FYS Committee Report, April 2012
Elisabeth Gruner, Committee Chair

Committee Members: Lewis Barnett (Fall only), Paul Clikeman, Erik Craft, Joanna Drell, Al Goethals, Ray Hilliard, Terry Price, Dan Roberts, Peter Smallwood (Spring only), Tricia Stohr-Hunt, Mary Kelly Tate, Sydney Watts

“The committee shall solicit proposals for FYS courses, review them for compliance with the FYS Guidelines adopted by the faculty, provide guidance on FYS faculty training and course development workshops, and conduct periodic reviews of the FYS program to ensure quality and continued participation by faculty from all five schools. The committee, in consultation with the Registrar, also will deal with student petitions for exemption or substitution of FYS requirements. The actions of the committee will be reported at the University Faculty Meeting at the end of the year.”

In compliance with the above charge, the FYS committee approved 34 new FYS courses this year, all but three of which have subsequently been approved at university faculty meetings (those three are on today’s agenda) and many of which will be taught for the first time next year. (See appendix for full listing.) Faculty and prospective faculty participated in over 30 workshops during the course of the year, and 34 prospective faculty have just completed a summer institute held April 30-May 4, 2012.

The committee has also paid attention to assessment of the FYS program. As with last year, there was considerable discussion amongst the FYS faculty and the FYS committee regarding grade distributions in FYS courses; we continue to pay attention to this issue as well as to overall program assessment. For 2012-2013, the assessment format will change slightly to allow for review of all four program goals every semester; this will allow us to make some comparative analyses of our achievement of goals throughout the year. We will also have grade distribution concerns on the agenda as part of a comprehensive review of the program during 2012-2013.

The committee’s major achievement during 2012-2013, besides reviewing and approving courses, has been to propose and begin planning for the first-ever FYS mini-conference, to be held during Family weekend, 2012. Student submissions of creative projects, research papers, and a variety of other work will be presented at the conference, Friday, September 28. Sydney Watts has taken the lead on planning this new event, which we hope will become an annual occurrence. The committee will review and judge student submissions during May, to allow accepted students time to revise their work for presentation in the fall. The committee also judged submissions last May for the John Rilling award for first-year writing; three students were honored for their work at a reception in the fall. The Rilling award will again be presented next fall, this time at the student mini-conference.
Last year’s committee ended their year’s work by reviewing applications for the first class of FYS Faculty Fellows. Those fellows—Marcia Whitehead, Carol Wittig, David Epstein, and Mary Kelly Tate—have now completed their work for the year, and the 2011-2012 committee’s final task of the year will be to select the new class of Faculty Fellows for 2012-2013.

The committee has been invaluable, as it was last year, as a sounding board and source of advice to the FYS coordinator.

Appendix: Courses submitted for approval during 2011-2012
First Year Seminar Courses Submitted for Approval
January – May 2012

Con Beausang, Physics
The Five (or Ten) Best (Physics) Experiments Ever!
This course will examine the people and stories behind some of the key experiments in physics. We will focus on experiments which have radically altered our views of the world or universe around us or which have radically altered our civilization by the technology they enabled. Inspired by and loosely based on the text "The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments" by George Johnson the course will explore great physics experiments from history as well as some of the more amazing experiments underway.

Kristin Bezio, Jepson School of Leadership Studies
Revolution, Leadership, and Dystopia in the Modern World
This course will examine fictional dystopian societies and real-world social revolutions to help students discuss the concerns of social and national groups in terms of leadership, community, and ethics. The course will begin by discussing early twentieth-century concerns related to rapid industrialization; move through the era of the Cold War and fears of nuclear holocaust; and conclude by examining contemporary concerns about genetic experimentation, the expansion of media, and internet culture. We will discuss political theory, history, literature, film, and other new media as we explore the problems, benefits, and challenges produced by expanding societies, global awareness, and technological innovation.

Kathrin Bower, Modern Literatures and Cultures
Lost in Translation?
"Lost in Translation?" will explore the influence of cultural knowledge on the understanding of literature and film. After analyzing two films that humorously illustrate the interplay of language and cultural misunderstanding, we will examine a variety of literary works in translation where knowledge of the cultural and historical context is essential to understanding the meaning of the texts. We will also look at immigrant writers for whom writing in another language is an act of cultural translation as well as a stimulus for creative experimentation and discuss how translating literature into English affects the novelty and innovation of the original.

Stephanie Cobb, Religious Studies
Gladiators, Emperors, and Mystery Cults: Religion and Daily Life in the Ancient World
"Gladiators, Emperors, and Mystery Cults" explores what it meant to be religious in the ancient world. In particular we will examine the relationship of daily life to religion in paganism (both Greek and Roman), Judaism, and Christianity. Sometimes our topics will be obviously religious—sacrifice, temple worship, prayer—but sometimes we will discuss elements of ancient life that will not seem especially "religious"—gladiatorial games, for instance—and it is at those points that the course goals truly come to the fore: What is religion? What is the religious life? And what does it have to do with "real" life?

Christine Contrada, School of Continuing Studies
Are They Amazons? Categories of Women in Renaissance Italy
Since Joan Kelly posed her question “did women have a Renaissance?” historians have spent the last few decades carefully considering the place of women in Renaissance society rather than continuing to exclude them to the periphery of the historical narrative. Based on studies of social and cultural norms categories of women have emerged. They are saints, sinners, humanists, mothers, daughters, wives, and even, when they have leadership positions or were active philosophers, unnatural Amazons. This course
will explore these labels in a historical context to place their experiences more clearly into the larger history of their age.

**Erika Damer, Classics**  
**Roman Laughter**  
The course will explore humor in the Roman world and its expression in a variety of literary genres. It will be of particular interest to students interested in classical studies, MLC, English, History, GWSS, and theater. Main goals of the course may be: to explore the political, social, and cultural particularities of Roman humor and the difficulty of translation, and, conversely, to explore the universality of the comic experience. Primary sources will be chiefly textual, but we will also analyze film and live performances, and archaeological evidence. Students will read these texts through literary, historical, psychological, and performance perspectives.

**Scott Davis, Religion**  
**Tolkien and the Medieval Imagination**  
This course undertakes a reading of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings in light of the medieval texts Tolkien worked on, including Beowulf, the Ancrene Wisse, and the Gawain Poet, as well as some of Tolkien's biographical and critical writings.

**Jessie Fillerup, Music**  
**What is Time?**  
Have you ever wondered why time sometimes seems crawls when waiting for a class to end? Or why it seems to stand still during an important moment, even while your watch is ticking? Have you ever had a memory that unexpectedly intruded on the present, fracturing your sense of continuity? This course explores the nature of time by studying musical works in conjunction with literary, philosophical, and scientific texts.

**Don Forsyth, Jepson School of Leadership**  
**Groupology**  
This course surveys what we know (and don’t know) about groups. People have wondered at the nature of groups and their dynamics for centuries, but only recently has the scientific analysis of groups by researchers from psychology, sociology, and related disciplines provided answers to such questions as: Why do humans affiliate in groups? How do groups sway their members? Why do so many groups make such poor decisions? What gives rise to a sense of esprit-de-corps versus intragroup conflict? This course does not teach “group skills.” It is, instead, an introduction to the scientific study of group-level interpersonal processes.

**Jerry Gilfoyle, Physics**  
**Science and National Security**  
I will examine areas where scientific advances had large impacts on national security. (1) Nuclear weapons changed the nature of the balance of power among both nation states and transnational actors like Al Qaeda. (2) Computers have grown in power and opened up new technologies. They also created new vulnerabilities and new ways to wage war. (3) Biological techniques can ‘weaponize’ viruses and bacteria at low cost. I will study the technical aspects of these technologies, analyze the threats they pose to modern societies, and discuss strategies for limiting their use and spread.
Mimi Hanaoka, Religious Studies
Dreams, Visions, and the End of Time in Islam
What does it mean when we dream? Every culture must explain these mysterious experiences. This course focuses on how the religion of Islam makes sense of visions, not only in dreams but also in waking life. In Islamic traditions, dreams and visions can reveal information about prophecy, truth, the future, the afterlife, and the end of time. These visions speak about death, judgment, paradise, and hell. Students will read a rich corpus of Islamic materials that address this topic: the Quran, hadith (reports about the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad), dream interpretation manuals, mystical texts, and local histories.

Scott Johnson, Rhetoric and Communication Studies
Narratives of Identity and Relationship
Story plays a central role in creating our senses of identity and relationship. Narratives of various forms help establish who we believe we are, how we see ourselves in relation to others, our personal ideologies, and our behavior in interactions with those around us. Gender, race, social class, ethnicity, ability, friendships, family, sexual identity, profession, religious beliefs...these and countless other aspects of our lives are in many ways given meaning through the narratives in and around us, and they are brought to life in our communication behavior. In this course, we will explore in depth the role of narratives in shaping who we are and how we interact with others.

Jeannine Keefer, Art and Art History
Power and Architecture
Architecture has long been the vehicle for expressing power relationships. We will explore political, religious, economic, and social power relationships as expressed in the built environment with specific structures and urban interventions. Some will be familiar to you, some are no longer extant, and some will be new sites to consider.

Julie Laskaris, Classical Studies
The Universe In Ancient Mediterraneanean Thought
This course will investigate how the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Etruscans conceived of the origin, structure, and functioning of the universe. Sources will include religious, philosophical, and literary texts, the art historical record, and selected secondary texts. Topics will include ancient ideas about cosmogony, theogony, anthropogony, natural law, the just ordering of the natural and human worlds, and the afterlife and underworld. While the focus of the course will be to understand each culture's cosmologies on its own terms, we will also take a look at cross-cultural influences.

Nicole Maurantonio, Rhetoric and Communication Studies
Cops, Crime, and Popular Culture
This course will examine popular representations of police and crime within a variety of genres, from reality TV to news. Through a critical analysis of primary source materials collected through independent research, students will engage with fundamental questions of media representation as they relate to issues of race, class, and gender.

Mariela Mendez de Coudriet, Latin American and Iberian Studies
Women's Autobiographies as Acts of Narrative Resistance
The course will focus on a cross-cultural analysis of texts from a diverse array of ethnic, national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds that share the common aim of narratively resisting and overcoming different acts of oppression and abuse. Students will research and discuss the socio-cultural and
economic factors behind these acts, and closely examine the intersections of gender, race, class, and ethnicity in the texts analyzed. As students engage in exploring autobiographical writing through individual and group projects both inside and outside the classroom, autobiography will be problematized as a genre whose boundaries have become more fluid in recent decades.

**Andy Newcomb, Psychology**  
**Resilience, Optimism, and Happiness**  
How do we deal with adversity and find happiness? In this course we will explore the process of resilience as a pathway humans use to cope with challenge in their lives. Using a multi-dimensional ecological perspective we will examine how cultural and contextual factors influence protective processes that underlie human wellbeing. From this framework we will study the special role that optimism plays in dealing with life events. Finally we will consider whether resilience and optimism lead to happiness or if happiness is simply a cognitive construction that can be found regardless of the adversity in our lives.

**Erik Nielson, School of Continuing Studies**  
**Rap Music**  
This course will present rap music as a complex form of poetic expression. It will examine the genre's historical, cultural, and rhetorical context, drawing on a wide range of folklore, music, literature, and popular culture to do so. It will also focus on rap in its current form, considering the evolution of, and formal differences between, various subgenres. Finally, even as the class tackles the broad social and political issues that rap naturally brings to light, it will emphasize the ways that close textual analysis can reveal the complex themes and devices underlying rap music’s lyrics and structures.

**Kevin Pelletier, English**  
**Apocalypse Culture**  
This course explores the figure of the apocalypse and its place within American history and culture. We will survey a variety of apocalyptic representations, beginning with the New England Puritans and continuing to the present. We will read Protestant sermons and poetry, nineteenth-century political tracts, and contemporary fiction. We will screen films and television episodes, explore comic books, and enjoy a wide range of apocalyptic music. By examining the apocalypse within these diverse contexts, we will establish a better understanding of what is at stake when the apocalypse is invoked and why it has enjoyed a central presence in America’s cultural imagination.

**Stephen Simon, Political Science**  
**The Question of Universal Rights**  
The question of whether there are universal rights is puzzling because many people are outraged by certain enacted policies but also are uncomfortable with asserting universal truths. Students in the proposed course will improve their ability to reason through a complex question by gaining a better understanding of competing approaches and applying them to politically salient contemporary controversies. The seminar will focus on the recent history of the idea of universal rights and the form that the debate takes today. Students will work on their writing skills by articulating their own informed views on specific human rights issues.

**David Stevens, English**  
**The Unarticulated: Abstraction, Surrealism, and the Absurd**  
This course will examine kinds of literature that intentionally eschew realistic modes of expression. Students will encounter a broad set of texts from various cultures in an attempt to understand why
some authors resist the central impulse of language/narrative to represent, clarify, and even simplify. Questions that students will consider include the relationship of literary to other kinds of art (especially visual art); the relationship of literary form to its content; and the relationship of "nonrational" writing to its more common rational counterpart.

**Sydney Watts, History**
**Social Utopias, Past and Present**
This course examines the history of utopian communities in Western Europe from the Renaissance through the first-half of the nineteenth century. The course begins by surveying the meaning of utopia in its Western roots from Plato’s Republic to Thomas More's Utopia. The course also charts the rise of Utopian Socialists from their ideological foundations in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution to their theoretical applications of social science. Throughout the course we will draw meaningful comparisons of the history of utopian communities with present-day intentional communities that aim to put their utopian ideals into practice.

**Douglas Winiarski, Religious Studies**
**American Gods**
An obscure man in New York City's dingiest neighborhood is reborn as an Old Testament prophet. An immigrant Jewish peddler struggles to practice his faith in Yankee New England. An enslaved African American receives visions of a bloody Christ that ignite an insurrection. Early America was awash in a sea of gods both old and new. In this seminar, we will explore the alternative religions that flourished in nineteenth-century America, then turn to the study of religion in contemporary popular culture. The course concludes with an extended journey through Neil Gaiman's award-winning science fiction novel, American Gods.

**Eric Yellin, History**
**Capitalism and Its Discontents**
The course will consider how philosophers, economists, novelists, social reformers, and ordinary people have conceived of, promoted, opposed, and sought to reform capitalism since the Eighteenth Century. Focused on the Western world, the course will encourage students to think about the social and political meanings and impacts of capitalist and anti-capitalist ideologies. Readings will examine industrialization, imperialism, work, gender roles, class and racial hierarchies in the past and today. Authors may include Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Max Weber, W.E.B. Du Bois, Edith Wharton, Emma Goldman, Milton Friedman, John Kenneth Galbraith, William Julius Wilson, and Barbara Ehrenreich.

**Andrea Simpson--Political Science /Paul Achter--Rhetoric and Communication Studies**
**Watching The Wire**
Frequently hailed as a television masterpiece, "The Wire" created a vivid and detailed portrait of Baltimore that focused on its police, drug trade, shipping docks, city hall, public schools, and newspapers. In the series, one reviewer said, Baltimore stood for the parts America "where drugs, mayhem, and corruption routinely betray the promise of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" "The Wire" ask audiences to look at places, people and stories that mainstream television--and other media--customarily ignores. Students will analyze the series, and they will research and write about the problems that face urban America.
Stephanie Cobb, Religious Studies
Magic and Miracle: Healing in the Greco-Roman World
The interrelated concepts of magic, miracle (religion), and healing in antiquity have long been topics of great interest and debate among scholars of antiquity. Are magical incantations, for example, different from prayers? If so, how? How are physicians in antiquity different from magicians or miracle workers? Does religion develop when magic fails? Is religion supplication and magic manipulation? Is religion licit and magic illicit? This course explores these—and many other related—issues in an attempt to identify, where possible, social (and gendered) constructions of the categories of magic, miracle, and medicine, and the prejudices that accompanied them.

Jane Geaney, Religious Studies
That’s So Gay
This seminar explores social norms for expressing gender and sexuality. It examines non-normative sexualities and gender transgressions through things like representations of gender in children’s cartoons, the recent rise of queer visibility in the media, and the practice of sex and gender “niche marketing,” including the moral ambiguities of LGBTQ tourism. The course considers a variety of cultures in order to highlight alternative ways of constructing sexuality and gender. One of the overarching issues in this course is the paradoxical impulse to affirm the value of difference by imagining a single universal queer identity.

Timothy Barney, Rhetoric and Communication Studies
The Rhetorical Lives of Maps: U.S. Cartography and International Politics
This course is a historical and critical interpretation of how maps aided and complicated America’s rise to international power. The processes, production, display, and circulation of maps gave way to a “geographic imagination” that constrained both policy and popular culture—in turn, Americans saw their place in the world in very spatialized ways. From a rhetorical perspective, maps gave us specific and partial perceptions of the globe and cartographers from a host of different institutions and with various national and international interests (government institutions like the State Dept., the CIA, the Department of Defense, academic institutions like the American Geographic Society, popular magazines like National Geographic and Time, and corporations as diverse as Rand McNally and Google) sketched the contours of American identity in both longitude and latitude. The course teaches students how to critique maps as systems of visual codes and also contextualizes for them how maps are used as rhetorical strategies by American elites and publics; by both the powerful and those challenging the powerful. Not only then is this a course on cartography; it’s a course on the wild world-making processes of U.S. geopolitics and international space.

David Leary, University Professor
Human Life From Start to Finish (A Two Semester First Year Seminar Sequence)
In the Beginning: Envisioning the Origin of Human Life (Fall Semester):
A reading-, discussion-, and research-based seminar focused on classic and more recent depictions of the origin of human life, both human life and society in general and individual lives in particular, and on what those depictions suggest about the nature and significance of human existence. Readings will include the ancient Hebrew book of Genesis, Augustine’s Confessions, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Charles Darwin’s Descent of Man, Kenzaburo Oe’s A Personal Matter, Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon, and Raine Eisler’s The Chalice and the Blade. They will be read, discussed, and written about in pairings that invite comparative considerations. Throughout the semester students will conduct independent research on a self-selected creative, philosophical, religious, or scientific artifact (e.g., a movie, video game, musical composition,
painting, sculpture, dance, work of architecture, piece of literature, philosophical treatise, religious scripture, or science-based publication) that depicts the origin of human life, whether an individual life or human life in general. (This could be a work of completely inventive mythology or science fiction.) This project will result in a class presentation and a written paper that considers this artifact in relation to issues raised by the seminar’s assigned readings.

**In Conclusion: Envisioning the End of Human Life (Spring Semester):**
A reading-, discussion-, and research-based seminar focused on classic and more recent depictions of the end of human life, both individual lives in particular and human life and society in general, and on what those depictions suggest about the nature and significance of human existence. Readings will include the ancient Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh*, the Hebrew story of *Job*, Plato’s *Apology* and *Haedo*, early Christian passages on the end of time, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, James Agee’s *A Death in the Family*, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. They will be read, discussed, and written about in pairings that invite comparative considerations. Throughout the semester students will conduct independent research on a single self-selected creative, philosophical, religious, or scientific artifact (e.g., a movie, video game, musical composition, painting, sculpture, dance, work of architecture, piece of literature, philosophical treatise, religious scripture, or science-based publication) that depicts the end of human life, whether an individual life or human life in general. (This could be a work of completely inventive mythology or science fiction.) This project will result in a class presentation and a written paper that considers this artifact in relation to issues raised by the seminar’s assigned readings.

**Sylvia Gale and Terry Dolson, Center for Civic Engagement**
**Storytelling, Identity, and Social Change**
This course explores the role that life narratives—“stories”—play in shaping a community’s shared sense of identity and in enacting social change. Using a rhetorical lens to read a variety of life narratives produced at crucible moments in American history, we will consider how distinct storytelling methodologies have been used to inscribe, enforce, and/or upturn specific community norms and identities, and to mobilize or restrict change. Texts will include as-told-to and self-authored narratives, “imposter” narratives, oral histories, stories archived using digital media, and secondary sources on narrative storytelling, narratives and social movements, and community literacy.

**Jan French, Sociology and Anthropology**
**Law and Order: The Anthropology of Justice**
Television shows about law and justice are ubiquitous. We know about forensic techniques from shows such as *CSI* and about Miranda warnings (“right to a lawyer”) from twenty years of *Law and Order* (reruns 24/7). Many scholars have raised the question whether jurors are influenced by their exposure to popular culture. Therefore, this course will focus on law, order, and justice as cultural phenomena, through readings on and discussion of legal ethics, dispute resolution, and the relation of law to justice, politics, culture, and values. Students will investigate how people talk about law and justice, the written language of law, and the role law plays in everyday life.
Yvonne Howell, Modern Literatures and Cultures  
The Power of the Powerless: Literature and Social Change in Eastern Europe  
When and how do ordinary people have the power to effect real changes to the system? How can we "live truthfully" in a complicated global economy and ecologically fragile world that seems to demand collusion and moral compromises? This course takes its title from an influential essay by Vaclav Havel, the playwright, rock music fan, and political prisoner who helped bring down the Iron Curtain and become Czechoslovakia's first democratically elected President. Readings include fiction and essays from Eastern Europe as well as a selection of "core" philosophical and political texts.

Reingard Nethersole, Modern Literatures and Cultures  
From Page to Pixel: Changing Forms of Gaining and Disseminating Knowledge  
For more than 500 years book culture and the library have been remarkably stable entities; but in the age of the iPhone, Kindle and YouTube the "Gutenberg Galaxy" diminishes. The digital revolution like the print revolution in the 15th century is changing our world, begging the question of its impact upon our cognitive abilities. What in this brave new world of the pixel is going to happen to the commerce of thinking and the particular reflexive sociability that comes from rummaging in bookstores and libraries? How are the life of the mind, the world of ideas and the way in which we form our imagination affected by fundamental changes in cultural technology?