

Spring 2026 Baker Core Course Descriptions

BC 120 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR II COURSE DESCRIPTION:

First-Year Seminars are a rigorous introduction to intellectual life. They are designed to help every Baker student make the transition to college-level discourse and critical inquiry. You will be asked to consider compelling and enduring questions that are central to a twenty-first century liberal arts education. You will be expected to take an active role in your own academic growth. You will develop the practical skills and inquisitive mindset necessary to become an engaged, life-long learner.

This course will focus on more sophisticated critical analysis of some of those enduring questions and also build on the academic writing, oral communication, and information literacy skills you began to develop last semester. Faculty from many different academic disciplines and areas of expertise teach compelling and provocative topics about which we are passionate in order to introduce you to an authentic learning community. No matter the section topic or the discipline(s) from which it derives, we all share the same goals for your learning.

COURSE GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING:

You will learn to:

- critically analyze a variety of texts, ideas, and information
- become more self-aware and introspective as you consider your own informed responses to others' ideas
- create clear, thesis-driven academic writing
- become a confident contributor to intellectual discourse by communicating your own sound and well-reasoned ideas with clarity and conviction
- develop the sophisticated research strategies and evaluation techniques necessary for college-level work

BC120A: "The Science of Happiness" ■ Cynthia Appl ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

Never before has there been so much scientific information on how to become happier. Unfortunately, many of the things we intuitively think will make us happy, actually make us less satisfied with our lives. We will learn about research-supported practices that have the power to increase our quality of life. We will also broaden our perspective on well-being by learning concepts of happiness from around the world.

BC120B: "Creatures: The Darker Side of Literature, Films & Shows" ■ Sai Im-lam ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

Creatures walk among us. Through the examination of literature, short stories, films, and shows, explore creative works that house eerie, yet hauntingly captivating creatures of fantastical origins. From the creatures of mythology and folktales to the creatures of popularized cinema and television, we will strive to analyze their origins, depictions, and symbolism to gain a deeper understanding of their emergence and relevancy within today's culture. *Content Warning: Some of the materials in this course may contain depictions of violence, disturbing themes, or controversial subject matter.*

BC120C: "Finding Meaning in Movies" ■ Trevor Belt ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

In this class we will watch influential films and explore their cultural and historical impact on contemporary American life. We will examine both contextual and technical approaches by famous filmmakers and learn what it means to be a "non-passive" audience member. If you love watching movies, this is the class for you.

BC120D: "Law & Order: Psychological Intent" ■ Sara Crump ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

In this class, we will examine the interplay between psychology and the legal system by discussing topics such as how to assess competence and insanity, whether jurors can successfully disregard evidence when instructed, the reliability of eyewitness testimony, capital punishment, and much more. We will determine whether the assumptions made about human behavior by the legal system are actually supported by empirical research, and we will examine the role of psychologists in all parts of the legal process.

BC120E: “Rewire Your Brain & Body for Less Stress & More Resilience” ■ Erin Laurie ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

In this course we will use the book "The 5 Resets: Rewire Your Brain and Body for Less Stress and More Resilience," by Dr. Aditi Nerurkar, to discover five science-based mindset shifts to help bring stress back to healthy levels. You will learn about how your brain responds to stress and how stress handled improperly can become problematic in all areas of your life. You will be given opportunities to put into practice the strategies that you learn and come away with a new mindset.

BC120F: “Moral Panics” ■ Ryan Gibb ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

What are the “kids” doing these days? Is the world just going insane and is everything we know and doomed? Maybe we should take a step back and inspect trends in the marketplace of fear. In this BC course, we’ll survey a history of moral panics. We’ll discuss the sources of these beliefs as well as the public policies which have resulted from them. What stereotypes do we share that are not reflective of reality? Can learning facts rooted in reality alter our core understanding about an issue, group of people, or behavior? How do these stories get started in the first place? This BC class will study these questions and more as we complete common assignments geared toward improving students’ written and oral communication.

BC120G: “Telling the Story: Autism in the Media” ■ Charlise Prosser ■ MWF 9:30-10:20

Increased awareness has led to more and more depictions of Autism in social media, popular culture, and literature. We will analyze and critique multiple perspectives in books, plays, movies, television shows, websites, and social media and deepen our understanding by comparing research-based evidence as we search for authentic rather than stereotypical examples of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

BC120H: “Horrible Laughter: Dark Comedy in Film” ■ William Pore ■ TR 9:30-10:45

Sometimes awful stuff is funny, and funny stuff is awful. We will view and analyze films that use comedy to deal with events such as economic collapse, nuclear war, and terminal illness. From Chaplin’s *Modern Times* to *Mean Girls*, from *Dr. Strangelove* to *The Big Lebowski*, our journey through cinema will address the question of how to stop worrying and laugh through the pain.

BC120I: “Storytelling across Mediums” ■ Sai Im-lam ■ TR 9:30-10:45

From Ash’s determination to become a Pokémon master to Ofelia’s bravery, every story has importance. Explore the vibrant world of storytelling across a wide array of mediums: short stories, comic books, video games, movies, and shows. Through the analysis of varying depictions of storytelling, we will work to unravel the essence and significance of these stories through their plot, themes, characters, and dialogue along with their significant cultural impact.

BC120J: “Party Like It’s 1929: America’s Jazz Age” ■ Ashley Garcia ■ TR 9:30-10:45

Prohibition, flappers, jazz, and social unrest...The 1920s was a decade of social, political, economic, and cultural change. For many Americans, the decade was a period of hyper-consumerism and parties, while others experienced economic precarity and racial violence. We will explore the seedy underbelly of America's jazz age and the limits of the so-called "era of permanent prosperity."

BC120K: “The Evolving Faces of Poverty” ■ Tara Burnham ■ TR 9:30-10:45

We will examine how poverty in America has evolved through the lenses of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the television series *Heartland*, and the documentary *Poverty in the USA*. Students will explore how shifting systems of power, identity, and opportunity have shaped the lived experiences of working-class Americans across generations. Through analysis, discussion, and research, the course investigates enduring struggles for justice, sustainability, and progress in the pursuit of the American Dream.

BC120L: “The Other Self” ■ Joanne Janssen ■ TR 9:30-10:45

We like to believe we can and do know ourselves. We also like to think we have clear, stable identities that we have cultivated intentionally. How, then, do we explain people who present themselves as model citizens but participate in illegal behaviors behind closed doors? And how do we make sense of the surprising factors that make us who we are—and which could just as easily have been altered? This class will explore doubled selves, and the questions they prompt about identity, responsibility, and culture.

BC120M: “American Horror Stories: Violence in Literature, TV & Film” ■ Tamara Slankard ■ TR 9:30-10:45

In this course we will explore the construction of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American identity against the backdrop of physical, psychological, racial, sexual, and even—perhaps—justifiable violence. We will discuss how artistic representations of violence do far more than simply shock and titillate: they help us to better understand the connections between identity, culture, history and art. *Note: As the title suggests, a significant portion of the course content entails visual or narrative depictions of graphic violence and controversial subject matter.*

BC120N: “Bibliotherapy: Reading for Healing and Humor” ■ Melanie Massey ■ TR 8:00-9:15

Books have the power to make us laugh, to teach us about the world, and to provide meaningful insight into our own lives and the lives of others. We will explore the personal and academic benefits of therapeutic reading and look at bibliotherapy theories drawn from medicine, literature, education, and psychology. The power of a good book will be explored, and the reader’s choice celebrated.

BC400 INTERDISCIPLINARY CAPSTONE COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Interdisciplinary Capstone is the culmination, not only of your Core Concentration, but of your entire Baker undergraduate education. This is where it all comes together. This is where you demonstrate how a liberal arts education has prepared you to understand the complexities and interconnectedness of a twenty-first century world. (NOTE: Although you may select any Interdisciplinary Capstone, you must complete a final researched writing and presentation project that addresses some of the ideas and concerns central to your chosen Core Concentration Theme [Identities & Systems, Power & Justice, Sustainability & Progress, or Exploration & Imagination]). Prerequisite: BC 110, BC 120, all other Core Concentration requirements, and junior or senior status.

COURSE GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

At the end of this course you will demonstrate your refined ability to:

- synthesize the four approaches you have studied over the course of your Core Concentration (creative arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences) in order to understand how scholars from multiple disciplinary perspectives approach ideas of your Core Concentration theme.
- conduct sophisticated and advanced college-level research in order to critically evaluate and engage with a variety of ideas and arguments surrounding your Core Concentration theme.
- apply the interdisciplinary knowledge you have gained in order to address questions and ethical issues central to your Core Concentration theme.
- write persuasive, compelling and sophisticated arguments that engage directly with ideas central to your Core Concentration theme.
- present and communicate effectively your informed and polished researched arguments on your Core Concentration theme to the Baker community.

BC400A: “Reading Tolkien’s Hobbit” ■ John Richards ■ MWF 8:30-9:20

Only Tolkien nerds need apply. [mic drop]

BC400B: “Music Festivals as Cultural Zeitgeists” ■ Tasha Riggins ■ MWF 12:30-1:20

Music festivals have been a cultural staple spanning history and geographic boundaries. These festivals are often a reflection of the time in which they were held. From Woodstock to Lilith Fair, and Burning Man to Glastonbury, students will examine the political, financial, social, and even fashion trends of the time through these festivals. The class will time-hop through festivals, gaining valuable insight into what each festival represented to those in attendance and as a historical marker. Students will be able to draw from their major to create a research pathway through the topic.

BC400C: “Perseverance and Progress” ■ Trilla Lyerla ■ MWF 2:30-3:20

Biographies allow us to take inspiration from lives of individuals past and present, individuals who may inform our understanding of how we, too, might overcome obstacles and limitations to make the world in which we live just a little better. During the first half of the semester, we will read about and discuss the life of Civil Rights Activist John Lewis. In the second half, each student will have the opportunity to research, write, and present on issues of global significance that have been/are being addressed by other changemakers to insure justice, progress, and/or sustainability.

BC400D: “Tyranny 101” ■ Ryan Gibb ■ TR 8:00-9:15

In this class, we study the building blocks of dictatorships. There are few things more important than securing civil rights and political liberties, and in this class, we will explore the implicit and explicit means by which we gain and lose freedom.

BC400E: “Around the World in 16 Weeks” ■ Joe Watson ■ TR 12:30-1:45

One of the great things about travel is how other parts of the world can expose you to new and different ways of thinking. You develop a better understanding of the tapestry of global cultures, and sometimes, new insights into your own backyard. In this class students will investigate a variety of social, political, and cultural issues through the lens of different countries across all the world’s continents. Using outside research and the expertise you’ve developed across different disciplines as Baker students, you’ll consider accepted practices and explore other ways of thinking to get a better understanding of global cultures. This class will be the next best thing to grabbing your passport and hopping a flight.

BC400F: “Religious Diversity & Secularism in America” ■ Nick Pumphrey ■ TR 2:00-3:15

Competing narratives in the United States and Europe define whether we live in a “Secular” world or a Christian world. However, neither and both would be the appropriate answer. The religious history and atmosphere of a community is defined by that group, i.e. Christians think America was founded on Christian ideals. Christians make up the predominate number of both Europeans and Americans; however, both areas have historically non-Christian religions from around the world. The purpose of this class is to analyze the idea of the secular world, cultural and sociological responses to religion/secularity, and basic laws for the freedom/discrimination of religion.