TCNJ Honors First Seminar Program Offerings (Fall 2019)

Robert Anderson, "Explorations in Time and Time Travel"
Rita King, "The History of Disease"
Steffen Marcus, "Mathematical miscarriages of justice: on the use and abuse of analytical argument."
Nina Ringer, "The Persuasive Power of Recent Television Narrative"
Michael Robertson, "The Simple Life"
Felicia Jean Steele, "Conversations with Elves and Klingons: Constructed Languages"
Leeann Thornton, "Know your Food"
David Venturo, "The Beatles and Their World"
Tentative (dependent on FY Honors class size): Jodi Weinstein, "The Cambodian Genocide, 1975-1979: Experience, Memory, and Justice"

Descriptions for each can be found on the following pages.

David Venturo
"The Beatles and Their World"

The Beatles' lives and musical careers reflect profound cultural changes that took place after the Great Depression and World War II. In particular, the extraordinary transformation of this group in a decade and a half from one of many local Liverpool bands to the most influential popular music group of all time and an international cultural arbiter offers insight into the modern cultural world. With the Beatles as its focus, this seminar will explore such topics in modern cultural history as race relations, women's rights and gender issues, youth culture, counterculture and protest, mass media and public relations, as well as, of course, developments in popular music. This fall 2018 seminar celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Beatles' trip to Rishikesh, India, to meditate at the ashram of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and the fiftieth anniversary of the recording and release of the Beatles' remarkable "White Album."

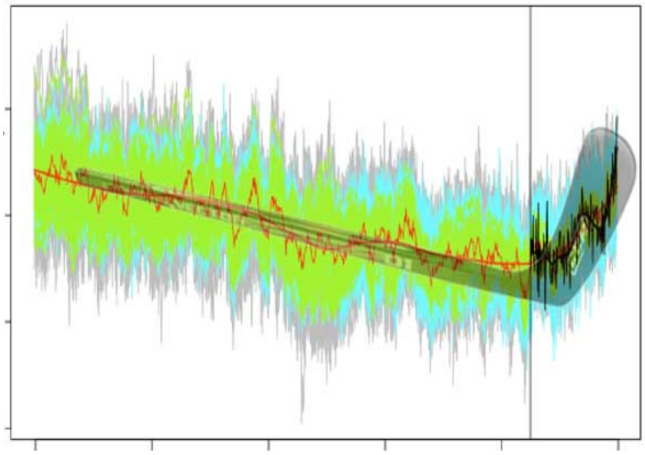
The course is firmly committed to the three foundational pillars of the Honors Program: Deep Thought and Reflection, Integrative Ways of Thinking, and Purpose to the Community. "The Beatles and Their World" epitomizes this commitment in myriad ways: it bridges many disciplines (see answer 3 below); its reading and writing assignments challenge students to digest, evaluate and analyze primary and secondary sources; its careful design as a discussion-based course (most class sessions begin with a twenty- to twenty-five minute student presentation and a five-minute student response) means that students take responsibility for course themes and directions and polish leadership skills. In addition, regular discussion teaches students to engage respectfully with each other, even when opinions and positions differ, thus encouraging tolerance and diversity. Moreover, studying a small band, from a decaying port city, that achieved a massive international following and lasting effect on the world and celebrated peace and love in an era of tumult, uncertainty, and transformation (the 1960s) anchors the students' investment in community engagement. The challenges of social and political justice that drove young people and informed the counterculture in the 1960s are still with us today. As a possible campus event or events, I am considering inviting experts on the Beatles and the 1960s to visit our campus. I have done so in the past and eagerly look forward to doing so again. Last year (thank you, Stephanie Sen!) the Beatles class took a field trip to Grounds For Sculpture to watch a fiftieth-anniversary viewing of "Yellow Submarine." This fall, I look forward to taking my class on a related Beatles' field trip. I also look forward to participating in events in Norsworthy Hall and to meeting with Honors Program faculty and staff.

The Beatles and Their World encompasses a wide range of disciplines including cultural and political history, race and gender studies, international studies (concentrating on the Beatles' visits to India, Japan, and the Philippines), music and musicology, close reading (of lyrics), and the history of technology, including, but not limited to, recording technology. The course is also research- and writing-intensive: students learn how to draft, evaluate, and revise both shorter and longer papers. Furthermore, the course is discussion-based. The writing and discussion both foster integrative ways of thinking (see question 2) and encourage students to work across disciplines and outside their comfort zone.

"The Beatles and Their World" beautifully reflects and epitomizes the values and goals of the Honors Program. It combines diversity of viewpoints and disciplines, rigorous assignments and expectations, and study of a subject that will help students to understand much more clearly and insightfully both the past and their present world. Significantly, I begin two years' of SOSA release time in fall 2019 to write a scholarly book, "The Lives of the Beatles," that encapsulates more than three decades of study and a decade of teaching the Beatles. This is an ideal time for me to teach an Honors section of "The Beatles and Their World."

Steffen Marcus

"Mathematical miscarriages of justice: on the use and abuse of analytical argument."



In this class we will analyze how basic analytical, mathematical and statistical arguments have been used and abused in times when it has really counted. We will study examples from real courtroom cases as well as contemporary science and culture. Taking a critical eye to several case studies and two popular expositions, we will work together to understand how analytical arguments are used effectively, how they are often used erroneously, and what the consequences of their use can be for justice in the world. Some of the cases we will study are famous. Many have dire consequences for the parties involved. All of them hinge on the use or misuse of mathematics.

The course leads the students through an array of discussions exploring how mathematical/statistical/analytical/data-driven arguments are used in the world, using justice as a theme to weave the various discussions together. Topics covered include: artificial intelligence/machine learning, reproducibility in experimental design in psychology, the 2008 financial crisis, unconscious bias in criminal investigations, the expected dollar value of a college degree, sexism in academic hiring practices, the science of predicting earthquakes, and the history of Ponzi schemes among a multitude of other topics.

The course is purpose built around the three honors pillars. Students are confronted daily with the central question of how justice is either missing in or can be preserved through data-driven argumentation. An integrative study of numerous disciplines and topics is used to understand this question and the contexts under which it arises. Students are given the opportunity to engage in original statistical research using data gathered from the campus community.

The students are evaluated on three research "essays" (one for each text), weekly reading responses, and one class period of discussion leadership in pairs. The word "essays" is in quotes because along with research essays, students are permitted to submit, in place of a research essay, either a piece of creative writing that expresses their argument and research, or a piece of original statistical research studying a question relating to justice in the campus community. Each course meeting runs as a seminar discussion. During the five weeks we spend on *Math on Trial,* student pairs choose case studies and prepare a 1 hour discussion leadership for that case study. In this way, approximately 10 total hours of in class discussion is completely student-lead.

The course is unique in the curriculum. It places at its center a discussion of how the "data sciences" and society are playing well together, and more importantly, how they arn't. As computational power

increases and the world moves closer and closer to a data-driven society, the topic of data and how it influences our thought needs to be emphasized in the liberal arts curriculum. Literacy in mathematical and statistical argumentation is becoming crucial, and this course provides an opening to students in the Honors program for this conversation regardless of their major.

Leeann Thornton
"Know your Food"

Food has been a central component of cultural traditions throughout history and around the world. Industrialized agriculture and globalization have provided food security and easy access to a variety of foods for many people. Technological advances, particularly in the US, have allowed a few people to produce food for many. That means that most Americans are far removed from the actual plants and animals from which our food is produced. This disconnect makes it difficult to truly know your food and understand where it came from, how it was processed, and how food production impacts your health. It also makes it difficult to understand the hidden costs of food, such as environmental and health costs. This course will explore a variety of ways that people do or do not know their food. Because food security is a global issue, this course will explore TCNJ Liberal Learning outcomes related to global issues and awareness. We will read books, watch movies, talk to farmers, and explore issues relating to food and food culture. Students will write about, present and discuss their perspectives and misunderstandings about food and food culture.

Community engaged learning is already a multifaceted component of my course. The students interview farmers, help set up a local farmers market, and work at Fern Brook Farm. I worked closely with CELR staff to communicate with community partners the objectives of the course and the ways that students need to explore food related issues in our surrounding area. The farmers help students grapple with pros and cons of local or organic food production, the farmers market helps the students see food injustices in our neighboring community and ways that people
are working hard to provide affordable healthy food. Working at Fern Brook helps the students see the importance of food-related education programs and community supported agriculture initiatives.

How is Know Your Food aligned with the TCNJ Honors Pillars, leadership, and community engagement?

The major research paper will require students to examine primary and secondary literature to explore historical and modern issues related to a specific food. Students will have freedom in the choice of the food topic and the particular issues that most impact their argument about whether a food should or should not be a major component of the American diet. Students will need to grapple with a lot of "gray area" because there is not a clear answer. Some foods are produced sustainably with respect to ethical treatment of the farmers but include a high environmental cost when they are shipped from tropical areas for our winter use. For some foods, genetic engineering comes with high costs to the farmer and the environment, while other foods altered with genetic engineering help the farmer and decrease environmental costs. The reading and other media assigned in this course empower the students to

consider many perspectives and carefully reflect on many issues related to our food production.

The readings selected for this course intentionally push students to consider strongly opposing views. I have constructed the course to get students to think about biological, environmental, social justice, global, and health issues related to food.

Know Your Food is inherently multidisciplinary. There are so many factors that contribute to understanding our food choices, that I want students to see that many disciplines are helpful for understanding the issues. I do help them understand ecological factors, basic plant growth, and research contributing to the scientific understanding. I challenge them to evaluate data and use evidence in supporting an argument. We also look at the complexities of the Green Revolution and the harm that came from America's influence on global agriculture through neocolonialism. We consider some subjective influences on food such as nostalgia, family heritage, and language. We consider connections between food choices and climate change, health issues, and privilege. I challenge my students to carefully consider their own perspective and find the truth in different perspectives from the readings, videos, and fellow students.

Felicia Jean Steele
"Conversations with Elves and Klingons: Constructed Languages"

This course explores the topic of "constructed languages"--languages deliberately constructed for literature, gaming, diplomacy, or self-edification. Students will also examine the processes used to construct innovative alphabets for languages that developed without writing systems. The study of constructed languages provides an opportunity to examine language typology--the underlying structures of all human languages. The examination of constructed languages also provides an opportunity to study the "conlang" subculture and the notion of linguistic aesthetics. Students will research the structure and history of different constructed languages and construct one of their own.

Constructed languages exist at the intersections between a number of different disciplines: linguistics and art; history and media; anthropology and politics. For the purposes of this course, ***students will focus primarily on the intersection between linguistics and media broadly construed***: literature, cinema, and television.

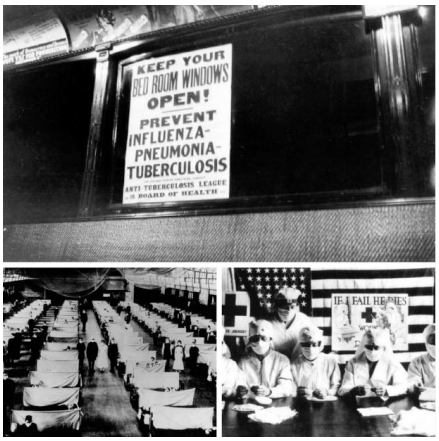
In this course, students will engage with texts written by scholars of language and by "conlangers"--practicioners who develop constructed languages for their own personal edification or for media. In addition, students will become familiar with the core terminology used in the discipline of linguistics and examine a significant amount of linguistic data so that they can learn about various language families and language types. Students will have three research exercises that they must convert into 5-7 page papers that they share with their peers: first, they must research the history and motivations of a specific "conlanger"; second, they must research the scope and reach of a specific "conlang" as it has been used by new community; third, they must write an analysis of the role of a "conlang" in the production of a piece of literature or a film. Their final project will be to construct a brief grammar, lexicon, and exemplary text

of their own "conlang" and present it to their peers. These activities require ***challenging study and deep thought*** that require the use of a variety of research techniques, including traditional library research and investigations of speech communities through the analysis of online communities (discussion boards, blogs, podcasts, and online videos).

While most of our students may have taken a couple of years of a language other than English in high school, most have not had the opportunity to study language linguistically, and many may have some reluctance to engage the topic because they associate language study with the development of fluency in that language for academic purposes. This course capitalizes on student interest in fantasy/science fiction literature and film, video games, computer science, and utopian social experiments. Students will have the opportunity to research communities of speakers who come together based on affinity and interest rather than social or familial bonds. Students will have a chance to convert their enthusiasm for popular culture into intellectual curiosity about a discipline, its history, and its practitioners. In producing their own conlang, students will have to practice ***integrative ways of thinking*** and imagine the possible uses for their language at the same time that they consider its structure.

Although students may not be able to effect change in the wider community, they will have the opportunity to bring a sense of ***purposeful commitment to the community*** into their living environment. One of the classroom activities that I will be using is a role-playing game called *Dialect: A Game about Language and How it Dies* (Thorny Games, 2018). Students will be able to lead an evening event in the dormitory around this game, sharing what they have learned about language structure and language communities with their peers.

Rita King
"The History of Disease"



We will discuss diseases over the millennia and their impact on human society. These include smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis, bubonic plague, syphilis, and the Spanish flu of 1918. Among the emerging diseases we will explore are HIV/AIDS, Ebola, SARS, and H1N1. How have we managed to eradicate smallpox and how close are we to ending the spread of polio? Current epidemics of polio and cholera will be discussed. Will the next Flu pandemic be H7N9? Are we ready? How does disease impact other areas including art and music? These and other questions will be answered in this course. The history of disease will go on, despite once confident predictions of an end to epidemics in our times. Those who now wage the heroic struggle to find elusive cures to our new plagues may find that they have more to learn from the past than had once been thought.

This course connects several disciplines. Besides the obvious science and history connection, we explore the impact of disease on the economics of a country, as well as, the art and music generated during epidemics and pandemics. Learning outcomes include:

- Students will learn the symptoms, etiology and methods of transmission and prevention of infectious diseases that have afflicted humanity throughout history and how these threats have evolved over time.
- Students will learn how societies have reacted to epidemics.
- Students will interpret historians' arguments on the history of disease
- Students will become familiar with the state of global public health throughout the ages.
- Students will see how art and music have been impacted by diseases.

- Students will see how the economy is affected by epidemics and pandemics.

Michael Robertson
"The Simple Life"

This course, centered on a counter-hegemonic ideological construct, cuts across disciplines: most notably, history, literature, economics, anthropology, and psychology.

I begin the course by giving students an excerpt from the *Prison Notebooks* of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and introducing the concept of *ideological hegemony*. That offers students a sophisticated way to think about the concept of the "American Dream" and to understand the notion of the "Simple Life" as a form of counter-hegemonic praxis. Those concepts come alive at an evening showing of two award-winning documentary films: *The Queen of Versailles*, which is about a wealthy couple's effort to built the largest private home in the U.S.; and *Tiny*, about the Tiny House movement. Along with the films, students read articles by psychologist Elizabeth Dunn on the relation between money and happiness. The films and articles engage student interest immediately and lead to profound discussion of the American Dream vs. the Simple Life.

This first unit on the simple life is titled *Shelter*. Later in the course we study *Food* – students read multiple articles on agriculture and agricultural policy – and *Clothing*, focusing on the human and environmental impacts of "fast fashion."

The course includes three book-length texts. The first is Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, the most famous and influential text in the simple life tradition, and the next is Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy*, which draws on the work of radical economists E. F. Schumacher and Tim Jackson. Last, I have students read a fictional portrayal of a simple life utopia: either Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Lauren Groff's *Arcadia*, or William Morris's *News from Nowhere*.

One of the most important and successful aspects of the course is students' semester-long independent research project. Early on, I introduce them to Annie Leonard's *The Story of Stuff*, a documentary film and online project that analyzes consumption of consumer goods as a process involving *extraction, production, distribution, consumption*, and *disposal*. Each student chooses a different food item or consumer product and writes a 3,000-4,000 word essay analyzing the *externalized costs* associated with each stage of the process and proposing how it could be more sustainably produced, distributed, consumed, and disposed of. I give their essays a real-world audience by publishing them online in a "Story of Stuff" website.

The scaffolded nature of this research assignment – I give students five deadlines over the course of two months as they craft the essay in stages – reflects my attention to student **writing**. Given the importance of writing as a form of learning, I require a brief ungraded writing assignment for every class. In addition, students write two graded essays (1,500 words each) in addition to the lengthy research essay. Each of these essays goes through a carefully guided process of pre-writing, drafting, and revision, and I meet with every student in an individual conference to discuss a draft of each of the three essays. I have found

that in their course evaluations, almost every student in the FSP comments on how much their writing improved.

Students develop their **speaking** skills throughout the semester through a series of scaffolded exercises that culminate in a seven-minute speech based on their independent research project.

I have worked with the Bonner Center to develop a community-engaged-learning activity that powerfully extends student learning. As part of the unit on food, students read multiple essays on the contemporary U.S. food system that complement Thoreau's *Walden*. Following this reading, they spend a Saturday working at Fernbrook Farm, a Community-Supported-Agriculture organic farm in Chesterfield. Their responses to the follow-up writing assignment reflect the in-depth learning this experience promotes.

Late in the semester, following students' reading of work by anthropologist Donald Kraybill, an expert on the Amish, I lead students on a day-long trip to Lancaster County, where we visit the farm of Mr. and Mrs. King, members of an Old Order Amish sect, and share a meal with them. Many students indicate on course evaluations that this is their favorite part of the class. Crossing into Lancaster County, they feel they have entered a different country, where the inhabitants speak a different language (they hear Mr. and Mrs. King speaking a German dialect with their children and each other) and have radically different values. The Kings' farm vividly embodies the concept with which we began the course: the simple life as a form of counter-hegemonic praxis.

Nina Ringer
"The Persuasive Power of Recent Television Narrative"

Many have claimed we are in a new golden age of television, or Peak TV. The Sopranos and The Wire were pioneers that have been followed by multiple recent serialized stories that have attracted film directors, actors, and writers. We have moved from the confinement of networks to cable, pay subscription services, and streaming platforms. Content is developing as quickly as technology, offering us a broader palette of more characters who look like more of us. How we engage with the stories these characters tell shows us the impact of the argument the creators are making. Focusing on the implicit visual arguments these stories make will allow us to create our own explicit written and visual arguments about them. We will explore and write about three of these series, uncovering strategies that each uses to persuade. Students will write one longer final essay on one other series of their choice. Additionally, in small groups, students will create, shoot and pitch a ten-minute pilot for their own series.

For each of the four series that we screen and discuss together, students write an essay that integrates online discussion opportunities, classroom discussion, and classroom integration of critical articles, sometime in physical manifestations, of "joining the conversation" in assessing those articles, taking the side of the author, partially joining with the author, or directly challenging the author's views. Students choose one series to explore in more depth for a final, longer essay. Students are fully responsible for the research for this project, as they are responsible for finding and assessing more articles on their own each time for each of the first three essays. Students create a short pilot in a small group, writing, directing, shooting, editing, acting, lighting, recruiting outside actors, scouting locations, and screening for a group

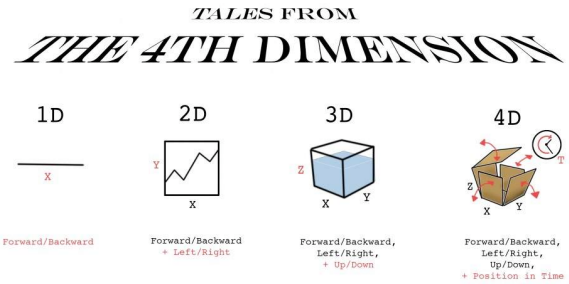
of executives from streaming services and studios to pitch the pilot for potential sale. Those executives—their classmates—must provide a rational for accepting, rejecting, or accepting with changes. This project allows students to get behind the camera to learn some of what is involved in creating pilot, which can then inform their writing; encourages collaboration on the ideas, the execution, and the presentation of the project; builds skills in selling a project, allowing students to articulate their contribution to the project through their pitch of the project.

Students in Fall 2018 were introduced to the center by Mark Eckman, Manager of Visitor Services, who was able to give them a concise but thorough overview of the purpose of the collection, its growth into events like Paley Fest, which hosts a number of writers, actors and directors in screenings and talks, and how the Center can be used for ongoing research. We were given access to a screening room where I was able to present episodes from two different series, both directed by well-known film directors, allowing students to see again the overlap of film and television, as well as an introduction to the history of television, which further grounded the students in their study of more recent narrative television. Students were then allowed to explore the media library on their own, screening episodes of their choice from the collection.

With the assistance of Raj Manimaran from the Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research, students in this FSP are paired with students from Beyond Expectations, a non-profit organization in Bordentown that focuses on training students, some of whom are in the foster care system, in media skills. This group is a perfect fit for our Public Service Announcement, designed and written in the classroom and outside of class, and executed with the students from Beyond Expectations in one full day on campus.

In reflecting on how the course aligns with the Three Pillars, the course investigates analysis of television and film, since we look at the very close alignment of recent narrative television with film, with writers, directors, actors and cinematographers from film doing excellent work in recent television. We also dip our toes into history, looking at television's beginnings, and business, as we explore the rapidly changing technology of how television is now delivered, and how we might market ideas for new series to not only studios but to streaming platforms.

Robert Anderson
"Explorations In Time & Time Travel"



What do you know about time? Does it move, or do we move in it? It is it constant or variable? Can we leave our present moment? These and many other questions are explored as we examine literature on the nature of time and time travel. Ideas and works by thinkers and writers such as Albert Einstein, H. G. Wells, Jack Finney, Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Heinlein, Stephen Hawking, Dean Koontz, and Stephen King are considered. Physics, philosophy, religion, literature and popular culture are brought to bear on considering meanings and definitions of time and their effects on human thought and consciousness.

Challenging students to provide and challenge 'diverse points of view'. The diversity in my course is not so much in the racial, gender, or cultural areas, but in the larger picture of 'how the universe works'. That is, we challenge conventional thinking about destiny, free will, and the extent to what we 'know' is about 'solid' stuff, or the product of human thought. So using time as a vehicle, we look at how things come to

be and the extent and/or manner in which they are 'natural' phenomena. Sounds basically philosophical and if so I plead guilty. But the philosophy is overlaid (or undergirded) by a kind of basic sociological approach– namely that cultural (and historical) conditions contribute to what we understand as real. The model of quantum 'reality,' including granularity, indeterminacy, and rationality not only contributes to this 'diversity' but it also illustrates an 'uncanny' connection between the sociological and physics view of things.

Students are highly engaged throughout the course in that they are all 'champions' of particular course readings in which they lead the class (and the instructor) through detailed analyses of the various readings. They debate such matters as destiny, free will, and the relations between cosmology and various religious perspectives. This provides a high level of student leadership and requires them to work in a collaborative manner.

As the course is intentionally interdisciplinary in its nature, students must read through various kinds of writing. Plus, there are eight required books on the reading list. Most students use a variety of technologies in shaping their oral presentations.

While my approach is embedded in a 'classic' sociological approach, we do extensive work in theoretical physics and we also dabble in philosophy, much history, cosmology of course, and what else seems to fit and be important. It is a liberal learning course and it 'intends' to bring students to an understanding of the relations among academic disciplines to each other and to 'ordinary' life, etc. We have a class 'motto': *Ubi dubium ibi libertas* (Where there is doubt there is freedom).

This course is suitable for the honors program because it stretches students in such matters as: course load, breadth of interests, 'rigor' required to grasp interconnected components, stretching beyond 'taken for granted' kinds of subjects, and a close appraisal of our one, universal 'possession'– time (if there is such a thing).

Jodi Weinstein
"The Cambodian Genocide, 1975-1979: Experience, Memory, and Justice"

On April 17, 1975, communist Khmer Rouge forces seized power in the Southeast Asian nation of Cambodia. During their four-year regime, nearly 1.5 million Cambodians perished. Some died of starvation and overwork as the Khmer Rouge attempted to create a utopian peasant society. Others were executed because Khmer Rouge officials deemed them "enemies of the state"– namely individuals with advanced education and skills. Nearly forty years later, the Cambodian nation continues to struggle with the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge era. In November 2018, two of the highest-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders were convicted of genocide and other crimes against humanity. Several other officials died before they could stand trial, and many others will never face justice.

The genocide in Cambodia received little attention at the time and still remains poorly understood. This FSP examines specific events and experiences in Cambodia while emphasizing their deeper historical significance and their enduring relevance in today's world. We will begin with an overview of the

political, historical, and cultural factors that contributed to the genocide. Next, we will embark on an in-depth exploration of the genocide itself. We will examine memoirs, film, and interdisciplinary scholarship to gain insight into the perspectives of survivors and perpetrators alike. We will read several survivors' memoirs, such as Luong Ung's *First They Killed My Father* (we will also watch the film of the same title), in order to give students a sense of what it was like for young children to live under the Khmer Rouge. We will also explore materials that help us understand why some Cambodians joined the Khmer Rouge, and why some of them killed. In short, we will seek to understand the roots of hatred and brutality. We will read a biography of Kang Guek Eav (a.k.a. Comrade Duch), who oversaw Tuol Sleng (S21), a prison where approximately 12,000 Cambodians were tortured and executed. We will also watch the 2010 film, *Enemies of the People*, which chronicles a Cambodian journalist's efforts to get inside the mind of an aging former Khmer Rouge leader. The film presents viewers with several uncomfortable juxtapositions: We know that this man oversaw the death of millions, yet we see him playing happily with his grandchildren. The film also shows villages where Khmer Rouge survivors coexist peacefully with former Khmer Rouge officials and prison guards.

Ultimately, we will address a broad range of global issues: What are the causes of genocide? Why do genocides continue to occur around the world? How does a society achieve justice, closure, and reconciliation in the aftermath of genocide? Can the international community as a whole--or can we as individuals--do anything to prevent future genocides?

This course is suitable for the Honors Program because it encourages cross-cultural and interdisciplinary thinking. It will provide an intellectual challenge while fostering empathy and a sense of global responsibility. Ultimately, it will invite students to become key contributors in a global dialogue on the causes of genocide, and possible ways to prevent it in the future.