



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Honors College

Course Descriptions Summer & Fall 2025

Honors College Summer 2025 and Fall 2025 course descriptions packet includes:

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***Summer 2025 Honors College Courses
(Summer Session 1, May 27th - July 10th, 2025)***

Honors 293 (1): Sexuality and Social Histories (#1005)

TuTh 1:30 - 4:30pm

Jason Roush, Honors College

Human sexuality is continually evolving within cultural contexts. Widespread social factors like economics, education, family, geography, religion, and law shape how we come to perceive sexual identity and ourselves. In turn, sexuality is equally powerful in shaping society and social norms, both through organized political/community movements and through interpersonal relationships. How have our understandings of sexuality and gender identity shifted over the past fifty years? What will be the future of sexuality in coming decades?

Through historical readings and contemporary theory, along with films and other media, this course explores the changing social constructions of sexual identity and pivotal moments in LGBTQ history, as well as examining how heterosexuality and LGBTQ identities influence and interface with each other. Some specific topics that we will study and discuss include:

- community organizations and social events related to sexual identity
- same-sex marriage equality and alternative families
- the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and beyond
- changing conceptions of bisexuality and "heteroflexibility"
- social activism focused on issues of gender and sexual identity
- emergence of transgender and intersexual identities and communities
- issues surrounding asexuality, consent, disability, race, and sex education.

In addition to writing some short in-class response papers (1 - 2 pages each) based on course topics, students will write one final essay (5 pages) on a relevant community organization or social event of their choice. A brief class presentation (10 minutes) on that organization or social event will also be required.

This course fulfills a Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement. (NOTE: If you're interested in taking the course as an HONORS 380 exception with an additional assignment instead, please just email Jason when you register for the class!)

Honors 380 (1): Exploring Psychological Identities in TV and Film (#3250)

TuTh 10:00am - 1:00pm

Roxann Harvey, Honors College

In our rapidly changing cultural landscape, popular movies and TV series serve as powerful mirrors reflecting societal values, norms and struggles. This course examines the psychological themes present in contemporary media, including reality television, K-Pop dramas, modern series and popular movies. Through the lens of psychological theory, we will explore the practical implications of character portrayals, emphasizing how they can inform our understanding of real-world issues such as social influence, stigma, identity formation and mental health challenges.

By critically analyzing peer-reviewed research articles and media examples such as *Bridgerton*, *Sex Education*, and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, students will explore the intersection of psychology and culture, enhancing their ability to connect psychological theories to everyday scenarios. These analyses offer insights into how media shapes perception of self and society, providing valuable lessons on the psychological processes that govern human behavior.

This course encourages students to become more discerning consumers of popular culture, equipping them with the tools to analyze and interpret the psychological narratives embedded within entertainment. Students will gain a multifaceted understanding of how media both reflects and shapes societal and individual identities, enhancing their ability to apply psychological concepts to real-world contexts. Course requirements will be as follows:

- Attendance, active class discussion & leading class discussions
- Weekly 2-page reflections related to the episode, including an in-depth analysis of at least one related peer-reviewed research article on the psychological concept of the week.
- A 10-minute presentation with slides on a topic of your choice that provides an in-depth analysis of a chosen psychological concept as represented across multiple media formats. The presentation must include analysis of at least five peer reviewed articles on the topic.
- 2-page written feedback on two peers' presentations.
- Final 10–12-page paper on a psychological concept of your choice analyzing how the concept is portrayed in two different TV shows or movies across different cultural or geographic contexts. The paper must reference at least eight peer -reviewed journal articles and draw connections between psychological theory and the media examples. The project includes a 5 - minute in class summary presentation with slides.

Fall 2025 Honors College 200-level Courses

Honors 210G (1): “The Personal Is Political”: Reproductive Justice on Film (#12684)

TuTh 9:30 - 10:45am

Carney Maley, Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies

The reproductive justice movement was developed by a group of Black women activists in the 1990s as a way to merge their advocacy for both reproductive rights and social justice issues. Using this intersectional framework, we will examine how ideas about reproduction have evolved in the U.S. from pre-*Roe vs. Wade* to the overturning of the Supreme Court case in 2022, to today. Reproductive Justice allows us to explore not only the evolution of abortion rights, but also the right for people to have children and to parent them in a safe environment. Therefore, we will investigate topics such as maternal healthcare, foster care, LGBTQ+ family building, new reproductive technologies, sterilization, and contraception. Students will read the works of legal scholars, activists, historians, and journalists to chart how people’s reproductive decisions are shaped not only by gender identity but also race, socioeconomic class, and sexuality.

The course will also focus on how issues of reproductive justice are represented in contemporary American film. Analyzing both narrative and documentary films from the 21st century can provide us with insights into how society views certain reproductive choices (i.e. what is considered socially acceptable, legal, desirable, etc.), and how these individual and structural decisions change over time. Assignments will include written analyses of contemporary documentary and narrative films and a final research project that investigates a current activist organization committed to one of the reproductive justice issues covered in the course.

This course fulfills the Intermediate Seminar (IS) requirement.

Honors 210G (2): The Science & Social Impact of Baseball & Softball (#12685)

TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm

Steve Ackerman, Honors College

Baseball and softball have both reflected American society and left their imprint on American consciousness. This course is designed for all students, regardless of background knowledge of science or social science. Science concepts discussed in class will be general and explained in everyday language. Although baseball/softball has more superstition and “magic” than perhaps any other sport, there is real science involved, which is often ignored or misunderstood.

Baseball and softball also impact our social conscience and attitudes such as class issues, gender issues, equality among ethnicities, etc. In this course we will examine scientific elements such as physics (what happens when a ball is thrown/batted/fielded, curve balls, rising fastballs), biology (sports genes, anatomical construction), math and sabermetrics/statistics, as well as the impact of these sports on society and how athletics reflect societal norms.

Students will have six writing assignments: three brief written responses (1 - 2 pages), two short papers (2 - 3 pages), one longer paper (> 5 pages, with five references required), as well as an oral class presentation.

This course fulfills the Intermediate Seminar (IS) requirement.

Honors 291 (1): Psychoanalysis, Beauty & Horror (#2755)

TuTh 4:00 - 5:15pm

Avak Hasratian, English

Psychoanalysis is both a clinical reality and a theory of art, allowing us to access and heal our internal psychic lives through aesthetic experiences that bridge desire with frightening over-fulfillment. These forces shape our ethics—codes that shift across time and cultures yet drive art and us to reclaim the traumatically unrepresentable: The Mother, The Dead, The (No)Thing, The Double, The Object.

This course examines how great Beauty emerges from this longing to reconnect with Loss, and why it can veer into Sublime horror. We'll begin with Freud's "The Uncanny," exploring the eerie in the familiar, then Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," where we doubt the line between the living and the dead.

Then, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* intensifies this unease, while Lacan's "Kant Avec Sade" ties pleasure to terror. Patrick Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* weaves obsession into an attempt to both cause and transcend death. Hitchcock's *Psycho* allows us to touch and disconnect from our own terrifying attachments, while Pedro Almodovar's *Volver* restores through beauty's maternal return.

Supplemental texts from film critics and possible works in sculpture, architecture, and other media deepen our view. Why do we seek both wonder and dread? How can psychoanalytic approaches to art allow us to detach from our increasingly superficial society of the spectacle? This course uncovers how beauty soothes and horror renews us. Expect rich discussions as we trace these thoughts through narratives, films, and ourselves. Assignments include short response papers and small group presentations.

This course fulfills an Arts (AR) distribution requirement.

Honors 292 (1): The Ethics of Wealth & Poverty (#2756)

MWF 12:00 - 12:50pm

Mickaella Perina, Philosophy

What constitutes wealth, and what constitutes poverty? How are wealth and poverty experienced domestically and globally? Do we have obligations to the poor? Ideas of wealth and poverty evoke various economic and existential conditions; in this course, we will explore the material and moral considerations associated with such conditions and some of its immediate consequences.

This course will focus on how philosophers have grappled with these issues and how social movements have addressed them. First, we will examine these issues from the perspective of philosophers who see these problems mainly as a matter of distribution of resources.

Second, we will study arguments defended by those who conceive of these problems as matters of justice and human rights and argue for an obligation to secure the social and economic rights of the poor. And third, we will consider these issues as great asymmetries of economic and political power requiring radical economic, social, and political change.

Students will be required to attend class regularly and participate in class discussion, to post comments on a discussion board on Canvas weekly, and to successfully complete four quizzes, two exams (an in-class mid-term exam and a 5-page take-home final essay), and a brief individual oral presentation.

This course fulfills a Humanities (HU) distribution requirement, and it can also be counted towards the Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity Minor.

Honors 292 (2): Theologies of Violence and Non-Violence: Connecting Sex and Religion in U.S. History (#3230)**TuTh 2:00 - 3:15pm****Mia Applebaum, Classics & Religious Studies**

Although the U.S. is sometimes classified among the world's secular liberal democracies, given its foundational separation between church and state, religion—both visibly and invisibly—shapes the contours of the nation's political and social life, especially around questions of sex and sexuality. This seminar explores how dominant social and political norms in the United States around sex and sexuality have produced forms of violence and influenced religious traditions.

We will begin with a theoretical introduction in which we explore the scholarly conversations around our key terms. Then we will examine inter-connected and ongoing historical periods where theological interpretations informed government policy toward Native American communities, racial segregation, the AIDS epidemic, abortion legality and bio-politics, and minoritized types of marriage. We will dive into fundamental questions, such as whether religion causes violence.

This class is facilitated like a seminar and will take students through a carefully curated list of academic essays, journalistic articles, and films. Assignments will include in-class presentations and two longer papers.

This course fulfills a Humanities (HU) distribution requirement and can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.

Honors 293 (1): The History of Higher Education (#12681)**TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm****Kaitlin Siner-Cappas, Global Inclusion & Social Development**

What does it mean to educate for public good? What is the role and importance of being an engaged citizen? To be an active participant in our own community and in a democratic society? How does this translate to our own backyard here at UMass Boston and its history and role as an urban, public, research university?

This course will focus on exploring the history of higher education, with a keen focus on periods of expansion, and will consider its role as a public good. The course will also explore related, critical perspectives on pedagogy, and education for emancipation and transformation, through the lens of scholars such as Freire and Dewey.

We will also explore the privatization and commodification of higher education, and concepts such as academic capitalism. These major course concepts will be explored and contextualized through the unique origin and evolution of UMass Boston, and the background and individuals who brought UMass Boston to bear – as well as related challenges and controversy - then and now. Students will also consider their own reasons for pursuing a college degree, and critically reflect on their own positions, identities, and motivations for pursuing higher education.

Course assignments focus on a series of weekly reflective activities; the development of an evolving personal and community statement about education; and a written analysis and presentation exploring a meaningful moment, movement, or historical figure in education. Course readings consist primarily of educational articles, policy briefs, historical/archival information, newspaper, and other forms of media.

This course fulfills a Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement and can also be applied to the minor in Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity.

Honors 293 (2): Race: Scientific Myth, Social Realities (#12682)**TuTh 2:00 - 3:15pm****Steve Ackerman, Honors College**

This course explores scientific, societal, and behavioral subjects explaining how, when, and where we started our journey to become *Homo sapiens*. We will discuss the basic tenets of evolution and its impact. All animals (and plants) have approximately the same 20,000 protein coding genes, just reassorted on their respective chromosomes. We discuss human evolution, from the first apes 48 million years ago in Asia who migrated to Africa, to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*. Genome mixing (introgression & admixture) among small isolated groups over 40 million years means that all human genomes are a hodge-podge of geographic sequences. We discuss the out-of-Africa migrations starting with *Homo*

erectus 1-2 million years ago, as well as the migrations of *Homo sapiens* from Africa. As these small groups interacted, there was genome mixing with Neandertals & Denisovans. Modern migrations of the last 7,000 years show that contemporary genomes too are a mixture of different geographic locales. We then discuss the philosophical and societal consequences of populations and ethnicity as a discrimination of differences. The philosophy of why human races were invented and the societal impacts of prejudices will be explored in a series of guest sessions. In particular we will address issues pertaining to African, Asian, Hispanic/Latino heritages and their historical and legal problems. Students will have six writing assignments: three brief written responses (1 - 2 pages), two short papers (2 - 3 pages), one longer paper (> 5 pages, with five references required), as well as an oral class presentation.

This course fulfills a Social/Behavioral (SB) distribution requirement.

Honors 294 (1): Poverty and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (#2757)

TuTh 12:30 - 1:45pm

Shymaa Allam, Global Inclusion & Social Development

Poverty is one of the most pressing global challenges, shaping policies, economies, and societies worldwide. Over the last 50 years, global development frameworks—including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—have prioritized poverty eradication as a fundamental objective. SDG Goal #1 aims to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere," recognizing that poverty is multidimensional and requires a holistic, transdisciplinary approach.

This course challenges conventional narratives that attribute poverty to personal failure, poor decision-making, or lack of morality. Instead, it critically examines how poverty is defined by those who experience it, the structural forces that shape economic inequality, and the complex decision-making processes of individuals living in poverty. Through an exploration of essential needs such as food, health, and education, students will analyze how social and economic systems create and sustain conditions of poverty. Additionally, the course will assess the extent to which individuals' choices can drive systemic change.

Students will engage with diverse readings, policy frameworks, and real-world case studies to develop a deeper understanding of poverty beyond economic deprivation. Assignments include short analytical reflections, a group project on SDG 1 ("No Poverty") in a specific region, and a final paper that explores a chosen topic's relationship to poverty and its alignment (or misalignment) with the SDGs. By the end of this course, students will be equipped to critically assess global anti-poverty efforts and develop informed perspectives on solutions for sustainable development and social justice.

This course fulfills a World Cultures (WC) distribution requirement and can also be counted towards the Wealth, Poverty, and Opportunity Minor.

Honors 294 (2): World Cultures through the Lens of Digital Photography (#2758)

(PLEASE NOTE: This course will be offered REMOTE via synchronous instruction)

TuTh 4:00 - 5:15pm

Mary Oleskiewicz, Performing Arts

In this fun, creative, and hands-on course, students will learn the fundamentals of photography, including photographic composition, essentials of digital editing, and visual storytelling. We will focus our collective lenses on the richness of world cultures in the Greater Boston area using cell phone cameras, DSLRs, or mirrorless cameras. Choice of camera is the student's preference (cameras will not be provided). In addition to developing a good eye, students will learn the ins-and-outs of preparing a final image for printing. We will learn from photos of great photographers, and collectively view and discuss student photos during zoom meetings.

Each student will attend and photograph at least one cultural event of their choice during the semester and keep a class photo journal. After a period of photographic exploration in the field, each student will shoot and assemble a digital portfolio on some aspect of a particular culture (people, food, music, architecture, ritual, etc). In addition, each student will select one photo to be enlarged, professionally printed, framed and matted (students will not bear this cost). We anticipate that the printed photos will be shown on campus in a special class exhibit near semester's end. There will be no final paper or exams. Students may be asked to write a descriptive or personal, philosophical introduction to their digital portfolio. No prior knowledge of photography is required. Each student will be guided to improve from their current level. Final grades

will be based on an individual student's improvement, effort, growth, and willingness to take artistic risks with the subject matter.

This course fulfills a World Cultures (WC) distribution requirement.

Honors 295 (1): Addiction

TuTh 9:30 - 10:45am

Alexia Pollack, Biology

****PLEASE NOTE:** because the biological perspective on “addiction” is vast and encompasses many disciplines, our focus will be on underlying neurobiology and mechanisms of drugs of abuse. *Therefore, students **must** have a solid foundation in general biology (BIOL 111 or equivalent) prior to taking this course***

What is addiction? How do drugs such as cocaine, heroin, nicotine and alcohol affect the brain? Why is addiction so difficult to treat and to cure?

We will use the textbook *Psychopharmacology: Drugs, the Brain, and Behavior* (Meyer and Quenzer, 3rd edition) in order to explore these questions and learn about the structure and organization of the brain, the mechanism of action of drugs of abuse, and the nature of the changes that take place in the brain following exposure to drugs of abuse.

We will also read and discuss articles from *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* and a non-fiction account of addiction by a young adult: *Tweak* by Nic Sheff. These texts will add depth and dimensions to the topic by allowing us to consider the effect of drugs on individuals and families, as well as the role culture plays in substance use and abuse.

There will be three written assignments (2-5 pages in length) and one midterm exam on biology. At the end of the semester, each student will create and deliver a short oral presentation; specific topics will be chosen by each student.

This course fulfills a Natural Sciences (NS) distribution requirement.

Fall 2025 Honors College Junior Colloquia

*You must have completed at least **two** Honors courses at the 200-level to take the Junior Colloquium.*

Honors 380 (1): The Ghost in the Machine: Consciousness, AI, and the Future of Civilization (#1483)

TuTh 11:00am - 12:15pm

Todd Drogy, English

What is consciousness? Where does it reside? Can it be created, artificially? What can we do to prepare ourselves for advanced AI, as we anticipate massive technological change and its impact on various existential threats posed to human civilization?

In *The Ghost in the Machine: Consciousness, AI, and Future of Civilization*, we will explore and endeavor to understand the origin and nature of consciousness. By looking back toward ancient texts and forward toward the edges of contemporary science and philosophy, we will engage with several models of consciousness. Then, we will seek to extrapolate and apply such models to the great ethical and technological challenges confronting our civilization.

To what degree might AI transform the psycho-social domains of relationship, community, sex, labor, gender, health, and war? If AI becomes conscious, how might we incorporate it into our rituals, laws, and the protection of natural rights?

Academic texts will play an important role in this course, but we will also look to popular culture—TV, film, music, and social media—as we seek to grapple with ethical dilemmas posed by AI and its multiplicity of effects on human civilization.

This is a discussion-based class, with a strong emphasis on class participation. You will compose four short (3 page) Reflective Analysis papers on readings/films/discussions. You will also keep a journal of reflective, informal writing. A thesis-driven research paper (12-14 pages) will be due at semester's end.

Honors 380 (2): Drug Action and Discovery (#2754)

Tuesday 12:30 - 3:15pm

Paul Bauer, Honors College

This course will introduce you to the concepts of drug action and discovery and focus on two questions: First, how do drugs interact with the body and cause their positive and negative effects? Second, how are drug therapeutics discovered and developed?

We will start with a overview of drug properties and targets and then review the basic principles of drug pharmacology, pharmacokinetics and safety supported by examples from the scientific literature. You will choose a drug of personal interest and create interim written reports (1 page) and a summary presentation (5 pages) based on the class discussions and lectures.

In the second part of the course, we will discuss broad drug discovery processes and work as a class to develop a proposal for a new drug discovery program. We will decide on an unmet medical need and drug target, and develop plans for discovering leads, assessing preclinical safety, designing a clinical trial and developing a patient strategy. Classes will focus on key concepts and teams will contribute to decision making at each stage. Knowledge quizzes and short group presentations will measure understanding, and a presentation of the final proposal to the faculty (approximately 30 minutes) will conclude the course. Students should have a good foundation in general biology, and knowledge of Cell Biology or Biochemistry is helpful but not required.

The course reference book will be on Course Reserve at Healey Library: *Rang & Dale's Pharmacology* (10th edition).

Honors 380 (3): On Theory (#3874)

MW 12:00 - 1:15pm

Alex Des Forges, Modern Languages

This course will examine the functions and discourses of "theory" across a variety of disciplines, including the hard sciences, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies. Our aim is to assess the relative significance of theoretical thinking in the different disciplines, reflect critically on the pretexts for and consequences of defining one's own project as theoretical, and consider the kinds of work that are specifically excluded from or generally understood as complementary to "theory."

How is theory different from practice? Is it possible to identify a transdisciplinary mode of theorizing, or are the ways in which theories are created inevitably defined by the disciplines to which they belong? How do certain styles of thinking, speaking, or writing suggest to us that they aim to go beyond a data set, individual experience, or personal observation to make more general statements about the world? What is the relationship between theory and methodology? Is theory useful? What are its pitfalls? These are some of the questions that we will address.

Requirements include weekly short written responses, active participation in class discussions, and a final 12-15 page research paper. Preparation for the research paper will include an annotated bibliography and a brief presentation to the class on your work in progress.

Alternative HONORS 380 course:

ASIAN 488L/MLLC 488L (1): The Idea of Asia (#12780/#12781)

TuTh 9:30 - 10:45am

Teruko Kawashima, Asian Studies

*This course is similar to an Honors junior colloquium and can be taken as an alternative HONORS 380 course in Fall 2025. (An HONORS 380 exception will be submitted to the registrar's office **after the student's completion of this course.**)*

This capstone course for Asian Studies majors, which also welcomes upper-level Honors College students, examines the imagination of “Asia” from a variety of perspectives: historical, economic, religious, philosophical, literary, and artistic. The aim of the course is to consider Asia as a region by exploring texts and phenomena that address issues beyond the boundaries of single national traditions. Through such explorations, we will try to think about how Asia is defined by those inside and outside this large and diverse region of the world.

The course begins by looking at how, at various moments, specific Asian cultures envisioned themselves vis-à-vis other Asian cultures. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam provide insight into how texts, people, and systems of thought traveled between and within South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, while a look at conceptualizations of languages, nationalisms, and intra-Asian colonialism affords an opportunity to examine how these “ideas of Asia by Asians” concretely manifested themselves, sometimes problematically.

In the second part of the course, we will consider how the idea of a “coherent Asia” was constructed by those outside of Asia. Such ideas about Asia had great influence in both Asian and global history; we will investigate historical and contemporary examples, ranging from European philosophical texts, modern American films, to contemporary news media representations. These investigations will help us situate our own, current understandings of Asia. *All readings will be in English translation, and no specific prior knowledge about Asia is required, as this is a thought-focused course.*