6120 Beowulf 4 credits. (Also ENGL 3120, MEDVL 3120, MEDVL 6120)

In recent years, Beowulf has received renewed attention in popular culture, thanks to the production of two recent Beowulf movies and riveting new translations (eg. Seamus Heaney). The poem's appeal lies in the complex depictions of its monsters, accounts of heroic bravery, and lavish portrayals of life in the Meadhall. Through close readings we will also explore the “dark side” of the poem: its punishing depictions of loss and exile, despairing meditations on unstable kingship and dynastic failure, and harrowing depictions of heroic defeat and the vanities of existence on the Middle-Earth. Attention to the poem's literary heritage (in Latin and Norse) and its layered pagan and Christian perspectives reveals an amalgamated Christian heroic ethos. [Readings in Old or Modern English]

6300 Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century 4 credits. (Also COML 6300)

A study of the development of aesthetics as a theoretical discipline specifying the genetic process, forms, effects, and judgments peculiar to art. Through readings of primarily British and French criticism and philosophy, we will examine the empirical and psychological basis of aesthetics as indicative of the progress of modernity, but we will also investigate Kant's transcendental founding of aesthetics in a self-reflexive subject. Some topics orienting our discussion: the relation of empirical epistemology and linguistic theory to neoclassical conceptions of figurative language; the consequences of an aesthetics of the sublime for formal and generic theories of literature; tragedy and the pleasures of pain; ideology and aesthetics; and, especially, the relation of aesthetics to ethics. Authors include. Longinus, Boileau, Shaftesbury, Hume, Burke, Lessing, Rousseau, and Kant.

6370 Sovereignty II: Baroque Files 4 credits. (Also COML 6571)

“Baroque Files” follows the afterlife of sovereignty, as its representation moves from the symbolic body of the king in the Renaissance into increasingly abstract forms, including public administration. At the heart of this question lies the concept of a “file.” What is a “file”? An epistemological form? A legal document? An aesthetic? Is a file the same as an archive? What kind of mind creates a file? “Baroque Files” pursues the history, philosophy and concept of the file from Shakespeare and Cervantes to Milton and Defoe. While the seminar reads early modern texts, its conceptual and methodological focus is not restricted to the early modern period. Topics include exemplarity, encryption, storage, rules, probability, and the psychological or psychoanalytic notion of a “case.”

6480 Forms of Knowledge in the 19th Century 4 credits.

What kinds of knowledge does Victorian literature make? Attending to representations of small scales of interiority as well as vast living systems, we will consider when and how novels and poems enfold the knowledge practices of ethics, biology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. Raymond Williams writes of a naive nineteenth-century realism, “We thought we had only to open our eyes to see a common world,” but we will examine how Victorian literature creates as well as distorts images of a common reality as it reimagines practices of knowing. We will also evaluate the consequences of recent accounts of the novel as information, and of critical efforts to forge methods for interdisciplinary scholarship. Likely authors include Austen, Gaskell, Tennyson, Dickens, Eliot, Carroll, Hardy, and Stoker; theorists include Moretti, Gallagher, Poovey, Jameson, Foucault, Daston, Deleuze, and Thacker.

6525 Modernism, Media, and Mediation 4 credits.

What was the position of literary writing among the new media technologies that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century? How did modernist writers respond to a social and political situation in which access to media and information was at once widely distributed, and consolidated by corporations and the state? This class pursues continuities between past and present, against today's claims of heroically disruptive innovation and new crises for literature. Reading a range of key media theorists, it examines the way specific means of storage and transmission (radio, wax cylinder and gramophone, photography, film, and several forms of print) were both represented and employed by writers including Pound, Hughes, Dos Passos, Rukeyser, Fearing, N. West, O. Welles, MacLeish, Kay Boyle, and Bob Brown.

6545 Key Texts of Modernity 4 credits.

This course will develop critical perspectives on modernity through four juxtapositions of eighteenth-century and modern texts: Robinson Crusoe (Defoe) and Foe (Coetzee), the Spectator Papers (Addison) and Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Clarissa (Richardson) and "Penelope" from Ulysses (Joyce), and Tristram Shandy (Sterne) and Midnight's Children (Rushdie). Key topics will include travel and empire, alterity and cultural encounter, commodification and post-Marxist “thing theory,” the public sphere and ideas of community, gendered identity and narrative interiority, and temporality and sensibility. Through these themes, we will consider the imaginative constitution of modernity in the eighteenth century, and its transformation or re-constitution in the twentieth.
This course analyzes the historical development of U.S. federal Indian law and its relation to American Indian literatures as a critical commentary on that law. As such, the course is generative for an understanding of (post)colonialism in the United States. We will study case law dealing with issues in the ongoing history of federal Indian law, which include sovereignty; criminal and civil jurisdiction; religious, cultural, and civil rights; and the legal parameters of Indian identity. Along with the case law, we will read literary, political, historical, ethnographic texts that will help us understand the fundamental cultural and political conflicts between Indians and Europeans embedded in the law, between kinship-based societies sharing communal land, and a society based in the twin structures of individualism and property.

What can lawyers and judges learn from the study of literature? This course explores the relevance of imaginative literature (novels, drama, poetry, and film) to questions of law and social justice from a range of perspectives. We will consider debates about how literature can help to humanize legal decision-making; how storytelling has helped to give voice to oppressed populations over history; how narratives of suffering cultivate popular support for human rights; the role played by storytelling in a trial; and how literature can shed light on the limits of law and public policy.

The course will explore the philosophy, psychoanalysis, and politics of sound along the artistic interface of cinema, video, performance, and new media art. From analysis of synchronization of sound and image in the talking movie to its disruption in experimental music, video, new media and sound art, we will consider the prominence of sound and noise as carriers of gender, ethnic and cultural difference. We also will explore the theory of sound, from tracts on futurism, feminism, new music, and sampling, to more recent acoustic applications of eco-theory in which sound merges with discourses of water and environment. In addition to studying a wide range of artistic production in audio, sound, new media, and screen arts, we will discuss the dialogical impact of theoretical discussions of sound in psychoanalysis and aesthetics, as well as the phenomenal growth of digital acoustic horizons in the Pacific Rim.

Race, comparison, and time—what do these terms have to do with each other? What does it mean to be in time, or out of time? What are some other ways of inhabiting time, or of being inhabited by time? What is the time of the racialized subject? How is time and temporality figured in literature? Some of the writers we’ll be reading in the course include Carolivia Herron, Carlos Bulosan, Jamaica Kincaid, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Joy Kogawa. Other readings will be drawn from a range of disciplines, including selections from the work of Johannes Fabian, Frantz Fanon, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Cathy Caruth, Thomas Bender and David Wellbe.

In an era of increasing interdisciplinary collaboration, the fields that comprise the humanities are engaging in new ways with law as well as with each other, and projects developed within the context of law schools themselves bear renewed relevance to the humanities. This colloquium will bring together scholars working at the forefront of legal history, law and literature, law and culture, and critical theory from the institutional vantage points of both law and the humanities. Those who present materials will be asked to speak not only about their specific research but also to address where their work is situated within new developments in law and humanities as a whole. The colloquium topic for Spring 2016 is forthcoming.

Required course for MFA poetry students only.

Required course for MFA fiction students only.
This course will focus on fiction that departs from representational reality, studied from a writerly point of view. We'll examine excursions from the conventions of plot, character, narrative structure, and grammar. What opportunities have these departures afforded fiction writers? Do they wish to imply that conventional narrative has lost its luster, or do they merely serve to broaden its boundaries? Included will be works by Nabokov, Dixon, Link, Davis, Murakami, Saunders, Miéville, Whitehead, and others. Grade will come from in-class presentations and discussion, and from a portfolio of experimental writing assignments. Poets and PhD students welcome.