares (spring):

While we normally think about anxiety as a bad thing, the first major treatment of "angst" as a concept takes it as potentially very positive – for Kierkegaard, anxiety has the potential to show us what makes us human. But in order to make this point Kierkegaard has to separate out a fundamental "anxiety" from ordinary "cares" and "worries." It turns out that there is one particular kind of care, however, which we cannot shake loose of without losing everything – and that is the kind of care which is practiced in hospitality: care for the other. As we continue to explore hospitality in the classroom, students will sustain their [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\) engagement](#).

## WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS AND WHY?

Common Area Designation: Social Science

### Uneven Outcomes (fall):

Human beings experience social life through relationships that are rooted in the places they live such as cities and neighborhoods. People make meaning of their experiences within the context of their connectedness to who they consider to be their neighbors.

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However, relationships, experiences and connections are not the same for all people and are often shaped by economic, social, cultural and political resources. This course explores the meaning of neighbor by considering four basic questions: (1) How is social life organized? (2) How do people define and relate to who their neighbors are? (3) How are resources distributed between neighbors and across communities? (4) What are the social outcomes associated with uneven resource distribution?

### **Neighbors in Action** (spring):

The social sciences have long analyzed how power is organized, exercised and maintained. This course will do the *opposite and examine how communities and neighbors* collectively challenge and reorganize social life economically, culturally and politically. This class will examine how groups develop relationships to challenge systems, envision what they want the future to look like, how they will get there and what politics and power are. We will use this information to develop our own understanding of who our neighbors are and what responsibilities we have to one another. *This semester entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\)](#) component.*

## DIVINE

### **ART & FAITH**

Common Area Designation: Arts

#### **Origins** (fall):

What is art, and what does art have to do with faith? This course will examine the origins of art and faith in prehistory and around the globe before the year 1300 CE. We will explore the pyramids of Egypt, the earliest representations of Jesus, and the forms of the historical Buddha in Asia. We will learn about icons and iconoclasm, in which believers smashed and burned divine images. What happens when the divine is represented in art -- what kinds of choices have to be made when a divinity is rendered in human form? How does the visual form of a god impact the ways in which people relate to that god?

#### **Today** (spring):

This class will explore the role of faith-based art and architecture after the year 1300 and especially in the world of the present day. Field trips to local churches, mosques, and other religious sites will help us to think about the presence and visual construction of faith in our community. We will focus on specific pieces of religious art on display in the Worcester Art Museum, and we will contribute to a new digital resource, available from iPads within WAM's galleries, connecting historical artworks to thoughts and ideas from the present day. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning \(CBL\)](#) component.*

### **CONTEMPLATION: SCIENCE & ART**

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### **Exploring Mindfulness** (fall):

Mindfulness practices have their roots in ancient spiritual traditions but have recently been secularized to promote health and wellness. This seminar explores the secular mindfulness phenomenon including its usefulness for enhancing well-being and its scientific basis. We will examine the different kinds of secular mindfulness practices being used as well as their similarities to those used in contemplative traditions such as Buddhist meditation practices and Catholic prayer. Because one cannot understand mindfulness practices without experiencing them, the class will consist not only of the presenting and discussing of readings as in a traditional seminar but also the practicing mindfulness in guided exercises to experience the mental processes involved.

#### **Encountering Music** (spring):

"But you are the music while the music lasts". This course explores the foundations of musical experience, why music has the effect on us that it does and why it has such importance in our lives. To accomplish this goal, we will examine how we encounter music differently through listening, performing and composing, as well as the evolutionary origins of music and philosophical questions about the meaning in music. We will also investigate psychological topics such as how music lives in the brain and exceptional musical abilities and disabilities.



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## ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY

Common Area Designation: Social Science

### **Everyday Spirituality** (fall):

How do Americans engage with spirituality, faith, and/or religion? How do these play out in people's actual lives? Starting with childhood and what parents want for their children, we move to the role of spirituality and/or faith in the lives of adolescents and college students: How do adolescents and college students seek and find meaning? Moving then through adulthood, we consider work, marriage and divorce, economic challenges, addiction, illness, and health care. We end by looking at spirituality, faith, and religion in aging and the end of life. Through a variety of readings, film, and media, we consider how people engage transcendence in their everyday lives. *This seminar has a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component.*

### **A Faith That Does Justice** (spring):

"A faith that does justice" is a Jesuit motto linking faith to the pursuit of justice. What does that look like? In this seminar we will examine the role that faith, spirituality, and religion can play in mobilizing social action such as starting social service programs, launching social movements, and/or engaging in advocacy. We will study leaders, movements, and ordinary citizen activists motivated by a wide array of religious and spiritual backgrounds to work towards making the world a more just place. We will also consider different religions' teachings motivating social action. Throughout the seminar, you will deepen your own leadership skills through a variety of readings, films, case studies, and a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) requirement.

## IDENTITY, DIVERSITY, COMMUNITY, AND LEADERSHIP

Common Area Designation: Studies in Religion

### **Exploring 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 relationships within diverse communities. Our willingness to place ourselves outside the boundary of our 'comfort zone' and compassionately encounter difference, disability, and 'otherness' may paradoxically lead us to a more honest and merciful knowledge of the self. Through film, readings in theology and literature, and [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) placements in the Worcester community, 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.

### **Exploring Leadership** (spring):

The second half of our seminar will build on discussions of identity, diversity, disability, and community and focus on diverse ways of leadership. How do different social groups approach leadership? What ways of leading are privileged? What ways of leading are marginalized? How do we come to know ourselves through difference and leadership? How and in what ways does Holy Cross' Jesuit mission call us into leadership? With the help of film and readings in theology, leadership, and education, as well as continued involvement in [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) and a case study in leadership, students will become knowledgeable about diverse and critical ways of leading, leadership styles that an increasingly diverse, global, and divisive world may require.

## RELIGION & SCIENCE

Common Area Designation: Studies in Religion

### **Religion-Science Emergence** (fall):

The religious impulse and associated behaviors date back to the origins of humanity, while the beginning of what came to be called science only emerged a few thousand years ago when the earliest interests in noting the "heavenly bodies" and calendar cycles transformed into questioning creation myths. In the first semester we will track the development and early essence of both religion and science from their origins, through their easy collaboration and amity, and up until what is often considered their first historical scuffle, that between Galileo and the Catholic Church.

### **Religion-Science Encounters** (spring):

The trial of Galileo by the Roman Inquisition marks the beginning of the encounters between science and religion when science is sufficiently advanced to be able to fully engage with religion. In the second semester we will continue to track the developments of religion and science from Galileo, through Newton, Darwin, Einstein and contemporary theists and atheist scientists and fellow



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travelers. A main focus concerns whether, as a society and as individuals, science and religion are inherently in conflict, independent, in dialogue, or integrated.

## THE ART OF DISCERNMENT

Common Area Designation: Studies in Religion

### **Finding the Sacred in my Life (fall):**

Discerning the sacred's presence in our lives involves looking at our life story, wherein we find ourselves within a web of relationships. Our stories reveal diverse pathways to encountering the sacred. In this course, we will reflect on "identity" through the categories of family, gender, sexuality, race, and socioeconomic class, and learn from theologians who engage these categories from the standpoint of particular communities to reflect on who God is. As we discern the sacred in our present lives and our communities, we foster a disposition of listening and attention through Ignatian practices such as the examen, discernment of spirits, contemplation, and meditation with attention to the role of silence.

### **Life's Meaning and the Sacred (spring):**

Can we anchor our sense of meaning, purpose, and life to our encounter with the sacred? This course engages theological, philosophical, and developmental perspectives to reflect on perennial human questions, such as the pursuit of wholeness amidst brokenness, finitude, and suffering in the world. Inspired by our personal and communal reflection on these questions, this course fosters a vision for making life decisions rooted in the commitment to promoting justice and a sense of mission and vocation. We will practice the Ignatian art of discernment individually and communally in reflecting on and testing present commitments within the broader discernment of one's life's direction. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component.*

## GLOBAL SOCIETY

### EARLY AMERICA AND THE WORLD

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies

### **Pirates to Patriots (fall):**

We talk a great deal about "globalization" and "global economies" in the 21st century. However, people living in America were "globetrotters" touched by international webs of trade as early as the time of Columbus. This course will explore North America's first global age beginning in the 1400s and extending through the American Revolution. It examines this history thematically by focusing on various kinds of trades through the lives of people who pursued them. We will begin with the gold and silver that indigenous peoples mined to fill Spanish treasure galleons and that pirates plundered. We will end with the Patriots who eschewed tea for coffee as they boycotted English goods on the eve of revolution in defiance of imperial constraints.

### **Canton to King Cotton (spring):**

This course begins by looking at the formation of the Early Republic through a Pacific lens. We will explore the ways in which the fledgling nation's involvement in the China trade, linked together with the trade networks of the Atlantic World, enabled the florescence of American democracy. We will examine the social, cultural, economic, and political implications of these global trade connections as we question their effects on individual lives among people of African, European, and Native American descent. We will explore how such connections contributed to distinct regional identities in areas ranging from the South, New England, and the Far West, to Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. These distinct identities often led to conflicts, the most notorious of which was the American Civil War. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component.*

## EXILE LITERATURE

Common Area Designation: Literature

### **Displacement and Memory (fall):**

In this year-long course we will focus on the literature of writers who write from and about the position of an exiled "outsider." Literature has traditionally been a welcoming space for people who, by choice or history, do not fit easily into the mainstream of

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society. In the fall semester we will consider how narratives of recollection and forgetting produce the transport and recovery accessible through literary experience. We will consider the ways in which literature can represent and reproduce the human, social, cultural, historical and political experiences of exile, whether an exiled individual experiences a forceful expatriation, a voluntary emigration, or even an internal exile.

### **Global Women Writers (spring):**

In the spring semester we will expand the notion of an exiled “outsider” by examining a variety of literary works by contemporary global women writers whose female protagonists do not fit easily into the mainstream of society. The readings will encourage students to think about how each author's work inhabits a distinct cultural heritage and engages with the national historical narratives, and to what extent, if any, we can identify a female voice that transcends national cultures. This identification will not be an attempt to merely find “common ground”; rather, it will be an attempt to map out the complex, complicated, and oftentimes contradictory positions that women must occupy to tell their story.

### **MIGRATION NARRATIVES**

Common Area Designation: Literature

#### **Leaving and Finding Home (fall):**

In this year-long course, we will examine contemporary migration narratives alongside mythological stories of ancient Greece and Rome, such as Vergil's *Aeneid*, Euripides' *Medea*, and Homer's *Odyssey*. In the fall semester, we will study immigrant education in America as context for your Community-Based Learning commitment at a local Worcester Public School. We will also consider refugee narratives from various angles and read several Greek tragedies. *This semester entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component in which you will assist in a Worcester Public School classroom.*

#### **Epic Journeys, Immigrant Identities (spring):**

In the spring semester, we will study displacement and read stories about why people leave their homelands. How are these contexts and reasons understood in other times and places? Alongside Greek and Roman epic, we will consider contemporary narratives of global conflict and mass migrations. How do these challenges reverberate around the world, and what are our responsibilities as global citizens today? How can ancient representations of immigration help us negotiate our democratic society today? *This semester entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component in which you will assist in a Worcester Public School classroom.*

### **PROTECTING OUR GLOBAL OCEAN**

Common Area Designation: Natural Science

#### **Ocean Foundations (fall):**

This course introduces the scientific foundations of ocean systems, examining the physical, chemical, biological, and geological processes that shape our shared marine environment. Emphasizing the ocean's vital role in global climate, biodiversity, and human society, students will explore how ocean science helps us understand a rapidly changing world. Through texts and case studies that reflect a range of global and cultural perspectives—including Indigenous Arctic knowledge and the lived experiences of small island nations—students will come to see the ocean as both a natural system and a space shaped by human life and culture. A research paper will challenge students to connect core scientific concepts to issues of global relevance.

#### **Ocean Frontiers (spring):**

Focusing on the ocean's future in an era of global change, this course explores key challenges—such as climate disruption, marine biodiversity loss, and resource management—through the lens of equity and sustainability. Special attention will be given to marine protected areas, with students engaging in a collaborative project that investigates conservation efforts across local, national, and international contexts. Emphasis will be placed on just and inclusive strategies for protecting the ocean as a shared global commons. By the end of the course, students will have a deeper understanding of the ocean's interconnectedness with global societies and a stronger sense of their own role as future ocean stewards and engaged global citizens.

# MONTSERRAT COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

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## WORK, ART, & POLITICS

Common Area Designation(s): Arts or Social Science

### **Art and Industrial Revolution (fall):**

We start by looking closely at the experiences of individuals and communities confronted by enormous changes during the Industrial Revolution. International migrations followed new labor demands and artists from around the world converged in the USA. Focusing on artistic images with contemporary texts, we explore the diverse lives of workers, c. 1760s-1930s in the US. We investigate situations that brought art together with labor in response to social need: settlements, craft cooperatives, organized protest, and advertising. Art exposes both similarity and contrast in how cultures can respond to upheaval in democracies, playing many roles in the process. Works of art are both part of this history and our means to study it. We will practice both objective visual analysis and subjective reflection.

### **Democracy at Work (spring):**

The course examines socio-economic and political developments in Western Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, the 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century through a comparative politics approach. The relationship between economic development (economic growth, the changing nature of work, redistributive policies, etc.) and democracy is at the heart of this course. We explore the connection between industrialization, the emergence of middle and working classes and democratization. Next, we analyze what factors make democracies stable and what institutions underpin Western European democratic regimes. We also investigate historical cases of democratic breakdown and deliberate on the challenges that democracies face today, including globalization, migration, economic crises and populism. Assignments include short essays, research projects and oral presentations.

## NATURAL WORLD

### ECONOMICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Common Area Designation: Social Science

#### **Impacts and Damages (fall):**

In this seminar, we will explore the economic dimensions of climate change. We will examine the causes of climate change and its wide-ranging impacts. We will discuss how shifting environmental conditions and extreme weather events affect industries, markets, and societies. In our discussion, we will assess the cost of inaction and the economics of mitigation. Finally, we will consider the distributional impacts of climate change, highlighting how vulnerable populations bear a disproportionate share of the economic and social burden.

#### **Solutions and Policies (spring):**

In the second semester, we will explore the role of international cooperation and global agreements in advancing climate policies. We will also evaluate the effectiveness of climate policies, investigate energy transitions, and examine strategies to balance economic growth with sustainability while emphasizing equity and global impact. Students will carry out cost-benefit analyses of environmental projects, assessing methods to weigh long-term benefits against short-term costs. Students will also analyze the economic dynamics of collaboration and the challenges of harmonizing policies across nations, with a focus on fostering innovation and shared responsibility in mitigating climate change.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Common Area Designation: Philosophical Studies

### **Me and the Environment (fall):**

What kind of person should I be? What do I owe to others, and to myself? These two questions form the core of any ethics class, but we've recently added a third: What, if anything, do I owe to *non-human* others – animals, nature, the environment? We will always begin with some philosopher's abstract theory – Mill's Utilitarianism (concerned with pleasure and pain), Kant's ethics (concerned with respect), Regan's animal rights – and we'll always end up in some applied issue (factory farming, the new agriculturalism, animal use in medical testing, and anything else you bring up). Throughout, however, the emphasis will be on developing your *own* answers to those three questions. In the end, that's all that matters.

# MONTSERRAT COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

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## **The Environment and Me** (spring):

We'll continue to explore the ethics of our relationship to ourselves, human others, and the non-human others of the environment. We'll still be working with our three questions, but now adding a fourth: what kind of role can those non-human others play in *our own* moral development? There's no question that we affect the environment, but ... how does the environment affect *us*? We will be working with somewhat deeper, more holistic theories of human nature and the environment in this class – Aquinas' natural law, Aristotle's virtue ethics, Schweitzer's reverence for life, Leopold's concerns about ecosystems – and we will move on to different, more complicated applied issues. In the end, though, it comes back to you: what do *you* believe?

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MODELING**

Common Area Designation: Mathematical Science

### **Modeling the Natural World** (fall):

Choices we make influence our relationship with the environment. As we witness the growing effects of climate change, it becomes increasingly urgent to ask: how can we respond? In this course, we explore this question through mathematical models—tools that help us predict the outcomes of various decisions and better understand complex environmental systems. We will investigate how models can provide insights into sustainability, energy usage, and resource management. By the end of the semester, students will have a deeper understanding of the environmental issues we face, and will also be able to critically discuss, write about, and apply mathematical models. This course is designed for students with a basic background in algebra.

### **Environmental Reasoning** (spring):

How do our daily actions contribute to the broader environmental challenges we face, and how can scientific models help us make better decisions? This course dives deeper into the complexities of environmental systems. Students will develop and analyze more advanced models to study topics such as population dynamics and the spread of pollution and diseases. This course encourages critical thinking and equips students with tools to tackle real-world problems. Students will sharpen their problem-solving abilities, hone their communication skills, and gain a deeper appreciation for how mathematical modeling can guide public policy and personal choices. By the end of the seminar, students will be empowered to make informed, responsible decisions in an increasingly complex world.

## **LAND, SEA & CITYSCAPE IN ART**

Common Area Designation: Arts

### **History of Landscape Art** (fall):

In the history of Western art and architecture, landscapes have both reflected and shaped views of nature. In this course, we will ask what do we mean by "landscape" and by "nature"? Does the divine have anything to do with landscape art? What contextual factors have led to the forms, styles, and opinions of landscape art? Our approach will be chronological, beginning in the classical era and concluding in the twentieth century, with consideration of regional variations. The landscape forms we will explore include, among others, Renaissance works, Neoclassical portraits, the plein-air paintings of Impressionism, and the abstracted visions of Modernism.

### **Themes of Landscape Art** (spring):

In this course, we will expand our study of landscape art, asking the question, how can historical perspectives inform our understanding of the relationship between art and nature in the world of today? We will investigate specialties in the landscape tradition, such as maps, townscapes, land art and gardens, the role of landscape in diverse global cultures, and contemporary takes on landscape art. For further context, we will also examine the intersection of literary, academic, and philosophical currents with landscape art.

## **(UN)NATURAL FOOD IN AMERICA**

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies

### **The Rise of Modern Food** (fall):

In this seminar, we will explore the dramatic transformation of the American food system. We will start from when diet was deeply shaped by where one lived and what time of year it was to our supermarket present, where one can walk into a grocery store and

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pick from tens of thousands of products no matter the day or where they live. This semester will examine the advances, events, and individuals that made this extraordinary abundance our expected normal, as well as the environmental and social costs of so much "cheap" food.

### **A More Natural Food System** (spring):

The American system makes a lot of inexpensive food. But there are high hidden costs to this abundance, such as the plight of immigrant laborers or manure run-off from farms in Iowa slowly suffocating sea life in the Gulf of Mexico. In the spirit of a Jesuit commitment to forming 'women and men for others,' our seminar discussions will explore alternative visions for what a more 'natural' or harmonious food system might look like. We will make special use of contacts in greater Worcester and meet with representatives from local businesses and nonprofits who are leading the way towards a more just, sustainable, and equitable food system for all involved from field to fork.

## **WATER**

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies

### **Water & Humans** (fall):

This course addresses water both across the globe and through time. In it we will examine the hydrological cycle, consider the different types of water sources, and explore how water impacts human populations. We will see that this necessity is not only vital for survival and integral to daily life, but also that it can be destructive. With a seminar format, this course is reading- and discussion-heavy—and we will learn a lot from sharing with each other! This course includes a [\*Community-Based Learning\* \(CBL\)](#) placement with focus on the natural world in order to help us find hope and joy through interaction with the environment and through addressing environmental issues.

### **Humans & Water** (spring):

This course addresses water both across the globe and through time. In it we will examine human interactions with water, consider how humans approach different types of water resources, and explore human impacts on waterscapes. We will see how human ingenuity is utilized to exploit this vital necessity, but also how human intervention can be destructive. This course includes a [\*Community-Based Learning\* \(CBL\)](#) placement with focus on the natural world in order to help us find hope and joy through interaction with the environment and through addressing environmental issues.

## **WRITING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Common Area Designation: Literature

### **Writing American Nature** (fall):

In modern America, the natural world is often imagined to be a perennial, pristine, and wild environment that is separate from the ever-changing sphere of human life. Yet humans are a part of nature, and human conceptions of the natural world vary dramatically across history. This course explores how humans inhabit natural environments by forming nuanced cultural ideas about them. Our particular focus will be how writers and rhetoricians in the nineteenth century invented powerful, competing, and influential conceptions of the American environment against the historical background of expanding westward settlement. Analyzing the invention of American nature raises fundamental questions about our place in the natural world with consequences for our everyday lives.

### **Writing the Future Environment** (spring):

The second semester builds upon the first semester by projecting its focus on representing the environment into the future. Imagining the future is a key aspect of human experience. From prophecy to forecasting, humans have developed complex strategies to engage with the unknowability of what is to come. This course will examine modern cultural approaches and concepts (such as Utopia and dystopia) that have been used to imagine the future. Our focus will be how speculative fiction attempts to imagine the environment of the future as it will have been altered by climate change. Analyzing these representations will lead us to explore core questions about the future of human flourishing on a warming planet.

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## SELF

### OUR HISTORIC CONTRADICTIONS

Common Area Designation: Historical Studies

#### Slavery & American Identity (fall):

Thomas Jefferson was the embodiment of our country's founding contradiction. The primary champion of the United States' foundational ideas – natural rights, liberty, and equality – enslaved hundreds of people. The persistence of slavery, and the power the institution had over the country's politics and society, left indelible marks on Americans' collective selfhood. In this seminar, we will seek a greater understanding of our country by examining the centrality of slavery to our nation's history. We will explore the roots of slavery's most enduring legacies on our national identity: race, racism, and inequality. Reading about, writing about, and discussing this difficult aspect of our history should give us an important perspective on ourselves, collectively and individually.

#### Abolition & American Identity (spring):

Another dimension of our founding contradiction is that it produced a robust, interracial freedom movement. The movement to abolish slavery was driven by enslaved people, Black intellectuals, white allies, and justice activists interested in fundamentally altering the identity of the country by ridding it of its "original sin." Abolitionists originated the notion that American democracy could transcend race, and they were the first to envision the inclusive citizenry we profess to hold as an American ideal. Reading their words and reflecting on their ideas should teach us a lot about our collective selves – what freedom and equality mean in our context, and what we can do to persist in overcoming slavery's most harmful legacies.

### POLITICS AND THE RESTLESS SOUL

Common Area Designation: Philosophical Studies

#### Politics and the Restless Soul (fall):

As you begin college, are you nervous? Caught up in a sense of trepidation? Our modern world creates this underlying current with its many opportunities and distractions and yet we often face this unspoken restlessness. Where does this agitation come from and how can we live with it? As individuals and as citizens living in a political community, our daily lives confront the search for meaning. This understanding of restlessness has profound roots that can be traced back through many centuries of thoughtful discourse. This course will seek to explore some of the sources of our restlessness, treating intellectual curiosity and the search for knowledge as an antidote to the restlessness animating our lives today.

#### Acting on Restlessness (spring):

In the Fall, we explored the ideas of curiosity and restlessness. In the Spring, we will confront the reactions that grow out of our unsettled state. What should a person do to act on this angst? How should one follow their curiosity in pursuit of a satisfying life? In this semester, students will explore philosophic perspectives from antiquity to today on how to live a happy and engaged life in order to evaluate and apply them to our contemporary political world. This course seeks to help students consider the relationship between thought and action as one pursues a meaningful life in the midst of a world that promises comfort and ease.

### PURSUING HEALTH

Common Area Designation: Studies in Religion

#### Health as a Personal Project (fall):

What does it mean to be healthy and what is the place of illness and disability in a good life? How does stigma influence notions of illness and moral responsibility? What does ethics have to say about dignity (persons created in the image and likeness of God), autonomy, and interdependence in medical contexts that place a high value on independence and control? How is the view of persons as consumers of health care shaping approaches to health and well-being? In this seminar, we will draw on sources from Christian ethics, literature, film, and memoir to explore experiences of illness, injury, disability, and the desire for health and healing. *This course entails a commitment to a [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component in which students will spend one hour each week contributing to the work of a health-related community partner.*



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## **Health as a Common Good** (spring):

What are the implications of claiming access to health care as a human right and a common good? What are some of the social determinants of health and illness? How do racism, sexism, and economic inequality impact health? What might solidarity, stewardship, the option for the poor and vulnerable, and other themes in Catholic social teaching contribute to medical ethics today? Together, we will explore issues in public health; the roles of markets, governments, and other institutions in providing access to care; the participation of human subjects in research; and environmental justice. Students will continue their contributions to the work of a health-related community partner. *Spring semester also includes a project-based [Community-Based Learning](#) (CBL) component designed to understand and enhance campus health and well-being.*

## **SELF AS A PRODUCT OF NATURE**

Common Area Designation: Natural Science

### **The Self and Intelligence** (fall):

The human brain is uniquely adapted for creating an intelligent self. No other species in the history of our planet has ever created the means to travel to space, cured a disease outbreak, or enrolled in a college class. But what does it mean to say our species is intelligent? And what makes humans so adept at thinking abstractly, changing their environment, using tools, and representing their own minds and the minds of others? In this seminar, we will explore readings primarily from psychology and animal behavior, but also from neuroscience, philosophy, and computer science to investigate questions about intelligence and consciousness, and how they might have come about in nature.

### **The Self and Social Behavior** (spring):

Modern humans have roughly the same brain as our early homo sapiens ancestors. Yet humans have created unparalleled technologies. It has taken our species less time to advance from building the first chariot to landing on the moon than it took us to move from using stone tools to bronze tools. Much of what we think of as human behavior is a result of culture and language. How unique are these cultural and social behaviors to humans? Do other animals engage in teaching and learning, altruism, or cumulative culture? In this seminar, we will expand on what we learned about the intelligent human self to examine how social behavior changes what a species can do.

## **THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY**

Common Area Designation: Philosophical Studies

### **Selfhood and Freedom** (fall):

What does it mean to be an individual? Are moral obligations a limitation on individual freedom or an expression of that freedom? Different philosophical answers to these questions entail different assumptions about freedom, human nature, morality, and the good life. These are longstanding debates but new dilemmas emerge in the modern world. What sources of meaning and value exist in a world that prioritizes individual autonomy and choice? How does the expansion of modern technology impact our understanding of the self and what it means to think for oneself? This semester, we will explore such questions by studying a variety of classic philosophical texts alongside works by contemporary writers.

### **Selfhood and Community** (spring):

This semester, we will dive more deeply into the question of how to reconcile individual freedom with the idea of a common good and the requirements of community. We will devote specific attention to the concept of “social capital” and its significance for democracy. Broadly, we will explore the following questions: Can we conceive of the political community as something more than a contract based on self-interest and the reciprocal protection of individuals rights? What is the “glue” that holds a political community together, and what are some factors that might drive it apart? And how do we reconcile the need for social cohesion with the preservation of individual freedom?