

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or** any **other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first-year seminar requirement.

COURSE NUMBER:			
COURSE TITLE:	<i>THE STONE: RACISM AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY</i>		
SUBMITTED BY:	Craig Vasey, Leah Cox	DATE:	Jan 26 2016
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION. In the space below, provide a one- to two-sentence description of this course. The description will be entered in Banner and will also be used in other publications about the first-year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

This course uses the recent series of interviews with contemporary American philosophers about racism (*The Stone*, *New York Times* blog), to explore the current social situation in the US, from color-blindness to “Black Lives Matter.” Students will do research into the theory and practice of ten important contemporary US thinkers.

RATIONALE. Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM’s basic components, explaining *specifically* how it will meet the common FSEM student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and arguing why this course should be approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement. Please point to specific readings, assignments, and exercises and show how they will meet the learning outcomes.

In the first week, the students will read the *Encyclopedia of Virginia.org* documents on eugenics legislation in the 1920’s, which will provide context for appreciating the history of “race,” the problematizing of “race,” the relevance of the Civil Rights Movement, and the intellectual/ academic advances of the last two decades. The first half of the course is built around George Yancy’s series of interviews in 2014-2015 with Judith Butler, bell hooks, Cornell West, Noam Chomsky, Seyla Benhabib, Charles Mills, Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, and others in *The Stone* blog of the *New York Times*. Each week the class will read two of the interviews and each student will be assigned to do an oral presentation summarizing the content of the interview, laying out and analyzing one or two specific arguments from it, or offering critical reaction to them. During the second half of the semester, they will be finding and reading some of the works of the philosopher they reported on from *The Stone*, bringing synopses of these texts to class to present and explicate.

Regarding the specific FSEM learning outcomes: Students will find and consult original sources (articles, books) by the philosopher they are assigned, as well as secondary sources on the philosopher’s work for their final project. Each student has to write up two arguments from each of six interviews. These will be submitted to critical scrutiny during class time. Each student will submit a written 2-page report on six interviews, and will have to peer-review the report of another student before the next class meeting. In all, each will peer-review and be peer-reviewed six times. Students will be accountable for overlooking grammatical or spelling errors (they will lose points on their own reports if they let writing errors go by in the reports of others without pointing them out). Students will have to participate in class discussions every day in class, and will each be doing a formal 20 minute oral presentation supported by PP or Prezi.

SYLLABUS. Attach a complete course syllabus.

SUBMIT this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Will Mackintosh (wmackint@umw.edu) by 5 PM on February 1, 2016. All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

From *The Stone*: Racism and Contemporary American Philosophy

Professor Craig Vasey. Dept of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion

Text: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/philosophers-on-race/>

Since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's, white Americans have wished the problem of race in US society would be gone. Time and again, we see that it is still with us, from the 1970's War on Drugs and the 1980's rhetoric of "welfare queens" and "color-blindness," to the recent acknowledgement of the phenomenon of mass incarceration and the police brutality called out by the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Since the 1980's a new approach in Philosophy and Sociology known as Critical Race Theory has emerged, which has moved racism decisively into the academic domain, and problematized the very concept of "race" (once again). This seminar aims to engage students in the connections between current philosophy and the very "real world" problem of how to think about, live with, and move forward with racism in America.

In the first weeks of class, the students will read the *Encyclopedia of Virginia.org* documents on eugenics legislation in the 1920's, which will provide context for appreciating the history of "race," the problematizing of "race," the relevance of the Civil Rights Movement, and the intellectual/ academic advances of the last two decades. During the next several weeks the course is built around George Yancy's series of interviews in 2014-2015 with Judith Butler, bell hooks, Cornell West, Noam Chomsky, Seyla Benhabib, Charles Mills, Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, and others in *The Stone* blog of the New York Times. Each week the class will read two of the interviews and every student will participate in developing the group's comprehension of them through oral presentations summarizing the content of the interview, laying out and analyzing two specific arguments from it, and offering critical reaction to them. During the second half of the semester, students will work more in depth on the philosopher they choose from *The Stone*, finding and reading some of his or her works, and bringing synopses of these texts to class to present and explicate.

Week 1. Introduction to FSEM, to UMW, to college expectations. Watch *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

Week 2. Read <http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/> on Eugenics legislation in Virginia. Finish *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

Week 3. Collaborative presentations on *The Stone* interview with Charles Mills. Each student will be assigned a portion of the interview to summarize, and /or an argument to unpack and analyze, and/ or the task of developing a critical response to the arguments or concepts of Mills' work, and bring a one-page report on this task. This week we will demystify what it means to **summarize** a passage, to **explicate** a concept, and to **analyze** an argument, so that everyone has a clear model to work from in the coming weeks. Student efforts will be critiqued by the professor and by other students for a) clarity, b) organization, and c) adequacy to the task; written reports will be peer-reviewed in class; everyone will be clear on expectations for their upcoming work.

Weeks 4-10. Reading and reporting on *The Stone* interviews: George Yancy interviewing twelve contemporary American philosophers on race and racism. Every student will bring to class each week a printed two- page report

consisting of summary, argument analysis, and critical reaction to the interview; half the class will report on the interview each day, all students contributing to the discussion. (If you report on Tuesday, you will receive your peer-review on Thursday and submit your revised report along with the peer-review on Friday by 4 PM. If you report on Thursday, you will receive your peer review on Tuesday and submit your revised report along with the peer-review on Wednesday by 4 PM.)

Midterm exam in week 6 on the concepts explored in the opening weeks and in Charles Mills' work.

Week 11. The metaphysics of race: How real is race? How is race real? The invention of the concept (Hume, Kant) and the history of the philosophical problematizing of the concept (du Bois, Sartre, Beauvoir, Fanon).

Weeks 10-14. Students pair up and pick one of the twelve philosophers we've encountered. During the next weeks they are deepening their familiarity with and grasp of essays and/or books by the person they choose, doing research into her or his ideas, reception, and importance. Outcome: a ten-page paper reporting on, explicating, and analyzing two works. Each day a pair of students will make an oral presentation on the progress of their work; this involves presenting and discussing the sources being used, such as articles, books, speeches, *YouTube* video clips, film clips, etc.

Work for the course:

10 1-page report and oral contribution on Charles Mills (Week 3)

36 Six 2-page reports on interviews, peer-reviewed; contributions to presentations (one per week in Weeks 4-10): written report is worth 4 pts; oral contribution is worth 2 pts; up to 2 points will be lost for inadequate peer-review. If you report on Tuesday, you will receive your peer-review on Thursday and submit your revised report along with the peer-review on Friday by 4 PM. If you report on Thursday, you will receive your peer review on Tuesday and submit your revised report along with the peer-review on Wednesday by 4 PM. All submitted written work is expected to be "college-level" work. The peer-review exercise will give you practice at working up to that expectation. The grade will be for the revised report.

12 Midterm exam (Week 7)

20 Final paper (Week 14)

10 Presentation on final paper progress (Week 11-14)

12 Final exam (Finals Week)

Final grade: 90-100: A 80-89: B 70-79: C 60-69: D

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an FSEM, students will

- utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments; **Students will find and**

consult original sources (articles, books) by the philosopher they are assigned, as well as secondary sources on the philosopher's work for their final project.

- **improve development and organization of written arguments; Each student will write up two arguments from each of six interviews. These will be submitted to critical scrutiny during class time.**
- **demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process; Each student will submit a written 2-page report on six interviews, and will peer-review the report of another student before the next class meeting. In all, each will peer-review and be peer-reviewed six times.**

Students will be accountable for overlooking grammatical or spelling errors (they will lose points on their own reports if they let writing errors go by in the reports of others without pointing them out).

- **apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; Students will prepare short oral commentaries on the interviews and present a more extensive oral report on their research project.**

and

- **communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion. Students will have to participate in class discussions every day in class, and will each be doing a formal 15 minute oral presentation supported by PP or Prezi.**