**Spring 2010 USIE Seminars**

**Anthropology**

**Brain, Mind, and Human Experience**

*Student Facilitator: Raymond Beyda | Faculty Mentor: Dario Nardi*

In this seminar we will explore the history of our understanding of the brain and mind, its basic structure and physiology, and the way these structures have evolved over time. Along the way we will discover how our understanding of this organ has changed as new technologies have allowed us to see deeper into our thoughts and actions. In addition to learning what the brain is made of, we will explore the concepts of mind and behavior. What makes us human? Where do self awareness and consciousness reside? The majority of our discussions will be largely devoted to case studies which will illustrate how mysterious and how amazing the human brain and mind are. From alien hands to romantic love, we will explore how human experience is, at least in part, sculpted by the circuitry of our brains.

**Communication Studies**

**The Spin Zone: Cable News in Contemporary America**

*Student Facilitator: Gon Carpel | Faculty Mentor: Tim Groeling*

In a few short years, cable news has gone from nonexistence to what is arguably the most influential medium on our national conversation on politics and society as a whole. To better understand these influences, we will begin by establishing a strong foundation of media theory, economic analysis, and major modern media criticisms. Building on that foundation, we will then conduct an in-depth examination of Fox News, MSNBC and CNN. We will look at each of these three outlets' background information, examining their history, ownership, current lineup, nature of their coverage, key on-air personalities, as well as the top off-air personalities. Finally, students will apply what they have learned by conducting a content analysis of the news presented on a specific outlet.
Business Strategies for Journalism in the Internet Age

Student Facilitator: Corinne Crockett | Faculty Mentor: Tim Groeling

This seminar will inspire structured discussion of the future of the journalism industry in the Internet age, focusing on the “selling” of news. You will examine the newest models or the industry and their corresponding critiques. You will critically analyze these models and evaluate their viability in real-world application.

Economics

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is: An Economic Look at Food Systems in America

Student Facilitator: Neha Bazaj | Faculty Mentor: Matthew Kahn

Food production and consumption patterns in the U.S. have changed more rapidly in the past 100 years than at any other point in history. Farms that once produced a variety of crops are now dedicated to a single crop, and home-made food is no longer the only option. The advent of industrial agriculture, changing lifestyles and growing incomes are just a few of the factors commonly cited for these changes. The next 50 years are likely to be just as tumultuous as the “food movement” encourages Americans to find their way back to the land. This course aims to examine America’s food system through an economic lens; how changing constraints, changing incentives and the desire for efficiency have shaped the current food system.

English

A Rose by Any Other Name: Representing the Wars of the Roses through Literature

Student Facilitator: Anna Wylie | Faculty Mentor: A.R. Braunmuller

In this seminar, students will look at retellings of famous battles as well as character assessments of the main players in the Wars of the Roses, and how these accounts change depending on who is in power when they are written. Students will also discuss the power of literature as state propaganda, and how it affected the perceptions of these events when they were written as well as their current influence on modern understanding of this time period. Furthermore, students will consider how to determine which writings are accurate and which are not, or even if this task is possible.
Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales and Folk Tales Across Cultures

Student Facilitator: Nancy Giang | Faculty Mentor: Christopher Mott

Why do we read fairy tales and folk tales as children? Why have they been able to withstand the transience of oral and literary tradition? Why do we still cherish these stories as part of our heritage? This course studies these fanciful stories in order to reveal the literary and cultural reasons for their permanence despite iterations and translations. We will read selected works from various cultural traditions which will be translated into an English version that still maintains the lexical integrity of the original pieces, in order to facilitate discussion and comparison of them. The seminar is, however, not focused solely on analyzing stories of previous eras, but is also designed to trace the implications of plot, style, and other literary techniques of the tales through subsequent periods.

Human Complex Systems

Artificial Intelligence: Here, Now, and All Around Us

Student Facilitator: Amy Huang | Faculty Mentor: Dario Nardi

The seminar will begin by examining how our perceptions of intelligence have shifted over the last century, how it has traditionally been implemented in machines, and how it might be newly represented today. Then, we will explore instances of intelligence in a variety of locations not typically associated with the science-fiction robots of the future. We will see where algorithms originating in AI have produced solutions, or raised questions, in other, seemingly disparate fields. After examining our current reality, we’ll look ahead to future and alternate realities, to the end of judging exactly where we stand among them. Finally, we’ll question whether the Internet, as a collection of millions of individual minds, might ever begin to “think” in human fashion.
Environment

**Environmental Nonprofits: Opportunity in a Changing World**

*Student Facilitator: Isis Krause  | Faculty Mentor: Carl Maida*

This class seeks to begin the learning process of how nonprofits function and the role they play in society. Nonprofits with an environmental focus are a particular subset of nonprofits and will be the focus of this class. Whether considering local water pollution, citywide environmental justice or national climate change policy, nonprofits play a large role in shaping the future of our environment. By gaining a deeper understanding of the history, managerial/leadership practices, key concerns, and future direction of nonprofits, specifically through the lens of environmental nonprofits, students will have the background knowledge to help them seek future jobs in the environmental nonprofit field.

Molecular, Cell, & Developmental Biology

**Science and Society: Bridging the Gap**

*Student Facilitator: Rameen Moridzadeh  | Faculty Mentor: Karen Lyons*

Both the advances and shortcomings of science continually morph our society. As such, it is imperative for aspiring public policy advisors, government officials, and other non-science students to understand how science directly impacts our futures. Entrenched in these debates, however, are strong misconceptions about scientific topics such as evolution, genetics, and regenerative medicine. The purpose of this course is not only to identify these misconceptions, but more importantly to provide a deeper understanding of the scientific culture and it’s bearing on seemingly unrelated fields. Through a combination of debate, guest lecturers, and presentations, students will delve into topics and questions at the forefront of science. For instance, should insurance agencies and potential employers screen applicants using genetic profiling, and what is the validity of such profiling? Is immortality attainable in our lifetime?
Political Science

**Videogaming World War II: Experiencing Power Politics and Theory of Tripolarity**

*Student Facilitator: Einar Engvig | Faculty Mentor: Michael Lofchie*

Short reading introducing lecture and discussions of in-game experiences and corresponding readings, followed by active simulation. Discussions revolve around relating new gaming experiences and knowledge, as well as aspects of game itself to theory of tripolarity, political realism in general, and any related aspects therein. Students engage in problem-based simulation learning by playing Hearts of Iron 2 (HOI2) as specific great power nation-states from 1936 to 1948, where understanding of geopolitics of era are not only relevant for winning, but essential. Game is designed to follow general historical lineage that can be altered depending on strategies students simultaneously study and use.

**Private Parts: Privatization, the Public Sector and You**

*Student Facilitator: Justin Lam | Faculty Mentor: Brian Walker*

Through the lenses of political theory, public policy and management, you will receive a national and international perspective on the private and public sectors. This outlook, rarely provided in undergraduate courses, will help situate your understanding in a 21st century and global context. This seminar will begin with a review of the motivations guiding the private and public sectors, and a historical survey of the factors that have resulted in the privatization of certain public goods today. Through case studies, this course will expose you to several ways in which decisions about whether they receive public goods from private or public entities can affect them. These studies will take place in a mostly American but also comparative government contexts, with relevant examples brought in from other countries. Finally, you will be challenged to think about these relationships in the context of your role as a citizen and about how you might be able to influence those around you with this knowledge.
Psychology

**L.A. Schools: An Inside Look**

*Student Facilitator: Lauren Camarillo  | Faculty Mentor: Jim Stigler*

In this seminar, we will take an inside look into two middle school classrooms in Los Angeles and Compton Unified School Districts, analyzing lessons, student-teacher interaction, learning optimization, and the instructional dynamic of a classroom. Using our observational experiences from these two videotaped lessons, we will compare schools in the suburban-urban context, discussing factors of the academic achievement gap. Broadening the scope from Los Angeles schools to K-12 education in the United States, this seminar will address the socioeconomic and psychological implications of underachievement in our public education system. Is the so-called academic achievement gap truly an achievement gap? Or is it merely a gap in opportunity? Through discussion, we will discover which factors of a school’s structure – both externally and internally – perpetuate the negative cycles in our history from which we are trying to progress.

**The Psychology of Investing**

*Student Facilitator: Alexandra Davis  | Faculty Mentor: Adriana Galvan*

In this seminar, we will examine human rationality (or irrationality), and the psychology behind decision-making. The course will explore the shortcuts people use when presented with too many choices, and the biases that steer people towards one decision over another. We will compare the differences in the outcomes of options when they are presented in various ways, and consider the impact social factors may have on the decision-making process. Subsequently, we will discuss how these factors may apply to investment decision-making, additionally evaluating the roles of emotion and mood, as well as risk tolerance in investment choices. Then, we will attempt to discern whether or not economic theory is still applicable, given what we have learned. Finally, the course will conclude with a discussion of the real-world value of the concepts covered, and how this knowledge about decision-making can be used to make more fitting choices in the future.
The Psychology of Child Play

Student Facilitator: Nancy Young | Faculty Mentor: Scott Johnson

Child games are important activities that enhance many aspects of child development (e.g., social, physical, and mental developments) and promote intrinsic interests in learning. This seminar poses some important questions to keep in mind throughout the course. How do games reinforce gender stereotypes and gender division? Do children naturally gravitate toward certain games, and if so, why? How do children become socialized through their participations in the games? This seminar will cover different topics ranging from Jean Piaget’s theory of children as active learners to motor development to sex differences. Students will come to understand how various games played in childhood strongly influence child development and affect the way children perceive themselves and the world.

Sociology

Sociology of Facebook and Online Social Networks

Student Facilitator: Eric Kim | Faculty Mentor: Terri Anderson

Online social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have dramatically altered the ways in which individuals in society interact with one another. No longer do we give each other phone calls, but instead we simply write on each other’s “Facebook walls.” No longer are our diaries private and kept to ourselves, but instead they are now public and available for all to see on blogs. Although the Internet is overcoming the distance gap in terms of communication, how authentic are these cyber-relationships? Can relationships now be defined by quantity instead of quality? Is the Internet ultimately bringing us closer together, or further apart?