Fall, 2015 Honors Seminar Descriptions

Monsters, from Folklore to Reality--Andrew Eklund

In this course, we'll examine the influence of religion, culture, and science on monsters throughout history. We'll also look at how we respond to the presence of monsters. Monster-related topics such as genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, epidemics, invasive species, the supernatural, and the psychology of fear will be analyzed using movies, books (“On Monsters”, “Monsters in America”), and Halloween field trips. We'll also focus on the scariest monsters in today's society---HUMANS. Projects will include group presentations, designing our own monsters, and a team trivia final exam.

Dreams, Dreams, Dreams—Gordon Atlas

What are dreams all about? Are they really meaningful, interpretable stories that are relevant to our lives or simply irrelevant neuron-firings that amount to unintelligible gibberish? What is the value of examining one’s dreams closely? What is the function of dreams for the human organism? We will explore these questions and plunge into the world of dreams in this seminar. Students will be asked to study their dreams by keeping a dream journal and interpreting their own and others’ dreams. Dream dictionaries, outlandish theories, and poorly conceived beliefs about dreams will be trashed, debunked, and abandoned.

Invest Like Buffet—Mark Lewis

Warren Buffet is perhaps the best-known and most successful investor of our time. Using cash generated by a declining New England woolen mill, he built Berkshire Hathaway and created a personal fortune of over sixty billion dollars. We will explore his life and business career to learn what traits and philosophies made him so successful, and how we might be able to apply them to increase our personal financial success. The class will include a stock investing competition with a $50 prize for the winning student. Students will be evaluated based on attendance, participation in discussions, and a paper.

Two Faced: Alter Egos and Other Selves—Katarina Riesing

In our recent history we have seen a growing interest and exploration of the alter ego: from Jekyll and Hyde to Beyonce and Sasha Fierce, Superman to Second Life – we have a fascination with tapping into these other selves. This course will simply ask the question – why? We will look at the photography of Cindy Sherman and Nikki S. Lee, superhero comics, and the films Fight Club, Black Swan and Sybil to investigate these fractured identities and begin to think about our own. The course will culminate in a written, visual or performative project, of the student's choice, examining our own relationships with our many selves.
Science That Will Save Your Life—Frederic Beaudry

Your GPS takes you off the beaten path and your car runs out of gas. A late fall camping trip turns into a snowbound nightmare. Make the right decision in a survival situation and you will be home in time for supper with tales to tell. In this course you will use a variety of sciences to explore decisions your life may someday depend on. Through problem-based learning workshops and a demonstration project assignment, students will learn technical skills and hone their risk assessment abilities. Ultimately we will develop decision making reflexes that can help us shine through tough situations, including many of life’s stressful events.

Drink Up: The History and Science of Alcohol—Garrett McGowan

Medicinally, as a source of nutrients, in worship and religion, and as a social lubricant, alcohol (ethanol) has been used by people from the earliest times to present. It was likely a fortuitous accident tens of thousands of years ago that it came into human culture, and while abused by a minority of drinkers, most derive pleasure from its consumption. In this course, the history and science of ethanol will be examined. A combination of laboratory exercises and lectures will comprise this course; and may include but not be limited to “crafting a homebrew,” analysis of beer/wine/spirits, field trips to vineyards and invited speaker visits.

Create Your Own Religion—Brian Sullivan

The problem with most communities of faith is that they either expect you to believe certain things, or else try to convert you to those beliefs. This course will offer a safe and friendly space for each of us to explore, develop, question, and articulate our own beliefs or lack of beliefs without any pressure, assumptions, or judgment. Using Daniele Bolelli’s Create Your Own Religion: A How-To Book Without Instructions as a starting point, we will contemplate spiritual topics such as god, the afterlife, morality, truth, spirituality, gender, and community.

Culture and Cuisine, Film and Food--Becky Prophet

Food offers more than sustenance. In different cultures food displays aesthetics, power, social or economic status, values of families, and religious precepts. How is this revealed in different cultures? We will discover the place of food and the value of cuisine in a range of cultures by viewing and discussing films. We will prepare and sample foods from different cultures, as well. Films, discussions, and samplings will lead to understanding and discoveries about different cultural groups. Vegetarians are encouraged and will be accommodated.