



**Signature Humanities Courses** are intended to introduce UChicago undergraduate students to exciting themes, ideas, and materials in the humanities. They are courses that open up fields and disciplines for further exploration. Signatures Courses are identified with a corresponding **SIGN** course number in the course offerings list below.

**Big Problems** courses emphasize process as well as content: learning how to creatively confront difficult intellectual and pragmatic problems wider than one's area or expertise and to consider how to deal with the uncertainty that results. Big Problems courses are identified with a corresponding **BPRO** course number in the course offerings list below.

### Major Seminars

**Seminars in Research and Criticism:** These courses, limited to 15 third- and fourth-year students who have already fulfilled the department's Gateway requirement and taken at least two further English courses, examine different topics and change from year to year. All seminars focus on the analytical, research, and bibliographic skills necessary for producing a substantial seminar paper (around 15–20 pages). They are particularly recommended for those wishing to pursue graduate studies in English, those who wish to write a strong critical BA paper, or those interested in research methods in English.

**Makers Seminars:** These courses culminate in a final project that can take a variety of forms beyond the research paper. These courses are intended for third- and fourth-year English majors, but non-majors may petition the instructor for admission.

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## English Department 2018-19 Course Offerings

### Autumn 2018

#### **SIGN 26038/ENGL 12320: Critical Videogame Studies**

**Patrick Jagoda**

Since the 1960s, games have arguably blossomed into the world's most profitable and experimental medium. This course attends specifically to video games, including popular arcade and console games, experimental art games, and educational serious games. Students will analyze both the formal properties and sociopolitical dynamics of video games. Readings by theorists including Ian Bogost, Roger Caillois, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Mary Flanagan, Jane McGonigal, Lisa Nakamura, and Katie Salen will help us think about the growing field of video game studies. (Theory)

#### **SIGN 26014/ENGL 12520: Climate Change in Literature, Art, and Film**

**Benjamin Morgan**

If meteorological data and models show us that climate change is real, art and literature explore what it means for our collective human life. This is the premise of many recent films, novels, and artworks that ask how a changing climate will affect human society. In this course, we will examine the aesthetics of climate change across media, in order to understand how narrative, image, and even sound help us



witness a planetary disaster that is often imperceptible. Our approach will be comparative: what kind of story about climate change can a science fiction novel about a dystopian future tell, and how is this story different than, say, that of an art installation made of melting blocks of Arctic ice? Do different media tend to emphasize different aspects of ecological crisis? Readings and discussions will introduce students to some of the ways that humanities scholarship is contributing to climate change research. The syllabus may include Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (2014); Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003); John Luther Adams, *Become Ocean* (2014); George Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015); and Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (2016). (Fiction, Theory)

### Winter 2019

#### **SIGN 26039/ENGL 17950: The Declaration of Independence**

##### **Eric Slauter**

This course explores important intellectual, political, philosophical, legal, economic, social, and religious contexts for the Declaration of Independence. We begin with a consideration of the English Revolution, investigating the texts of the Declaration of Rights of 1689 and Locke's Second Treatise and their meanings to American revolutionaries. We then consider imperial debates over taxation in the 1760s and 1770s, returning Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography to its original context. Reading Paine's Common Sense and the letters of Abigail Adams and John Adams we look at the multiple meanings of independence. We study Jefferson's drafting process, read the Declaration over the shoulders of people on both sides of the Atlantic, and consider clues to contemporary meanings beyond the intentions of Congress. Finally, we briefly engage the post-revolutionary history of the place and meaning of the Declaration in American life. (1650–1830, 1830–1940)

#### **SIGN 26040/ENGL 15107: Some Versions of Apocalypse**

##### **Mark Miller**

The end of the world is one of the most durable of mankind's obsessions, from prophetic texts of antiquity to today's fascination with zombie plagues, environmental disaster, and nuclear winter. In this course we will explore what is both fearful and alluring about catastrophe on an unimaginable scale, as we read and view some paradigmatic apocalyptic works across a wide historical range. The course will focus on close attention to the aesthetics of individual works, locating those works in their historical contexts, and the conceptual analysis of the texts' motivating concerns. We will especially attend to the relationship between aesthetic form and the political, economic, and subjective forms that mediate catastrophe--as well as the ways that the end of things asks us to think beyond mediation. Texts include the biblical Book of Revelation, William Langland's medieval allegory *Piers Plowman*, Daniel Defoe's early modern chronicle of the black death *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Cormac McCarthy's postapocalyptic novel *The Road*, and both the novel and film versions of *World War Z*. (Fiction)

#### **ENGL 29303: The New Frankness: New Narrative Fiction/Criticism/Autobiography/Theory**

##### **Makers Seminar**

##### **Lauren Berlant**

This course asks what happens to concepts of narrative, causality, the textual event and the shape of affect when aesthetic separations between fictional and documentary realism are forced to break down from the sheer force of a narrative voice. What's the relationship between a performative voice and the



aesthetic leap inside/outside the historical present? What happens to the archive of the evidence of the encounter? A workshop class too: we will make work. Authors include: Georges Perec, Harry Matthews, Barbara Browning, Renee Gladman, Shiela Heit, Tan Lin, Sarah Mancuso, Chris Krauss, Sam Pink, Leanne Shapton. (Fiction, Theory)

**ENGL 29505: Joan Didion: Reporter, Novelist, Essayist, Memoirist  
Research and Criticism Seminar**

**Deborah L. Nelson**

This seminar is a reading and writing-intensive course designed to provide advanced English majors with the tools and resources necessary to propose and conduct their own literary research projects. Reading for the course will include one of Didion's novels as well as works of non-fiction in its various forms. Because the course requires historical research and considerable engagement with criticism as well as with the literature itself, it is ideally suited for students interested in developing the skills necessary to write a B.A. Honors paper or considering graduate work in English. The course will culminate in a substantial critical paper of your own design.

**Spring 2019**

**SIGN 26042/ENGL 12720: Inventing Consciousness: Literature, Philosophy, Psychology  
Timothy Harrison**

Consciousness is an historical achievement. As a phenomenon, consciousness probably came into being somewhere deep in evolutionary time. Yet as a concept consciousness is relatively new: the European notion of consciousness emerges only in the late seventeenth century. This course draws on the resources of literature, history, philosophy, and psychology to examine how the concept of consciousness came to possess the explanatory dominance it currently holds. We will begin by acquiring a sense of what consciousness currently means in philosophy and psychology, paying particular attention to how the Western concept differs from similar ideas in such traditions as Buddhism. After examining the pre-history of consciousness by reading such authors as William Shakespeare, we will then turn to two historical moments that were central to the concept's development. First, we will train our attention on the interplay between philosophy and literature in the late seventeenth century, reading texts by René Descartes, John Milton, Thomas Traherne, and John Locke. Second, we will focus on how, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the psychology of William James contributed to the development of "stream of consciousness" techniques in the novels of Henry James and Virginia Woolf. In this course, we will stress the historical contingency of this concept—consciousness has a birthdate—in order to determine the nature of a consequence that follows from this fact: the extent to which current uses of this concept are still shaped and constrained by the historical circumstances that conditioned its appearance and development. (1650-1830, 1830-1940, Fiction, Poetry)

**SIGN 26041/ENGL 13720: Thinking with Race in Medieval England  
Julie Orlemanski**

The medieval period is often thought of as the era just before the idea of race emerged – before the Atlantic slave trade, before European colonialism, before scientific racism. At the same time, the Middle Ages have been crucial to modern phenomena of racialized nationalism and ideologies of whiteness. In recent years, medievalists have studied and debated race's significance. Acknowledging



the complex and urgent status of medieval race today, this course examines some of the stories, images, ideas, and institutions of medieval England. We will test how race helps us think about the articulation and operationalization of human difference between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, especially with respect to Jews, Saracens (a term created by Christians to refer to Arabs and Muslims of varying ethnicities), and the so called “monstrous races” who were thought to populate the far reaches of the world. We’ll ask – How did geography, religion, and history come to be corporealized, or understood as legible on the body? How did the essentialization of differences between groups act to satisfy desires, or seemingly to solve intellectual and ideological difficulties? How does “thinking with race” in medieval England throw new light on race and racism today? Readings will be both in Middle English and modern English translation. No previous experience with medieval literature is expected. (Pre-1650)

**BPRO 28200/ENGL 28200: Narrating Migrations**

**Josephine McDonagh, Vu Tran**

Human migration is one of the most pressing global problems of our time, though it is not a new phenomenon. It has shaped societies throughout time, and the degree to which it is perceived as a "problem" or an "opportunity" changes radically according to circumstances and ideologies. In this course, we will analyze the different ways in which migration has been perceived, understood, and experienced. We will focus on two intense episodes in the global history of migration: migration from early nineteenth-century Britain; and migration to late 20th and 21st-century America. Our emphasis throughout will be on the ways in which migration is narrated: the stories that societies tell about the migration of themselves and others. We will cover a wide range of migration narratives, including those of creative writers and artists, and will consider them through the lenses of literary criticism, history, theory, and also artistic practice itself. (Fiction)

**ENGL 25804: Signs of the Americas**

**Makers Seminar**

**Edgar Garcia**

It is a common misconception that literature can happen only in the alphabet or that such non-alphabetical literatures have long ago ceased to be made. This course corrects such misconceptions by exploring modern and contemporary literatures that have been written with, or in response to, such sign-systems as pictographs, hieroglyphs, totem poles, wampum, and khipu. Focusing especially on the sign-systems of the native Americas, this class gives students a basic introduction to the mechanics of these signs, in order to discuss how these mechanics might be at play in the works of such poets, writers, and artists as Anni Albers, Simon Ortiz, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich, John Borrows, Charles Olson, Bill Reid, Robert Bringhurst, Fred Wah, Clayton Eshleman, Cy Twombly, Joaquín Torres-García, Cecilia Vicuña, and others. Key questions to be asked include: how are these signs an interface for contemporary histories of nation and capital? And: how do those material histories and their identifications in race, gender, kinship, and ecology change when cast in the mechanics, tropes, and figures of these signs? As a “Makers Seminar,” this course will include creative alternatives to the standard analytical college paper. (Fiction, Poetry, Theory)



**ENGL 29705: Incarcerated Life  
Research and Criticism Seminar  
Chris Taylor**

The United States today is in the midst of an incarceration crisis, one in which millions of Americans are currently warehoused within, or have passed through, carceral institutions. Many scholars locate the emergence of this punitive turn in the 1970s, and with good reason: the landscape of penalty and confinement looks much different in earlier historical periods. Turning to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this course will explore literary, philosophical, and pragmatic engagements with the prison across the British Empire and in the postcolonial United States. By tracing the particular fears and fantasies that grouped around institutions of confinement, we will explore the logic by which an institution once marginal to social life has become so central to society that incarceration is now a conventional form of life. This course will involve a robust research component, culminating in a final paper; while this course is rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, students will be welcome to pursue research on contemporary regimes of incarceration. Our theoretical readings will include Michel Foucault, Angela Davis, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Our archive of literary, philosophical, and practical texts will include the Newgate Calendar, Cesare Beccaria, Oliver Goldsmith, John Gay, Jeremy Bentham, James Williams, Harriet Jacobs, and Austin Reed. (1830-1940)