

Dis/Unity and Difference

Center for the Humanities Seminar 2018

(selected) Fridays 2:00-3:30
HSSC 2111

Prof. Tyler Roberts
Office Hours: T, Th 4-5, W 2:30-4:30, and by appointment

HSSC 2154
x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu

Course Description

Difference is a reality of community life, as is disagreement about how to respond to difference. Commonality and unity are also realities, or at least aspirations, of community life, for the very idea of “community” suggests something held in common that draws disparate groups of people together. How do we think, imagine, and represent difference and unity—and how do we think about them together? Does striving for unity always obscure or ignore difference? Does focusing on disunity undermine the possibility of unity and related ideals, such as solidarity? This course, which is tied to the Center for the Humanities 2018-19 annual theme, “Dis/Unity and Difference,” will explore these questions through the work of visiting scholars and select performances. Topics will include (but will likely not be limited to) race, religion, public health, and national identity.

Course Plan and Learning Goals

The Center for the Humanities seminar provides students with an opportunity to more deeply engage the work of visiting scholars and other select campus programming throughout the semester. The course puts an emphasis on preparation for and participation in extended class discussion. The seminar will meet eight times over the course of the semester and students are required to the Humanities Center events listed below (at this point, there is an event TBA, and the classes connected to it, that are not on the syllabus). We meet twice around each event, once in preparation for the event and once to discuss the event. Visiting scholars have selected readings most appropriate to introducing students to their work and to preparing for their talk. The instructor has selected the material for the first class session.

This course is a little unusual. We do not spend time building a foundation of knowledge in a particular area of inquiry. Rather, our discussions will build on and respond to Humanities Center programming with the goal of tying multidisciplinary humanistic inquiry to pressing questions in our world. We hope to create a space for open and honest discussion of sometimes challenging material and that you will all draw on your own experiences, both inside and outside the classroom as we forge connections between the material under consideration, our own lives, and the lives of those around us. A successful semester will depend on a spirit of generosity, an assumption that everyone in the room is here to listen, explore, and learn.

Course Work and Evaluation

As a student in the course, you have two core responsibilities: (1) coming to class having done the assigned readings, which in most cases the speakers themselves have recommended as

appropriate introductions to their work, and (2) attending the public events. You will also be responsible for keeping a course journal, which only you and I will see; due dates for these are on the schedule below. Your entries should relate to the material under consideration (whether readings, speaker events, or performances) to the core questions of the course (as stated above). Personal reflection is most welcome as part of that work. For class sessions during which we discuss an upcoming talk, you will also be responsible for preparing two questions that you would like to ask during the public event Q & A (or, in the case of the play, two questions you would like us to discuss in class). Each entry should be 250-300 words. Your final entry, offering reflections on the course as a whole, should be 500 words. Your grade will reflect your engagement with the course (attendance, preparation for and contribution to class, attendance of public events) and your journal.

Course Plan and Readings

Unless otherwise noted, readings are available through Burling Library electronic reserve.

Feb. 8: Class:

Karen Tabb, et al., "Self-rated health among multiracial young adults in the United States: findings from the add health"

Karen Tabb Dina, Mixed Race America and the Future of Health (TEDxTalk)

https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_www.youtube.com_watch-3Fv-3DcWAQzD5wcFc&d=DwIGaQ&c=HUrdOLg_tCr0UMeDjWLBOM9ILDRpsndbROGxEKQRFzk&r=ipDL0SbNnvagbTB0d7majWcmvpVIIkGKReiCQVteXY&m=BS97OLBuB5a6pcnzHwjPpGR1ha7WL8DqFn66AHqyGJU&s=iHfwQu1iWLcKensSWjq70YH9G_oSrnNO6hLDXud8vHQ&e=

Feb. 11: Journal Entry due: 250-300 words on Dina material discussed in class on Feb. 8 and two questions you would like to ask during the Dina Q & A.

Feb. 12: Lecture: Karen Tabb Dina, "Disparities in Pregnancy Outcomes among Racial Minority Women in the United States," JRC 101, 7:30.

Feb. 20: Journal Entry due: 250-300 words on Dina's talk.

Feb. 22: Class: Discussion of Dina lecture.

Feb. 27: Journal Entry due: 250-300 words on reading assigned for March 1 talk and two questions about the reading you would like us to discuss in class.

March 1: Class: Preparation for "Kafka's Ape"

Readings: Franz Kafka, *Report to An Academy*

Reviews of "Kafka's Ape"

(both readings can be found on class PWeb site under "Assignments")

Tony Miyambo and Dee Mohoto, "Kafka's Ape," Flanagan Theatre, 7:30

March 6: Journal Entry due: 250-300 words on "Kafka's Ape."

March 8: Class: Discussion of “Kafka’s Ape”

April 3: Journal Entry due: 250-300 words on Ferrario Reading

April 5: Class: Preparation for Ferrario talk
Readings: TBA

April 9: Alberta Ferrario: “Hinduism(s): Ancient “Religion”, Colonial Construction, or Nationalist Idea?: Debate over a problematic concept

April 17: 250-300 words on Ferrario Lecture

April 19: Class: Discussion of Ferrario talk and class wrap-up

April 24: Final Journal Entry due.

Course Policies

1) Out of Class Work Expectations: This is a two-credit course and I have worked to ensure that the workload, including attendance of related Humanities Center events outside of class time, is appropriate. I expect that you will attend the Center’s public events, which are often in the evening. If you cannot please communicate with me at the beginning of the semester.

2) Honesty/Intellectual Integrity: Grinnell College’s [Academic Honesty policy](#) is located in the online Student Handbook. It is the College’s expectation that students be aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy.

3) Statement of accommodations: It is essential that every one of you get the most out of this learning experience. I encourage students with documented disabilities, including invisible disabilities such as chronic illness, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, John Hirschman, located on the 3rd floor of the Rosenfield Center, 641-269-3089.

4) Adjustments relating to religious holidays: Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Please contact me within the first three weeks of the course if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you.

5) Communication: I consider active and thoughtful communication to be a key element of professional success. You will find that I am very accommodating when you communicate well with me, and less so when you do not. I try to return email within one business day, but sometimes life intervenes and I will not be able to do so. If you would like to communicate about something more than a logistical question (which I encourage you to ask each other about before getting in touch with me), it is always preferable to have a quick face-to-face conversation.