difficult dialogues

course offerings
fall 2008

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 fourth semester of DD courses, fourteen 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 the dialogue symposium programming.

dialogue seminar

IDND 010 The Dialogue Seminar (1/2 credit) | faculty TBA

If you want an opportunity to deepen your understanding and experience of dialogue, consider taking the Dialogue Seminar offered this fall as part of the Difficult Dialogues Initiative. This half-credit course is intended for everyone, but will also benefit students who are looking for a partial credit. Each section will be led by teams of faculty members paired with experienced DD graduate 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 symposia. Attendance at roughly one DD symposia event per week will be a requirement of the class.

first year seminars

MGMT/ID Making a Difference | Mary Ellen Boyle, Laurie Ross

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.

ENGLISH Webs and Labyrinths: Imagining Globalization in Art and Literature | Steve Levin

The globalized world calls for a new language to describe it: new metaphors, new stories, and new modes of storytelling. We now live (we so often hear) in a world of webs, labyrinths, and networks--metaphors that suggest the breaking down of borders and increased connectivity across cultures, nations, markets, and geographies. This course will introduce you to writers, poets, painters, photographers, sculptors, architects, and filmmakers who are trying to find a language in their work to address a sense that we live in an age of constant newness. We will consider different sorts of border crossings associated with the era of global culture: reflexive modes of storytelling that break down boundaries between artists and audiences; sweeping historical novels that weave together the real and the "magical"; and multimedia narratives that combine texts and technology. We will think about new thematic concerns that surface with the rise of commercial societies: how to construct a "self" in a global world; the persistence of modern forms of empire and inequality; the use of technology for social surveillance; the rise of global English; and contemporary expressions of cross-cultural conflict and encounter. Our focus will be on the dialogues that take place among genres and disciplines, and on narrative experiments that make it difficult to draw clear distinctions between fiction, poetry, drama, and visual culture. Fulfills the Verbal Expression requirement. You must be placed at the Verbal Expression level to be admitted into this seminar.

COMM Communication & Culture In Main South | Sarah Michaels

This seminar covers the same content as COMM 101 which is a requirement for the Communication & Culture major and minor. However, this course will be run as a hands-on, discussion-based seminar, with students doing original research and taking an active role in class discussion. 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?" All of the ideas and tools introduced in the course will be put to use in investigations of communication and culture in the Main South Neighborhood of Worcester. We will investigate local media, public art, and both formal and informal learning in the neighborhood.

Seminar participants will participate in a weekly field-work session with neighborhood students, collaborating on multi-media projects, such as street photography and graffiti art, while contributing to a community-based website, MainSouthSpeaks.com. The course will be interdisciplinary, drawing on psychological, anthropological, sociological, technological, aesthetic, cinematic, semiotic, and cultural studies points of view and methodologies. There will be a particular emphasis on the roles of talk, text, and image in social life and how they relate to power, access, and equity in the world.

dialogue courses

COMM 101 An Introduction to Communication & 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 – so that you have tools to ask and answer your own questions and become a 'player' in the field of communication studies. 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.

ENG 215 Language and Culture in the United States | Fern Johnson

Using a cultural perspective on language, this course addresses varieties of language use and their consequences in the United States. Topics include demographics in sociolinguistic perspective; the systematic nature of language; language and culture of African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans; gender patterns in language; bilingualism and multilingualism in the United States; and the policy implications of language diversity. As a Dialogue-oriented course, key issues that engage dimensions of language in relation to race, ethnicity, and immigration will be explored through structured dialogue processes. For undergraduate English majors, this course satisfies the Period (C-3) requirement.

ENG 239 / ENG 339 Aliens and Others in Science Fiction | Betsy Huang

This course examines literary figurations of the alien in science fiction, with specific focus on the subgenre of 'first contact' narratives. Analyses of the genre will take critical and theoretical approaches to investigate constructions of otherness and difference, as well as critiques of the discourses and histories of humanism, colonialism, slavery, and identity politics. Short fiction and novels by H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Ursula Le Guin, Philip K. Dick, Stanislaw Lem, Samuel R. Delany, Orson Scott Card, Octavia E. Butler, among others, will be read. Feature films and television series that deal with alien contact will also be studied. For undergraduate English majors this course satisfies the Period (C-3) requirement.

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.

ID 204/IDCE 304 International & Comparative Analysis of 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 First and Third 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 the global perspective.

IDCE 30240 Community Planning Studio | Miriam Chion

This studio focuses on the development of a specific community plan. This includes an assessment of existing conditions and their development potential; an understanding of the community goals; and the drafting of a plan, policies, and regulations. For example: The planning studio has studied the Mission of neighborhood in San Francisco in the development of its community plan and zoning controls. This planning studio identified specific policies and regulations that could enhance the economic and cultural vitality of the neighborhood, while retaining the existing population and workers.

IDCE 30221 Education and Development | David Bell

Education (formal, non-formal and informal) has played a strategic role in shaping society over the past century, and continues to inform development at the community, national and international levels. This course examines the historical evolution of education and explores its continued local and global relationship to the process of international and community development.

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 100 The Good Life | Wes DeMarco

Healthy human beings want to live good lives. We want to be happy. But what can a person do to live a good life? What makes one life "good" and another "not good"? What makes one person happy and another not? Are there significant connections between health, well-being, social involvement, ethical endeavor, worldly achievement, felt satisfaction, and living a good life? In this seminar we will use philosophical, psychological,

religious, and literary works to explore some of the ways that human beings organize their lives, set fundamental goals and values, and try to assess these. Our seminar will examine a range of possible life aims including the search for pleasure, cultivating personal excellence, the pursuit of wealth and power, contributing to the pubic good, ecological attunement, seeking spiritual fulfillment, and having no aim at all. This "difficult dialogues" offering features intensive listening and discussion of some deeply personal issues, including the issue of whether a dialogical approach to communication and action can make for more open and flexible relationships and a happier, healthier life.