

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FALL 2009

Responsibility: Comparing Ethical Perspectives Across Cultures

Sally Holt

Sec. 8 and 9

This course explores how people think about ethical action. How do people decide what to do given a difficult circumstance? How do people think about what it means to live a good life? Students consider the idea of what it means to be an individual and further, they explore what it means to act ethically from the perspectives of several different worldviews. The concept of duty is considered as students learn about and evaluate how each text utilized depicts the relationship between the individual and society. The course raises important issues as discussions focus on leadership, citizenship, philosophical and theological foundations for decision-making and diversity. Texts: *A Communion of Subjects, Confessions, The Way to Rainy Mountain, The Bhagavad-Gita, On Liberty.*

The “Whys” of Knowing

Noel Boyle

Sec. 23 and 29

Most students mistakenly assume that professional development is the only purpose of higher education. By considering various accounts of why human beings pursue knowledge, we will overcome this assumption. Students will learn that knowledge can be its own reward, that curiosity and wonder are central human experiences. Students will learn that genuine freedom requires an education that makes it possible to live with deliberate purpose, that knowledge is essential for constructive citizenship. Questions we will explore include: “What is the purpose of a human being?”, “Who is wise?”, “What is freedom?”, “Is democracy good?”, “Is there a such thing as Truth?”, “What does it mean to be mature?”, and “What is a civilization?”. Of greatest practical concern, we will focus on both the content and purpose of Belmont’s general education program. In the end, students will hopefully understand that education is a preparation for the whole of life and that they ought to spend their time at Belmont seeking not only information but also transformation. Texts: *The Trial and Death of Socrates, Elements of Style, 1984, The School of Freedom, A Rulebook for Arguments.*

Denying the Holocaust: How We Know What Isn’t So

Doug Bisson

Sec. 30 and 32

Who says the Holocaust never happened and why do they say it? What arguments do the deniers present to support their claims? What answers have been made to the claims of the Holocaust deniers? Is there a difference between “Holocaust revision” and “Holocaust denial?” What are the motives of Holocaust deniers?

This course will explore the larger theme of “ways of knowing” by acquainting students with the methods of historians and showing how the latter use written documents, eyewitness

testimony, photographs, physical evidence and demography to demonstrate that the Holocaust actually occurred. Texts: *War and Genocide*, *Lying About Hitler*, *Sources of the Holocaust*.

“I’m Just a Girl”: The Female Experience through Fiction and Film

Caroline Wooldridge

Sec. 56

This seminar is a discussion based course addressing the questions of how girls’ experience in America shapes the way they “know” themselves, others and the larger world in which they live. What does it mean to be a girl in America today? How does gender structure the way we “know” ourselves and our place in the world? Using works of fiction, memoir and documentary film we will investigate these questions. Looking at the female experience in this country will involve interdisciplinary thinking about the various cultural systems of race, class, sexuality, and various cultural issues such as body image, sexual violence, agency, power and myriad other lenses and issues through which American girls understand themselves and the world. Texts: *Wintergirls*, *Prep*, *The Glass Castle*, *The House on Mango Street*, *Sula*.

The Art of Paying Attention

Dane Anthony

Sec. 5 and 48

The transition to university life is often a student’s first significant introduction to life in community as an independent being. As well, it can be an abrupt encounter with levels and layers of internal and external expectations not previously encountered. This course is designed to engage students in deepening their understanding of life and community beyond themselves, to begin to connect with the larger scope of both internal and external voices. Students will be challenged to explore how vocation, calling, contribution, expectations and assumptions resonate within the communities in which they find themselves. Texts: *StrengthsQuest*, *Old Jack*, *Writing to Change the World*.

If Music Be the Food of Love....

Richard C. Shadinger

Sec. 58

Shakespeare acknowledged the importance of music when he called it the “food of Love” in his play *Twelfth Night*. While this seminar will examine “ways of knowing” through a focus on food and sustainability by reading the common book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, we will also investigate the connection between food and music, two elements of our lives which have a strong hold on us. Music and food can be obsessions and it surprising to discover how often eating and music are intertwined. Other readings will be from Wendell Berry’s *The Way of Ignorance* and a book entitled *Go Green, Save Green*, a practical guide to protecting God’s green earth.

Backing Into Your Future
Jimmy Davis
Sec. 18

When we think or talk about our future, we generally use terms that suggest that we can actually see it: we “look” to the future, we “face” the future, we “see” the future. I think we may have our metaphors messed up; we may have our body orientations all wrong. Instead of “facing” the future, maybe we’re backing into it. As our lives progress, invisible “future” events move from behind us (where we can’t see them) into our peripheral vision, and then into full view as they recede into the past. If we think of the future as something we “back into,” it becomes clear that one of our most important activities is interpreting events as they come into view so we can try to anticipate what the next thing will be and, perhaps, adjust to it.

So now you’ve “backed” your way into college. You don’t know what it will hold for you, in spite of all the time and energy you spent making the decision to come to Belmont. What you may need now, more than anything, is the ability to effectively interpret things as they happen in order to understand what’s coming next. That’s what this course is about: how we interpret the events we can see—things in our past—and those interpretations shape our thoughts and actions.

In addition to the common book for all First Year Seminars, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, we will read several other books: *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, *Affluenza*, *Ishmael*, *Feed*, *The Things They Carried*, and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Our reading of these books will be frequently supplemented with shorter articles, essays, book chapters, poems, and short stories.

“Honey, What’s for Dinner?” Having the Courage to Ask What’s *Really* on Your Plate
Mark Chirico/Elinor Chumney
Sec. 51

This section will use the common book *Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan as a springboard for discussion for a number of topics examining “ways of knowing”. It will explore the American “food culture” focusing primarily on sustainability, the various food chains, and the many influences on what we choose to eat. The section will require supplemental reading assignments, group projects, journals, formal writing assignments, class discussions and viewing of films. Texts: *The Jungle*, *Freakonomics*, *Fast Food Nation*.

What Is a Question? That’s the Question
Sybril Bennett
Sec. 11

In their classic “Who’s on First” parody, late comedians Abbott and Costello touch on a very basic human need to be understood. If one doesn’t understand the question, know what question to ask or how to find the answer, how can he or she be informed? Journalists ask questions everyday but are they the right questions? What does critical thinking have to do with simply asking a question? Come along for this journey as we seek a better understanding of race and poverty by just figuring out what questions to ask. By the way, what is race and for that matter, what is poverty? They may not be what you think. From what is truth to whether there is absolute truth, this course will engage, educate, entertain and empower you in ways

you won't be able to question. Texts: *Outliers, Ishmael, Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America.*

Becoming the Change

Julie Hunt

Sec. 12

Who am I? What am I uniquely designed to do? What is my calling? What injustices ignite passion within me? To what causes do I want to offer my voice?

In this course we will dialogue, read, write, create, serve, observe and share. We will look within ourselves and each other and will look to those outside of our circle who have made a mark on the world. We will grapple with ways of knowing ourselves, our community and how we might each respond to Ghandi's charge to "be the change you wish to see in the world".

Texts: *StrengthsQuest, Writing to Change the World, Three Cups of Tea.*

The Rest of the Story

Sarah Bowles

Sec. 14

Humans are storytelling creatures. We love a good book, an engrossing movie, a government scandal, a juicy piece of gossip. But is it ever possible to know the *whole* story? In this seminar we will examine the ways we might go about learning "the rest of the story": through in-depth research (as is the case with investigative journalism), alternative narratives (like conspiracy theories), personal narratives (also known as memoirs), and even outright lies or exaggeration (such as satire or urban legends). How is storytelling a way of knowing? Can a story be true and false at the same time? What do we learn from believing—or disbelieving—the stories we tell and are told? Texts: *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, Jarhead, America (The Book).*

Culture Influencing Choice: Fact or Fiction?

Kelley Kiningham and Marilyn Thompson Odom

Sec. 38

This seminar course will be designed to help answer the following question, "How do we know what we know?" In today's society, unlike ever before, we are constantly exposed to a variety of multimedia resources such as newspapers, television, internet, film, magazines, books and radio which are often used to influence our choices. In this course we will critically evaluate the roles these play in shaping our "ways of knowing". In addition we will look at how our own personal experiences shape our decisions and how researching a critical question can often change our viewpoints, or at the very least, give us a better appreciation of the issue. Texts: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle; The Giver.*

Unconventional Wisdom, or How to Become a Stand-Up Skeptic
Nathan Griffith
Sec. 24 and 44

If hell is other people, think of this course as asbestos underpants. One of the things we cannot escape is the need to work together with other people to accomplish tasks we can't manage individually. To do this successfully, we need to understand how we relate to reality (so that we can communicate with each other) as well as how we relate to each other (so that we can adjust our behavior). So, we will begin by asking how and why we produce knowledge. The answers to that question then tell us what it means to be an educated person, which leads to the question of what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. And part of what that means is having to act in concert with other individuals, so we will also look at causes and patterns in human behavior, and how to use a knowledge of them to solve the problems that bedevil collective action. Texts: *Teacher in America*, *Democracy in America*, *Climate of Extremes*, *Kindly Inquisitors*, *How to Lie with Statistics*, *Summer Meditations*, *Thinking Strategically*, *State of Fear*.

Conscientious Consumption
Andrew Webster and Cathy Turner
Sec. 42

The first year seminar is designed to provide an intellectually challenging course of study on a topic by exploring "ways of knowing". Beginning with developing an understanding of knowing to how to know we will explore the myth fact and legend in the realm of human consumption. Why do we eat? How do we know we can eat it? What are the taboos of consumption? What hungers are fulfilled by consumption? How are we consumed by our consumption?

Readings will include: Malcolm Blackwell's *Blink*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and Dede Hall's *The Starving Student's Cookbook*.

Where Does Stuff Come From?
Daniel Schafer
Sec. 1 and 59

Curiosity about the origins of things is a key facet of the human quest for knowledge. Some of the earliest stories in nearly every culture seek to explain why the world exists and how people came to be here. The foundational myths of most modern nations similarly revolve around stories of origins (e.g. Americans see their national character as profoundly shaped by the revolution and early debates about the constitution). On a more personal level, when we met a new person our first question is likely to be "Where are you from?" Origins are clearly important to us. This course will inquire into the origins of a number of different things and will explore the ways that disciplines as diverse as history, astronomy, economics, linguistics, geometry, journalism, archeology, and physics might be helpful in identifying where things come from.

The readings give an indication of the nature and scope of the class. Beside the common FYS book (Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*), which explores how the food we eat reaches our table, readings will include three other major works. Pomeranz and Topik's popular work *The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present*, now in its second edition, shows how the modern global world economy took shape – and along the way tells us a good deal about sugar, pirates, opium, coffee, potatoes, chocolate, banking, and slavery. David Anthony's *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppe Shaped the Modern World*, gives us a crash course in linguistics and archeology so that we can see how scholars debate the deep origins of, among other things, the English language. Lastly, Simon Singh helps us dress the REALLY big picture in *Big Bang: The Origins of the Universe*. The class research project involves students in figuring out and telling the story of where some particular thing comes from.

Food for Thought: What We Know and Don't Know About What We Eat—And Why
Stephan Foust
Sec. 33

Over the past four decades, the mass production, marketing, and consumption of food in the United States have changed significantly. The result is what many health experts consider to be a national eating disorder that has led to an epidemic of obesity and disease. While examining the complex practical, political, and scientific reasons for this cultural shift, this seminar will also investigate the role mass media has played in these changes. Students will explore what's reported, what's not, who sets the agendas, and how information on this and other topics is framed and distributed. Placing themselves in the roles of media decision makers and journalists, students will build a case for what they think would be ethical, accurate, and morally responsible approaches to the sharing of information in the future. Text: *Spin Cycle*.

The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth: Can We Trust the News Media?
Thom Storey
Sec. 50

Is global warming real? Is organic food really better for you? Does Islam promote terrorism? Is Barack Obama's agenda truly a form of Socialism? Is wind-driven electricity a feasible replacement for fossil-fuel? Questions like these are debated daily on the streets, in classrooms, in Congress, and ultimately, in our media. Be it traditional print (newspapers and magazines), broadcast or the Web, so-called "facts" and truths are spewed by the gazillions to audiences willing to read, listen, watch or interact. The media are the No. 1 educational tool in this nation, whether traditional educators accept the assertion or not. A longstanding saying goes: "Journalists write the first draft of history." That's a lofty statement. But the second half goes: "Then they leave it up to historians to get it all right." Consumers today can't wait for historians to give us what is right, or true. So, how do intelligent consumers today discern truth from opinion, rumor from outright lies? This class will look at the media, agenda setting, corporate influence and more through critical thinking and firsthand research.

Looking Backward to Move Forward: How Our Past Informs Our Present

Jeffrey W. Coker

Sec. 49

Americans are a forward-looking people, focused much more on the new and immediate rather than looking backward. This tendency for embracing the “here and now” most likely has been both a strength and a shortcoming in the American character. And yet, one mark of an educated person is an ability to reflect on the context within which one lives. We will spend our semester asking some important questions regarding who you are, how you got to this point in your life, and, in the process, hopefully help you shed some light on where you are going. Some of the broad questions we will examine may include:

- Do generations really have unique characteristics? If so, how does your generation differ from those in the recent past, such as Baby Boomers and G-Xers?
- How has being an American changed over time? What does it mean to be an American in the 21st century?
- Is college life (and higher education generally), different today than in the past? If so, how?
- Why did you select your major (if you have one)? What is the history of your discipline?
- What career aspirations do you have at this stage of your life? How has the history of this sector of the American economy developed? Based on this, what does the future seem to hold?
- What is your family history? How has this contributed to the person you've become?

This multi-layered examination of “context” will provide you with an appreciation of how the past informs who we are in the present. We will spend our semester researching, writing, and discussing these and other questions that add up to...you. Texts: *Generation Me, I Am Charlotte Simmons, Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century.*

Phood and Philosophy

Jonathan Thorndike

Sec. 36

The primary goal of this course is to increase your recognition, appreciation, and use of multiple ways of knowing. FYS serves as an introduction/ gateway to the Belmont University community and to academic discourse. This particular section will focus on the theme of “Phood and Philosophy” (intentional misspelling). We will explore the modern cultural definition of food and how it influences thinking patterns, behavior, families, health and well-being, communities, and relationships. The required reading list is composed of fiction, nonfiction, and a quasi- cookbook. All of the books have food and its consumption as a major theme or as a subtle motif running in the background. They show how food can be a central focus of life or a throw-away afterthought. Students will write research essays, view films, discuss books, take tests, develop their own philosophy of food and culture, and cook a meal together in small teams. Texts: *Kitchen, Life of Pi, Into the Wild, Supper of the Lamb.*

Knowing What to Eat: The Epistemology of Food
Doug Murray
Sec. 52 and 60

This section of Belmont's First-Year Seminar will ask—and seek to answer—some of the following questions: What are the forces which shape the taste of American eaters? What is the history of the food we consume? What are the anthropological and social meanings of food rituals? What are the economic implications of the foods we consume? What are the correlations between food and ethnicity and food and social class? Students will engage in multiple writing projects, most notably a documented research project and a food history of an individual. I hope that by the end of the class, each student will have a better understanding of the role of food in life and culture. Texts: *Food and Culture*, *Sweetness and Power*.

And Then What Happens?
Mary Thompson
Sec. 3 and 4

The FYS is designed to help entering freshmen make the academic transition to the university community through an intellectually challenging course of study on a topic that relates to the issue of “ways of knowing.” According to economist Thomas Sowell, “Most thinking stops at stage one.” But in this course, we shall ask, “And then what happens?”

Thinking beyond stage one is especially important when making decisions and taking actions whose consequences unfold over a period of years. We shall examine this issue from two perspectives: 1) What are the incentives and disincentives/constraints for taking a particular course of action? And 2) What are the foreseeable costs and benefits of that particular action? The books and films discussed in this class will address our relationship to earth's natural resources and ask, “When it comes to our environment, why do we take the actions that we do? Should we/can we change our way of thinking and, in the process, change our behavior?” Texts: *The Creation*, *The Last American Man*, *Jayber Crow*, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

Life and Death Through the Eyes of Native Americans
Jack Williams
Sec. 34

The First Peoples of this country, commonly referred to as Native Americans or American Indians, are represented by 562 federally recognized tribes. Within these diverse cultures is wisdom and knowledge about life, death, and spirituality that not only guides them in modern times but also serves as a valuable resource for others.

These indigenous societies have been greatly impacted both by a tragic history and a remarkable tie to the earth and the heavens. Since the arrival of the Europeans, their history has frequently been marked by deculturation and population decline in the wake of westward expansion, wars, diseases, forced migrations, and genocide. Governments at all levels have repeatedly made treaties and promises to help these societies recover, but most of these obligations have been broken or neglected. In spite of overwhelming negative forces, Native American peoples have managed to maintain a strong tie to many of their traditions and cultural ways, which continues to aid in their recovery.

The readings, films, discussions and other activities in this section focus on the history and worldviews of indigenous peoples, with an emphasis on the Lakota (Sioux) and Cherokee tribes of the United States. Readings include books or articles on Native American history; myths, legends, and stories; spiritual beliefs and religious practices; and modern writings. A special emphasis will be placed on studying the cultures of Native Americans as a way of developing individual cultural competence. Healthy cultural competence includes an understanding of our own prejudices and worldviews as well as those of others and the ability to communicate effectively with peoples of other cultures. Texts: *Wisdom of the Elders*, *Pushing the Bear*, *Keeping Heart on Pine Ridge*, *The Lakota Way*, *Indian Givers*.

Folk Music Traditions in America

Virginia Lamothe

Sec. 10

Music's great messages reach our ears not only through words, but also through the shapes, colors, and identities of a geographical location. Whether it be blues or zydeco, folk music in America is vastly diverse. Folk music preserves the culture of a region, and in doing so, teaches us great lessons about race, economics, religion, and gender. This course will examine folk music from a number of regions in the United States, from rural blues of the Mississippi Valley, to the Velvet Underground of Andy Warhol's New York City, and even a closer look at our own Grand Ole Opry. Just as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) asks us what aspects of location makes our food "organic," this course will explore pathways of knowledge to understanding how location makes our American music "authentic." Through firsthand accounts and rare recordings, students will take a ride across America with rambling men and women like Woody Guthrie and Bessie Smith in order to discover more about how music is made, where it comes from, and what it means in America. Texts: *Bound for Glory*, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, *All Yesterday's Parties*, *Chronicles: Vol. 1*, *Air Castle of the South*, *Zydeco*, *Bluegrass Odyssey*, *History of the Blues*.

Table Talk: A Return to the Dinner Table

Diane Monahan

Sec. 28 and 31

This course examines how larger systems such as organizations influence the communication patterns of families. We will use the common book, *Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, to serve as the catalyst of exploration into how events in our world, be it our larger culture or immediate community, influence family communication such as regularly eating dinner together. Text: *Table Talk*.

Metaphors We "Know" By: The Truth of Fiction, the Fiction of Truth

Annette Sisson

Sec. 26

You've probably heard it said that "truth is stranger than fiction." And in the reality of our lives, that aphorism sometimes proves to be true. Uniquely paraphrasing the words of Jesus, American fiction writer Flannery O'Connor declared, "You shall know the truth, and the truth

shall make you odd.” As O’Connor understood, figuring out the truth is often tricky business, and the process of trying to know the truth of something—or to really know anything for sure—not only makes us human, but indeed makes us unique.

Similarly, poet Emily Dickinson exhorted her readers to “Tell the truth, but tell it slant.” Although she was not encouraging her readers to tell lies, she did put her finger on the difficulty of directly stating or understanding truth. Metaphors—with their fictional basis and imaginative possibilities—help us try to know and communicate truths when plain words and simple facts fail us.

The title of this section of First-Year Seminar pays tribute to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s book *Metaphors We Live By*. Over the course of the semester, we will explore the complex nature of grappling with truths—both “telling truths” and grasping truths. Specifically, we will examine the way fictions (i.e. metaphors, archetypal narratives, story-telling, symbols, etc.) enable us to interpret the world and explain its complexities and mysteries to ourselves and others. In the process of searching out and (re-)constructing truths, we will encounter personal and family fictions, as well as historical, social, and cultural fictions, all of which will reveal the imaginative stories that serve as the “metaphors we ‘know’ by.”

Actions = Consequences?

David Bridges

Sec. 21 and 46

This FYS will study why and how we make decisions, both small and large, and how those decisions affect our lives and the communities in which we live. Texts: *Parabola* “Thinking,” *Parabola* “Holy Earth.”

Artificial Life

Bill Hooper

Sec. 54

This course explores Artificial Life as myth, philosophical proposition, scientific discipline and artistic medium. Readings include: Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, Dawkins’s *Selfish Gene*, Turing’s *Imitation Game*, Ray’s *Zen and the Art of Creating Life*, research articles from current publications such as *Gene*, *Evolutionary Computation* and *Artificial Life*.

You will also learn by experimenting with “creatures” made from software, hardware, and teams of your classmates. You will learn most through reflection on the relationship between creature and creator, on the risks inherent in creation, and on the surprises of emergent behavior.

Encountering the Other

Regine Schwarzmeier

Sec. 39

This seminar will focus on ways of knowing the self and understanding the other. Furthermore, it will show how encountering the other can broaden a person’s perception and contribute to a deeper awareness and knowledge of the self. Whenever members of two

different worlds encounter each other it is natural for clashes to occur. These conflicts are based on a variety of differences such as race, class, gender, nationality, language, culture, religion, and values. They can only be resolved when one makes every effort to encounter the other with tolerance and come to a true understanding of the other which can only be achieved by ridding oneself of prejudice and a willingness to explore and learn which most often means stepping outside of one's comfort zones. We will ask: What is knowledge? How do we receive knowledge? How does knowledge shape us? How can knowledge transform us? Texts: *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*,; *The Reader*; *Kitchen*; *Life of Galileo*; *Death in Venice and Other Stories*; *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.

The Politics of Knowledge.

Ken Spring

Sec. 20 and 35

This course is an intense look into the way our knowledge about politics and political discourse is framed by the six major institutions (Family, Media, Government, Economy, Education, and Religion). It is also a course on how politics shape our knowledge about our communities and our American identities. As such we focus on theoretical frameworks such as the sociology of knowledge, symbolic identities, social constructionism, structuralism, critical theory and postmodernity as they apply to our understandings of politics and media forms. Within this course we dissect the layers of meaning and symbolism entrenched in political commentaries ranging from globalization to education. We lay foundations general general American Government History then intertwine with readings of politics, media and popular culture, with the goal of having a deeper understanding of each. This class will require to you critically examine both American politics as well as your knowledge of it. Texts: *Flatland*, *Taking Sides*, *Dumbing Down*, *Deep Economy*.