

Big Problems

*Executive Director: Margot Browning, JRL S102, 702-5657,
m-browning@uchicago.edu*

The Big Problems courses that follow are among a growing number of capstone experiences offered as electives to fourth-year students in the College. Under special circumstances involving senior project needs, third-year students may petition for special permission to register for a Big Problems course.

"Big problems" are characteristically matters of global or universal concern that intersect with several disciplines and affect a variety of interest groups. They are problems for which solutions are crucially important but not obviously available.

Big problems courses emphasize process as well as content: learning how to creatively confront difficult intellectual and pragmatic problems wider than one's area or expertise and to consider how to deal with the uncertainty that results. This might often point to the importance of working in groups. If the common core curriculum gives a basis for learning and the concentrations develop more specialized knowledge, the Big Problems experience develops skills for thinking about and dealing with the important but unyielding issues of our time.

Big Problems courses encourage linkage to B.A. papers, research experiences, or internships. They use interdisciplinary team teaching, seeking to cross disciplines and divisions and to transcend familiar models of content, organization, and instruction.

Each year a Big Problems Lecture Series features outside speakers and additional workshops for interested students.

Courses

23400. Is Development Sustainable? (=ENST 24400, HIPS 23400, NCDV 27300, PBPL 24400) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* For course description, see Environmental Studies. *T. Steck, Staff. Spring.*

23500. The Organization of Knowledge. (=HIPS 23000) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* This course explores several structures of knowledge that students may have encountered in their core and specialized education, with the goal of enabling students to identify and explore the implications of these different structures. We ask whether all knowledge is relative, and if so, to what? When things are structured differently, does that mean that knowledge is lost, or are there several diverse ways of structuring knowledge each of which may be viable? We read a wide range of classical and modern thinkers in various disciplines. *H. Sinaiko, W. Booth. Not offered 2002-03.*

23600. Social Context, Biology, and Health. (=PSYC 25300) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* We take for granted our relationships with other people as fundamental. Yet when these connections are absent or disrupted,

our minds and biology are likewise disrupted. Epidemiological studies have now clearly established a relationship between social isolation and both mental and physical health. This course adopts an integrative interdisciplinary approach that spans the biological to sociological levels of analysis to explore the interactions involved and possible mechanisms by which the social world gets under the skin to affect the mind, brain, biology, and health. *J. Cacioppo, M. McClintock, L. Waite. Not offered 2002-03.*

23900. Biological and Cultural Evolution. (=BIOS 29286, CHSS 37900, HIPS 23900, LING 11100, NCDV 27400, PHIL 22500/32500) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing. Core background in evolution and genetics strongly recommended.* This course draws on readings and examples from linguistics, evolutionary genetics, and the history and philosophy of science. We elaborate theory to understand and model cultural evolution, as well as to explore analogies, differences, and relations to biological evolution. We also consider basic biological, cultural, and linguistic topics and case studies from an evolutionary perspective. Time is spent both on what we do know, and on determining what we don't. *W. Wimsatt, S. Mufwene. Winter, 2003.*

24100. Science and Religion. (=HIPS 24200, PHIL 24500) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* In this course, we explore some aspects of the relations between science and religion in Western culture, including Christian, Jewish, and Islamic. Questions to be taken up include: What are science and religion? Are they competing intellectual systems for making sense of the world? Social institutions? Can they be in conflict with one another? Can they support one another? Each of the three instructors treats these questions by examining certain historical episodes and texts to add different perspectives to the material. *D. Garber, J. Kraemer, R. Perlman. Not offered 2002-03.*

24200. Psychoneuroimmunology: Links between the Nervous and Immune Systems. (=BIOS 02370, PSYC 34100) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing, and BIOS 20180s or 20190s.* This course covers all aspects of neuroimmunoendocrinology at the molecular, cellular, and organismal and social levels. *M. McClintock, J. Quintans. Spring, 2003.*

24300. Globalization and Neo-liberalism. *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* Developments over the past decade have led a number of former leading enthusiasts of globalization to raise basic criticisms of the Neo-liberal paradigm. In doing this they have echoed and drawn attention to the results of economists and historians whose work undercuts the basic premises of Neo-liberalism. This course explicates a varied collection of this work, viewed as a critique and alternative to Neo-liberalism, by economic historians such as Hobsbawm, Williams, Arrighi, and Polanyi, and economists such as Palley, Taylor, Stretton, Marglin, Eatwell, MacEwan, Blecker, and Brenner. *M. Rothenberg, R. Baiman. Spring, 2003.*

24400. Concepts of the Self from Antiquity to the Present. (=CLCV 28100, HIST 20400) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* This seminar explores the evolution of ideas about the nature and formation of selfhood from classical antiquity to the present. Along the way, we look at Greek tragedy, Stoic philosophy, early Christian texts, and the conceptual models of selfhood and self-understanding behind Descartes, Kant, Freud, Foucault, and others. Students should be prepared to deal extensively with scholarship

on self, ethics, and community across the fields of philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and social history. *S. Bartsch, J. Goldstein. Not offered 2002-03.*

26000. Rewriting the Past: Narrative, Ritual, and Monument. (=FNDL 23000, HUDV 27100) This course focuses on the manner in which we make use of the past, the personal past, the collective past, and the place of social and historical change in retelling and rewriting life-history and history. The course begins with a discussion of memory, conceptions of the personal and historic past, and such related issues as nostalgia, mourning, and the significance of commemoration in monument and ritual. These issues are explored in a number of topics including [twentieth-century war memorials](#), the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, high school and college reunions, the Holocaust and its representation in contemporary European society, the construction of the Israeli national tradition, and the construction of Abraham Lincoln as an American story of loss and renewal. *B. Cohler, P. Homans. Spring.*

26100. On Love: Text and Context. (=HUMA 26200) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* Two senior members of the faculty (one a humanist, the other a social scientist) together explore the nature and character of love. First, as humanists, we read Plato (*Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Lysis*); then, as social scientists, we view love from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on its psychological, social, cultural, and developmental dimensions (Freud and other modern writers). Assignments may also include literary and cinematic materials. Finally, students present their own research and reflections on the subject. *H. Sinaiko, D. Orlinsky. Spring, 2003.*

26102. War. (=HUMA 26300) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* In this course, we ask such questions as: Why do humans go to war? What is the experience of war like? How does war affect the individual and his society? What is a just war? An unjust war? Can we conceive of a world without war? We read and discuss texts such as Homer's *The Iliad*, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*, and Glen Gray's *The Warriors*. The readings serve primarily as a starting point for the discussion of the above questions and any other issues raised by the class that are related to war. *M. Ehre, H. Sinaiko. Spring, 2003.*

For descriptions of the following associated courses and programs, see the relevant concentration sections of the catalog. Registration in these courses is not restricted to third- or fourth-year College students.

BIOS 22257. Darwinian Medicine. *PQ: Completion of the general education requirement in the biological sciences. R. Perlman, W. Wimsatt. Autumn.*

HMRT 20100/30100. Human Rights I: Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights. (=HIST 29300/39300, INTL 31600, LAWS 41200, LLSO 25100, MAPH 40000, PHIL 31600, PLSC 33900) *M. Green. Autumn.*

HMRT 20200/30200. Human Rights II: Historical Underpinnings of Human Rights. (=GSHU 28800/38800, HIST 29400/39400, INRE 39400,

492 BIG PROBLEMS

LAWS 41300) *M. Geyer. Winter.*

HMRT 20300/30300. Human Rights III: Contemporary Issues in Human Rights. (=GSHU 28900/38900, HIST 29500/39500, INRE 57900, LAWS 47900, PATH 46500) *Staff, R. Kirschner. Spring.*