FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS 2019

First-Year Seminars constitute the gateway to the K-Plan and to college life for entering students, while also serving as the foundation of the Shared Passages Program. Offered in fall quarter, First-Year Seminars are designed to orient students to college-level learning, with particular emphasis on critical thinking, writing, and speaking. In keeping with Kalamazoo College's emphasis on intercultural education, they aim to engage students in the study of significant social and historical differences. They integrate collaborative and group work, effective research strategies and discussions, all promoting active, engaged learning. They work to accustom students to modes of academic behavior likely to promote success in college, including class participation, productive approaches to assignments, visits to faculty members' offices, and awareness of support structures for K students.

First-Year Seminars are linked to academic advising, the First-Year Experience program, Upjohn Library, and the Writing Center. They create connections with the components of the K-Plan: depth and breadth in the liberal arts; learning through experience; international and intercultural engagement; and independent scholarship.

2019 DESCRIPTIONS

Note: First-Year Seminar descriptions are also available on the online course schedule. Students will choose and register for a First-Year Seminar during their registration time. Detailed information on how to search and register for courses can be found on the first-year registration website: (https://reason.kzoo.edu/advising/incoming/).

# DISSENT: SITES OF PROTEST AND RESISTANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE – DIMITRIOS PAPADOPOULOS (SEMN-101)

Dissent, in its different forms, has shaped history and continues to claim ground for theory and action, in increasingly urgent ways, in the digital age. New technologies of surveillance, discrimination, and oppression emerge and digitally enabled injustices and forms of violence and inequality, (re-) appear often continuing past legacies of colonialism and exploitation. At the same time, new sites and platforms for subversive voices and practices are created and imagined in response. In this course, we will map these forms and spaces of oppression, violence, and inequality, but also the emerging sites of protest, resistance, and disobedience. In doing so we will think about the condition - as both a mode of thinking and praxis- of being a dissident and its new dangers and possibilities in our globalized world. From the Arab Spring to the Black Lives Matter movement and from Standing Rock to refugee camps in Europe we will explore different sites and case studies to talk about, among other things, data, software and surveillance, hashtags and digital protest, new forms of activism, solidarity and mobilization, the “digital subaltern”, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial technologies and indigenous media, or alternative, counter-cartographies of neighborhoods and cities. We will engage with theoretical texts but also experiment with digital tools as a means of exploring critical concepts but also their real-life complexities and implications. By the end of the class, we will reach a deeper understanding of different forms of dissent and
disobedience and a good basis from which to think critically about digital spaces and cultures. No prior knowledge or experience with coding, software or digital tools is required.

FROM PLAYSTATION 4 TO PLATO: RECREATING THE ANCIENT PAST IN MODERN MEDIA – JOSH HARTMAN (SEMN-102)
The past does not exist. That is to say, in most cases, the past is not stable, and our ideas about it change. The goal of this class is to examine the modern media that attempt to define and transmit the ancient past and to put them in dialogue with sources from the ancient world itself. Think of any book, film, or video game about the past – does it transmit the authoritative version of what it depicts? Are you sure? Why did this particular version of the past come to be? How is the past made and by whom? Our objective is to investigate how the past is made and remade, particularly the history, culture, and mythology of ancient Greece. We will explore how the Greek world is currently being imagined across a wide variety of media (e.g. video games, film, music) and put these media into dialogue with the ancient sources that generated them. We will focus on concepts that ignited the imaginations of the ancient Greeks as well as those of modern artists, particularly mythology, epic poetry, and the life and times of the philosopher Socrates. We will discover that many of these ancient accounts are also in conflict with one another, and that modern accounts are no closer to “the truth” than their ancient ancestors. Examples of texts to be discussed include: Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey, Homer’s Iliad, Hades (by Supergiant Games), the musical Hadestown, and a modern role-playing game inspired by the Iliad.

Please note that while video games will form a part of the syllabus, you will only be required to play short parts of them. They will be made available to you on one of the computers in the K College Library.

THE ART OF PLAY – MICHAEL POWERS (SEMN-103)
“A person only plays when they are in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and they are only fully a human being when they play.” Ever since Schiller’s famous declaration about the playful essence of humankind, the notion of play has occupied a central place within the modern Western literary and critical traditions. Play—a notoriously difficult concept to define—has been variously touted as a possible key to understanding art, regarded as an action capable of prefiguring and enacting political change, and considered a crucial component in children, and adults, learning how to engage with the world. In this course, we will examine literary and critical texts, visual artworks, and popular games that challenge us to take play seriously. Key themes include: the revolutionary potential of “free play”; the crisis of language and accompanying interest in nonsense and wordplay in modernist literature and art; the social and cultural importance of toys and games; and the essential link between play and the imagination.

MIGRATION, COMMUNITY, AND SELF – JEFF HAUS (SEMN-104)
Going to college and immigrating to a new country have much in common. Moving to a new place presents many challenges. Yet, a new environment also offers opportunities for personal growth that force immigrants to reconcile “Old” with “New.” Through reading, writing, and discussion, students will seek to relate a specific episode of migration—the mass movement of over 2 million Jews from Eastern Europe to the United States between 1881 and 1914—to their own “immigration” to Kalamazoo. Along the way, the class will explore many of the universal questions raised by
relocation. Why does migration occur? What motivates people to pick up their lives and move to a new place, and what happens to them when they arrive? How does the migration experience shape their view of the world they left behind and their view of their new environment? How do immigrants reconstruct communities for themselves where none may have previously existed? Finally, how does moving to a new place shape one’s sense of self?

MUSIC AND FREEDOM – JOSH MOON (SEMN-105)
This course will interrogate the complex yet tantalizing relationship between music and freedom. What does freedom in music mean? Is liberation found in lyrics that express a challenge to oppression? Can transcendence be summoned from sound and improvisation? Are independent artists emancipated when they follow their own voice at the expense of profit and even their own fans? Has freedom been extinguished from music and replaced with a cheap illusion, as Theodor Adorno believed? On our search for answers, we’ll talk about protest, politics, aesthetics, film, identity, spirituality, and other topics as we seek a richer, more critical understanding of the sounds and songs that allow us to feel free.

FROM PLATO TO PLAYDOH: SOME OF THE GREAT IDEAS OF MATHEMATICS – MICHÉLE INTERMONT (SEMN-108)
The ancient Greeks established some of the foundations of mathematics. In particular, their contributions to the field of geometry are quite well-known – who hasn’t heard of the Pythagorean Theorem?! But mathematics didn’t stop evolving then (and no, it hasn’t stopped evolving yet!). It is a dynamic subject and the great ideas of geometry morphed into a branch of mathematics called topology. Enter playdoh. While protractors and compasses may be the tools of geometry, playdoh is a more appropriate tool for studying topology. Of course, there have been many fascinating developments in mathematics since the ancient Greeks, and we’ll be exploring several of them with an eye towards establishing some of the themes that make mathematics universal.

Note: In addition to talking about math, we’ll be doing math. You don’t have to be good at the subject to take this course, but you should like it.

HARRY POTTER GOES TO COLLEGE – AUTUMN HOSTETTER (SEMN-115)
The magical world of Harry Potter has become a cultural phenomenon, resonating with readers of all ages around the world. One reason for its wide appeal is its relatable characters and accurate portrayal of human behavior and psychology. In this course, we will apply Psychological principles to understand and analyze the behavior of the characters in the first book in the series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. Throughout the course, we will draw parallels between Harry’s experiences as he enters the magical world of Hogwarts and our own experiences as we enter college. This is a class about Harry Potter for grown-ups—perfect for those who already have familiarity (and better yet, love!) for the Harry Potter series. It is also a class about Psychology that addresses fundamental questions about human nature, how to overcome adversity, how to interact with others despite our differences, and how to be successful in college and beyond.

WHOSE HOMER? CONTEMPORARY ODYSSEYS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – ELIZABETH MANWELL (SEMN-116)
Why have a host of contemporary writers and artists chosen Homer’s Odyssey—one of the oldest “European” writings we have—as the basis of novels, plays and art designed to challenge societal
injustice and spark social change? The transformation of older artistic forms into new can also spark controversy: what does it mean to take words of the Ancient Greeks and harness them for change? Can it even be done? We’ll explore these questions first by reading a new and controversial translation of the *Odyssey*, and then by looking at a variety of ways that the *Odyssey* has been transformed by African, African-American, Asian-American, Latinx and queer artists and writers to highlight the refugee crisis, systemic racism, and sex/gender discrimination. We’ll think about the differences between reception, adaptation and appropriation, and whether these acts are ethical. In the process, we’ll witness how the power of this story of departure, abandonment and return inspires artists from Beyoncé to Junot Díaz to Romare Bearden to Alison Bechdel and beyond.

**THEATRE AND THE OTHER – C. HEAPS (SEMN-123)**

This course uses works by playwrights from around the world to study issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and intercultural communication, with a particular emphasis on the voices of the subaltern, those who have been silenced by the power structures they lived (or live) in. We will read works from Amiri Baraka, Cherie Moraga, Marie Clements, Velina Hasu Houston, and Lucienne Guedes Fahrer. While reading these plays, we will discuss ways in which theatre can help bring voices to the voiceless but also talk about how to overcome obstacles we face in the theatre creation process that inhibit our voices and those of others we try to represent.

**IN DEFENSE OF OURSELVES: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS – FARI NZINGA (SEMN-126)**

Twenty-six years ago, news broke that a nominee to the Supreme Court was facing sexual harassment charges from a former colleague named Anita Hill. After riveting senate hearings, and round-the-clock news coverage, nearly 1,600 women joined an effort to buy their way into the discourse, contributing nearly $50,000 to pay for a full-page *New York Times* ad, published November 17, 1991, called “African American Women in Defense of Ourselves.” “We will not be silenced,” they wrote. Since then, their cogent analyses and innovative forms of activism have greatly contributed to the national conversation, much as the work of African American women artists has shaped visual language and helped push the culture and the conversation forward. In this course, we will be looking at political, philosophical, visual and literary texts that explore how African American women have claimed their experience and articulated their resistance to oppression in the United States. Additionally, this course is designed to introduce participants to various ways contemporary artists and art movements, primarily in the U.S., have explored the intersection of visual representation, identity (gender, ethnic, racial, sexual) and politics, one of the most persistent themes in art since the 1960s. We will be paying particularly close attention to the visual languages and strategies deployed by Black women, and how they, both as artists and scholars, have chosen to represent themselves.

**THINKING WITH RIVERS: GETTING TO KNOW THE KALAMAZOO – MATTHEW NIELSEN (SEMN-127)**

This course introduces students to river studies and offers an opportunity to investigate the Kalamazoo. Multidisciplinary readings acquaint students with an assortment of rivers from around the world, familiarize students with various methods for analyzing rivers, and demonstrate how rivers shape interactions between humans and nature. Classroom discussions encourage students to analyze rivers comparatively and conceptualize rivers in new ways—e.g. as living entities with anatomies, lifespans, volitions, and legal rights. Research papers ask students to get to know the
Kalamazoo River. Our goal, by the end of the semester, is to be able to think with rivers, not just about them.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY - AMELIA KATANSKI (SEMN-135)
Novelist and environmentalist Wendell Berry has written, “A significant part of the pleasure of eating is in one’s accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes. . . . Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world.” And yet, in today’s world of fast, processed food, many of us have lost of our connection to where our food comes from. Is it possible to rebuild relationships between those who grow and harvest food and those who eat it and gain an accurate consciousness of the connection between plate and planet, cuisine and culture? In this seminar, we will learn about the industrial food system and explore the ways that people today are developing alternatives that use food as an instrument of social justice and a way to build strong communities. We’ll read Michael Pollan’s influential exposé The Omnivore’s Dilemma as our starting point in our exploration of food justice, but we will study this issue from a variety of books, films, and perspectives. We will talk with local farmers, community organizers, farm workers’ advocates, entrepreneurs, and anti-hunger activists and get to know the Kalamazoo community by experiencing its harvest. We will also engage in a service-learning project that will work to build and sustain the movement for just, local, and sustainable food for everyone in our community. Academic service-learning combines classroom study with real world experience, allowing students to apply what they are learning to everyday life in a way that addresses community-identified needs.

CROSSING BORDERS: AUTISM AND OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING - BRUCE MILLS (SEMN-136)
In the past two decades, the diagnosis of and attention to autism has grown exponentially. More public awareness and debate, however, does not guarantee a more complex understanding. In this class, we will explore autobiographies, essays, clinical studies, and films about or by those with autism in order to gain an informed understanding of this widely-diagnosed spectrum disorder. We will move outside the borders of the class to see students within AI (autistic-impaired) classrooms and participate in service-learning work in the Kalamazoo community. For this work, groups of students will be matched and spend time with a person on the spectrum and his or her family. In an effort to understand this way of knowing, we will consider how expectations about communication and social relationships “impair” and/or enhance an ability to live in a “neurodiverse” world. If you have a reason for wishing to take this seminar (i.e., if you are committed to developing peer-to-peer relationships across cognitive difference (whether on or off the spectrum), if you have a sibling or friend with autism, etc.), please contact Bruce Mills at bmills@kzoo.edu as soon as possible. This contact will enable me to consider specific interests or circumstances more closely and thus whether to reserve a space for you in the class. Academic service-learning combines classroom study with real world experience, allowing students to apply what they are learning to everyday life in a way that addresses community-identified needs.

SHAKES-TEEN - AMY SMITH (SEMN-139)
In this course, we’ll be focusing on how the United States has reworked Shakespeare into the teen movies of the 90’s, rock and rap music across the decades, and vlogs like “Jules and Monty.” In exploring how Shakespeare has been adapted to these radically different contexts, we’ll also be exploring the difficult issues these adaptations focus on--race, gender, sexuality, colonialism and
class. What a culture does with Shakespeare’s plays can tell you a lot about that culture; so we’ll be asking a number of questions: Why is Shakespeare so popular in the United States today? What does he mean to us? What are we doing with his plays and why? What do our adaptations of his work tell us about our own views about racism or sexism in America, for example?

**DESIGN INTELLIGENCE – CHUCK STULL (SEMN-143)**
Design can make a difference. Imagine Apple without the iPhone, the iPad, or the MacBook. Could IKEA succeed selling Chippendale knock-offs? How does Facebook differ from Instagram? Is suburban life sterile by design? This course will look at the role of design in the world around us. Our emphasis will be on features, feel and function rather than on the aesthetics of design. We will consider why some designs work well and others work poorly. We will think about how and why things are designed in particular ways. Design choices have economic and business implications. We will analyze the impact of design on retailers, marketing, land use, packages, and websites. Observing and understanding design can help us better understand the world.

**THE NEW WORLD ORDER - GARY GREGG (SEMN-155)**
The seminar will study recent analyses of the New World Order in the context of theories of “globalization,” focusing on causes of social strife and debates about what makes for a just society. It will examine the culture of the investment bankers who are the New Order’s main architects, the ideology of “neoliberalism” that is its blueprint, the fate of American workers whose jobs are disappearing, and the New World as lived by some of the two billion people in shantytowns, bidonvilles, and favelas. Students will write brief review-style essays and a case study of a city or region.

**KISSING THE WITCH – ISABELA AGOSA (SEMN-162)**
In recent years especially, there has been a wave of fairytale and folklore inspired contemporary literature. Why do we feel the need to continue to rely on these old tales? In this course, we will look at how short stories, novels and poetry have interacted with fairtales and folklore in recent years. What ancient themes get disrupted, heightened and complicated through each retelling? How have contemporary authors used fairytale and folklore to navigate current discussions of race, gender, and sexuality? In our discussions and our own creative writing we will engage these questions and, by the end of the course, we will have the tools needed to start our own mythmaking.

**GLOBAL REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS – MAX CHEREM (SEMN-167)**
People often say they are either for or against greater levels of immigration. But immigration is a broad concept. In simply saying “yay” or “nay” we neglect to address a lot of important, nuanced questions. This course examines some of these questions. What is the difference between a so-called “economic” immigrant versus an asylum seeker or refugee? If we can make such a distinction, do we owe different kinds of treatment to individuals in these categories? What happens when someone is attempting to reach another country’s territory but is stopped en route (e.g. in international waters)? How do concerns about the internal political equality between current citizens or about the preservation of public political culture impact immigration? Is it permissible for wealthy countries to encourage the immigration of doctors and nurses from poor countries—even though this will lead to a shortfall of skilled healthcare workers in poorer countries? What
tensions are created by the conflict between social and global justice as applied to immigration? We will investigate these questions and many more through readings, documentaries and discussion.

SALEM POSSESSED: THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS & THEIR LEGACIES - CHARLENE BOYER LEWIS (SEMN-168)
In 1692, the people of Salem, Massachusetts grew terrified when a small group of girls accused an enslaved woman, an impoverished woman, and a scandalous woman of bewitching them. Ultimately, twenty men and women were hung or pressed to death with stones and over a hundred others found themselves imprisoned. Historians have long considered the Salem Witch Trials a pivotal moment in American history. Countless works have offered countless reasons for the strange happenings in Salem, trying to explain why a small community in Colonial America would succumb to witchcraft hysteria long after it had died down in Europe. The Salem Witch Trials have haunted American culture. Starting in the nineteenth century and continuing into the present, writers and artists have grappled with the various meanings of the witch hunts and the persecution of innocent persons, seeing connections between “the furies of fanaticism and paranoia” of 1692 and their own time. Most famously, Arthur Miller in The Crucible used the trials to examine the persecution of alleged Communists in the 1950s. This course will examine and seek to understand the events of 1692 and the subsequent legacies of the trials in American culture through the actual documents from the trials, the writings of historians, and the imaginative works of novelists, playwrights, poets, and film makers.

LIFE WITH TWO LANGUAGES – LARISSA DUGAS (SEMN-172)
Almost half of the world’s population uses two or more languages as they go about their daily lives. In this seminar, we will explore what it means to be a bilingual or multilingual person – how this effects our ways of communicating and our perspective on the world. We will also investigate how different societies organize life with two or more languages. Topics include: code-switching, language attrition, language & identity, bilingual children, bilingual education, super-bilinguals, bilingualism & politics, the “English-only movement” in the USA, and minority languages in the USA. Yookoso -Bienvenido- Bienvenue- Hwan-yung-hahm-ni-da - Chào mừng This course is designed for students from a multilingual household or community or those whose primary residence is outside of the United States.

SLANG: A DISCUSSION OF INFORMAL ENGLISH - CANDACE BAILEY COMBS (SEMN-184)
This course is designed for students whose native language is not English. Permission required.
Slang is the ever-changing use of informal language that is reflective of culture and society. Though slang is most common in spoken language, modern dictionaries have long embraced slang and recorded its usage. Notable examples include the Oxford English Dictionary new entries of ‘vape,’ ‘selfie,’ and ‘GIF.’ In this class, we will discuss, research, and write about the informal use of slang and its role in social interactions as well as what slang represents in the lives of English speakers. We will identify the purpose of slang in a community of speakers, and how language is used to create relationships. An important distinction will be made regarding the environment of informal and formal language and how English speakers navigate the cultural requirements of spoken and written language in academic settings. Through readings, videos, discussion, and writing, we will explore the fun and function of slang.

IMAGINING POSSIBLE WORLDS: THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY - LARS ENDEN (SEMN-188)
Which story is more likely to occur in the real world: *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings*? According to Scottish philosopher David Hume, “nothing we [can] imagine is absolutely impossible.” So, since science fiction and fantasy stories seem equally imaginable, maybe they are equally possible. However, the great sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov once said, “science fiction, given its grounding in science, is possible; fantasy, which has no grounding in reality, is not.” So, maybe sci-fi stories are more possible than fantasy stories after all. This suggests a deeper, underlying question: “what does it even mean to say that something is possible?” In this course, we will explore that question—“what is possibility?”—from a philosophical point-of-view by using science fiction and fantasy stories as our guide. To do this, we will read such notable contemporary writers as Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, Michael Chabon, Ursula K. Le Guin, and T. C. Boyle. We will also watch three very weird movies and even a few episodes of *Star Trek*. We will use these experiences as the foundation for our philosophical study of possibility, which will include thinking hard about such topics as science, freedom, knowledge, God, evil, and zombies. YES, that’s right! ZOMBIES!!

**IT’S ONLY ROCK’N ROLL (BUT I LIKE IT) - SCOTT BADE (SEMN-191)**

Mick Jagger said the song “It’s Only Rock ‘n Roll (But I Like it)” was a response to the pressure he and the band felt to continually exceed their past accomplishments. Who could have imagined how rock and roll (and all of its children) would succeed, exceed and change the world? Who could have imagined what rock and roll has accomplished and what the world has accomplished because of rock and roll? In this seminar we will explore some of the fascinating relationships between current events, social, cultural and political developments, and rock music, as expressed through the music, lyrics, art, philosophy and fashion of rock and roll. Through generous listenings, viewings, readings, discussions, and, most importantly, through our writings, we will gain a well-rounded view of the history of rock music and a deeper appreciation for the complex and evolving part rock and roll has played and continues to play in the social, cultural, political and, of course, musical evolution of our lives and the world.

**BANNED: CENSORSHIP AND THE POLITICS OF ART – PATRICK KINNE (SEMN-193)**

Art is a ubiquitous part of our society, but how exactly do we define the word “art” and what do we expect from it? Some might say art is solely for aesthetic enjoyment and to make us feel good, but what happens when art becomes part of the culture wars? What social conditions drive controversy around art? This course will explore art’s seemingly unparalleled ability to outrage and offend. We will discuss and dissect a wide variety of historical cases where art has been deemed dangerous and/or objectionable. Through a variety of readings and discussions we will explore such topics as: Is censorship ever okay? What can controversies surrounding art tell us about those who are offended? And, what does being offended mean in a democratic society? In this course we will learn how to unpack the context of controversial art and self-examine our personal values and what it means to have those values challenged.

**BAD RELIGION – ALYSSA MALDONADO-ESTRADA (SEMN-195)**

In this course, we explore communities and practices that have been considered “loud,” “superstitious,” “weird,” “unorthodox,” and purportedly “satanic.” To outsiders, *bad religion* is religion that seems to straddle the lines of magic and witchcraft, and religion that does not stay in its sphere but seems to embroil itself in public space, business, and politics. This class does not argue that there is such a thing as “bad religion” but explores contestations over what constitutes “appropriate” religious practice, community, authority, and belief in 20th century and
contemporary America. We will explore groups from Scientologists, the Peoples Temple (known for the Jonestown suicides) to apocalyptic Catholics, Latinx devotions and Afro-Caribbean religions—groups that have drawn the ire of neighbors, established churches, media, and governmental authorities. We will explore how understandings of immigration, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality structured these communities and shaped the controversies that surrounded them. We will interrogate the construction of religious norms and ideas of “acceptable” religious practice across different moments in American history. Students will critically analyze primary sources and media representations—from crime television shows to documentaries—to explore how media and pop culture are operative in constructing the religious mainstream and margin in America.

MEMORIES, SECRETS, AND LIES: WRITING THE SELF – KATHRYN SEDERBERG (SEMN-196)

Why do we love to read “confessions,” watch makeover shows, read blogs, and take selfies? How do we shape the stories we tell about ourselves, and the image of self we present to the world? Is there such a thing as a “true” or “authentic” self? In this seminar you will work with memoirs, letters, a TV series, a graphic novel, diaries, and scrapbooks to explore how individuals present themselves and how they tell their life stories. We start with the genre of confessions, looking at how writers draw in their audiences by claiming to tell secrets, and “nothing but the truth.” We will discuss memory, its failures, and the ways we retrieve “lost time” in narrative. Other topics include performance and identity, censorship and autobiographical scandals surrounding authors who “broke the rules” of memoir. One week we visit the Kalamazoo College Archives and work with diaries, letters, and scrapbooks from college students 100 years ago—examining how their experiences may parallel or differ from your own. We will also visit the Kalamazoo Institute of Art to view works of self-portraiture.