



## 2017 Liberal Arts Seminars

### ***Diversity and Difference* – [Jill Gatlin](#) (TTh 12:00-12:50)**

“Diversity” has become a buzzword for universities, communities, artists, businesses, and politicians, but what does it really mean? This seminar explores diversity and human difference as subjects of both celebration and controversy, through the study of personal experiences and observations as well as literary, popular, and scholarly writings. We will examine how we—as individuals, community members, and citizens of different nations—experience and define human difference and diversity on a daily basis. Looking at how race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, (dis)ability, and other differences shape people’s lives, we’ll consider both destructive and constructive uses of the idea of difference.

### ***Cultural Studies: Consumption and Waste in America* – [Jill Gatlin](#) (TTh 1:00-1:50)**

This seminar examines habits of consuming and discarding at the individual, community, corporate, and national levels to think about the concept of “culture.” We may be accustomed to thinking of “culture” as the opposite of “trash”—yet nearly everything we consume becomes or produces waste. Looking at fiction, essays, poetry, visual art, advertisements, architecture, and waste itself, we will question how throwaways, garbage, and waste—labels for not only what we throw in the trashcan but also groups of people, art, or even landscapes—define culture. In addition to short written responses, students will develop a unique argument regarding an object or phenomenon of “waste” of their choosing, using skills of detailed observation, close analysis, and interpretive questioning.

### ***Family Dramas* – [Patrick Keppel](#) (TTh 12:00-1:00)**

This seminar explores the tension between the individual and the family by examining plays and films in which this tension is the central focus. The impulse toward creating a coherent, even impenetrable, family unit is by necessity strong, yet in practice that unit is relentlessly challenged from within by problems of hierarchy, power, individuality, and communication, and challenged from without by past family patterns, social obligations, or financial pressures. Drama and film

are useful art forms to study these family conflicts because of the way they provide a provocative glimpse behind the walls that hide such tensions from the world. Seminar participants will also examine the complex concept of the family from the point of view of contemporary Family Systems Theory.

***Thinking About the Environment* – [James Klein](#) (TTh 1:00-2:00)**

Thinking About the Environment looks at the crucial ideas – and the values – represented in today’s environmentalist movement. Students will analyze and discuss the emerging – and contrasting – philosophies of modern environmentalism, ranging from the ‘wise use’ policies of the Roosevelt Era through the broad-based populism of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* to the militant ‘Earth First!’ claims of radical environmentalists in our own day and age. We will examine case studies in environmental problems, focusing on larger questions of how we have manipulated the air we breathe, the water we drink, the energy we burn, and the land we work. Readings will take us from the global issues of modern oceanography to the local concerns over the fate, and the future, of Boston’s Charles River, in an effort to understand better the interaction of human design and the natural world.

***Law and Order* – [James Klein](#) (Tues 4:00-6:00)**

Over the last three hundred years, modern societies have succeeded in imposing law and (to a certain extent) order on their citizens. In this seminar we will discuss how and why that happened, focusing on the law, on crime and punishment, on efforts to end all forms of personal violence, and on the tactics for constructing social conformity.

***Reason and Faith in the Western Tradition* – [Jacob Vance](#) (TTh 4:00-4:50)**

What is faith? How does belief relate to but differ from rational knowledge? This seminar examines how thinkers from Antiquity to the Enlightenment have defined reason and faith, and how they have attempted to either harmonize rational philosophy with theology or separate them. By studying the role of rational investigation in searching for the truths of faith, students will develop a rich understanding of Western philosophical and theological writings. They will learn to analyze, discuss, and write about philosophical texts from different historical periods in light of the tension between reason and faith. Readings may include excerpts from: Plato, Aristotle, Saint Paul, Plotinus, Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, Aquinas, *Descartes*, *Pascal*, *Locke*, Hume, and Rousseau (selections).

*Complexities in Repairing the Environment* – [Matthew Duveneck](#) (TTh 4:00-4:50)

Solutions to environmental problems raise scientific, economic, and ethical questions about whether and how humans should interact with their environment. Through readings, reflection, and discussion, and through the use of several case studies, we will explore the merits of both mitigation and adaptation strategies to problems arising due to climate change, wildlife-human conflicts, wetland degradation, air pollution, and invasive species. For example, we'll discuss mitigation strategies to reduce the magnitude of climate change itself, such as recovery of methane from landfills, but we'll also explore adaptation techniques that focus on limiting the impacts of climate change, such as using alternative crops suited for a changing climate. Although mitigating a problem may theoretically provide the best solution, the process is often expensive and rarely ameliorates an environmental problem completely. Students in this seminar will gain an appreciation for the complexity and challenges of the decisions we make that affect the natural world.

Any questions? Please feel free to contact the Liberal Arts Chair, Patrick Keppel, at [patrick.keppel@necmusic.edu](mailto:patrick.keppel@necmusic.edu) or 617-585-1322, or drop by his office at St. Botolph 214.