Honors Program 200-level Course Offerings for Fall 2012

Honors 258 Darwinian Medicine
TuTh 9:30-10:45
John Ebersole, Biology

Can we learn about our health by taking an evolutionary perspective on aging, pain, trauma, or disease? The adaptations of our bodies and the adaptations of the parasites (germs & worms) that sometimes make us sick are produced by natural selection, and Darwinian Medicine is concerned with such questions of adaptation:

Why do our bodies fall apart as we get old, and why don't we live longer? Why do humans, almost alone in the animal kingdom, have menopause? Why are some germs fairly benign while others are virulent? (Isn't it bad for any germ to kill its host?) Why do we get a fever when we get sick, and should we suppress our fevers? Does sneezing benefit us by expelling germs that are making us sick, or does it benefit the germs by dispersing them? Why does nausea accompany pregnancy (morning sickness)? Why are children more finicky than adults about what they eat? Why hasn't natural selection rid us of our useless and dangerous appendix? Should we treat our sprains with ice and anti-inflammatories, blocking the body's response to the injury? Why do so many of us have miserable allergic reactions to things that are not harmful? Why do we, and some of our primate cousins, waste energy and nutrients in heavy menstruation, when most mammals recover the nutrients of the womb by resorbing the uterine lining if they are not impregnated during a reproductive cycle? Could there be an adaptive explanation for adolescent acne? The new discipline of Darwinian Medicine has generated some new questions, provided a few interesting hypotheses -- and sometimes even produced answers!

Requirements include regular reading and participation in seminar-style course meetings, weekly quizzes on the readings, one short paper explaining a key concept, and one research paper involving some original work (e.g., generation of new information, analysis of old information, new synthesis of existing literature).

This course can fulfill a Natural Science (NS) distribution requirement.

Honors 290 (1) On Violence
TuTh 9:30-10:45
Matt Brown, English

Since September 11, 2001, we have been living in a time of death, an epoch characterized by one formation of violence—terrorism—precipitating several more: military action, surveillance, indefinite incarceration. But haven’t we always lived in a time of death, a time in which “everywhere and always, by war and famine, fire and flood, contingency and conspiracy, people have died unnecessary deaths and had their lives cut short before the playing out of a natural span?” So writes literary critic David Simpson, who opens up the current fascination with terrorism to broader questions about national identity, mourning, and commemoration. Living in and through this particular time of death, we realize that we have always lived in a time of death, in which self and community are shaped, both directly and indirectly, by various manifestations of violence. However unsettling such an admission might be, we must confess that violence is central to our experience and understanding of the world. Gazing back into the twentieth century, we see a cold war, two world wars, programmatic genocide, and nationalist revolutions—in short, formations of violence on a scale unprecedented in human history. Keeping this historical frame of reference in mind, we will read arguments from linguists, sociologists, psychoanalysts, novelists, and philosophers whose ideas have become central to how we think about violence and how it affects language, meaning, and representation, and about how these relate to questions of identity, social institutions, and history. Over the course of the semester we will consider literary, philosophical, political, and cinematic investigations into the phenomenon of violence. Through a wide range of authors and texts, from Longinus’s On the Sublime and Montaigne’s essay “On Cruelty,” to Hannah Arendt’s On Violence, Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain, John Banville’s The Book of Evidence, Christopher Nolan’s film Memento, we will consider the relationships between power and violence; the banality of evil; the self “othered” through trauma; globalization and the “new” racism; problems of social power and social organization; ideas of subjectivity and its attendant categories; desire, gender, and the history of sexuality. Authors will include: Freud, Derrida, Banville, Foucault, Fanon, Benjamin, Marx, Coetzee, Arendt, Longinus, Montaigne, Rushdie, and Butler. Course format will be discussion with the occasional mini-lecture. Students will be expected to participate vigorously in discussion, in addition to submitting four formal papers (three shorter essays and one final research project). This is a writing intensive course.

This course can fulfill an Arts (AR) or Humanities (HU) distribution requirement.
In 2011, U.S. labor unions are weaker than they have been in a century. Worker productivity has grown by 50% since the 1990’s while benefits have decreased and wages are stagnant. The economy is in ruins. What happened? This course will examine the actions and fates of unions and workers in two distinct periods since the end of World War II. The first quarter century after that war was characterized by a social contract between unions and corporations. In exchange for labor peace and support for the existing two political parties, unionized workers, mainly white males in manufacturing, received job security and a “family wage.” The economy was stable; wages and benefits increased across the board. We will examine the meaning of that social contract “on the ground” for workers and their families, including those excluded from union membership. We will examine the role of unions and union leaders in the politics of the Cold War era.

The last 30 years are the era of the broken social contract. As unionization rates have dropped steeply, real earnings and benefits have declined for workers in and out of unions, economic inequality has widened and the U.S. has transformed from a producer to a consumer economy. What relationships are there between unions and social and economic stability? Why have unions been so slow to respond to issues such as changing technology, immigration, diversity in the workforce and globalization?

Finally, we will examine future trends and possibilities. Can unions based on 20th century models of work be relevant in “the new economy” where telecommuting and 24/7 work schedules are increasingly common? We will discuss the unique evolution of the concept of social class in the U.S. We will look at the problems and potential for transforming the union ideals of solidarity and loyalty in a society where lifetime employment is a relic and tomorrow’s workers can expect to have three times as many different jobs as their parents did.

Class meetings will include lecture, group activities, discussion and videos. The first 2 weeks will include a review of labor history leading up to the strength of the union movement after World War II. For this section of the class, you will need to read Labor's Untold Story by Boyer and Morais. Buy a used copy from Amazon for the first day of class.

No single text is comprehensive enough to understand today’s labor movement. A course packet will include materials from leaders and critics of unions in the US. The readings will be available on the course wiki page. Students will also use the wiki page to explore their personal and family history of work and unions. Grading will be based on a mid-term and final paper, class preparation and participation in class and wiki discussions.

*This course can be used to fulfill a Social/Behavioral (SB) or Humanities (HU) distribution requirement.*
Most twentieth century histories of political violence described torture as a pre-modern practice. To the extent that torture occurred in modern states, it was defined as aberrant or regressive—a throwback to what were deemed barbaric or uncivilized methods. More recently, however—as torture has moved to the forefront of public discussion—scholars and policy makers have been grappling with the possibility that it may be an ongoing political phenomenon. This course will address torture in its modern manifestations, as a form of political violence simultaneously excluded from and included within contemporary power relationships.

First, we will discuss the ways in which torture has been defined, legitimized, de-legitimized, and turned mainstream in nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century legal and political texts. In this part of the course, we will ask how certain practices have been defined in national and international law as “cruel and degrading” and how others have been defined as “torture.” We will likewise read texts such as the recently de-classified “counterintelligence interrogation manual” distributed by the CIA to its agents in 1963, and the “torture memos” written by the French government during the Algerian independence movement.

In the second part of the course, we will focus on theories of pain, truth, and knowledge. We will ask ourselves how it is that the distinction between “imagined pain” and “real pain” was developed in the nineteenth century, and how this distinction has set the foundation for political discussions—and cinematic representations—of torture. We will similarly ask what sort of truth or knowledge is produced by the relationship between the interrogator and the torture victim—and what sort of truth or knowledge is desired in this relationship. Finally, we will ask whether torture is indeed central to modern politics—and whether the sorts of bodies, subjects, and truths that it produces are necessarily modern phenomena.

Course requirements: Attendance and class participation (15%); thesis statement, 200-300 word abstract, and partial bibliography due in week nine(15%); presentation of research during the last three weeks of class (20%); a research paper of 10-15 pages, due on the last day of class (50%).

This course can fulfill a Humanities (HU) distribution requirement.

Honors 290 (4) Social Justice Documentary Filmmaking
M 4:00-6:45 p.m.
Chico Colvard, Honors Program

This course will introduce students to social justice issues as they have been represented and explored through documentary film and video. The course will provide a conceptual overview of the forms, strategies, structures and conventions of documentary film and video with an emphasis on U.S. moving images. The course focuses on documentaries that construct arguments about the social world, addresses power relations in society, and aim to raise awareness and motivate action for social justice. Students will examine dominant, experimental and emergent modes of representation; important documentary texts, movements, and filmmakers; and selected documentary genres. Specific topics for the course include: Mental & Physical Disabilities, Race In/equality, Crime & Punishment, Immigration, War, Gender & Sexual Identity, Social Class & Workers’ Rights, Politics, and Education. The aims of this course are two-fold. Students will gain knowledge of the current theoretical dilemmas and debates in documentary filmmaking, including questions of how to define documentary, what constitutes the ethical treatment of subjects and subject matter, documentary’s construction and positioning of its audience, and political and economic constraints on documentary filmmaking. In addition, the course will emphasize critical thinking and viewing skills related to representations of the social world through audio-visual media.

Assignments will include short (one-page) response papers using cinematic terminology and “critical viewing skills” that we will learn in class; a mid-term “close reading” paper of 3-5 pages on one of the films viewed in class, and a final paper of 5-7 pages comparing and contrasting two films. Each student will also choose one of the assigned “homework” films to present to the class in a 5-7 minute lecture. Grading will be based on the written work and presentation described above, plus active class participation.

This course can fulfill an Arts (AR) distribution requirement.
As has always been the case, individuals—whether immigrants, refugees, or undocumented migrants—leave their own homes and countries and cross borders in response to an array of factors, among them, poverty, economic instability, war, limited educational opportunities, oppression, and dangerous political circumstances. As they leave behind their homes, languages, identities, and ways of life—in short, everything that is familiar to them—in order to pursue a better future, they must make excruciating decisions and painful sacrifices. As they cross borders from one place to another, they are confronted with strange worlds and words and must learn to negotiate these words and worlds under trying circumstances.

In this course, we will study the complicated experience of im/migration and its consequences through the lenses of film and literature although we will engage other texts as well. We will explore the conditions that have compelled people to leave their homes, often doing so without documentation, the often treacherous journeys they have undertaken, the difficulties they encounter in unfamiliar surroundings with little means of support, the tensions and isolation of living in a new language, the intergenerational conflicts among family members, and the responses and attitudes of the people they meet and among whom they come to live. We will consider the losses and gains of migrating from one place to another and gain a deepened and more nuanced understanding of this life altering process. The works that we will consider will draw us into the particular stories of individuals who have left one place for another. At the same time, these works, taken together, will allow us to consider the themes and issues that are reflected across these stories.

We will view films such as Dirty Pretty Things, The Golden Door, El Norte, and The Namesake and read short stories and several memoirs. Assignments will include regular journal responses to the films and readings as well as an opportunity to lead a discussion about a particular film, a mid-semester project that involves responding to and analyzing a book—fiction or non-fiction—that deals with the issue of im/migration, and a final project. Possibilities for final projects will be provided but students will be encouraged to pursue their own questions and interests.

*This course can fulfill an Arts (AR) distribution requirement.*
Honors 290 (6) **Science: in the Universe, Nature, Art and Daily Life**  
TuTh 8:00-9:15  
*Elena Strekalova, Honors*

This course is designed to give an overview of some important concepts in chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics and computer science and how they are used today.  
No science or mathematics background is required. The course is based on the reading of major scientific publications and book chapters followed by in-class discussions. All the necessary help and background for understanding scientific literature will be provided.

Staring with a brief historical overview of the development of science we'll discuss our current understanding of the universe. We'll journey from the early development of mathematics down to the most complex mathematical surfaces and how they are related to butterflies. Understanding fractal landscapes in physics and biology will give us the right tools to fully admire the beauty of snowflakes. We'll talk about how physicists apply mathematical networks to social sciences and disease control. Introducing the concepts of chaos and order in nature and our daily life, we'll attempt to explain what the synchronized flashing of fireflies has to do with our heart cells. We'll discover how scientific photography is used to create fine art. We'll read about the path of a Nobel Laureate towards the discovery of jumping genes and the impact it has had on modern genetics. We'll gain insights into the structure of matter from the atom down to the quark followed by discussions of space travel. Finally, analyzing explosions from Hollywood movies, we'll attempt to give explanations and acquire a sense of what science is - a quest for discovery rather than memorized formulas and definitive answers.

Attendance will be required due to the fast-paced nature of the class. Frequent in-class quizzes with short (one paragraph) answers to the questions based on the readings will be given to ensure that students are familiarized with the covered material. The goal of the class is to maintain a discussion environment with the exchange of ideas. Final grades are determined based on students’ performance on reading assignments (30%), individual research project presentation (30%), written "NSF Grant Proposal" (maximum 10 pages) that will have several evaluated checkpoints over the courses of the semester (30%). The remaining 10% of the grade is based on class activities and participation.

There will be no textbook for this course. Readings will include articles from scientific journals and selected book excerpts.  
*This course can be used to fulfill a Natural Sciences (NS) distribution requirement.*

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Honors 290(7) **Ethics and US Foreign Policy**  
MW 2:00-3:15  
*Lisa Rivera, Philosophy*

Is the United States a uniquely moral nation with a special global mission to fulfill? Or should it consider only its national interests in making foreign policy decisions? Do the concerns of policymakers about right and wrong explain American foreign policy decisions or are their choices driven by practical necessity? What moral theories are useful in evaluating American foreign policy? We will look at theoretical debates about whether realism or idealism better explain US foreign policy, consider arguments over the morality of armed intervention, and delve into moral justifications leaders make for American foreign policy choices. In addition to ethical theories we will read the views of some of the architects of modern American foreign policy and examine cases of American intervention in Latin American and Southeast Asia through a moral framework. Major assignments are a very short essay once a week, a class presentation, a midterm essay and a longer (15 page) final paper project.

*This course can be used to fulfill a Humanities (HU) or Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement.*
Honors 380 Junior Colloquium **On Theory**  
W 2:00-4:45  
*Alexander Des Forges, Modern Languages*  
This course will examine the functions and discourses of "theory" across a variety of disciplines, including the hard sciences, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies. Our aim is to assess the relative significance of theoretical thinking in the different disciplines, reflect critically on the pretexts for and consequences of defining one's own project as theoretical, and consider the kinds of work that are specifically excluded from or generally understood as complementary to "theory."

How is theory different from practice? Is it possible to identify a transdisciplinary mode of theorizing, or are the ways in which theories are created inevitably defined by the disciplines to which they belong? How do certain styles of thinking, speaking, or writing suggest to us that they aim to go beyond a data set, individual experience, or personal observation to make more general statements about the world? What is the relationship between theory and methodology? Is theory useful? What are its pitfalls? These are some of the questions that we will address.

The course will consist of several units, each about three weeks in length. Each unit will focus on a sequence of theoretical developments in a particular discipline, involving close reading of selected primary texts that have one or more issues in common. The majority of class time will be spent on seminar discussion of the texts; there will be short written responses and two medium-length papers/projects.

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Honors 380 (2) Junior Colloquium **Quantities and Qualities**  
Th 12:30-3:15  
*Dick Cluster, Honors*  
This colloquium will be a version of the “Songs, Stories, Statistics, and Research” colloquium I taught in spring 2010 and spring 2011. As before, we’ll look at these different ways of apprehending (sensing, studying, understanding) and representing the world around us. This time around I might broaden the “stories” category to include other kinds of qualitative writing besides fiction, and the “statistics” category to include a broader range of quantitative data. I’ll be sure to keep songs.

The colloquium will alternate between, primarily, a study of qualitative and quantitative approaches to making sense of the world, and secondarily, an inquiry into the nature of research (academic and otherwise). The connection is the definition of research: an attempt to better understand some aspect of the world.

As in previous versions of the course, I’ll set the overall structure and will choose and present about half the curriculum material, and you will be responsible for choosing and presenting the other half. Subjects included by myself or by students in previous colloquia have included dreaming, slavery and its aftermath, love & romance, outer space, psychological depression, and magic. This time I’m considering including U.S. income distribution and/or the foreclosure crisis.

In our examination of academic research, a variety of UMB faculty will visit for brief presentations and Q&A about the whys, wherefores, and how-tos of their own research. Students will write “research autobiographies” examining your own history of doing academic and other investigations. As part of the final paper assignment (see below), you will go through a staged process of defining, redefining, pacing, and presenting your independent research projects, on any topic, for this course.

Assignments will include: oral presentations and student-led class discussions; reflective writing about past research experience (1 6-page paper) a take-home midterm (6 pages) and a final 15-page research project in which you approach an issue of your choice by using relevant songs, other qualitative approaches, and quantitative analyses.
The Cross-Cultural Symposium for 2012-2013

Open to juniors and seniors, this is a year-long, fall-spring small seminar that examines a given topic from many disciplinary perspectives under the guidance of Honors faculty and invited guests, both scholars and practitioners. The symposium examines its topic in both its domestic U.S. and its global aspects. Students who want to use the symposium in lieu of thesis also do an additional project, which might be an academic paper, or field work, or some other type of product, to be determined by the student and the Honors faculty member. The Honors Program alternates between two cross-cultural symposia—“International Epidemics” and “Museums, Libraries, and the Construction of Knowledge.” Next year’s symposium will be on “Museums, Libraries, and the Construction of Knowledge,” taught in the fall by Christopher Fung of the Anthropology Department, and in the spring by Cheryl Nixon of the English Department. The cross-cultural symposia typically have a field research/project component and require the student to commit to both semesters of study.

Honors 490 Libraries and the Making of Knowledge
M 2:00-4:45
Christopher Fung, Anthropology

part 1: Oral and Literary Traditions and the Making of Knowledge

This course examines several different examples of knowledge production using oral, written and material culture-based ways of creating, archiving and re-accessing knowledge. The goal of the course is to get students to think more critically about what knowledge is, how it is created, where it comes from and how it is used and re-used.

We will specifically be looking at two different extended case studies:

The first case study examines the ways in which Mesoamerican literary traditions were made and used during the Classic Period (c. 200-900 CE/AD) and during the period of the Spanish Conquest (1519-1800 CE/AD). We will look at the roles played by writing systems, text and image systems, oral versus written knowledge and the ways texts and images were incorporated into material culture (such as stone monuments, ceramic vessels and other portable artifacts) to articulate specific kinds of knowledge and project this knowledge onto the lived world. We will also briefly look at the way modern Mesoamerican indigenous groups have re-engaged with historical and archaeological writings to address contemporary needs and problems.

The second case study focuses on the 9 year-long encounter between Captain James Cook and his various crews and the Polynesian peoples of Hawa`i and Aotearoa/New Zealand from 1768 until Cook's death at the hands of the followers of Kalani`opu`u of the Island of Hawa`i in February of 1779. Cook's voyages and death have been an integral part of the "story of European colonization", but have generally been examined primarily through the documents left by himself and his crews. The perspectives of Polynesian peoples on who Cook was and what his visits were about have been neglected until the late 1980s. Using insights from the work of anthropologists and ethnohistorians we will look at the way Cook's voyages were sites for knowledge production for both British sailors and scientists and Polynesian chiefs, priests and commoners. We will look at documentary evidence, material culture and the surviving oral narratives about Cook to better understand this colonial encounter.


Coursework
Students will be expected to produce two 10 page essays, one on each of the case studies.

Students will also be expected to write 6 blog entries of about 600 words each and 12 shorter responses to blog entries over the course of the semester.

During the course of the semester we will also visit at least two area museums: The Museum of Fine Arts in the Back Bay and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge. UMass Boston students have free entry to the MFA at all times. We will visit the Peabody Museum either on a Sunday (when it is free to Massachusetts residents) or during class time (in which case I will figure out a discount from their regular admission). The field trips will be a part of regular expectations for the course. Absences will have to be made up.
**A Special Course Offering for Fall 2012!**

Honors 490(3)  **Special Topics – Film Curating**  
W 4:00-6:45  
*Chico Colvard, Honors*  
E. chico.colvard@umb.edu

*This is an unusual course offering in the Honors Program. Chico Colvard is a UMass Boston alumnus and documentary film maker who has taught for the Philosophy and Africana Studies Departments and for the Honors Program. To take this course, you must apply directly to the instructor. Please contact him by email (see address above, and copy Honors@umb.edu) to briefly explain your interest and qualifications. The Honors Program will register you when the instructor indicates that you have been accepted into the course.*

In this digital age of access to videos on demand, there remains a steady increase of film festivals, cinémathéques, art houses and the prominence of curating – both as a concept and career path. This seminar course mostly consists of screenings and lectures that will provide students with a historical, theoretical and practical overview of film curating. Bringing together the art form and strategies behind showcasing films, this course offers an academic and hands-on exploration into the role of film programming and presentation in an age when analog has fallen from grace and digital distribution technologies are transforming both the traditional notion of film exhibition and commercial side of distribution. One of the key attractions of the course is the behind the scenes access students have to innovative and thought-provoking filmmakers, producers, film festival programmers, critics and other industry insiders. Student participation at leading film festivals and independent film gatherings is part of the course. Using the fall 2012 debut of the UMass Boston Film Series as our laboratory, students will assume integral roles in curating the UMB Film Series. At the end of the year, students will curate a film-related event of their own choosing, drawing on the combined knowledge, resources and expertise gathered from this course.

**REQUIRED TEXT:** *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*  

**AIMS** This course will focus on the most common point of contact between the filmmaker, audience, and cultural politics of the “dependent” film industry. The changes currently taking place within the film industry as a result of shifting economic models and technological developments, that have democratized the filmmaking process, suggest that, in the very near future, curatorial skills will be as relevant to those working outside the traditional film industry as those working within it. Traditional methods of film distribution are rapidly being replaced by more accessible digital technologies, which means that film programming is likely to become a far more nuanced activity than the kind of assembly-line work historically done by the buyers of content for traditional cinema chains and TV/cable broadcasters. This course seeks to make students knowledgeable of these changes and to develop practical skills that will allow them to curate effectively in today’s multi-media market.

**GRADING** Assessment is by means of six (6) short response papers (30%), a mid-term paper (25%) and final student curated project (25%). Class participation is essential and will count toward 20% of the final grade.