FSSY (FSSY)

FSSY 112. Shakespeare - Still a Hit. 4 Units.
What is the enduring appeal of the works of William Shakespeare? Not only are the plays themselves popular today; there are also many film versions and adaptations, some recent and some dating back to the early days of cinema. In this First Seminar, students will read approximately six Shakespeare plays, including at least one history, comedy, and tragedy. In addition, they will view at least one film version or adaptation of each play. With the help of Kelvin Smith Library, the films will be made available on streaming video with password-protected access, enabling students to view them when convenient and as often as necessary. Since this class (like all First Seminars) is writing-intensive, students will complete four formal essays as well as frequent in-class writing activities. There will also be in-class readings from the plays, discussions of the various film adaptations, and one or two short oral presentations or activities.

FSSY 113. Movies and Meaning. 4 Units.
This course explores methods for interpreting films. To interpret a film is a more aggressive and creative activity than is simply viewing one. How do critics and researchers of cinema "make meaning"? What strategies do they use? How does one mount a film interpretation that is both novel and persuasive? The course will emphasize close reading of films as, each week, we screen a film and together discuss what meanings we can infer from it. Also each week, we'll read an essay that offers an interpretation of the film. We'll analyze the reading in light of our sense of the film under consideration. Students will write short essays, approximately one every two weeks, in which they analyze the rhetorical and interpretive strategies of a given film analysis. Students will share their essays with the class, and these readings will serve as bases for class discussions. Final writing projects will consist of student interpretations of a film. At least twice during the semester, the class will, in substitution for the weekly required evening screening, attend a film off campus--either at the Cleveland Cinematheque or at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The course emphasizes writing instruction and discussion in a seminar format. There will be required evening screenings each week.

FSSY 117. Science and Literature. 4 Units.
This course explores the treatment of scientific themes and the depiction of scientists in literature. This is not a course about science fiction: instead of envisioning future scientific advancements, Science in Literature pays close attention to the ways in which literary texts comment upon ongoing scientific debates and respond to the questionings of science. This four-credit-hour course also provides an introduction to various dimensions of academic life. It will be characterized by intense yet open-ended intellectual inquiry. Throughout the semester, we will foreground critical reading, thoughtful analysis, as well as written and oral communication.

FSSY 119. Art, Music and The Museum. 4 Units.
This four credit-hour course provides an introduction to art, music, and the museum, particularly the intersections between and among these three subject areas. Formal training in these disciplines is not required. The course will be characterized by intense yet open-ended intellectual inquiry and guided by readings and the experience of artworks from a wide range of styles and cultures. A strong emphasis will be placed on academic writing. The goals are to enhance basic intellectual skills including critical reading, thoughtful analysis, and written and oral communication (including PowerPoint presentation); to introduce basic information literacy skills; to encourage a global and multidisciplinary perspective on the learning process; to facilitate faculty-student interactions; and, in the most general sense, to provide a supportive intellectual experience for first-year students at Case.

FSSY 135. The Rest is Silence. 4 Units.
The purpose of this course is to examine a widespread yet under-examined agent of the symbolic world: silence. Without the delimiting, shaping power of silence, language would be a lump of indistinguishable sound. The title of the course comes from Shakespeare: specifically, Hamlet's last words. As we know, the rest (of Hamlet) isn't silence: the play goes on for many more lines, beginning with Horatio's well known valediction, "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince:/And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" Hamlet's last words give us a good view into the ambiguous nature of silence, the strange entanglement it has with boundaries, both formal, and metaphysical. We will study how silence is imbricated in different, even antithetical, practices: in the articulation of creative forms (with special attention to poetry); in methods of religious contemplation and meditation; as agent of ecological and political suppression; as sensory deprivation, or form of torture. Silence continuously challenges and reorients our symbolic projects. As Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier argues, it forces us to question "the binary logic of apparent opposites by dissolving one into the other (presence as absence, emptiness as plenitude, quietness as expressivity, silence as intensity of life)." What we can know or say about silence will emerge from an ongoing discussion of texts that engage its properties--its paradoxes--differently. Our semester-long study (and practice) of silence will draw on your powers of critical inquiry, reflection, and synthesis, as well as your powers of attention and imagination. Seminar-style discussion and writing are the cornerstones of the course, which is designed to help you locate yourself in the surrounding structures and expectations of the academic community, especially its forms of conversation and writing. My hope is that as you explore and refine your relationship with silence, you will begin to identify and conserve it as an important resource in your academic life: as a refuge from information overload, as a ground for ethical decision-making, and as a guide to precision in speech and writing.
FSSY 141. "Renaissance" Men and Women: Polymaths from Late Antiquity to Leonardo Da Vinci. 4 Units.
The term "Renaissance man" is often used to refer to a polymath, someone whose expertise spans numerous and diverse subject areas. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), perhaps the most famous polymath of all, was an artist, scientist, engineer, musician, and indeed a man who lived during the Renaissance. Yet already in late antiquity and the Middle Ages many of the great thinkers were polymaths, and they were not all men. This course examines the intellectual contributions of Leonardo da Vinci and two earlier polymaths: Saint Augustine (390-430CE), a north African bishop, philosopher, and theologian who became a Doctor of the Church; and Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), a German nun who was a composer, philosopher, herbalist, and mystic visionary. Through discussion of writings by these three figures and of secondary literature about them, the course explores their intellectual diversity and the cultural forces that shaped them. It also examines what it meant to be a polymath at various points in history, why polymaths have become associated with the Renaissance and with men specifically, and why there are relatively few polymaths today.

FSSY 146. Doc Talk: Language & Medicine. 4 Units.
This course explores the role of language in constructing, experiencing, treating, and understanding the states we call "health" and "illness." We will ask questions such as: Why do we fight cancer but mend broken bones? When (and how) do some experiences (e.g., sadness, hunger) become symptoms of disease? Why do doctors ask where it hurts rather than when or how? Is there a difference between saying that a patient is "med compliant" and that she has "taken her prescription medicines"? To answer these questions (and to ask dozens more), we will read primary research on medical language, visit several of Cleveland's nationally renowned cultural institutions, and discuss the symbolic and social meanings of a variety of medical terms, images, objects, and patterns of communication.

FSSY 147. Art and Physics. 4 Units.
The twentieth century's advances in physics, from relativity to quantum mechanics and string theory, have offered distinctly new ways of looking at ourselves and the world around us. It is no surprise that they have equally impacted different branches of the arts, revealing new possibilities for what to represent and how to represent it. This course intends to explore this relationship between physics and art by taking two of those signal advances -- Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle -- and considering how they inflect artistic models of expression such as painting (Cubism), music (atonal composition), and literature (postmodern metafiction). Our goal is not to trace specific trains of influence (although they do exist) so much as to consider how parallel developments in the sciences and the arts emerge contemporaneously, and on that basis to reconstruct the conversation between them. We will try to ask what each of these discursive models has to say to the others, and how the apparently unbridgeable gap between science and art might find some points of common contact.

FSSY 153. What is Mind?. 4 Units.
This seminar introduces students to the systematic study of the human mind, with a primary focus on general topics as the nature of perception, consciousness, intentionality, mental causation, and free will. In addition, we will take up the more specific topics of the transition from anatomically modern to behaviorally modern human beings, as well as debates over whether mind is identical with the brain, or if mind is an outcome of brains, body, and environment.

FSSY 154. The Imagination Project. 4 Units.
For the first years of our schooling, we are taught to play make-believe. Then, we are taught to understand facts. Whatever happened to the imagination? What is it? What are the theories that help to explain it? And what is its place at a research university? In this class, we will read, talk, think, and write about the purposes and scope of the human imagination, which is often understood as the symbolic realm of images and ideas that exists as part of our mental life. We will look at how the imagination has been understood by various thinkers and artists, and we will consider how the physical world interacts with the imagination in stories, music, film, and scientific ideas. Even though we may think that imagination means "something from nothing," it is much more complicated and collaborative than that, as we will see in our examination of larger imaginative projects such as the Sistine Chapel, Star Wars, Legos, and Disney World. We will examine the role of the imagination in as many disciplines as possible, including physics, sports, fantasy, politics, and the media. As we interrogate these sources, we will learn the basic tenets of argument and research that will help you in your upcoming SAGES courses. Are there imaginative practices that can help us succeed here at Case? How can we turn our own imaginations into reality?

FSSY 155. Pursuits of Happiness. 4 Units.
What is Happiness? And why do Americans consider its pursuit a self-evident, inalienable right? To what extent is happiness a component of the American Dream? How have writers used stories to illustrate the possibilities and limits of this ideal? This course examines the various ways that thinkers have defined happiness, using both theoretical frameworks and literary examples. Students will carefully analyze the validity and utility of these models, selecting elements to construct their own personal philosophies of happiness.

FSSY 158. Ecology in American Literature and Film. 4 Units.
How can American literature and film help us understand environmental issues? This course will explore that question by investigating several of the foundational texts of the ecology movement in the United States. Many American authors and directors are sensitive to the natural beauty of the American continent and, therefore, emotionally and spiritually affected by environmental destruction. Scientific and political questions will be important for our inquiries, but we will emphasize the cultural and spiritual aspects of environmental thinking. While science strives to understand nature and provides data documenting environmental conditions, and politics should propose pragmatic solutions, the will to act on scientific facts or political ideas requires emotional and ethical engagement, which literature and film particularly stress. The expressive content and moral messages in literary memoirs and films complement scientific work and politics by allowing us to reflect on an obligation to preserve the natural environment. Consequently, this class will consider environmental awareness and the human connection to the natural world by examining writers' experiences. Our exploration will also consider dystopian stories that imagine where environmental disasters might lead. Possible texts include Walden, Desert Solitaire, A Sand County Almanac, and movies like Jeremiah Johnson, Into the Wild, and Wall-E.
FSSY 177. Cosmic Horror. 4 Units.
Cosmic Horror is the literary genre that most powerfully wrestles with the question of humanity’s place in the universe as revealed by modern science. From its shadowy beginnings in the pulp fiction magazines of the nineteen twenties and thirties, Cosmic Horror has come to occupy the center of contemporary literary culture. Prominent philosophers, ecologists, writers, and programmers have taken inspiration from the genre as they seek to discover meaning in a universe no longer centered on humanity. These works explore a physical world indifferent to human life and human meaning, a world in which human action shrivels into insignificance when faced with the abysses of cosmic temporal and spatial scales. In reading writers such as H. P. Lovecraft and Octavia Butler, and philosophers and scientists such as Eugene Thacker and Carlo Rovelli, we will focus on several key questions. How does “cosmic” horror differ from other kinds of terror? What traditions, beliefs, or practices does modern science threaten for these writers? Why have so many thinkers from diverse fields found themselves drawn to these works in recent years? What resources do these works offer for making sense of the environmental crisis? This class, like other First Seminars, is writing-intensive and will follow the seminar format. It is characterized by intense yet open-ended intellectual inquiry, guided by reading from primary as well as secondary sources. This interdisciplinary course (investigating intersections of literature, philosophy, psychology, and science) will help you recognize the different perspectives that can be used to enter into a discussion on a subject, and enable you to make sometimes surprising connections across different fields, times, and genres.

FSSY 183. E-Lit: New Media Narrative. 4 Units.
Imagine a book we might read by touching the words, choosing among possible paths or endings, or even by allowing our own faces or voices to be part of the scene. Electronic literature, that is, literary works designed to be read or experienced on a computer, often requires exactly such multisensory engagement, asking readers to make unusual connections between words, images, sounds, or movement, and, sometimes, to put themselves into the story. In this class, we will read, experience, and write critically about electronic literature and experimental print literature, including works of interactive fiction, digital documentary, blogs, cut up and computer-generated poetry, digital games, and geo-locative fiction. The works we read present unfamiliar, often non-linear, modes of writing, storytelling, or of conveying information. Such texts give us insight into how we “read” and how digital spaces influence the way we understand, experience, and respond to ideas, places, and people.

FSSY 185K. The Greek and Roman Humanities. 4 Units.
The civilizations that developed in ancient Greece and ancient Italy are called collectively “Classical Civilization.” The study of the Greek and Roman humanities (languages, literature, arts, history, and philosophy) is known as “Classics.” The Greeks and Romans have had a profound, widespread, and long-lasting influence on many aspects of subsequent Western Civilization, so studying the Classical Humanities is not only a rewarding endeavor in itself, but also can benefit those who want a deeper understanding of the modern arts and humanities. In this seminar we will read and discuss representative works by Greek and Roman authors in translation and look at artifacts produced in the ancient world in order to come to a better understanding of the foundations of the western humanities. We will also study the impact of Greek and Latin on English in order to understand how language can shape thought—an important thing to learn for anyone who is also trying to become a better writer! The seminar will investigate numerous questions about Classics. Where were the Classical lands? When was the Classical period? Are there connections between Greece or Rome and other ancient civilizations? What were the sounds and sights of Greece and Rome? What remains of the ancient world in terms of language, literature, the arts? How have the Classical Humanities shaped modern concepts and institutions? Where can one find tangible influences of Greek and Roman civilization in modern America? Why and when have modern people turned to Greece and Rome for inspiration?