FRESHMAN SEMINARS

Spring 2010

A Program of Personalized Study
for Freshmen at
the University of Southern California
QUESTION:

I've signed up for four units of Spanish, eight units of General Education and four units of my major. What do I do with the other two units?

QUESTION:

I'd like to meet a group of freshman like me, who take their education seriously. And a chance to work with a senior professor during my first semester at USC. Any suggestions?
The University has a program to help entering students understand the bigger picture of academic life at USC. We call them Freshman Seminars—small classes open only to freshmen, led by professors who are invited to teach subjects they find especially intriguing or provocative.

Each class allows students a glimpse of University life from the perspective of an informed member of the campus community, who has planned a special seminar with incoming freshmen in mind. The program began twenty-one years ago with eight seminars, limited to twelve students apiece. Every term since then, participants have recommended that classes be made available to more students.

This Spring, eleven seminars will be offered, with eighteen freshmen in each. Topics were chosen to reflect student interest and the enthusiasm of the seminar leaders: from bioterrorism to natural disasters, self-expression to the Sixties. Participants earn two units on a credit/no credit basis. No prior knowledge of the subject matter is expected. Freshman Seminars are scheduled once a week, usually in the afternoons, Monday through Thursday. Most meet for two hours at a time and run for ten or eleven weeks. Some include visits to laboratories, or professors' homes, but all meet initially on the main campus and end well before final exams.

Freshman Seminars are intended to stimulate thinking and personal relationships rather than competition for grades, so tests or writing assignments, though required, are not usually emphasized. The life of the mind is explored instead in a variety of ways: exploring Holland and the Holocaust, the American West or diversity in Islam. Freshmen will discover many opportunities to connect with teachers and fellow students—which can make a world of difference to a college career.

If you haven't quite decided what interests you, consider signing up for a Freshman Seminar. It's a great way to get an inside look at a subject that intrigues you, and academic life in general.
**Mondays**

**Bioterrorism and Emerging Diseases: Their Impact on Society**  
John Beierle  
Course FSEM 100; class 34600R  
Meeting Mondays, 12:00 to 1:50 PM

**Natural Disasters**  
Henry Koffman  
Course FSEM 100; class 34604R  
Meeting Mondays, 2:00 to 3:50 PM

**Seinfield is Life**  
James Brecher  
Course FSEM 100; class 34605R  
Meeting Mondays, 2 to 3:50 PM

**Tuesdays**

**Cultural Diversity in Islam**  
Ayse Rorlich  
Course FSEM 100; class 34601R  
Meeting Tuesdays, 12:00 to 1:50 PM

**Food and Culture**  
Thomas Gustafson  
Course FSEM 100; class 34608R  
Meeting Tuesdays, 2 to 3:50 PM

**He Said, She Said, They Said: Making Sense of the Opinion Makers and Making Up Your Own Mind**  
Anthony Anderson  
Course FSEM 100; class 34607R  
Meeting Tuesdays, 2 to 3:50 PM

**Sensual Science**  
Margo Apostolos  
Course FSEM 100; class 34619R  
Meeting Tuesdays, 3:00 to 4:50 PM

*Homecoming Float, 1925. USC Archives.*
**Wednesdays**

**The Archaeology of Inspiration**  
Stacie Chaiken  
Course FSEM 100; class 34602R  
Meeting Wednesdays, 12 to 1:50 PM

**Musical Subcultures of the Sixties**  
William Biersach  
Course FSEM 100; class 34610R  
Meeting Wednesdays, 2:00 to 3:50 PM

**Self-Expression and the Arts**  
Eric Trules  
Course FSEM 100; class 34612R  
Meeting Wednesdays, 2:00 to 3:50 PM

**A (W)rite of Passage:**  
USC, JEP, and NAI  
Alice Villasenor  
Course FSEM 100; class 34620R  
Meeting Wednesdays, 3:00 to 4:50 PM

**Thursdays**

**Cowboy Up: The American Cowboy in Fact and Fiction**  
Ron Scheer  
Course FSEM 100; class 34615R  
Meeting Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:50 PM

**Writing to Be Read**  
Richard Fliegel  
Course FSEM 100; class 34616R  
Meeting Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:50 PM

*Maypole Show, 1917. USC Archives.*
Some comments from earlier years:

I liked the comfortable, informal attitude as well as the small, intimate group. The seminar has made the university seem smaller and more personal.

-English major in "Five Women Writing"

It was a wonderful experience both intellectually and socially. I learned a great deal and also met some really nice people.

-International Relations major in "Eastern Europe in the 20th Century"

You get a chance to take a class on something that personally interests you. Once a week for two credits is definitely worth it.

-Undecided major in "Sigmund Freud: An Introduction to Psychoanalysis."

You will meet people and learn without a lot of pressure.

-Political Science major in "Women in the City: Images, Novels, Films"

Our instructor was great and respectful of our opinions and needs. The course itself was very interesting and I enjoyed it.

-Biomedical and Electrical Engineering major in "Medical Controversies and the Law"

It helps you balance yourself. It's good to read a little Tolstoy when you only have chemistry and biology bouncing around in your head."

-Psychobiology major in "Tolstoy's War and Peace"

This course helped me understand what great resources the faculty are and in general the wide variety of knowledge available at this University.

-Journalism/Political Science major in "Existentialism"

You learn about yourself and the class helped me to put my career into perspective. It made me open my mind to more things I could do.

-Biology major in "Sensual Science"

The best part was when I left the building after class and just went and ate dinner and thought about what was said.

-Undeclared major in "The End of the Cold War"

Great program. Great class. I'm going to take another Freshman Seminar next semester. So will my roommates.

-Business major in "The Renaissance Ideal"
**Mondays**

**Bioterrorism and Emerging Diseases: Their Impact on Society**  
John Beierle

Ebola, dengue fever, and Rift Valley fever are right now ravaging areas of the world—and those diseases are spreading. This course will cover the key diseases emerging throughout the world today, the underlying causes behind their appearances, and the economic, political, and societal pressures which impact their emergence.

We will also learn about the microbes projected to be used in bioterrorism and the means by which they may be transmitted to large segments of the population, as well as the response of health agencies throughout the world. We will examine key websites and personal and protective devices that can be applied to everyday life.

Students will come out of this class with a basic understanding of disease transmission, the global impact of infectious diseases. The basic concepts of vaccines and vaccinations will be detailed, and what we should expect in the future.

This course will be taught by John Beierle, an Associate Professor of Microbiology in the Basic Sciences Department in the School of Dentistry at USC. Dr. Beierle has been a National Institutes of Health Career Research Development Awardee, past President of the California Tissue Culture Association, and International Lecturer on infection control. His current research interests include environmental microbiology and public health.

**Natural Disasters**  
Henry M. Koffman

America has experienced more natural disasters than any other country in the world. We will explore the reasons. We will investigate the four major natural disasters: flood, fire, wind and earthquakes. What causes them, where do they occur, what are their impact and damage and finally what preventative measures can be applied?

Students are expected to attend the weekly meetings and present their research paper. A field trip to the California Science Center is planned. No quizzes, tests, mid-terms or final will be given. Final grade is based on participation and quality of work.

Henry M. Koffman, P.E., is the Director of the Construction Engineering and Management Program in the Viterbi School of Engineering's Civil Engineering Department. He is a real estate land developer, licensed building contractor, and a registered Professional Engineer in the State of California.
Seinfeld is Life
James Brecher

_Seinfeld_, which aired on NBC from 1989-1998, became one of the most successful situation comedies in television history. The self-described “show about nothing” really was about something: it presented the lives of its four main characters facing their everyday problems as individuals relating to each other and the world around them. These situations mirror the problems we “real people” face each day, and the solutions the show presents through the characters’ reactions provide guidance in how we should live our lives.

This seminar will look at these situations, the characters’ responses, and their – often disastrous – results as a guide to learn how more appropriately to respond to the situations we face in our own daily lives. We will accomplish this examination and personal growth through academic and popular readings, class presentations based upon particular episodes, and the occasional guest.

James Brecher, J.D., Ph.D., has practiced law, worked in the business world, and for the past eight years has taught advanced composition to pre-law and arts and humanities students and leadership and writing to occupational doctoral students here at USC. He has been awarded the USC College Outstanding Teaching Award in Advanced Writing, the John R. Hubbard award for fraternity and sorority service, and a “Tommy” award for the development of leadership skills and attributes in students.
Cultural Diversity in Islam  
Ayse Rorlich

This seminar aims at exploring the relationship between culture and religion by focusing on the role that culture plays in determining the interpretation of dogma and in shaping religious practices. To that end, we will explore diverse social worlds claiming Islamic affiliation, while also investigating the shared fundamental beliefs of the Muslims.

Azade-Ayse Rorlich is an Associate Professor of Russian History at USC. She received the Social Sciences Division Distinguished Teaching Award in 1983 and the General Education Teaching Award in 2001. She has conducted archival and library research in many cities of the former Soviet Union, has traveled extensively through the Russian republic and Central Asia, and specializes in the study of the Muslims of the Russian empire, the Soviet Union and its successor states. Her research focuses on the study of identity issues with a special emphasis on the place of religion and ethnicity in identity construction.

Food and Culture  
Thomas Gustafson

At the heart of the humanities is cultural study, and the study of culture at the university is primarily done through the study of literature, music, art, philosophy, religion, and language itself. This course, however, is governed by the premise that the pursuit and cooking of food—those twin cooperative acts—give birth to culture, and that sophisticated cultivation of the way we transform the raw into the cooked to affect taste—the art of cuisine—has become a mark of urbanity. This course will explore the interplay between food and culture, studying the history of civilizations through the history of food, beginning with a focus on an America and Europe transformed by the collision of cultures that Columbus initiated in 1492 and concluding with a focus on California cuisine and the food commerce and culture of Los Angeles.

The course will include field trips in and around Los Angeles to places such as the Grand Central Market, the Hollywood Farmer’s market, and a heirloom tomato farm. Each student will research a favorite food or spice and how it has proliferated around the world, while examining how political events and scientific inventions affected this progression. The “final exam” for the course will take place at the Caribbean restaurant “Cha Cha Cha” where we will test the mahi mahi mango taco, discuss its cultural significance, and then head to Pinkberry’s in Koreatown for a dessert of green tea frozen yogurt. Films such as “Like Water for Chocolate” and “What’s Cooking” will accompany readings for the course drawn from the writings of food lovers, anthropologists, historians and poets.

The course will be taught by Thomas Gustafson, a professor of English, Carol Gustafson, an urban ecologist, and Jennifer Houst, a farm ethnographer and professional chef. Their home is Birnkrant Residential College, where Thomas and Carol serve as resident faculty.
He Said, She Said, They Said: Making Sense of Opinion Makers and Making Up Your Own Mind
Anthony Anderson

This course will explore a wide variety of issues that affect us locally, nationally, and internationally. In a discussion format, this class will examine how the politicians, the media, the pundits, the think tanks, the YouTubers, and the bloggers are all at work in shaping and manipulating public opinion to their own ends.

Students will learn strategies for both locating and evaluating the opinion makers. There will be short weekly readings and each student will be required to make one oral presentation in the course of the class.

Anthony Anderson is an Arts and Humanities and Social Studies Librarian. He has previously taught two other Freshman Seminars: “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” Ethnic Conflicts in the World Today and the Media,” and “Anne Frank Was Not Alone: Holland and the Holocaust.”

Sensual Science
Margo Apostolos

Sensual Science is a way of looking at the world, a thought process that merges scientific inquiry with artistic creation. An objective of this course is to foster the growth of creative thinking by providing alternative approaches to problem solving which integrate art and science.

The course will follow a lecture/discussion format. The lectures will provide a philosophical, historical, and sociological basis. That is, readings and discussions will vary from aesthetics to the philosophy of science; industrial design will frame a historical view; and relevant ideas in today’s society will comprise the applications of creative thinking to current issues.

Margo K. Apostolos is an Associate Professor and Director of Dance in the School of Theatre at USC. She earned her Ph.D. from Stanford University and holds a M.A. in Dance from Northwestern University. Her research includes the exploration of an aesthetic dimension to robotics movement and the use of robots by the severely disabled in rehabilitative settings.
Wednesdays

The Archaeology of Inspiration
Stacie Chaiken

Whether you’re a scientist, a business person, an artist, or utterly undeclared, the world is full of inspiration from which to cook things up: plays, movies, meals, sonnets, songs, equations, proofs, or models for a whole new way of doing commerce.

In this seminar, playwright-performer Stacie Chaiken will lead students on a series of adventures and explorations. We might visit some mummies, taste exotic treats, or go on field trips to places you’ve likely never been, looking for inspiration to make something—anything. And whatever we make, we’ll show in an exhibit late in the spring.

Stacie Chaiken is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the USC School of Theatre, where she teaches Acting and Solo Performance. She has performed on and off-Broadway, on television and film, in the US and abroad, and is the writer-performer of the solo play, Looking for Louie. Chaiken has served as a visiting Fulbright Senior Specialist Scholar on the faculty of the Theatre Department of Tel Aviv University, and has lectured at Bar Ilan and New York Universities.

Musical Subcultures of the Sixties
William Biersach

During the sixties, due to circumstances within the music industry peculiar to the time, various popular musical styles developed which expressed the social, cultural, religious, political and sexual changes in our society. While the music of this period survives today and enjoys considerable popularity, much of the meaning behind it has been lost because the context has largely been forgotten.

In this seminar, students will pair off to do research projects involving various aspects of the sixties and how they found musical expression. Together we will sift through the lyrics, musical styles, facts, tall tales, and contrived myths surrounding various influential people, events, and movements. In so doing we will try to arrive at an understanding of what was really going on in the music business, the drug scene, the pop culture, political and social trends, and the minds of the youth during those turbulent years.

William L. Biersach has been teaching electro-acoustic media and recording technology in the Thornton School of Music since 1975, and has been conducting Freshman Seminars for nineteen years. In 1997 he received the USC Gamma Sigma Alpha Professor of the Year Award. As a studio musician and synthesizer programmer he composed the score for the Japanese cartoon series, Dan Cougar, and the musical theme for the USC Campaign for Leadership into the 21st Century. In 1995 he produced his first solo album, Filaxis Reconsidered: Music for Chapman Stick and Extensively-Prepared Digital Gadgets Nineteen Inches Wide, and among other projects since then, The Great Apple River Down Stream Inner Tube Float in 2000. His courses on the Beatles and Classic Rock have attracted the attention of Rolling Stone Magazine, CNN and Prime Time Live.
Self-Expression and the Arts
Eric Trules

Self-expression is the taking of an internal impulse -- a personal vision -- and through self-awareness putting it into external form. Writing, acting, painting, dancing, sculpting, filmmaking, singing--these are the wings upon which artists have flown from time immemorial. Self-expression and creativity are universal functions of the human experience. We are all creative, and we all have the need to express ourselves.

"Self-Expression and the Arts" will be an opportunity to explore this process. We will look at the wide range of self-expression in the performing, literary, and visual arts by talking in the classroom, and by attending local events, shows, and exhibitions in Los Angeles, as time permits. The seminar will attempt to open up the doors of perception in appreciating the arts--and simultaneously, to ask the student to have first-hand experience with his or her own creativity and self-expression. There will be brief weekly “creativity” assignments on perceiving and making art--as well as on the process of expressing oneself--in whatever ways each student finds the courage to discover.

“Trules,” as he is called by students, is an Associate Professor of Theater Practice at USC’s School of Theater and has been an artist-educator for forty years. He was a modern dancer in Chicago, founder, director, and chief bozo of NYC's resident clown troupe, and he has been a director-producer, poet, screenwriter, documentary filmmaker, arts festival producer, and solo performance artist in Los Angeles for the last twenty-five years. He is a USC Phi Kappa Phi "Faculty Recognition Award" winner, an Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award winner, and is currently a Fulbright Senior Specialist in American Studies (2008-13).

A (W)rite of Passage: 
USC, JEP, and NAI 
Alice Villasenor

This course will employ books as a means to explore rites of passage in and around the USC campus. We will spend the first few weeks of the course discussing texts (anthropological studies and classical literature) that feature formal education as a common rite of passage. We will consider the extent to which anthropological fieldwork can help us learn about USC, as we move into the freshman dorms with anthropology professor-turned-college freshman, Rebekah Nathan. We will then consider different kinds of rites of passage as reflected in literature.

After we have developed a theoretical frame with which to think about education as a rite of passage, you will participate in a common rite of passage for freshman on the USC campus: the USC Joint Educational Project (www.usc.edu/jep). All students in this course will become teachers, as you mentor college-bound high school students in USC’s Neighborhood Academic Initiative (www.usc.edu/ext-relations/nai/).

As Director of Humanities Initiatives for the Joint Educational Project in USC College, Alice Villasenor is starting an interdisciplinary writing mentorship program, linking USC students with college-bound high school students in South Central Los Angeles community schools. This seminar presents an opportunity for freshmen to help JEP create a new mentoring program while it is still in the early stages of development.
Cowboy Up: The American Cowboy in Fact and Fiction
Ron Scheer

Early cowboys in the 19th century were young, wild, and considered a public nuisance whenever they came into town from herding and trailing cattle on the open ranges. Hollywood made this unwashed, uneducated, and untamed hell raiser into a heroic and mythic figure. In movie westerns, the cowboy became an icon of American character, standing for our best national traits: honesty, loyalty, patriotism, courage, determination, and both physical and moral strength.

Let's look at the cowboy as we find him over the years from “The Virginian,” first adapted by Cecil B. DeMille from Owen Wister’s novel in 1914, to the most recent version of the same story almost a century later. Drawing on the university’s library of westerns and on downloadable films from Netflix, we’ll be looking at examples of western classics (both in and out of class) to explore evolving ideas about this particular American figure of the popular imagination. We’ll also take side trips into cowboy song and poetry, and short stories, plus a reading of the novel Shane. Come prepared to think, talk, discuss, and enjoy.

Dr. Scheer is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Writing Program. He has taught film, literature and writing. He grew up just west of the 98th meridian on the Great Plains.

Writing to Be Read
Richard Fliegel

"No one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money," said Samuel Johnson, but that's not the end of the story. There is after all a reader or an audience, expecting something. This is a seminar for writers or for people who are trying to be. We will focus on the question, "How does it change what I write when I'm determined to affect my readers?"

Writing to express yourself accurately is hard, but it's like falling off a log compared to writing things that succeed in stirring other people's emotions.

Students will be expected to read other writers' work in several genres and to share with the class what they themselves have written, sometimes on the spot. We promise not to laugh unless it's funny--and if that isn't scary, the devil knows what is.

Richard Fliegel is the Director of the Freshman Seminar program and Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs in USC College. He has published several detective novels and tried his hand at some other forms, from poetry to episodic television.