

Spring 2025 Humanities Colloquia



The History of Anti-Semitism

Michael Levin

HONOR 350 – 001

TTh 2:00pm – 3:15pm

Why do people hate Jews? Is anti-Semitism different from other forms of prejudice? And what does it mean to be Jewish in the first place? In this colloquium we will explore the historical roots of these questions, using various primary sources as a springboard for discussion. We will start in Biblical times, and cover such topics as the Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust, and events in modern America. There will be guest lectures from other professors in the History Department, who will bring their own expertise and experiences to the class. The emphasis of the course will be on discussion, with a final project to be determined.

Roman Construction: Design, Materials, Process

Elisha Dumser

HONOR 350 – 002

TTh 9:15am – 10:30am

We will study ancient Roman structures from the perspective of a humanities scholar. Both texts and structural remains serve as primary sources from which we will learn about architectural design, construction practices and building materials.

Religion East and West: The Big Questions (and Answers in Words and Art)

Paula Levin

HONOR 350 – 003

TTh 12:15 pm – 1:30 pm

We will examine the teachings of Eastern and Western Religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam - in their attempts to guide us to answers to The Big Questions: What is the meaning of life, how should I live, what happens after life, what is God. We will experience the great world of artistic expression of religious ideas through literature, virtual tours, visual media, and music. Guest lecturers will enhance our understanding of religion as it is practiced today. The emphasis of the course is on class discussion of what we experience and react to.

Humanitarian Social Media-Yes or No?

Carrie Tomko

HONOR 350 – 004

MWF 9:40am – 10:30am

Social media brings instantaneous news, information, and entertainment. Is it accurate in detail? Is it even true? Is it responsible "journalism"? Does it benefit humanity? Does it require accountability? This colloquium looks at the good, bad, and even the "ugly" of social media, studying the impact on culture.

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Hunting Witches in Early Modern Europe

Michael Graham

HONOR 350 – 005

MW 2:00pm – 3:15pm

This workshop-style colloquium will focus on one of the stranger aspects of early modern European history: the fact that the same era that included the scientific revolution and the early enlightenment also witnessed the execution of tens of thousands of people (mostly women) for the imaginary crime of witchcraft. We will start with a general survey of the witch hunt. Following that, teams of students will delve into sets of trial dossiers in an effort to figure out what was really going on in those particular cases. Finally, students will be able to get creative, either by writing and performing one-act plays on their particular cases, or else “forging” a pamphlet about their case, in the style of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tabloid-style accounts of witchcraft. This course should be of particular interest to students interested in history, literature, religion, anthropology, communications, psychology or sociology.

Are We Our Brains?

Nathaniel Blower

HONOR 350 – 006

MWF 10:45 am – 11:35 am

In this class we will discuss a number of topics related to the question: Are we our brains? The central focus of the course will be a dispute between Peter Hacker and Daniel Dennett. Hacker argues against the habit in neuroscience of treating brains as though they were people: assuming that brains think, feel, perceive, intend and do all manner of things that ordinarily we say people do, not their brains. Daniel Dennett defends the neuroscientists, claiming that Hacker pays too much attention to what we ordinarily say. As we discuss this dispute, we will touch on a number of traditionally philosophical questions about free-will, the afterlife, morality, subjectivity and more. On the more scientific side, we will discuss topics in neuroscience, computer science, mathematics, linguistics and more.

Adapting the Mystery: The Mystery of Adaptation

Matthew Wyszynski

HONOR 350 – 007

M 5:00pm – 6:30pm

The classical mystery story/novel is a genre known for its strict conventions and the obligation of the author to “play fair” with the reader. This colloquium will examine some of the works of a few canonical mystery writers (Doyle, Christie, Stout), analyze how these authors establish, reinforce, and expand the limits of the genre. We will also move on to adaptations of these well-known works—as TV shows, films, podcasts, and even board games—to study how one genre and medium is adapted to other forms. There will be class discussion, several exams, and a final project.

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Writing and Publishing Books

Jon Miller

HONOR 350 – 008

MWF 11:50 am – 12:40 pm

Do you like books? Do you dream of writing and publishing books for fun, for growth, for fame, for profit? This course will examine how your favorite books are written and published. We will study typical workflows for authoring books, and we will examine and compare the publishing process for a variety of books. We will learn about writing for publication, and how this differs from writing for pleasure or writing for a college class. And in this course we will write for publication: working with The University of Akron Press, we'll go behind-the-scenes to learn about the writing and production of a book of Akron history for the city's bicentennial in 2025. Students will write essays about Akron's history and have the opportunity to submit their essay for possible publication in the book.