

## **NYU Prison Education Program Course Descriptions**

### **Spring 2015**

#### **Cultural Foundations I: Introduction to Literary Analysis and the Politics of Interpretation; Professor Toral Gajawarala**

This course serves as an introduction to college-level literary analysis. Our goal this term is to familiarize you with basic tools of reading and analysis and to provide you with opportunities to think, discuss, and write about the texts that you study in a clear, insightful and argumentative fashion. In this sense, this is a course in reading, in writing and in discussion. This is also a course designed to expose you to questions of genre and aesthetic form: how do we define and evaluate, the novel, or the epic? What makes a drama 'dramatic' or a poem 'poetic'? What counts as a sonnet, and how do we define realism? By the end of the term you should have a clearer understanding of the major features of several genres and be able to incisively identify their representatives. Finally, this course makes the case for interpretation, as a critical act that is both scientific and aesthetic, and one that has political consequences. What does it mean, as Euripides asks, to defend Medea's murder of her own children? Or to suggest, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o does, that African literature shouldn't be written in English, only in the indigenous languages of the continent? This class will ask you to make a claim, to take a position, and to defend it with all the technical and rhetorical tools in your arsenal. Some of the texts that we will put under our microscope include: Euripides' *Medea*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Gogol's "Diary of a Madman", Chinua Achebe's "Girls at War", the sonnets of Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, Ted Berrigan, and Daniil Kharms, the free verse of Marina Tsvaeteva, Derek Walcott, Frank O'Hara, and Gwendolyn Brooks, essays by James Baldwin and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and the contemporary magical realist novel *The Arc of the Rainforest*, by Karen Tei Yamashita.

#### **Cultural Foundations I: Critical Perspectives on Justice Through Creative Writing; Professors George Shulman and Bryonn Bain**

This course has two main goals. First, we study different interpretations of justice as an ideal, while we also study how ideas of justice are practiced –implemented, enacted, and embodied, also corrupted and violated, as well as asserted, protested, recovered, revised. We look at the articulation of justice as an ideal, but we also look at claims about "justice" in relation to the state, law, hierarchies and institutions, like slavery and white supremacy, patriarchy and the family, capitalism and the workplace. We explore the gap between what is CALLED justice by dominant groups and institutions in a society, and what the ideal might really be. We explore how people try to expose, protest, and close that gap. At the same time we use texts and class discussion to practice and improve our writing skills. The readings take a wide variety of forms – philosophical dialogue, utopian fantasy, prison writing, legal opinion, spoken word poetry, non-fiction essay, etc. – so our writing assignments will take a variety of forms.

### **Summer 2015**

#### **Social Foundations I: Introduction to Sociology; Professor Jeff Manza**

This course will introduce you to the discipline of sociology – the study of how social *contexts* such as families, communities, schools, churches, and organizations shape individual lives. Our primary goal in this course is to develop what C. Wright Mills once famously described as "the sociological imagination," that is, the ability to see the connections between individual biographies and history, and begin to apply its insights to understand how societies work. Sociology is concerned with a broad canvass of the modern world. Our question ranges widely from the basic units of human life—or individuals' relationships with others—to the groups and organizations we are a part of (including our race, gender, class, religion, and groups we are assigned to or choose to belong to), all the way up to a now rapidly-changing global economy that is impacting all of our social relationships. Sociologists ask questions that are similar to the other social sciences (such as Economics, Political Science, Psychology, or Anthropology), but we have distinctive theories and methods that lead us to

approach problems in a unique way. This course will give you some tools to analyze social problems using a sociological imagination. It will also introduce you to some of the research and leading theories in contemporary sociology.

**Social Foundations I: Approaches to American Studies; Professor Andrew Ross**

This course is an introduction to American Studies. It covers approaches to topics that are central to US history, society, and culture. These include Native American dispossession, constitutional law, nationalism and race, labor and democracy, frontier settlement, empire, capitalism and morality, social movements, and consumerism.

**Writing I: Identity and the Cultural Constructions of Race and Ethnicity; Professor Laurie Woodard**

Identity: the ways in which we see ourselves; the ways in which others see us; the dynamic relationship between these two seemingly distinct and often irreconcilable poles is the underlying theme of this first-year writing seminar. We will explore the ways in which we create, build, rebuild, and live our racial and ethnic identities in constant dialogue with contemporary American societal constructions of race and ethnicity. As students develop and hone their writing skills, we will pose questions including: What is race? Is it immutable? How do we know it when we see it? How is it distinct from ethnicity? What is gained and/or lost by considering or not considering race today? In what ways do other facets of identity, for example gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, and class, inform, challenge, reconstruct, or deconstruct our racial identities? We will examine a variety of primary and secondary texts - fiction, nonfiction, essays, and plays – by Malcolm X, Soloman Northrup, Barbara C. Fields, Edward Said, Ayad Akhtar, Chandra Prasad, and Tricia Rose. Focusing on the various stages of the writing process, including free writing, crafting an argument, employing evidence, drafting, revision, and polishing essays, we will delve into forms including autobiography and memoir, textual analysis, and critical analysis. Students will also provide and receive feedback during in-class workshops.

**Elective: Foundations of Speech Communication; Professor Piper Anderson**

In this course students will develop effective speech communication skills that will prepare them for a range of academic and professional activities where formal presentations are required. Central components of the course include generating topics, organizing ideas for written and oral presentation, mastering elements of audience psychology, and practicing techniques of speech presentation in a public forum. Students will be required to participate in a culminating event presenting their persuasive speeches on a social topic of their choosing.

**Fall 2015**

**Writing I: Empire at Sea; Professor Elaine Freedgood**

We will read *Benito Cereno*, Herman Melville's short novel of a slave mutiny on a Spanish ship in the South Pacific, and Greg Grandin's historical exploration of its background in *Empire of Necessity*, to think about the sea as a place of trade, battle, piracy, and finally, a grave. Olaudah Equiano's controversial slave narrative from the late 1700s will be our second text: issues of selfhood, authenticity and the slave as sailor/merchant will surround our discussion of this text, which has been read as an autobiography, a novel, a conversion narrative, an ethnography, and a travelogue. We will read theoretical, critical, historical, biographical, and autobiographical works to think about how to write about fiction and history, the self and the soul.

**Writing I: Stories of Racial Formations; Professor Julia Mendoza**

There are many ways to express yourself: through memoirs, autobiographies, poems, letters, diaries, and even tattoos. In this course, we will ask ourselves what it means to not only write one's own story, but to also be thoughtful to the sensitive task of writing someone else's story. This class will not only explore the importance of telling stories, but also seek to understand how stories can illuminate our understanding of social conditions. Accordingly, we will seek to read stories along relative interdisciplinary scholarship in order to

understand how the power of a narrative can be used for thinking about broader considerations of racial formations. With a focus on storytelling, the reading for this course will specifically survey literature that examines how different people understand processes of racialization. The interdisciplinary scholarship for this course will survey literature that examines the processes of racialization as understood through various social and cultural histories. Although broad in scope, this scholarship is an attempt to comprehend the operation of racialization throughout different socio-historical moments, from the Black Atlantic slave trade to the current crisis of the War on Terror. The goal of this class is to not only consider how stories are situated in relation to a broader understanding of racial formations, but also to understand how racialized bodies conceive of justice and freedom.

### **Cultural Foundations II: Island Literature; Professor Kristin Ross**

In this course we will examine the island as topos and literary archetype in a variety of novels, plays and films. Topics to be discussed include islands and western desire; nationalism and insularity; islands and utopian fantasy; femininity, exoticism, and colonialism. The first half of the course will focus on canonical western texts (Homer to H.G. Wells); the second half will primarily examine 20th century cultural production from the Caribbean.

### **Social Foundations II: Introduction to Media Studies; Professor Aurora Wallace**

This course introduces students of media studies to some of the issues and theories that have been central to the study of mediated forms of communication. It will examine the factors that influence the media and, in turn, examine the influence of the media on prevailing attitudes, values and behaviors. Students will be expected to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various media theories and to arrive at some thoughtful conclusions regarding their own theoretical preferences.

## **Spring 2016**

### **Writing II: Forms of Change; Professor Gabriel Heller**

At heart, every piece of strong writing enacts a transformation—a transformation of chaos into form, experience into language, isolation into communication; a transformation in our way of thinking, seeing, understanding. All strong writing is about change. This is a course for students interested in exploring the forms of change that writing and reading make available to us.

Over the course of the semester, we will work hard to become stronger communicators and critical thinkers. We will practice different forms of the essay—from the autobiographical, to the argumentative, to the critical—and think deeply about the ways in which writing can help us express ourselves with greater power and open up more reflective space in our lives to facilitate growth and change. We will read a broad range of top-notch professional writers, who will challenge and inspire us on our own paths. Students will be expected to complete three essays, a variety of writing exercises, and an ongoing reflective journal.

### **Environmental Systems Science; Professor Andrew Bell**

A comprehensive survey of critical issues in environmental systems science, focusing on: human population; the global chemical cycles; ecosystems and biodiversity; endangered species and wildlife; nature preserves; energy flows in nature; agriculture and the environment; energy systems from fossil fuels to renewable forms; Earth's waters; Earth's atmosphere; carbon dioxide and global warming; urban environments; wastes; and paths to a sustainable future. This course will cover a very significant amount of demanding material. This course will be challenging, and students should expect a steep learning curve.

### **Cultural Foundations I: Political Theology; Professor George Shulman**

“Political theology” is the study of how faith shapes politics. It is readily apparent that the meaning of a scripture or of a faith is not self-evident, but requires interpretation, and as a result, people who profess faith in the same god or scripture still practice that faith very differently. This is manifest in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. At the same time, the concept of “faith” denotes not only faith IN a specific doctrine or belief about the sacred or the divine, but a form of life, a set of habitual practices and an orientation to living. As “political theology” thus signals the bonds between faith and life, so we will trace the bonds relating faith to politics. In the first half of the semester we will focus specifically on the Hebrew Bible and Christian gospels, reading slowly and out loud to see how “The Bible” contains stories and texts that provoke opposed interpretations with radically different implications. Then we explore how modern commentators have analyzed this whole history of interpretation, worldly practice, and conflict, as they argued about faith, nihilism, modernity, and democracy. In the final weeks, we will focus on the role of Biblical texts and broadly Biblical ideas in American politics, specifically regarding opposition to slavery and racial domination. texts include: the Hebrew Bible, the Christian "New Testament;" selected readings by Machiavelli, Rousseau, Marx, and Kierkegaard, as well as Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* and Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* in their entirety. Readings will also include texts central to civil rights politics the United States.

### **Writing II: Working; Professor Chinnie Ding**

Visible and invisible, lonesome and collaborative, inspired and endured, work makes and maintains the world we live in. To learn about work is to learn how most people spend most of the day, securing means, chasing dreams, existing in direct or indirect relation to other people. How do we come to choose the work we do, and how to assess and redress the inequalities that often accompany the division of labor? What are the ethical and economic relationships that connect us to the faraway strangers, or familiar faces we greet everyday, whose work maintains our ways of daily life, or whose lives our work affects? How have artists and writers depicted working people, and in what ways does creative work fit into or fall outside the economy at large? How has work structured our beliefs about money, status, and self-actualization, and how has it shaped our experience of time? Through topics such as globalization, migration, slavery, and unemployment, this course explores the challenges that work has posed to political thought, political action, and aesthetic representation alike. Readings spanning fiction, oral history, poetry, philosophy, and cultural criticism will be supplemented by films and artworks.

### **Summer 2016**

### **Cultural Foundations II/III: History and Memory in the Early Modern Atlantic World; Professor Laurie Woodard**

History and Memory in the Early Modern Atlantic World explores the history, memory, and representation of enslavement and abolition in the Atlantic World, circa 1500 to 1888. The key questions we are posing are: how do we recover the unrecoverable and how do we remember the “unrememberable?” We will consider the history of enslavement in the Atlantic World, the gaps in our knowledge, the global trauma of Atlantic World Slavery, and contemporary and contemporaneous representations. Key themes include: the formation of the Atlantic World, enslavement, the transatlantic slave trade, the formation of African American cultures, the emergence of race and racism, resistance and rebellion, abolition, emancipation and the meaning of freedom.

### **Elective: Foundations of Speech Communication; Professor Piper Anderson**

In this course students will develop effective speech communication skills that will prepare them for a range of academic and professional activities where formal presentations are required. Central components of the course include generating topics, organizing ideas for written and oral presentation, mastering elements of audience psychology, and practicing techniques of speech presentation in a public forum. Students will be required to participate in a culminating event presenting their persuasive speeches on a social topic of their choosing.

**Social Foundations III: Advanced Seminar in Urbanism; Professor Andrew Ross**

This course offers a broad survey of the history of urban and suburban development since the late-nineteenth century. It looks at some of the major movements in town planning and in housing and transportation policy, and examines several schools of thought associated with urbanism over that period of time. Suburbanization, where most Americans live, is a focus of attention, as well as environmental justice and the struggle for urban sustainability. Urban forms under scrutiny include the creation of streetcar suburbs, garden cities, greenbelt towns, master-planned and gated communities, edge cities, and global cities. The course analyzes ghetto- and barrio-formation alongside ethnic enclaves, gentrification, and the rise of neo-traditional New Urbanism.

**Elective: Interpersonal Communication; Professor Ashley Hamilton**

Communication is central to our lives. It's what makes our lives rewarding, but, done badly, causes many of our deepest hurts. In this course you will study and analyze the principle elements of interpersonal communication. We will analyze how people communicate verbally and nonverbally in a variety of personal and social contexts. This richer understanding will significantly improve the quality of our own interactions and provide a deeper understanding of ourselves.

**Fall 2016****Social Foundations II/III: What Is Cancer? History, Politics, and Experience; Professor Julie Livingston**

Across the globe an estimated 14 and a half million people will develop cancer this year. One in three Americans will die of the disease. Cancer is everywhere. It is the cause of much human suffering and also the engine of a multi-billion dollar medical, legal, and pharmaceutical industry. This course asks: What is cancer? And what do the high prevalence and devastating effects of cancer tell us about ourselves and our society? Over the semester we will pursue an in-depth study of the history, politics, and experience of cancer across a range of registers from the intimacies of the sick body to the global reach of the cancer industrial complex to the changing meanings of hope and chance in American society. Themes for the course may include: relationships of cancer to capitalism (via cigarettes, uranium, and pharmaceuticals); the race and class dimensions of environmental toxicity; bioethics and end of life care; patient activism; experiences of dying and grief. Our analysis will range across both social science and humanities approaches. Readings will be drawn from history, law, journalism, anthropology, public health, memoir etc.

**Cultural Foundations III: Machiavelli; Professor Karl Appuhn**

Often credited as the inventor of modern political science, Niccolò Machiavelli's name has become synonymous with power, ambition, and political trickery of all kinds. In this course we will get to know Machiavelli through careful study of his writings on politics, his personal letters and his theatrical play *The Mandrake Root*. We will also explore the turbulent political and social context of Machiavelli's Florence, a city-state caught in a struggle between republican rule and the autocratic ambitions of the Medici family. Through careful study of Machiavelli in his historical context we will seek a better understanding of why he is such an enduring, controversial, and important political thinker.

**Writing I: Empire at Sea; Professor Elaine Freedgood**

We will read Benito Cereno, Herman Melville's short novel of a slave mutiny on a Spanish ship in the South Pacific, and Greg Grandin's historical exploration of its background in *Empire of Necessity*, to think about the sea as a place of trade, battle, piracy, and finally, a grave. Olaudah Equiano's controversial slave narrative from the late 1700s will be our second text: issues of selfhood, authenticity and the slave as sailor/merchant will surround our discussion of this text, which has been read as an autobiography, a novel, a conversion narrative, an ethnography, and a travelogue. We will read theoretical, critical, historical, biographical, and autobiographical works to think about how to write about fiction and history, the self and the soul. Weekly writing assignments; one 8-10 page research paper, which students will work on from a research packet that

will be provided; and a final personal essay of 4-5 pages. Reading and writing will be treated as processes that we are always improving and always at least somewhat frustrated about, and also delighted and surprised by what can happen between books, our thinking together about them, and the putting of pen to paper, or fingers to computer keys.

### **Writing I: Stories of Racial Formations; Professor Julia Mendoza**

There are many ways to express yourself: through memoirs, autobiographies, poems, letters, diaries, and even tattoos. In this course, we will ask ourselves what it means to not only write one's own story, but to also be thoughtful to the sensitive task of writing someone else's story. This class will explore the importance of telling stories in order to understand how stories can illuminate our understanding of social conditions. Accordingly, we will seek to read stories along relative interdisciplinary scholarship in order to understand how the power of a narrative can be used for thinking about broader considerations of racial formations. With a focus on story telling, the reading for this course will specifically survey literature that examines how different people understand processes of racialization throughout various social and cultural histories. The goal of this class is to not only consider how stories are situated in relation to a broader understanding of racial formations, but also to understand how racialized bodies conceive of justice and freedom.

### **Spring 2017**

### **Social Foundations III: Criminalization and Its Discontents; Professor Chase Madar**

This class will study the increasing use of criminal law and its institutions—police, prosecutors, prisons—to enforce social order in the United States, with an eye to alternative forms of social regulation. The class will examine individual spheres of everyday life colonized by criminal law (education, mental health, drug and alcohol use, sexuality, immigration, family life, the economy) and look at demonstrably effective alternatives to our punishment-heavy social order. We will also look at on a thematic level, looking at the historical and cultural currents of racism, settler-colonialism and Puritanism that have brought us to our present moment of world-historical mass incarceration.

### **Elective: Leadership Skills; Professor Dolly Chugh**

Leadership Skills will focus on the personal, interpersonal, and group skills needed to effectively inspire trust and motivate action in others. The emphasis will be on practice and skill development.

My hope is that you will leave this course with ...

- A view of leadership that is grounded in behaviors, not titles or jobs or rank
- A clearer sense of who you are and your own approach to leadership
- Concrete tools you can practice and utilize beyond this course
- A lifelong learning approach to future situations you encounter

### **Social Foundations I: The Right to the City: Urban Struggles in a Globalizing World; Professor Gianpaolo Baiocchi**

The world is very rapidly becoming urban. By 2030, the United Nations projects three out of five people on the planet will live in cities, many of them in the projected forty-one "megacities" with populations greater than 10 million to be in existence at the time. In contrast, in the 1950 less than one-third of the world population was urban, and there were only two megacities. This course explores the urban question currently facing large cities in the United States and beyond. After an introduction to these trends and to contemporary debates in urban theory, the course turns to case studies in the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Compared to just twenty years ago, large cities are more interconnected (and subject to more complex governance arrangements), more unequal, more subject to volatile financial investments, and more environmentally vulnerable. At the same time, cities have been home to important experiments in urban democracy. The study of contemporary cities is brimming with exciting stories of political struggles for land, for justice, for racial

equality, for political voice, and for survival. This course explores both the changes facing urban residents and the responses they have developed.

### **Cultural Foundations II: Value of Life; Professor Michael Ralph**

This course examines ideas and practices that have shaped how we think about the value of life. We will focus our discussion on the value of a human life, specifically the way that competing notions of value shape our understanding of human and civil rights. But, we will also consider systems of dehumanization that make it difficult to disentangle the rights of human beings from animals. We will also consider the value of priceless resources, like “nature,” or “the environment.” In fleshing out these considerations, we will discuss moments like Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, when the monetary value of human beings in relation to nature is a matter of profound importance. In considering protocols used to inscribe and regiment the value of life, we will consider the pivotal role of actuarial science, crime statistics, and insurance in the context of slavery, colonialism, war, and terrorism.

### **Summer 2017**

### **Social Foundations II: Introduction to Media Studies; Professor Aurora Wallace**

This course introduces students of media studies to some of the issues and theories that have been central to the study of mediated forms of communication. It will examine the factors that influence the media and, in turn, examine the influence of the media on prevailing attitudes, values and behaviors. Students will be expected to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various media theories and to arrive at some thoughtful conclusions regarding their own theoretical preferences.

### **Writing II: Utopia, Dystopia, and Political Theory; Professor Anthony Galluzzo**

Utopia—literally “no place”—and dystopia are all over the place these days. From the utopian chants of “another world is possible” taken up by insurgent protest movements, such as Occupy and Black Lives Matter, to the dystopian visions of zombie apocalypse that dominate popular culture, radical change (for better or worse) is on our minds. Why? And what is the relationship between these visions of the human future and a present characterized by environmental collapse, stagnant capitalism, and political turmoil? We will address these questions by looking at utopian and dystopian literature past and present in terms of the political and social questions this literature seeks to answer. This course aims to introduce you to a range of academic writing skills and strategies—argument and argumentative summary, rhetorical analysis and strategy, close reading and literary criticism—through an immersion in different discourses or genres of writing: literary, philosophical, political, and polemical. In keeping with these course aims, students will be required to work in a variety of forms over the course of the semester— which will include informal writing, structured group presentations, journal entries, and individual presentations in addition to three formal written assignments and the requisite drafts.

### **Not-for-credit: Creating a Publication; Professor Alyson Paty**

Students serve as contributors to and editors of a new print journal. Students who participate as contributors will write original poems, stories, and/or essays; engage with contemporary literature as possible prompts and models; read their peers’ work and make suggestions; and hone their writing for publication through multiple revisions. Students who also wish to participate as editors will become familiar with all aspects of the publishing process, from establishing an editorial vision to production. Editors will analyze the form and content of existing print journals, and then determine editorial and design elements for their own publication. Editors will give feedback to a designer and will copy edit and proofread using a style guide. The semester will culminate in a printed volume.

**Writing I: America, A Place; Professor Sara Franklin**

What is America, really? A dream? A symbol? Or merely a collection of cities and country, mountains and coasts? In this course, we will explore narratives of America through a number of genres, including journalism, fiction, personal essay, poetry, film and television. How do Americans of various ages, races, creeds and socio-economic and geographic backgrounds view their America, both past and present? How do they view the America of "the other"? And how do those who hail from outside American borders see this place when they arrive here, seeking to understand and belong? Students will write about their own America as well as the America of "the other," and will also practice analyzing and critiquing the work of others. Class time will be devoted to short writing exercises, discussing assigned readings and viewings, and group writing workshops. Students will complete several writing assignments over the course of the semester, choosing one piece to workshop and revise as a final assignment for submission to the PEN Annual Prison Writing Contest.

**Environmental Science; Professor Drew Bush**

A comprehensive survey of critical issues in environmental systems science, focusing on: human population; Earth's waters; Earth's atmosphere ;the global chemical cycles; energy flows in nature; humans and global change; ecosystems and biodiversity; endangered species and wildlife; energy systems from fossil fuels to renewable forms; urban environments; wastes; and paths to a sustainable future. This course will cover a very significant amount of demanding material. This course will be challenging, and students should expect a steep learning curve.

**Elective: Devising Social Justice Theatre: A Practice and Reflection; Professor Ashley Hamilton**

In this course we will lay a foundation of knowledge through a close and thoughtful read of several "theatre for social change" texts including looking at various case studies of theatre that has been created in oppressed spaces, with marginalized communities - including others prisons, slum communities, war zones, etc. We will be looking at how theatre can be used to share stories and create change. Simultaneously, we will be working on creating our own process - as an ensemble in class - to write our own play about the stories you want to tell. I will lead you through a playwriting/creation process around the theme of prison, rehabilitation and re-entry. You will be asked to write creatively (fiction and non-fiction) and to participate on your feet with the group to create new material from scratch. We will then "produce" the play through a rehearsal process and finish the course with performing the play at Wallkill and writing reflective papers on our process. This course offers an opportunity for you to explore and share your own thoughts about prison and re-entry in a creative, unique way - while opening up a dialogue with your classmates and community about issues that matter to you. No previous performance or "theatre" experience is necessary.