STUDENT DIRECTED SEMINARS
RESOURCE GUIDE

The Student Directed Seminars program provides upper-year undergraduate students the opportunity to coordinate and lead a small 3-credit seminar on a topic not currently offered at UBC.

Student Directed Seminars
student.seminars@ubc.ca
The Student Directed Seminars program provides upper-year undergraduate students (in 3rd year or later) the opportunity to propose, coordinate, and lead their own 3-credit seminar class with a small group of peers on a topic not currently offered at UBC-Vancouver.

Each seminar brings together a group of highly-motivated students to explore and investigate a topic through learning activities including group discussions, research papers, presentations, guest lectures, applied problem-solving, and Community Service Learning.

Get involved

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Be a student coordinator

Student Directed Seminars are an expansion of the directed studies option offered by most departments and are a great way to enhance your own learning experience while gaining facilitation and leadership skills. You will also have the unique opportunity to work closely with a faculty member developing the course proposal and syllabus.

Learn more about how to create your own Student Directed Seminar.

Advisory committee

The Student Directed Seminars Advisory Committee is made up of faculty members from various departments, staff from the Centre for Student Involvement & Careers, the Alma Mater Society (AMS), and a former SDS Student Facilitator.

All course proposals are reviewed thoroughly for academic rigor, quality of course plans, appropriate marking schemes and assignments, and the overall qualifications and suitability of the student coordinator(s).

Advisory Committee Members 2020-2021

- Dr. Pam Kalas, 2019-20 SDS Program Chair, Senior Instructor (Botany)
- Dr. José Rodriguez, 2020-21 SDS Program Chair, Senior Instructor (Chemistry)
- Robyn Leuty, Manager, Workplace Learning (Program Sponsor) (CSI&C)
- Natalie Gerum, Educator (CSI&C)
- Pam Garcia, Program Coordinator (CSI&C)
- Kristen Palmer, SDS alumna (Psychology/GRSJ)
- Elizabeth Wong, SDS alumna (Integrated Science)
- Tommy Kuo, SDS alumni (Chemical Biology)
- Jeff Miller, Senior Associate Director, Faculty Partnerships (CTLT)

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This is an incredible forum for discussion, venturing into meaningful topics that pressed all the students to question themselves, their peers, the authors.

- Former SDS Participant

Be a student participant

Student participants have a role in shaping many aspects of the course as well. From helping to edit the course syllabus and choose readings, to peer marking, facilitating learning activities, and leading individual classes, each student builds their own learning experience and contributes to the learning outcomes for their peers.

Check out the list of current Student Directed Seminars to see what courses are being offered this year.
Artificial Intelligence for Social Impact
( CPSC/CPEN*)
Coordinator: Ren Wang
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kevin Leyton-Brown

“AI for Social Impact” is a seminar which aims to explore the use cases around applied machine learning for complex social and environmental problems, such as climate change, fairness in democratic processes, equitable medical tools and transparency in legal decision making. The goal of this seminar is to equip participants with the ability to critically analyze and identify the social, political, and economic variables paramount for the successful implementation of a machine learning technology within a low resource setting. Participants will analyze successful and unsuccessful examples of real-world technologies through a business school-style case exposition, developing a rigorous case study framework, and a deeper appreciation for realizing machine learning research in the real world.

Prerequisite(s): CPSC 340
Registration: Students will be required to submit a brief personal statement on their motivation for attending the course, as well as a CV. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Canadian Response to the Global Refugee Crisis
(POLI 308Z 001)
Coordinators: Credo Casmil, Saya Soma
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jenny Peterson

Did you know that you, a fee-paying student at UBC, are a part of the Canadian Response to the Global Refugee Crises through Student Refugee Program (SRP)?

This seminar will analyze the Canadian approach to providing asylum for those who are forcibly displaced. Using the framework of three durable solutions proposed by the UNHCR, we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of Canada’s asylum infrastructure. The subjects of analyses include the Canadian definition of ‘a refugee,’ asylum legal framework, private sector’s role in resettlement sponsorship, NGOs’ support networks, individual programs supporting refugees like SRP, and so on. The seminar will consist of discussions, presentations, and possible speakers from refugee-related organizations. Through the group project and corresponding
term paper, students will examine specific issues within the Canadian refugee support system and propose possible solutions.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: A short introduction and statement of interest is required. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Cultural Sociology
(SOCI 433D 201)
Coordinator: David Cho
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Catherine Corrigall-Brown

This student-directed seminar will investigate the topic of culture in a sociological perspective. Cultural sociology examines beyond the current diluted notion of culture as the four f’s: Food, Festival, Folklore, and Fashion, and further analyzes how these systems of orientation influence one’s goal orientation, perception, and behavioral output in multiple frames of analyses. Furthermore, the seminar will investigate whether the multiculturalism that many Western societies attempt to achieve requires a metacultural system for multiple cultures to flourish and co-exist. To do this, students will explore both classic and contemporary theorists such as Durkheim, Weber, Bourdieu, Goffman, and other thinkers. By the end of this course, students will explain how differences in core sociological institutions and memories of different cultures can lead to similarities and differences of socio-economic outcomes between cultural groups such as the Chinese, Germans, Japanese, and Jews, to understand the differences, disparities, and inequalities in contemporary multicultural societies such as Canada, USA, the UK, and so forth.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: Students who are interested should send a statement of interest including year of study, major, list of sociology courses you have taken so far, and reasons for interest to the Seminar Coordinator at hbdavidcho@alumni.ubc.ca. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Ethics of Genetic Engineering
(BIOL 490A*)
Coordinator: Madina Kagieva
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Pamela Kalas

In 2000, the world saw the first draft of the human genome, which Bill Clinton described as “learning of the language in which God created life”. Fast forward to 2012, a team of talented researchers led by Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier harnessed the power of CRISPR-Cas9 technology to edit the genomes faster, cheaper and more efficient than ever, allowing humans “to rewrite” the language in which the life was created. With great power comes great responsibility, so as a future generation of aspiring scientists and potential policymakers, it is imperative that we understand the responsibilities that come with the cutting-edge technology that we are using or implementing anew. The academic focus of this seminar will be centered around learning about new and exciting technologies and research regarding genetic engineering, followed by ethics-based discussions of associated inherent issues with the tools. Students will cover themes such as the ethics of Cloning Technology, Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells, Gene Enhancement, Human Animal Hybrids and Gene Drive, among others. In this peer discussion-based class, students will learn how to integrate all the genetics knowledge they gathered in other classes with the principles of justice and equity.

Prerequisite(s): BIOL 335
Registration: Statement of interest required. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Experiencing Ambedkar
(POLI - ASIA*)
Coordinator: Riya Samuel
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Sunera Thobani

Dr Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar is most well-known for his critical role in writing India’s constitution. As one of the most prominent Dalit freedom fighters, his socio-cultural and historical significance, is undeniable but how much is known about him as a thinker and writer?

Ambedkar was a prolific and extremely well-educated political theorist, but his intellectual contributions are seldom studied with the weight they deserve. The importance of studying Ambedkarite thought is that it circumvents the traditional historiographies and hegemony of the Indian elite that tend to dominate academic spaces.

This course aims to study Indian political theory beyond the Nehrus and Gandhis, as well as to challenge casteist and government-mandated assumptions. The first half of the course will dip into Ambedkar’s writings on law, citizenship, minority rights, nationalism, economics, labour laws, as well as his views on the systemic problems in ‘Indian’ culture, society, and institutions. After this more localised foundation, the second half of the course will explore his larger significance in social justice frameworks, and his enduring legacy. Additionally, this seminar will provide a basic understanding of the caste-system, as well as the ways in which it pervades
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Society, culture, and politics in the Indian subcontinent even into the present.

This seminar is a unique opportunity for students to delve deeply into Ambedkar’s intellectual contributions and living legacy, as well as to help create an environment where caste and casteism can be critically explored head-on. Evaluation is based on participation, written essays, journal entries and presentations, as well as innovative open education assignments.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: Registration by application only. Please send a statement of interest between 500-800 words to riya.samuel@gmail.com, briefly explaining why you would like to take the course and how you will contribute to this seminar. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

**Exploring the Intersections of Climate Justice**  
(ASTU 4008 001)  
Coordinators: Em Mittertreiner, Rachel Cheang  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jessica Dempsey

This seminar will focus on how anthropogenic climate change interacts with structural inequities of race, class, locale, and gender to construct unique understandings of climate justice. Students will reflect on how their respective academic discipline and lived identity modulate their proximity to the environmental and sociocultural impacts of climate change. This seminar will take a peer education approach, where collaborative development and facilitation processes support students in co-creating the weekly lesson plans. An equity framework will allow us to weave together multiple intersecting perspectives, for example considering climate change as a social determinant of health; as a burden that disproportionately falls on Black and Indigenous communities; or as a call to action for extractive industries.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: Interested students are required to submit a statement of interest to Student Coordinators Rachel Cheang and Em Mittertreiner at cheangrchl@hotmail.com. Please include your year of study and major, as well as a 4-5 sentence statement of interest describing your interest in this seminar and reflecting on connections between climate change and your current academic field. Students will be admitted to the course as long as their submission demonstrates that they have interest in the course material and are willing to learn and engage in critical discussion, regardless of relevant experience. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

**Fandom and Fanworks In the Age of Internet**  
(ASTU 400G 001)  
Coordinator: Olivia Brocklehurst  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Rick Gooding

This course surveys current internet fan culture, analyzing fanart, fan fiction, fan videos, cosplay, and online fan spaces in the context of gender studies, critical theory, queer theory, sociology, and other critical discourses. Questions this course will pose include; what is a fanwork? Why do people create fanworks? What is a fan? What is a fanwork’s relationship with its text of origin? Are fanworks queer art? Are fanworks anti-capitalist art? Is creating a fanwork a political act? What is the relationship between fanworks and children’s literature? How do fanworks represent and discuss the body?

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: Interested students are required to submit a statement of interest to https://fanworksinternet.ubc.carrd.co/ for more information or email oliviabrocklehurst99@gmail.com.

**Intermittent Fasting and Human Metabolic Health**  
(ISCI 490 201)  
Coordinator: Kevin Ren  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Barbara Stefanska

Although we know what we eat plays an important role in insulin resistance, research also suggests when we eat is just as important. This is the basic premise of intermittent fasting (IF), and there is a growing body of scientific evidence of its therapeutic potential. However, IF is often dismissed as a mere “fad”, and there are currently no courses at UBC that examine this exciting area of research. This course will explore intermittent fasting’s rationale in improving insulin sensitivity and its therapeutic role in various health conditions, such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and more. The course is designed for upper-level students with an interest in nutrition, physiology, and medicine.

Disclaimer: this course is not designed to promote/give any specific medical advice.

Prerequisite(s): None  
Registration: To apply, please send a statement of interest and academic background to kevin.ren@alumni.ubc.ca. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.
Introduction to Critical Animal Studies (ASTU 400F 001)
Coordinator: Leah Thompson
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jodey Castricano

Introduction to Critical Animal Studies (CAS) will explore how the systems of oppression which marginalize humans are intertwined with those that harm nonhuman animals. The literature, research and theoretical frameworks which ground this seminar are those of CAS scholars whose work is rooted in the connection between theory and practice, with an unapologetic emphasis on nonhuman animal liberation from human exploitation. Students in the seminar will choose a topic within CAS which most interests them and lead a lecture and group discussion with their fellow classmates, write reflections on readings, engage in peer review of assignments and write a research paper. Topics covered may include, history of CAS/Animal Liberation Movement, disability, animality, feminism/consent, dependency/domestication, cisheteronormativity, commodification/capitalism, media, colonialism, food/veganism, grassroots activism, and their relation to critical animal studies.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Japanese Pink Cinema: Gender, Sexuality, and Screen Studies (ASIA 490*)
Coordinator: Shay Scholes
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Colleen Laird

An introduction to the Pink Film genre exploring the industry’s history and conventions to facilitate a study of the relationship between transnational cinemas, sexuality, and bodies in commercial media.

Prerequisite(s): Students must either have FIST 100, an ASIA cinema course, or a GRSJ course prerequisite. A statement of interest can be submitted in lieu of the prerequisites.
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Making Smart Choices Post-COVID-19: Implications for Future Careers in Science and Medicine (ISCI 490 202)
Coordinator: Adrija Chakrabarti
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kevin Harris

This course will explore future implications in technology, healthcare and related industries of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and is geared towards students preparing for future job, interview and training pursuits in these fields. Through collaborative, student-generated learning, students will learn to discriminate between founded and unfounded scientific information, and understand the steps to scientific discovery and policy implementation during a global pandemic. The course is dedicated to teaching effective science communication skills in the context of COVID-19 for expert, lay person and peer audiences. Scientific phenomena related to COVID-19 will be explored, along with critical thinking and the mastery of these concepts, which is becoming a favoured commodity in various career aspects such as coursework, academic research, future job and graduate school interviews and/or current occupational work.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: A statement of interest is required. Please send an email to a.chakrabarti@alumni.ubc.ca to register in the course. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Myth and Wonderworks In Indigenous Young Adult Literature (ASTU 400Z 001)
Coordinator: Grace Guy
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Gaertner

Myth and Wonderworks in Indigenous Young Adult Literature explores the imposition of colonial values and the reclamation of Indigeneity in youth fiction. This course facilitates critical engagement with contemporary Indigenous theory and young adult literature. Reading novels, short stories, poems, and comic books by Indigenous authors in Canada, we will discuss topics of Indigenous sovereignty, children’s literature, colonialism and decolonization, and histories of protests.

Students must have 3rd year standing or permission from the Student Coordinator to register in this course.

Prerequisite(s): Students will be admitted based on the following criteria:
1. They are an upper-level student who have taken WRDS 150 or an equivalent course that would prepare them for academic writing and engagement (ie. ENGL 100, ARTS One).
2. They are majoring/minoring in one of: ENGL, FNIS, CDST, CRWR, ACAM, or are a student in the faculty of education. Priority will be given to students in ENGL or FNIS.

Students who do not meet the above criteria may be admitted based on interest if room remains.
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service.
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Centre.

Narrative Imperative  
(ASTU 400D 001)  
Coordinator: David Kind  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Brianne Orr-Alvarez

In this seminar, we will use psychology research to ask and answer these questions about sharing academic ideas in today’s utterly-distracted attention economy — How is the human attention span changing? What does that mean for the way we read, write, and learn? What are the evolutionary roots of story? What are the psychological triggers of fascination and persuasion? What deliberate writing choices can we make to seduce reader’s curiosity? One-time offering. Self-graded. Rigorous and totally worth it! Apply now at www.NarrativeImperative.ca.

Prerequisite(s): None  
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Navigating Polarity in Contemporary Politics  
(ASTU 400Y 001)  
Coordinators: Jacklyn Yee, Rabaab Khehra  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kim Snowden

This course deals with contentious and highly politicized issues, including racism and feminism through the contours of capitalism. Unlike other courses which unpack the history or structural causes of these issues, this seminar is centered on how we talk about them. Drawing insight from political and philosophical theorists, students will analyze narratives surrounding contemporary politics in relation to the polarizing debates that consume it. Participants will relate these topics to non-academic voices to reflect on what literary and artistic representations tell us about societal beliefs and fears. As it will be impossible to examine today’s political rhetoric outside the confines of media, it is imperative to be critical of historiography, representation, and identity politics.

Prerequisite(s): None  
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Neurodivergent Narratives  
(ASTU 400E 001)  
Coordinator: Kip Chow  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Dallas Hunt

Neurodiversity is the concept that so-called neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism and ADHD are natural variations of the human brain as opposed to deviances that should be cured or altered to better fit current societal norms. We’ll analyze fictional and nonfictional narratives about and primarily by neurodivergent people to explore discrepancies between insider and outsider perspectives of the neurodivergent experience with a focus on how neurodivergence interacts with other identities, such as race and gender. No prerequisites except an openness to learning.

Prerequisite(s): None  
Registration: To apply, send a statement of interest of up to 400 words to kip.m.chow@alumni.ubc.ca describing any knowledge and lived experience of neurodivergence you bring to the seminar and what you hope to gain from taking the course.

For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Russian and Postsoviet Politics  
(POLI*)  
Coordinator: Emmett Mark  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lisa Sundstrom

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw immense geopolitical realignment in the nations of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. In this seminar, we will examine the contemporary domestic politics and foreign relations of the Russian Federation, and other former republics of the Soviet Union. A focus will be on Russia’s present and future role in the global community, in part through examining the legacy of Soviet communism, and exploring current trends in regional conflicts and economic integration. How can we explain the rise of Putin and resurrection of authoritarianism? What are the guiding ideologies of Russian foreign policy? Why are certain former Soviet states now liberal democracies, while others still face the same challenges of 30 years ago? Key themes that will be discussed include Russian and post Soviet society, political identity, democratization, security studies, and civil society/activism.

Prerequisite(s): None  
Registration: Statement of interest required. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Social Horror Writing as Resistance  
(ASTU 400C 001)  
Coordinator: Katie Czenczek, Terri Anderson  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Emily Pohl-Weary

When Jordan Peele’s Get Out (2017) hit theatres, it sparked a contentious debate over whether or not it was considered horror. Peele stoked the fire by referring to the film as a “social
thriller” in which he was inspired by The Stepford Wives (1975) and its portrayal of the social issues impacting women during the time it was created. Using horror to address social issues is not a new phenomenon, nor is it confined to film. This is the amazing power of horror: it is as enticing as it is accessible. So what is social horror, and how does it differ from traditional horror? In our seminar, we will address this question and explore how social horror can provide a space for marginalized authors to explore identity, empowerment, and resistance. We will be looking at ways that horror addresses intersecting social issues including class, race, Indigeneity, gender, sexuality and disability. We will also think of writing as an enactment of resistance against hegemonic discourses and a tool for generating powerful alternative narratives. In order to do so, this seminar combines literary analysis, writing craft discussion, and social justice critique. We’ll also experiment with some generative work in order to understand how the authors we study use in the genre effectively. There are no prerequisites necessary to engage with the material, neither is a comprehensive understanding of specific theory, or any creative writing experience. In this seminar we will all explore new ideas and broaden our skill sets; a love of, or curiosity about, horror is all that is needed.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Sociology of Social Media
(SOCI 433D 202)
Coordinator: Ervin Wong, Kritika Joshi
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Thomas Kemple

How are social media platforms and giants, from Facebook to YouTube to TikTok, changing the world? In the past two decades, we have seen an explosive rise of various social media platforms that have immensely impacted society, shaping how aspects of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc. can be conceptualized. It has become a dominant method for transmitting, fostering, and developing knowledge and culture; the interactions performed and media artifacts shared in these spaces can have dire impacts on how we and social media platforms/institutions can exist as social agents. This seminar will explore how social media can be understood from a sociological lens, and how it might be applied to participants’ everyday social media use.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: Students who wish to participate in this seminar will be asked to provide a statement of interest to the co-coordinators. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Sustainability Beyond Buzzwords: Sociopolitical Approaches to Problems in Sustainability
(SOCI 433D 203/POLI 351Z 001)
Coordinator: Divija Madhani
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Emily Huddart Kennedy

This student-directed seminar combines sociological and political science perspectives to examine key issues in sustainability. It is organised around four modules: (1) Corporations & Technology, (2) Labour & Economy, (3) Food, Energy & Resources, and (4) Miscellaneous Special Topics. Some of the questions we will ask include: How do degrowth economies challenge capitalist systems of work and labour? Who can afford sustainability? How does climate change affect international migration and security? How effective is transnational corporate governance at encouraging global sustainable development? We will answer these questions via facilitations, policy recommendations, and a real-life data-based policy project on sustainability.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: To register in this course, please fill out this form: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdqBw48g7PMXrj5dMUAUFU0IfmNsB3jSwnbBZSE2Z7qe1BvQ/viewform. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

Feeding 9 billion: systems-thinking crop production technology
(LFS 490 001)
Coordinator: Allison Gacad
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Andrew Riseman

How will we sustainably feed 9 billion people by 2050 in a changing climate? This student directed seminar will assess the role of crop production technology in the global food system. Using a systems-thinking approach, participants will assess the social, economic, and ecological impacts of such technology (potential examples include, but are not limited to, hydroponics, artificial intelligence, biofertilizer, and genome editing). Participants will also have an opportunity to design technological interventions that can be used to build global sustainable food systems within existing political, social, economic, and ecological structures and systems.

Prerequisite(s): Students will ideally have LFS250 and LFS350 as prerequisites as it provides the foundation of knowledge of our food systems through a lens of security, sovereignty, and justice. However, all students will be required to submit an application survey which may demonstrate existing knowledge and enthusiasm with the topic otherwise if these courses have
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not been completed.
Registration: Interested students must email gacada@mail.ubc.ca for access to a pre-registration survey to complete course registration. For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

**Philosophical Inquiry in the Islamic World**

(PHIL 487 001)
Coordinator: Jackson Duckworth
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Sylvia Berryman

Philosophical inquiry in the Islamic world produced some of the most rigorous proofs for God’s existence, inspired some of the strongest arguments for and against the philosophical discipline, and generated numerous discourses on ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, language, and politics. Throughout the course of this discussion-based seminar, we will delve into some of the more prominent medieval and modern Islamic philosophers, including the likes of Ibn Sina (Latinized: Avicenna), al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). It is through the eyes of these and other scholars that we will explore the multifaceted relationship between Islam and philosophical reasoning, while establishing a basic understanding of the philosophical tradition within the Islamic world.

Prerequisite(s): None
Registration: For more information, visit UBC Student Service Centre.

To enrol in any of these seminars listed for 2020-21 term 2, please follow instructions listed or visit the Student Service Centre: [https://courses.students.ubc.ca/cs/courseschedule](https://courses.students.ubc.ca/cs/courseschedule)

*these seminars do not yet have course code/section assignments*