

Big Problems

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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: Big Problems (BPRO)

23400. Is Development Sustainable? (=ENST 24400, HIPS 23400, NCDV 27300, PBPL 24400) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* This is a discussion course for students without a background in environmental issues. Its aim is to grapple with the “big problem” of sustainable development. We analyze problematical issues underlying population growth; resource use; environmental transformation; and the plight of developing nations through a consideration of economic, political, scientific, and cultural institutions and processes. *T. Steck, M. Arsel. 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. Sterner. Spring.*

23600. Social Context, Biology, and Health. *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 2003-04.*

23900. Biological and Cultural Evolution. (=BIOS 29286, CHSS 37900, HIPS 23900, LING 11100, NCDV 27400, PHIL 22500/32500) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing or consent of instructor. Core background in evolution and genetics strongly recommended. For information on when course will be offered, call Margot Browning at 702-5657.* 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.*

24100. Science and Religion. (=HIPS 24200) *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 instructors treats these questions by examining certain historical episodes and texts to add different perspectives to the material. *J. Kraemer, R. Perlman. Not offered 2003-04.*

24200. Psychoneuroimmunology: Links between the Nervous and Immune Systems. (=BIOS 02370, PSYC 24150) *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. Not offered 2003-04; will be offered 2004-05.*

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 (e.g., Hobsbawm, Williams, Arrighi, Polanyi) and economists (e.g., Palley, Taylor, Stretton, Marglin, Eatwell, MacEwan, Blecker, Brenner). *M. Rothenberg, R. Baiman. Spring.*

24400. Concepts of the Self from Antiquity to the Present. *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 2003-04.*

24500. Language and Globalization. (=ANTH 27705/47905, LING 27500/37500) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* *Globalization* has been a buzz word in our lives over the past few decades. It is also one of those terms whose varying meanings have become more and more challenging to characterize in a uniform way. The phenomena it names have been associated with important transformations in our cultures, including the languages we speak. Distinguishing myths from facts, this course articulates the different meanings of *globalization*, anchors them in a long history of socioeconomic colonization, and highlights the specific ways in which the phenomena it names have affected the structures and vitalities of languages around the world. We learn about the dynamics of population contact in class and their impact on the evolution of languages. *S. Mufwene, W. Wimsatt. Winter.*

24600. Moments in Atheism. (=CLCV 22300, HIST 29402, RLST 25200) *PQ: Third- or fourth-year standing.* Atheism is as old as religion. As religion and its place in society have evolved throughout history, so has the standing and philosophical justification for non-belief. This course examines the intellectual and cultural history of atheism in Western thought from antiquity to the present. We are concerned with the evolution of arguments for a non-religious worldview, as well as with the attitude of society toward atheism and atheists. *S. Bartsch, S. Carroll. Winter.*

26000. Rewriting the Past: Narrative, Ritual, and Monument. (=HUDV 27100, PSYC 25400) 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 notional tradition, and the construction of Abraham Lincoln as an American story of loss and renewal. *B. Cohler, P. Homans. Winter.*

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. Not offered 2003-04.*

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. Not offered 2003-04.*

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. (=HIPS 25900) *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 29301/39301, INTL 31600, ISHU 28700/38700, LAWS 41200, LLSO 25100, MAPH 40000, PHIL 21700/31600) *M. Green. Autumn.*

HMRT 20200/30200. Human Rights II: Historical Underpinnings of Human Rights. (=HIST 29302/39302, INRE 39400, ISHU 28800/38800, LAWS 41300, LLSO 27100) *M. Geyer. Winter.*

HMRT 20300/30300. Human Rights III: Contemporary Issues in Human Rights. (=HIST 29303/39303, INRE 57900, ISHU 28900/38900, LAWS 57900, PATH 46500) *S. Gzesh. Spring.*