FRESHMAN SEMINARS

Spring 2011

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?
USC's ANSWER:

FRESHMAN SEMINARS
an inside look at intellectual life

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**

*Cowboy Up: The American Cowboy in Fiction and Fact*
Ron Scheer  
Section 34604  
Mondays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*Natural Disasters*
Henry Koffman  
Section 34606  
Mondays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*Seinfield is Life*
James Brecher  
Section 34605  
Mondays, 2:00-3:50 pm

**Tuesdays**

*Emotional Intelligence*
Thomas Gustafson  
Section 34609  
Tuesdays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*He Said, She Said, They Said: Making Sense of the Opinion Makers and Making Up Your Own Mind*
Anthony Anderson  
Section 34607  
Tuesdays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*Sensual Science*
Margo Apostolos  
Section 34619  
Tuesdays, 3:00-4:50 pm

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

*The Archaeology of Inspiration*
Stacie Chaiken  
Section 34610  
Wednesdays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*Self-Expression and the Arts*
Eric Trules  
Section 34612  
Wednesdays, 2:00-3:50 pm

*Musical Subcultures of the Sixties*
Bill Biersach  
Section 34622  
Wednesdays, 4:00-5:50 pm

**Thursdays**

*Writing to Be Read*
Richard Fliegel  
Section 34616  
Thursdays, 2:00 -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"
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.

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. This is not a class about the creation and the mechanics of the show, but an examination of what these situations faced by the characters can teach us. 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 nine years has taught advanced composition to pre-law and arts and humanities students and leadership and writing to occupational therapy 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 two “Tommy” awards for the development of leadership skills and attributes in students.

Tuesday

Emotional Intelligence
Thomas Gustafson

The university holds itself as a place devoted to the study and practice of critical thinking, and college curricula always give a pre-eminent place to courses on the history of Western (and non-Western) thought. But where in our education do we study and develop emotional intelligence? Can emotional intelligence even be taught? What if the university offered a course where we had the chance to study not just the head but the heart, not critical thinking but emotional intelligence, and where love of knowledge was combined with knowledge about love?

This Freshman Seminar will be such a course: It will draw upon literature ranging from the writings of Epicurus and Montaigne to stories by James Baldwin and the film “Groundhog Day” (and upon recent research in the sciences and psychology) to study such emotions as love, jealousy, anger, fear, hate, compassion, joy and happiness. At the heart of the course will be an attempt to study how and where we learn forms of intelligence not measured by any SAT test but significant for your life, including what one author calls such “essential human competencies” as “self-awareness, self-control, and empathy, and the arts of listening, resolving conflict, and cooperation.”

Inside the classroom, Thomas Gustafson teaches courses in American literature and American Studies. Outside the classroom, he serves as Faculty Master of Birnkrant Residential College.
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 You-Tubers, 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).

**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.