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difficult d!ialogues

course offerings
fall 2009

Can we learn to engage each other on issues on which we differ, and listen respectfully for what it is that we can learn – about the subject, about others and ourselves, about our common values? Can we learn to think critically and with discernment about contentious issues? Can we put aside our assumptions, and sit with the discomfort and creative potential of not-knowing?

The Difficult Dialogues program at Clark is a campus-wide initiative aimed at developing skills and awareness of dialogue, and encouraging engagement across differences in both our classrooms and community. Clark was one of 27 institutions originally selected by the Ford Foundation, from 730 colleges and universities nation-wide, to participate in this initiative.

In this sixth semester of DD courses, seventeen courses with an emphasis on dialogue will be offered. These courses will approach the process of dialogue in a variety of ways and across a number of disciplines, and will relate as is relevant to our dialogue symposium programming.

dialogue seminar

IDND 010 (section 1) The Dialogue Seminar: Visioning the New Sarah Buie, DD Fellows

If you want an opportunity to deepen your understanding and experience of dialogue, consider taking the Dialogue Seminar offered as part of the Difficult Dialogues Initiative. This half-credit course is led by a team faculty members paired with experienced DD fellows. The course will include a small set of readings on dialogue, but will focus on in-class dialogues that draw from the experiences and issues raised by the public events in the Difficult Dialogues fall symposium, Visioning the New: Economy, Governance and Higher Education. Attendance at roughly one DD symposium event per week will be a requirement of the class.

IDND 010 (section 2) The Dialogue Seminar: Israel, Palestine and The United States Kristen Williams, DD Fellows

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains at the forefront of the study of international relations. The course examines the roots of the conflict and attempts at establishing peace. The role of the United States in promoting a resolution to the conflict will also be discussed. As a DD seminar, how can the practice of dialogue help us better understand this conflict? Attendance at DD symposium events during the fall semester will be required.

first year seminars

Making a Difference | Mary Ellen Boyle, Micki Davis

This course will offer a scholarly perspective on "making a difference," defined as the many varieties of social change ranging from philanthropy to political activism. Students will analyze how others have made a difference in a range of times and places, and will learn skills to make a difference" at three levels: in their lives, on the Clark campus, and in the city of Worcester. This is a multi-disciplinary course in which readings will be derived from the fields of sociology, psychology, community development, urban studies, education, social policy, and political science. Themes of personal growth, leadership, collaboration, and activism will be explored. Students will complete a structured service placement in a neighborhood agency. The concluding assignment will be an examination of the social change approach used by the neighborhood agency. Fulfills the Values Perspective requirement.

dialogue courses

ARTS 208 Typography

Sarah Buie

Study of the informational and expressive dimensions of typographical language. The history and technology of type is considered, with an opportunity to handset metal type, as well as do extensive work on the computer. Applications to a variety of problems, including letterhead, poster and publication design.

COMM 101 An Introduction to Communication and Culture

Sarah Michaels

This class is the introductory course in the Communication and Culture major and minor. As a broad, 'entry-level' survey, it is a foundation for the study of (human) communication as a cultural process. We will read many of the key theorists in fields relating to communication studies, and examine a range of theories and models of communication with the purpose of understanding the systematic properties of communication, the differences and similarities between interpersonal and mass communication processes, and the ways in which the concept of culture is integrally related to communication.

The goal is to understand how 'meaning making' and the communication of meaning occurs – across a wide range of contexts. We will explore a variety of perspectives: psychological, anthropological, sociological, sociolinguistic, technological, aesthetic, cinematic, semiotic, scientific, and cultural studies points of view and methodologies. This class, which concentrates on the 'discourse' stream of the major, will place a particular emphasis on how language (talk and text) and culture work to create access, influence, and power in the world.

The course has a Difficult Dialogues designation and we will, in the course of the seminar, negotiate and reflect on what it means to confront controversial issues, engage with others from different cultures and economic backgrounds, and explore questions such as, 'How is it in a democracy, the few can dominate the many?' While engaging these controversial issues, we will be working together to create a climate and culture of rigorous and critical but respectful dialogue. The fall DD symposia events will be an integral element of this class, and students will be required to attend and participate.

EN 103 The Sustainable University
Jennie Stephens

Urgency for the societal need to promote a sustainability transition is increasing as risks associated with climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and other types of environmental degradation are increasingly threatening human well-being in complex ways. This course explores both the theory and practice of sustainability and sustainable development by examining the role of the university in promoting a sustainability transition. The role of universities in society involves more than providing formal course instruction for enrolled students; universities are also critical places of discovery and innovation, centers for political discourse, and catalysts for political action. This course focuses on sustainability at the university because institutions of higher education have unique potential to catalyze and/or accelerate a sustainability transition. In addition, the focus on the university provides a lens for examining how institutions with complex structures make a myriad of decisions with environmental consequences, a context for considering the broad role of education in sustainable development, and a framework and perspective with direct and personal connections for students to consider the challenges of promoting sustainability.

In addition to reading and writing about the challenges of sustainability and the role of the university in promoting sustainable practices in society, students engage directly with the challenges associated with promoting sustainable behavior and fostering institutional and social change through group projects right here on the Clark campus. The primary goals of this course are for students (1) to gain knowledge of the complex challenges and opportunities associated with promoting a sustainability transition, (2) to understand the concept of sustainable development with its social, environmental, and economic components, (3) to gain skills, insights and confidence to develop their own capacities as change agents, leaders and catalysts for generating institutional and individual commitment to social change for sustainability, and (4) to participate in and contribute to Clark University's ongoing sustainability efforts. An integral part of the course will involve contributing to the development and implementation of Clark University's commitment to transitioning to climate neutrality, and enhancing community dialogue about the societal challenges of climate change.

ENG 275 Fictions of Empire
Steven Levin

This seminar provides an introduction to contemporary global literature in English. The writers we will discuss come from very different backgrounds – from South Asia to Africa to the Caribbean – but they are all engaged with making sense of the legacy of colonialism and the emergence of something we might call global culture. These texts are exciting stylistically because of their inventive uses of language and narrative structure: their experiments with form capture the sense of new nations coming into being, new approaches to cultural tradition, and the new status of English as a global language. The stories they tell entertain while also providing original perspectives on histories of empire marked by political struggle, violent conflict, and global inequalities. Our readings will range from mid twentieth-century writings from the so-called "Third World" that tried to imagine a "third" alternative to the dualistic parameters of the Cold War, to more recent works that challenge and revise colonial conceptions of race and nation, gender and sexuality, and ethnicity and cultural difference. Topics we will consider include: the idea of the "postcolonial"; the relationship between literature and political resistance; the transformation of metropolitan English writing and language; "subalternity" and problems of representation; writing from a position of displacement, exile, and diasporization; and the persistence of colonial narratives in contemporary forms of imperialism.

GEO 179 Globalization, Environment and Justice

Dianne Rocheleau

Integrates ecology and political economy from local to global scale through case studies. Starts from a view of people in environmental "hot spots," following links to world economy and planetary ecosystems. Explores connections of international environmental and economic policy with everyday realities and possible ecological futures of people from the Amazon rain forest to the streets of Worcester.

GOVT 216 Comparative Environmental Politics

Paul Posner

Over the course of the past several decades environmental degradation and sustainability have assumed major significance as public-policy issues, both within nations and internationally. However, given the transnational nature of many environmental problems, addressing such problems has proven to be particularly complex and difficult. This course examines the complex nature of environmental policy from both an international and comparative perspective. We will examine the specific challenges that the international nature of environmental problems poses for policy makers. We will also compare different national experiences and strategies for addressing environmental issues with an eye toward identifying the factors, which impede or facilitate success in promoting effective environmental policy.

GOV 290 US-Latin American Relations

Paul Posner

This course examines the historical and contemporary relations between the United States and Latin-American countries. After a brief historical overview of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, we will explore various themes central to U.S.-Latin American relations. Topics include the impact of U.S. hegemonic rule; revolutionary challenges to U.S. hegemony; economic relations, including Dollar Diplomacy and NAFTA; defending national security, democracy and human rights; the "war on drugs"; and the Latin Americanization of the United States. While we will seek a deeper understanding of common patterns in U.S.-Latin American relations, the course will also emphasize the uniqueness of national experiences.

HIST/HGS 234/334 Racial Thought and Body Politics in Modern Europe (1500-2000)

Professor Thomas Kühne

The category of "race" has been used since about 1500, when Europe's Renaissance met with the exploration of "other" human beings in different continents. It served to create difference and to naturalize inequality among groups of people based on ideas and images of their bodies. However, the confrontation between Europeans and non-Europeans had a deep impact on identity construction in Europe itself. The seminar explores the relation between notions of race and the social construction of the body. It focuses on Europe and the European encounters with non-European peoples in the wider World, the scientific foundation of modern racism in the Enlightenment, with Social Darwinism and Hygienic Movements around 1900 and pays special attention to racist body politics that led to the Nazi extermination policies. The relation between anti-Semitism and other traditions of racism will be a core issue of the seminar. The seminar concludes with a look on present tendencies of globalizing European body norms and their racial roots.

These topics will be explored in a consequently dialogic way. The seminar confronts students with three axes, on which the “other” is negotiated—the historical opposition between then and now, the cultural gap between dominant and suppressed categories of distinction (“race”), and the anthropological opposition between mind and body. Each axis asks students for running a dialog between what is familiar and what is strange. Students have to play the “devil’s advocate” to learn looking at things from different points of view.

IDCE 304 International Comparative Community Development

Miriam Chion

Cities and communities have become more interconnected through global networks of production and information, blurring the boundaries between the so-called developed and developing worlds. Pockets of extreme poverty are found in the wealthiest cities and pockets of luxurious housing are found in the poorest cities. Similar development challenges take place across international boundaries, such as the inability to house growing populations, proliferation of global consumption fueled by international media, or scarce water resources. In this context of increasing global interaction and similar development challenges, communities have developed distinct places based on their local institutional and economic resources.

This course explores how communities are created and transformed through specific case studies from the Americas, Asia, and Europe. It includes discussions on urban space in an era of information technology, major community development trends, and planning approaches. This course seeks to provide (1) general knowledge on the social processes that shape spatial patterns and (2) practical tools for the analysis of communities as intersections of multiple social processes. Fulfills Global Perspective.

ID 30202 Land Use Seminar

Miriam Chion

Land use decisions are central to the development opportunities of any community. Those decisions are embedded in very complex political and social processes that defined the economic value of land. We will explore the complexities of these processes to understand how various communities define and appropriate land and how residents, workers, developers, and government officials shape development through land use decisions.

This seminar proposes to advance current land use knowledge through two major tasks. First, we will engage in a thoughtful examination of recent research and major influential studies on land use and space from a multidisciplinary perspective. Second, we will work on the construction of new knowledge through reflections and dialogue. We will address three major questions: How is the use of land related to concepts of space? How are land use decisions related to the development processes? How are the physical qualities of land embedded in economic, social, and political processes?

MGMT 100 Introduction to Management

Barbara Bigelow

This course introduces students to basic management skills and the context in which they are applied. The course involves considerable interaction between the professor and students, and among students, because the practice of management is about people working with, listening to, and respecting people who have different backgrounds, experiences, and opinions. As a result, the learning is based on a combination of dialogue, discussion, experiential exercises, and community service learning.

PHIL 105 Personal Values

Wes DeMarco

A philosophical study of some fundamental human value concerns. Students learn some important moral theories and methods used to reason philosophically about moral questions.

PHIL 270 Philosophy of Law

Judi DeCew

Examines fundamental questions in philosophy of law, such as: What is the source and purpose of law? What is the nature of judicial reasoning, and is it subjective or governed by some set of principles? How do alternative theories of law explain rights, duties, liability, responsibility and so forth? What is the relationship between liberty, privacy and justice? Readings include selections from legal theory and a variety of contemporary court decisions.

SOC 263 Deviance

Professor Patty Ewick

Why are some behaviors, differences and people stigmatized and considered deviant while others are not? This course examines theories of social deviance that offer answers to this and related questions such as: How and why are behaviors designated as deviant? How do individuals enter a deviant lifestyle? And how do various social statuses, such as sex, affect the incidence, type and responses to deviant acts?