

Spring 2021 Honors Legacies Course Descriptions



BRUCE WILSON, Associate Professor, Chemistry **HONR 2000— The Legacy of Alchemy**

From its earliest days, the practice of chemistry was in the artisan trades: glassmaking, glazing, metallurgy, the manufacture of acids and high-quality concrete. But sometime before 300 A.D. the practice of chemistry was blended with the mystic philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus (“Mercury Thrice-great”) and alchemy was born. In alchemy, elements and compounds were a representation of the heavens, and of the soul of the alchemist; “As above, so below.” The alchemist, in purifying a compound by steps, would learn to purify himself in steps, and this purification represented the purifying instruction that God put into the creation. This is secret knowledge. The search for the Philosopher’s Stone was as much about the alchemist as it was about turning base metals to gold. The alchemist’s soul, standing on his inner “Philosopher’s Stone” should then be capable of purifying the lives of others. We will study the Egyptian “Primal Forces” which became the “four elements” of Empedocles. We will read Lucritius’ poetic summary of Empedocles, then turn to the great texts of alchemy, those of Hermes Trismegistus and of Abu Masu Sabir Ibn Hayyan (known in Europe as “Geber”) before reading Roger Bacon and Paracelsus, both alchemists, but who began to see the first hints of a scientific method. Students will examine the role of the University in a soul-forming process similar to that of the alchemists, and in a term paper express how we still view matter as having mystical properties, especially in Utah.

GRANT MOSS, Associate Professor, English & Literature **HONR 2000— Heroes and Monuments**

Ancient Legacies: Heroes and Monuments

This course will look at a number of texts and artifacts and consider such questions as:

- How do we memorialize great people and great events?
- How do legends of heroes and events inform our world view(s)?
- How important is it that we understand the differences between the legend and reality?

Materials will include such works as Gilgamesh, Homer’s Iliad, and selections from the Old Testament as well as modern works which examine the ancient world.

KEITH SNEDEGAR, Professor, History & Political Science **HONR 2000— Life, Death, and Commemoration**

Ancient Legacies: Life, Death, and Commemoration

Premodern societies perpetuated their cultural memories in art, architecture, ritual and literature. In this course we will engage literary reflections on the meaning of life and death from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the essays of Michel de Montaigne, and we will explore the material culture of memorialization from the Egyptian pyramids to Roman triumphal arches and medieval effigy tombs. We will also consider how these ancient forms of commemoration resonate in modern events and societies.

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THOMAS BRETZ, Assistant Professor, Philosophy **HONR 2100—Nature, Society and Technology**

Arguably, we live in one of the most technologically advanced societies in the history of humankind. At the same time, there is no shortage of social and environmental problems. Indeed, there is reason to believe that we have some of these problems not *despite* of our technological advances, but maybe *because* of them.

In this course, we are going to delve into the complex relationships between nature and society as well as the ways these relationships are mediated through technology. To do so, we going to look at some classical and contemporary texts of both European and Euro-descendant as well as non-Western modernity. This will allow us to map and then critically examine the various ways in which we understand nature, society, and technology as well as their relationship.

T. HEATH OGDEN, Associate Professor, Biology **HONR 2100—The Evolution of Evolution and its Impact on Society**

Evolution is the central organizing concept of Biology and evolution “unites ... the world of purposeless, meaningless, matter-in-motion on the one side with the world of purpose, meaning, and design on the other” (Daniel Dennet). The course will investigate the rich history of evolutionary thought and its impact on society. Because evolution is a scientific theory we will overview what science is (and is not) and why scientific thinking and critical thinking are a necessary part of informing our worldviews. We will examine the people and ideas that predate Darwin and how they influenced him. We will dedicate significant time to Darwin and his contemporaries (Wallace and others) and the ideas of natural selection, tree like thinking, and the book *Origin of Species*. We will follow evolutionary advancements to modern day, highlighting how evolution affects our modern world. And we will examine science and society, including areas of supposed conflict between evolution and religion.

KARIN ANDERSON, Professor, English Literature **HONR 2100— Personal Me, Collective Me: The Fascinating Problems of Self-Representation in American Culture**

In a culture founded on “personal liberty” and self-expression, Americans place high value on individual experience as a key to knowing – and telling – “The Truth.” In this course we will explore some of the implications of telling our own life stories, and ask tricky, interesting, sometimes troubling questions: Who plays a part in our stories, and how do we contend with the ways we depict them in our own renditions? Who and what have been erased from our stories, and to what purpose? What do the stories we tell about ourselves inadvertently reveal, and to what consequence? What are the complex motives behind “setting the story straight” with firsthand testimonial? What are some crucial differences between “a true story” and “The True Story”? How does first-person narrative allow us to create ourselves, and to create valuable, usable meaning? How does personal narrative obliterate other possibilities of selfness? How do we contend with the stop-time of story versus the ongoing flow of actual life? We’ll read several short “true” first-person narratives linked on the internet, as well as significant sections of four influential contemporary first-person narratives in book form: *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance; *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehesi Coates; *The Yellow House* by Sarah Broom; and *Educated: A Memoir* by Tara Westover.

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SHANNON MUSSETT, Professor - Philosophy
HONR 2100— Approaching Our Own Historical Situation

Focusing on influential works drawn from literature, philosophy, drama, psychoanalysis, and sociology, this course surveys the modern period of Western thinking commencing in the 16th century. We will approach our own historical situation by tracing the development, cultivation, and demise of rational thinking. We begin with René Descartes—a figure central to the inception of modernity and the resurgence of rationalism. After reaching its apogee in the Enlightenment, the dominance of reason will be questioned through a variety of different genres and approaches. To facilitate this task, we will be taking up the themes of the unconscious, technology, madness, individuality, spirituality, art, and power.