

MIDWEST FACULTY SEMINAR
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
5845 SOUTH ELLIS AVENUE, COBB BOX 163 • CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637
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Midwest Faculty Seminar Topics 2013-2014

Digital Humanities

November 14-16, 2013

Digital technologies have long promised to alter the way that humanists approach their work. Only recently, however, have new media forms and novel statistical methods begun to make major inroads into the broad range of disciplines that constitute the humanities as a field. This seminar explores the contours of the humanities' digital turn, with equal attention given both to the ways in which humanists are approaching new media studies and to how data mining, statistical modeling and other quantitative methods are enabling scholars to pose new questions about various "old" media forms. It therefore asks, for instance, about the status of video games as works of art, about the ethical and political questions raised by life in online worlds, and about the ways in which digital technology is transforming the study of visual culture. The seminar also gives equal time to scholars interested in the work of cinematics, the digital analysis of classical texts, and the ways in which "distance reading" and data analysis can give humanists new tools through which to examine literary and cultural history anew. Its goal, in other words, is to survey the breadth and depth of the digital humanities as a scholarly enterprise in order to come to a better sense of how digital scholarship is impacting the work in the humanities today.

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*

January 23-25, 2014

Though Friedrich Nietzsche produced many remarkable works, *On the Genealogy of Morals* is widely regarded as his most influential. For all its importance to philosophers and others who have followed in his wake, the precise meaning of many of Nietzsche's claims about the nature of morality remain in dispute, and his influence on fields as diverse as philology, theology, and anthropology is sometimes hard to see. This seminar therefore reconsiders *On the Genealogy of Morals* and its influence on the intellectual history of the last two centuries, with a particular emphasis on detailed examination of some of Nietzsche's key terms and their reception throughout subsequent generations of scholarly investigations. What exactly does Nietzsche mean by "genealogy"? What is the proper understanding of *ressentiment*? What's wrong with Judeo-Christian morality as it existed in Nietzsche's time? How have Nietzsche's answers to these questions informed the ways that scholars across the humanities and social sciences have approached these issues since? Through an exploration of many of the key problems and controversies that have occupied readers of *On the Genealogy of Morals* over the years, the seminar aims to develop a more detailed understanding of this philosophical seminal text.

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Capitalism and its Futures
February 20-22, 2014

Not long ago, many economists and policy makers regarded the big questions of economics as essentially solved. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Cold War, capitalism's hegemony was largely unquestioned, and economic policy was regarded as sufficient to smooth out the worst effects of the modern business cycle. In the face of growing inequality, perpetual economic crisis, and looming climate catastrophe, however, the foundations of this political and economic consensus has been thrown increasingly into doubt. This seminar therefore explores the state of capitalism and its futures, focusing in particular on questions of growth, inequality, ecology and sustainability as they are conceptualized in the present. What, for instance, is the history of growth as an economic idea? Can we continue to assume its centrality as we move into the future? What, moreover, is the place of inequality in our current state of economic affairs? Can inequality as it exists today be justified? Or does it throw the long-term stability of our economy into doubt? What does global warming presage for the future of the global economy? Can analyses of it be approached in purely economic terms? Or does it pose a problem of such enormity so as to overwhelm the boundaries of economic thought? What, in the end, is the future of capitalism as a system of providing for the general welfare? Can it continue to provide for human need in its present form? Or do contemporary concerns about inequality and ecological crisis force a re-thinking of how we approach the intersections of economics and human well-being?

The Future of Higher Education
April 24-26, 2014

Why does college cost so much? What should students learn? What is a college education actually good for? These are not new questions, but the recent economic downturn, coupled with increased interest in MOOCs and other forms of online learning, have made them of particular concern for students, parents, faculty and administrators alike. This seminar explores these questions, with an eye towards re-tracing the path by which higher education, once a heavily subsidized public good, has come to the straits in which it finds itself today. What, historically, has driven growth in higher education costs? Where are new cost-savings to be found? How have we thought about the value of the liberal arts over the years? What is their chief justification now? What has been the relationship between higher education and private business in the past? And what defines that complex set of relationships today? At a time when student debt is on the rise and job prospects are seemingly dimmer all around, this seminar hopes to come to terms with the place of higher education in an increasingly stagnant economy, and thus with how educators and administrators can better approach the problems confronting higher education today.