How do we know what we know? Why do we believe what we believe? What constitutes persuasive evidence? While it is proverbial to say that facts don’t lie, the interpretation of evidence can be messy and even contradictory. Differences in perception and experience, knowledge and instinct are inherently human and feel even more perplexing in the face of information overload. What obligations do we have to look beyond personal and societal perspective, especially when what is accepted (or rejected) as evidence can have far-reaching implications for many other individual lives beyond our own? How do we navigate unfamiliar and even uncomfortable topics—on the one hand truly listening to the expertise of specialists while on the other hand honestly bearing critiques of systems of knowledge that privilege existing power structures?

In scholarship, disciplinary perspective makes a great deal of difference and even within fields of study, the criteria for proof may be challenged and revised. In art and culture, creative work strives to connect data and perception, both reflecting and defamiliarizing human experiences and even addressing gaps in certainty. At the most personal level, any assessment of evidence requires a dedication to internal reflection as much as it does a commitment to reason and analysis. The construction of knowledge and the formation of belief are never simple, nor is it always easy to arrive at new conclusions or embrace new concepts. Join us this fall as we explore what it means to discover and interpret, listen and rebut, learn and reconsider, and better understand evidence in all its forms.
In Pursuit of Questions

A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Who, what, when, where, why, and how?

From childhood, these questions construct the foundation of knowledge gathering and problem solving. Seemingly basic, they are essential to progressing from inquiry to answer, from simple thought to complex networks of understanding. And yet, these most central questions often are overlooked in our harried pursuit of information and our rash assumptions of meaning. Who “truly” knows, and how? What is known, and why does it count as knowledge? When is knowledge formed, and where is it found? What happens when we neglect to ask—and answer—the fundamentals?

Join us as Clark University professor Wes DeMarco (Philosophy) leads a community conversation exploring the value of the well-asked question.

Wednesday, September 12 @ 7pm
Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons

Co-sponsored by the Higgins School of Humanities, Difficult Dialogues, and the Department of Philosophy
From Crime Scene to Courtroom

Is there such a thing as the perfect crime?

Can someone truly disappear without a trace? In the right hands, forensic evidence can reveal the hidden story behind a crime scene. It also can give voice to the dead, who can no longer testify about the circumstances surrounding their fate. But do the clues left behind always lead to the truth?

Dr. Elizabeth Murray of Mount St. Joseph University has participated in hundreds of forensic investigations. She is one of only eighty anthropologists currently certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. She also has served as a consultant and case manager for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. In this talk, Murray will examine the role of evidence in the quest for justice and how critical errors in human judgment have led to wrongful convictions of the innocent.
Unsettled Nostalgia

What traces do lives pre- and post-war leave behind, and how do you represent the experience of forced migration?

Reproducing the war-torn landscapes of contemporary Syria, Mohamad Hafez creates multi-media sculptures and paintings that represent Middle Eastern streetscapes and buildings besieged by civil war, deliberately contrasted with hopeful verses from the Quran and other elements of his Islamic heritage. The poignant and powerful installation, titled Unsettled Nostalgia, reveals the entangled relationships between home and homeland, refuge and security, and art and politics.

Born in Syria, raised in Saudi Arabia, and educated in the Midwestern United States, New Haven–based artist and architect Hafez offers a very personal view of forced migration—lives before and after, decision points, forced hands, and adjustments to new realities. He uses his expertise as a licensed AIA architect as well as his lived experience of Damascus’s vibrant built environment to create sculptural compilations of paint, metal, and found objects that anchor uneasy conversations, stimulating deeper audience engagement on contentious topics.

ARTIST TALK
Tuesday, October 2 @ 7pm
Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons

Co-sponsored by the Higgins School of Humanities; International Development, Community and Environment; Peace Studies; and the Department of Visual and Performing Arts

EXHIBIT
Unsettled Nostalgia will be on display in the Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons through December 7. Please contact the Higgins School for hours and availability.
Decolonizing the Middle Ages

In the past few years, white supremacist appropriation of medieval symbols has become more visible than ever, from “white knight” KKK imagery to crests and shields at rallies.

This alt-right cosplay is in part the outcome of unexamined biases in the popular imagination as well as blindspots within the academy. What is at stake for those clinging to inaccurate notions of a homogeneous European past, and what can be gained by using evidence-based approaches to decolonize entrenched histories and to expand our understanding of the global middle ages? Dorothy Kim (Brandeis University) will unpack loaded fantasies and erroneous ideas about the medieval period, revealing the complexities of European societies at the dawn of a global age. Valerie Sperling (Political Science) will offer commentary.

The Roots of Everything is a lecture series sponsored by Early Modernists Unite (EMU)—a faculty collaborative bringing together scholars of medieval and early modern Europe and America—in conjunction with the Higgins School of Humanities. The series highlights various aspects of modern existence originating in the early modern world by connecting past and present knowledge.

Wednesday, October 3 @ 4:30pm
Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons

Co-sponsored by Early Modernists Unite; the Higgins School of Humanities; the Department of English; the Department of History; and the Department of Political Science through the Chester Bland Fund
The Death of Expertise

HOW ATTACKS ON ESTABLISHED KNOWLEDGE UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY

New technologies and increased access to education have provided a constant stream of information.

But what happens when these societal gains also help fuel a surge in narcissistic, misguided commentary that cripples informed debate on any number of issues? A quick trip through WebMD or Wikipedia does not create expertise, but these days, all voices demand to be taken with equal seriousness, and claims to the contrary often are dismissed as undemocratic elitism. More information has not made us any smarter. Rather, it has enabled and propagated a wave of ill-informed and angry citizenship, breeding distrust of intellectual achievement and expertise. How do we defend against this threat to our well-being and to the future of our democratic institutions?

Professor Tom Nichols (National Security Affairs, U.S. Naval War College) brings his own deep expertise and substantial policy experience as a strategist, commentator, and best-selling author to these pressing issues of our current political climate.
Shadows of Doubt

READINGS IN THE HIGGINS LOUNGE

Was it a trick of the light? A figment of your imagination? Or just a dream from which you couldn’t quite wake?

The yawning terrors of the night usually recede by dawn, but they sometimes linger as shadows in our minds. The horrors we can see, hear, and prove are frightening enough, but worse yet are the fears driven by chilling doubt and lurking dread. Although the sudden shock subsides, the unknown haunts us long after, a terror unresolved. Go ahead and tell the story. Who would believe it? Do you even believe it yourself?

Continuing our popular Halloween tradition, Professors Gino Dilorio (Theater), Jay Elliott (English), and Jennifer Plante (The Writing Center) will read scary tales of the uncanny, the unknowable, and the unfathomable. Combining the beauty of language, the art of storytelling, and the desire for community, Readings in the Higgins Lounge continues to showcase the power and pleasure of the humanities.
Jefferson and the Hemingses of Monticello

In 1998, DNA testing corroborated what family histories and the archival record had shown all along.

Thomas Jefferson fathered children by Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman on the Monticello plantation. This connection was denied by naysayers for centuries but is widely acknowledged today. An accurate account of the Hemingses is now shared at Monticello, thanks to ongoing initiatives such as the Getting Word oral history project and the new Sally Hemings exhibit that debuted this past spring. In this talk, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annette Gordon-Reed will examine the fascinating history of this American family and reflect on its implications for genealogical inquiry, scholarly method, and public history.

Annette Gordon-Reed is the Charles Warren Professor of American Legal History at Harvard Law School and Professor of History in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. From “American controversy” to “American family,” Gordon-Reed’s scholarship continues to transform our understanding of the past and shape our conversations in the present.

Thursday, November 1 @ 7pm
Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons

Co-sponsored by the Higgins School of Humanities; the Office of the Provost; the Department of History; and the Center for Gender, Race and Area Studies
I AM EVIDENCE

A FILM SCREENING

Behind every rape kit is a survivor waiting for justice that may never come.

Each day, thousands of kits containing potentially vital DNA evidence languish untested in police and crime lab storage units across the United States. Many have sat untouched for years, long past the statute of limitations for sexual assault. How could such a backlog happen? What can we do to fix it?

I AM EVIDENCE explores these questions through the experiences of four survivors as they trace the fates of their own rape kits and navigate the criminal justice process. Produced by Mariska Hargitay and HBO, the documentary illuminates unconscionable and systemic failures that have impeded the pursuit of justice and those individuals who are working tirelessly to end the backlog.

Wednesday, November 7 @ 7pm
Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons

Co-sponsored by the Higgins School of Humanities and Women's and Gender Studies

How could such a backlog happen?
Democracy relies upon objective and accurate news coverage, rigorous investigative reporting, and thoroughly informed analysis.

But recent attacks on the media—from real incidents of fraudulent claims to constant accusations of “fake news”—have increased the sense of urgency to protect the role of the free press. Anthony Brooks, a veteran reporter, producer, and radio host, will bring his years of experience and insights to a conversation on the state of the press today and the stakes for all of us as consumers of the news.

Senior Political Reporter for WBUR and frequent contributor to NPR, Brooks is a familiar voice on the radio and a force behind the scenes both locally and nationally. His award-winning contributions to broadcast journalism have illuminated powerful topics from the environment to the death penalty.

Clark University professor Esther Jones (English; Dean of the Faculty) will facilitate this timely and important discussion, just one week after the 2018 midterm elections.
The Higgins School of Humanities affirms the centrality of the arts and humanities to our lives and the values of a liberal arts education. It supports teaching and research through its grant programs and sponsors public events and campus initiatives, enhancing the intellectual and cultural life of the Clark community.

Unless otherwise noted, all events will be held on the Clark University campus in the Higgins Lounge at Dana Commons, 36 Maywood Street, Worcester, MA 01603.

Admission is free and open to the public. All information is subject to change.

To support the Higgins School:
Visit alumni.clarku.edu/make-a-gift. Please select designation “Other” and direct your contribution to the Higgins School of Humanities.
How do we know?