

2025 Honors College Seminars

Please note that “Seminar Room” refers to the Honors College Seminar Room

HONR 200-01: Sense and Consequence (3755) / Tu/Th 4:00pm - 5:15pm, Seminar Room

Instructors: David Hoffman and Tess McRae (Center for Democracy and Civic Life)

This course will build students’ skills at noticing patterns in their thoughts, interactions, and environments that are often hidden in plain sight. Recognizing these patterns is a way of building agency: the capacity to make choices that produce benefits for ourselves and our communities. Students will engage in personal storytelling; campus excursions; creative reflection activities; collaborative meaning-making; and imaginative work to gain hindsight, foresight, and insight that they can apply to any context or situation.



HONR 200-02: Environment and Culture (3899) / Mo/We 10:00am - 11:15am, Seminar Room

Instructor: Jose Arenas Gomez (INDS)



Nowadays there is growing emphasis on terms such as “sustainability” and “greening” in order to combat the uncertainties of a future marked by rapid, global environmental change. It is therefore important to understand how various social groups perceive and encounter environmental change and why this knowledge is critical for our environmental future. In this seminar, we will apply anthropological analytical tools to explore the correlation between humans and their surroundings, encompassing both cultural and geographic contexts, as well as the structures of inequality and the dynamic relationship between “nature” and “culture.” This course will also delve into

the realm of political and historical ecology, examining the historical impact of racism on the development and handling of environmental crises and how marginalized communities (black and indigenous) push back against their marginalization.

HONR 200-03: Hello Kitty and *Kawaii* Culture (7386) / Tu/Th 2:30pm - 3:45pm, Seminar Room

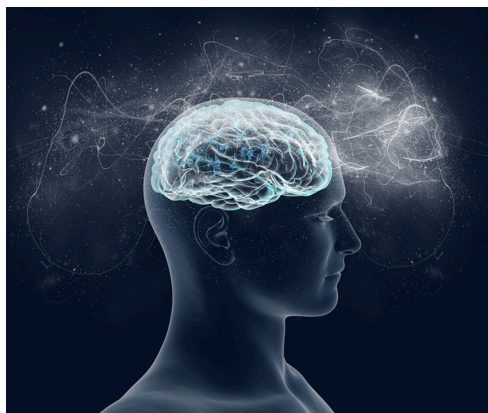
Instructor: Julie Oakes (Honors College)

Did you know that Hello Kitty turned 50 this year? While it may seem that Kitty and her Sanrio pals are ever-present characters in Japan's *kawaii* ("cute") cultural landscape, their creation is tightly linked to Japan's post-war boom that is most often associated with economic powerhouses like Toyota and Sony. This seminar will apply historic, political, and economic reads to modern Japan's "soft power" culture, tracing its international impact as both "Cool" and "Cute" Japan in the past half century. Other topics for exploration include the broader *kawaii* aesthetic (such as in J-Pop music, manga, fashion, and food) in both domestic and international contexts and a comparison to the more recent *hallyu* ("Korean wave") phenomenon, which has been on the rise since the 1990s.



HONR 300-01: The Human Brain: Health and Disease (2869) / Th 8:30am - 11:00am, Seminar Room)

Instructor: Chan Lin (Biology)



Understanding how human brain works is one of the biggest challenges in science today. Through the lens of human diseases, this seminar is designed for students to obtain a general overview of human neuroanatomy, to gain an understanding of some common pathologies of the human nervous system, and to learn from primary literature in the field of neurobiology. This course is designed to be multidisciplinary, utilizing knowledge from fields such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and the biological fields. During the class sessions, students from different majors will be put into smaller groups to exchange ideas through interactive lectures, hands-on

activities with brain models, and 3D digital databases. At the end of semester, students will give presentations addressing a particular societal issue, utilizing the methodologies explored throughout the seminar.

HONR 300-02: Material Performance in “Star Wars” (3456) / Mo/We 1:00pm - 2:15pm, PAHB 105

Instructor: Colette Searls (Theater)

Star Wars, the most popular, written-about film franchise in history, teems with puppets, masks, and costume-creatures that have remained iconic for nearly half a century. In this seminar, we'll examine how material characters like Yoda, Darth Vader, the droids pose questions about contemporary issues like technophobia, human-material relationships, and other-ness. We will inform our discussions with research into the larger context of American puppet emergence during the last quarter of the 20th Century, including a look at Jim Henson's Muppets, and conclude with our own experiential play with material performance.



HONR 300-03: Food, Agriculture, and Society (3612) / Tu/Th 11:30am - 12:45pm, Seminar Room

Instructor: David Lansing (Economics)



There's no getting around it – you need to eat. But *what* you eat, and *how* you eat, is highly determined by the political, economic, and social context you live in. The modern industrial food system is a miracle of cheap calorie provisioning and can grow more food on less land (using less labor) in ways that were unimaginable 100 years ago. At the same time, we are beset with problems of obesity, malnutrition, toxic soils, polluted waters, and exploited laborers. This course explores the ways that growing and consuming food shapes society, our bodies, and the planet. It also considers the

ways that the political and economic organization of society affects how food is grown, shipped, and eaten. At its core, this seminar's goal is for you to understand these relationships, why they exist, and for you to reflect on what should, and should not, be changed in our modern food system.

HONR 300-05: Understanding HIV and AIDS (3752) / We 1:00pm - 3:30pm, Seminar Room

Instructor: Jodi Kelber (Honors College)

This course will focus on how HIV and AIDS are understood in the United States, both in terms of their domestic presence and global manifestations. We will examine biological, policy, artistic, and activist ways of producing knowledge about the virus, how those knowledges, or understandings, depend on each other for meaning. We will also be looking at how these knowledges are interdisciplinary and, while they depend on each other for their meanings, those meanings are often contradictory or even ultimately untrue. Readings will come from all of these disciplines, but no particular expertise in any of them is required for this course. Besides reading, there will be shorter and longer writing assignments, and a group project that includes an intervention in cultural expressions of HIV and AIDS.



HONR 300-06: Contemporary Cinema: West Asia/North Africa (3753) / Mo 4:30pm – 7:00pm, Seminar Room

Instructor: Samir El Omari (MLLI)



This course will introduce students to films from WANA (West Asia and North Africa) regions related to history, politics, economics, culture, religion, linguistics, geography, literature, gastronomy, architecture, and technology. Readings will provide background on the particular cultural and historical contexts in which the films are produced as well as the aesthetic traditions from which they emerge and to which they refer.

Reading will also serve to familiarize students with approaches to critically interpreting visual media. The course will consider the significance of the national policies and practices and how they have shaped the work of filmmakers throughout the West Asia and North Africa; however, the films will also reach beyond the boundaries of the nation, encouraging students to consider factors such as censorship, the role of language and dialect on film viewership, and distribution, and foreign financing. All films will be screened either in English or with English subtitles.

HONR 300-07: Solving Wicked Problems (4878) / We 4:30pm - 7:00pm, SOND 206

Instructors: Simon Stacey (Honors College) and Bob Carpenter (Economics)

Students in this course will work in teams to learn to solve complex problems. The class adopts a case study model used at the Harvard Business School: every few weeks, teams of students will be presented with a new case study problem, on which they will work together to prepare a paper or presentation that will include a proposed solution to the problem. The case studies will span the disciplines, so all students will acquire knowledge about a range of new topics; however, the main objective of the class is to help students develop the skills to address complex and unstructured problems like they will encounter in their post-college careers. The final assessment will be a research project focused on improving teamwork skills, and the students will be credited in any publication that may result from the course.

