Cultural Studies | Fall 2026

Category A: Text and Theory

COMMRC 2220 - Readings in Critical Theory: Lacan
Calum Matheson Currently undergoing a renaissance in communication and allied fields, psychoanalysis has played an outsized role in shaping contemporary theories of language, race, sex, gender, and ideology. This course is designed to acquaint graduate students with important concepts in psychoanalytic thought with a particular emphasis on the work of Jacques Lacan as applied to media, rhetoric, and culture. Course readings attempt to balance Lacan's primary works with important background texts and psychoanalytically inspired scholarship in an effort to encourage students to make their own judgments and conclusions. Major themes include: media and paranoia, figure and trope, sex and gender, power and desire, capital and ideology, culture and subjectivity.

COMMRC 3317 - Seminar in Rhetorical Theory: Inventing Your Tradition
David Marshall Intellectual history is concerned with where, when, how, and why ideas emerge and change. Contemporary intellectual history focuses on taking up someone who is important to your own work in order to think about what to adopt, adapt, and/or reject. No matter your theoretical polestar, all researchers work in a tradition. Engaging in a sustained investigation of another researcher in your tradition can be a powerful way of refining your own voice and your own ideas about where critical energy can be found in a given field of inquiry. Working through such attachments is a key part of graduate school, and this seminar carves out time for you to do that work in a concerted way. If you feel like you're not getting enough time on key texts in your various courses, this seminar is an opportunity to really dig in. In this seminar, you'll learn about ways of doing contemporary intellectual history to productively engage with past scholarship. You're free to focus for the semester on any thinker who is significant to you: Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Marisol de la Cadena, Penelope Eckert, Frantz Fanon, Ã‰douard Glissant, Erving Goffman, Marjorie Harness Goodwin, Saidiya Hartman, Jodi Melamed, Walter Mignolo, Priya Satia, Anna Tsing â€¦ whoever. And you can reach further back if you wish: Wallerstein, Nora, Said, Spivak, Bourdieu. In my own work, I've taken up Vico, Heidegger, Arendt, Benjamin, Warburg, Fisch and Brandom. All lists here are suspect! You will have other names, and that is good. We begin by thinking together about how the work of another can matter to us. You'll then identify the following: a field to which you're speaking, an author of interest (which might be a collective), and a central work by that author. From

there, the seminar functions as a workshop that scaffolds writing projects building toward a conference paper (which might become a journal article or part of the theory or method section in a dissertation prospectus). Each week, you'll develop new skills and write new material in the following sequence: surveying an anthology, choosing an author, establishing a corpus, engaging a text, exploring an archive, assessing a scholarly literature, articulating a context, tracing an affiliation, following an appropriation, crafting a purpose, and drafting a paper. The seminar concludes with an open one-day conference at which you all present what you've been working on over the term.

ENGLIT 2811 - Minor Subjects: Childhood, Literacy, and Marginality
Courtney Weikle-Mills Grounded in children's literature/childhood studies, this course focuses on texts and cultural practices involving those considered "minor" or "marginal." As we will explore, the age-based marginalization of children and youth does not equal but complexly overlaps with larger processes and experiences of marginalization across other identity categories, with shared mechanisms including social isolation, institutionalization, criminalization, and control of reproduction. Assuming a readership defined by (inter)dependency and relationality, texts designed for or by young readers (understood intersectionally) frequently perform their initiation into and regulation within public, collective, stratified, and ordered social worlds via literacy, raising ethical questions about these rituals of textual socialization and what it means to write for/as people not considered fully literate, fully agential, or fully rights-bearing. Taking cues from literacy studies and children's lit/childhood studies scholarship that emphasizes the embeddedness of texts and reading within larger cultural and material practices/structures, as well as the ways that literacy involves interdependency and multimodality, we will consider how children's textual and material inclusion or exclusion within the public sphere is enacted in books for and by youth, with attention to how young people navigate this process, individually and collectively. We will also investigate cross-written texts for adults and children to explore forms of activism and solidarity organized around minoritarian practices and discourses. The course will involve significant training in and practice of close reading and archival research practices. We will work closely with archival collections at the University of Pittsburgh (especially our signature collection of children's materials from the Black Arts Movement as well as a new collection of Dick and Jane readers) and the American Antiquarian Society (especially their Historical children's Voices digital library of diaries, newspapers, and books created by young people). Students will be encouraged to identify and bring in materials related to their own areas of focus for us to discuss together. Anyone with an interest in any aspect of the course is welcome and the course will give guidance about how students can develop larger projects, or smaller pieces of projects, that involve some consideration of childhood/youth, education,

literacy/reading, marginalization, socialization, and/or literary/textual initiations into the public sphere.

MUSIC 2611 - Musicology Seminar: "Opera at the Limits of the Human"
Olivia Bloechi | How do language arts and practices live within a social and cultural context? What is the place of the critic and scholar of literature in the Humanities both as researcher and pedagogue? What kind of theoretical, wider perspective, can help us frame the context and different meanings of a work of art? Focused on the relation between language arts and historicity, the class will address issues concerning representation, gender, politics, education, and the psychology of language rules and infractions. Among the thinkers helping us in our discussions, we will study pragmatic linguists such as Emile Benveniste, social critics of hegemony such as Antonio Gramsci, psychoanalytic approaches to language and power in Jacques Lacan and Franz Fanon, the social critique of literary elitism in Pierre Bourdieu, the redefinition of cultural agency in postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Achille Mbembe, the contemporary critique of gendered discourse in the works of Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed and Paul Preciado, and the ecocriticism of Stephanie Posthumus. The class will be organized thematically rather than according to a strict chronology of different approaches. The professor will try to insert workshopping exercises in the classroom, in order to alleviate and share the burden of understanding the contemporary tenets of our field. Seminar taught in English.

Category B: Disciplines and Intellectual Movements

ENGFLM 2000 - Creative Scholarship: The Film Essay
Robert Clift | This seminar explores the film and video essay as a form of both creative expression and critical inquiry. Through a series of short video projects, students will develop foundational production skills while experimenting with diverse audiovisual styles, strategies, and modes of address. The course invites students to approach their scholarship and research in ways that are more expansive and imaginative than traditional written work, encouraging them to explore diverse modes for expressing ideas and engaging theoretical questions. The course engages a wide range of practices, drawing on the work of filmmakers such as AgnÃ¨s Varda, Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, Trinh T. Minh-ha, John Akomfrah, Arthur Jafa, and Larissa Sansour, as well as more recent critics and scholars who use the audiovisual to expand/challenge text-based scholarship.

GSWS 2252 - Theories of Gender and Sexuality

Shaun Myers This course provides an overview of the formation and important trajectories of gender and sexuality studies, emphasizing foundational readings as well as emerging directions in scholarship. Gender and sexuality studies are interdisciplinary fields in conversation with not only feminist and queer theory but also a host of academic disciplines. Engaging scholarship across this range of disciplines, students will work through some of the key historical moments shaping thinking about gender and sexuality even as they gain familiarity with the conversations, problems, and approaches reorienting gender and sexuality studies now. The course also serves as a graduate-level introduction to the skills and practices of reading, discussing, and writing in a variety of theoretical idioms.

THEA 2216: Advanced Theory and Methodology: Experimental Dramaturgy and Decolonization

Marjan Moosavi | This graduate seminar explores experimental dramaturgy as both a method and a critical mindset for engaging decolonization in theatre and performance. Through a global and comparative lens, and across plays, performances, and critical texts, we examine forms of storytelling that challenge dominant aesthetic, epistemological, and institutional paradigms. Drawing on decolonial theory and queer of color critique, we investigate how experimental theatre reconfigures questions of form, authorship, space, embodiment, and audience. The course also foregrounds debates around influence, circulation, and the tension between the global and the local. Topics include race, gender, migration, adaptation, interdisciplinary devising, and transnational collaboration. Throughout the seminar, we approach dramaturgy as a practice of analysis, creation, and world-making that enables us to rethink how theatre is made, studied, and situated.

Category C: Cultural Antagonisms and Cultural Crises

HAA 2401 - Contemporary Art: The Carnegie International

Since the first Annual Exhibition of the Carnegie Institute (now Carnegie Museum of Art), held in 1896, Pittsburgh has been recognized as an international center for the display and collecting of the art of the present. This graduate seminar will take full advantage of the opportunity to carry out a deep study of the 59th Carnegie International exhibition, _If the word we_, which will be on view at Carnegie Museum of Art (and some other local institutions) from May 1, 2026â€“Jan. 3, 2027. The exhibition's curatorial framework, artworks, and related programming will serve as our course's primary "texts." In their writing, in-class presentations, and other forms, participants will delve into and illuminate issues within this truly global exhibition that resonate with their specific scholarly

concerns. The first part of the course will focus on the historiography of the Carnegie International, the specific typologies of contemporary art represented in the exhibition, and how its global curatorial framework contends with urgent issues related to race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity in the Americas (the instructor's research focus). Topics for the remainder of the course will be determined by participants' research interests and selected final project formats.

HIST 2710 - Global Capitalism
This course will explore the history of capitalism in explicitly global context. Engaging with the work mostly of historians, but alongside that of historically-minded feminists, sociologists, and assorted theorists, the aim will be to understand historical capitalism in relation to other economic systems, to analyze the forces that produced and propelled it to global dominance, and the ways in which it has reorganized on a global scale the relationships between people and peoples, and between humans and non-human nature over the past 500 years.

SOC 2306 - Sociology of Revolution
Mohammed Bamyeh, Wednesdays, 4:00 - 6:30 pm | "Revolutions have served as one of the main engines of historical change, and along with other forms of mass protests, are now a frequent feature of our world. Why do revolutions happen? Who makes them? How do they transform while in motion? What are their psychological effects on those who participate in them? What sort of long-term social or cultural change do they bring about? How do they unite or fragment? What is the culture of revolutions? How do revolutionary ideas take root before the event? How are past revolutions imagined or narrated? These are some of the questions we will examine in this course. They are explored with case studies of historical and contemporary revolutionary movements, along with relevant theories of revolution. Students will be exposed to core materials across disciplines, but will also have time to explore case studies of their own choosing."

Category D: Designated Courses

DSAM 3000 - DSAM Seminar
Alison Langmead This seminar addresses the relationships between digital computing and the humanities and allied social sciences, both as a subject of both historical interest and contemporary practical concern. We engage in ongoing theoretical discussions but also fully engage with what it takes to implement interpretive research in the digital environment. Students leave this class having gained a personally significant

understanding of current debates in the field of digitally-oriented interpretive research as well as having built a digital project of their own. This course serves as one of the core requirements for the graduate certificate in digital studies and methods.

PIA 2448 - Political Economy of Development

Shanti Gamper-Rabindran This course begins by discussing Amartya Sen's concept of "development as freedom" and reviewing the trends in poverty, inequality and human development indices in both developed and less developed countries. We examine how various development strategies - investments in human capital, public goods, and responsive governance; corrections to market failures (e.g., externalities, monopolies); and efforts to address structural discrimination (e.g., against Indigenous peoples) - can improve socioeconomic outcomes for individuals and communities. We also examine efforts to reform the international system, including food production, the international trade regime, the international patent regime, which influences innovation and access to medicines; and international Loss and Damage funds to support climate mitigation and adaptation.

PIA 2522 - Climate Policy: Local and Global

Shanti Gamper-Rabindran | We examine strategies at the local, national and international level to address the climate emergency and to transition to more sustainable and equitable economies. These include mandating climate risks disclosure for financial institutions, climate litigation to hold governments and fossil companies to account and the declining costs and technology advancement for greater deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency. We discuss how to advocate for shifting taxpayers' funds from fossil fuels to renewable energy and for the just transition of fossil fuel reliant communities and how to counter climate misinformation and false solutions.