Mock Senate

In our Mock Senate, students will assume the role of a sitting U.S. Senator and then argue from that position for various pieces of legislation. Students will write and debate bills and resolutions, conduct committee meetings and caucuses, and vote as if they were arguing for their senator's views. In the course of the session, we'll study basic parliamentary procedure, public speaking, debate techniques, public policy, and substantive arguments about live policy issues facing our country. Part of the challenge will be in defending and advocating views that the student might not personally agree with. Time limitations will prevent us from doing a lot of empirical research, so we'll be focusing on the rhetorical strategies and theoretical frameworks more than the practical details.

Tokyo by Way of Hollywood: Transnational Film Adaptations

What happens when cultural works are adapted elsewhere? In this course, we will explore the nature of transnational adaptation. Specifically, we will explore the question of what happens when the culture of East and West combine in the mass media. For example, we will look at the works of Akira Kurosawa, how he was influenced by the American Western and Hard-Boiled Detective genres, and how his films in turn influenced both the spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone and the Star Wars films of George Lucas. We will also explore the ways in which Anime was influenced by Walt Disney and how it later influenced American animation in turn. Primarily we will consider how media products are transmitted between two cultures and how each culture is changed as a result. In addition to discussing and analyzing various works and their transnational adaptations, students will complete a creative project where they will adapt a Japanese or Chinese work to an American context.

Do you live in a computer? Current and Future Realities

What if, in the future, computers are so powerful that they can run computer games that replicate exactly the way our world is? What if these computer games are so sophisticated that they include actual reproductions of human minds? And what if they actually exist, now, as you read this? How do you know you are not actually inside one of such computer games? In this class we will discuss this and other striking questions. We will learn different theories about the relationships between the mind and the brain, and whether Artificial Intelligence is a real possibility. With all this background we will address the question: Is it possible that we are currently living in a computer simulation? The class includes screening of short videos relevant to the topic: clips from the movies The Matrix, Blade Runner, The Thirteenth Floor, etc.; chapters of the show Jeopardy (where Watson the super computer defeats two humans); and some instructional videos. We will also “talk” with some Turing Machines like Cleverbot.
Aesthetics and Philosophy in Film

Suppose I prefer the film, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and you prefer the film, *Citizen Kane*. What sort of theoretical framework should we use to analyze your [bad] aesthetic judgment and my [good] aesthetic judgment? If judgments of taste are subjective, then does it even make sense to suggest that we can reach a conclusion regarding the artistic merit of sword-wielding turtles verses black-and-white newspaper tycoons? Or perhaps subjectively universal judgments are possible? Questions in the philosophy of art are some of the most provocative in all philosophy. In this course, we will try to answer some of those questions by examining both the field of aesthetics and the substantive philosophical content in film. Along the way, we’ll put our theory into practice while watching classic and contemporary films, from the auteur style in Alfred Hitchcock’s work to the political philosophy in *Antz*. We’ll also examine questions about interpreting the meaning of works of art; the nature of beauty; the possibility of objective judgment of works of art; and the relationships between art and reality, between creativity and reason, between art and life, and whether anything at all—like graffiti—could become a work of art.

Periodic Explorations

What’s your first impression when you see the periodic table? Intimidating? Fascinating? Boring facts that students must memorize? Well, most chemists will be happy to tell you that the periodic table represents an amazing summary of the building blocks of matter that make up the world around us. In this hands-on course, you will discover a variety of chemical reactions that help us understand various patterns and trends in the periodic table. We will also study the scientists who made important contributions to the table, from Meyer and Mendeleev to Seaborg and Hofmann. Both future chemists and non-scientists will find something to capture their interest. You get to go back to "element-ary" school as we explore the wonders of the periodic table!

How do you know? Historical and Contemporary Views on Skepticism and Philosophy

Do you know that there is an external world, filled with ordinary physical objects like tables and chairs, corresponding to your sensory experiences? Of course you do! But you could be dreaming right now. Or, as René Descartes suggested, it could be you are being deceived by an evil genius. Your sensory experiences would be the same, yet there would be no physical objects matching up with your experiences. So, the external-world skeptic says, you don’t actually know that the external world exists. In this course we will attempt to respond to the skeptic, using philosophical reasoning as our tool. We will examine responses to skeptical arguments from historical and contemporary philosophers, and look at contemporary skeptical scenarios from literature and film. Our end goal is to better understand human knowledge, so that when the skeptic asks “How do you know?” you will understand how to give a sufficient answer.

The Process of Architecture – NOTE: This course takes place during both morning and afternoon class times – Students accepted into this course will not have a separate afternoon course choice.

Have you ever thought about becoming an architect or a designer? If so, take this course to explore the built environment through a hands-on learning experience. Through drawing and model-making, you will leave this course understanding the processes designers take to develop their designs. Students will be able to work with clients for whom they will design a building for an actual site. An important lesson will be to study a site and understand how a client’s requirements and the characteristics of a location work together to influence your design. Some classes will take place at the University of Virginia’s School of Architecture, giving you an opportunity to experience what it’s like to be an architecture student and, maybe, also a future architect. Consider taking this course even if you want to explore something new, something you haven’t tried, no previous experience is required. In the class you will have opportunities to take creative ideas and turn them into big visions.