



Fall 2026 First Year Seminar Course Descriptions

Bookclub! Exploring Reading and Literacy in our Community

Julia Haverstock and Hannah Pearson

Julia Haverstock is the Director of the Library at Warren Wilson College and a lifelong reader and cheerleader for access to information and knowledge through libraries. She holds an MLIS from San Jose State University and while living in Oakland, CA and working in restaurants, she developed a love for food, food activism, and growing food. She will gladly recommend the best places to eat in Western NC and will talk to you about food or books or nerd stuff any time!

Dr. Pearson is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Warren Wilson College whose teaching and research focus on the psychology of religion. She earned her BS from North Dakota State University and her MA/PhD from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. When not in the classroom, Dr. Pearson enjoys reading, spending time with her family and four pets (two dogs, two cats), watching bad reality TV, and crafting.

Book Club FYS explores all things reading and literacy. In this course, students examine how reading and literacy shape human development, foster connection, and influence identity. We also consider how restricted access to books, literacy, and knowledge impacts individuals, communities, and democratic life. Along the way, we will read for fun, visit the public library, and learn how the publishing industry works (or doesn't work). Students explore and partner with local public libraries and literacy-focused community organizations in the WNC area, connecting course ideas to real-world efforts that support reading and access.

Forgotten Pollinators

Amy Boyd

Dr. Boyd is a plant ecologist and conservation biologist who has studied carnivorous plants in New Hampshire bogs, cactus population dynamics in the Sonoran Desert, and pollination of stinky flowers in the Appalachian Mountains. Scientist, educator, artist, and writer, she is happiest when reading a good book in a hammock or wandering trails in wonderful wild places.

We depend on animal pollinators for production of nearly eighty percent of the seeds and fruits that make up the human diet, and yet this essential service has been ignored and often threatened by human activity. In this course, we study the fascinating and vital relationships between plants and the animals they depend on for reproduction: bees, beetles, bats and many others, some common and familiar, others almost unknown. We focus on the science of plant reproduction and the ecology of pollination, and examine the threats to this ecological relationship. We also partner with a local organization in their work to create and preserve environments that encourage and protect pollinators. Please note that this course includes some required Saturday field trips.



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Growing Your Inner Scientist

Langdon Martin

Dr. Martin is a chemistry professor with an interest in the interplay between chemistry (particularly organic chemistry) and biology--particularly in how all of Earth's life forms are adept at using carbon-based compounds for structure and energy. In addition to teaching, he enjoys cooking and baking, gardening, reading, hiking, and puzzle-solving...some of these things may show up in this course!

All scientists share a curiosity about the world. As Hope Jahren (whose book, *Lab Girl*, we will read from) puts it: "Ask a question. Guess what? You are now a scientist." And, while science requires an objective eye, scientists themselves are subjective human beings with strengths and flaws. What kind of scientist are you? In this course we practice being community-engaged scientists in Western NC, partnering with the Dr. John Wilson Community Garden in Black Mountain as part of our course.

Putting Yourself on the Canvas: Exploring Jacob Lawrence

Delicia Daniels

Dr. Daniels is a Creative Writing Professor whose work focuses on Black poetry and Black archive collections. She also enjoys fiber arts and reading.

In this course, students explore the artistry, passion, and progression of Jacob Lawrence, an extraordinary African American painter with roots in North Carolina. We will discuss Lawrence's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, track his journey as a professor at Black Mountain College, and construct creative projects that complement Lawrence's legacy. We will partner with museums to survey art collections and exhibits on site.

Sustainable Darkroom: Photography in the Garden

Charlotte Taylor

Professor Taylor is a media artist whose practice is a ritual of paying attention and playing with material. They are particularly interested in the intersections of sustainable darkroom practices and experimental animation. They are the founder of Fierce Flix, a nonprofit film camp for queer youth; a fierce believer in the connective power of radical joy; and a lover of clouds, leaves, and light (especially all three together). They have a goofy luck-dragon of a dog, Falkor, who loves hikes and road trips almost as much as Charlotte does.

In times of ecological, economic, and social instability, how can our art contribute to the community efforts of resilience happening around us? How can photography be an act of radical joy? Of creative sustainability? In this course, we explore photography with and about the garden. Students experiment with darkroom photographic practices while collaborating with the human and more-than-human world to tell stories of community-centered ecological sustainability and resilience. In partnership with the Dr. John Wilson Community Garden, we get to know both plants and people through the photographic lens. Over the course of the semester, students create traditional darkroom photographs and sustainable alternative photographic prints that meditate on the social and environmental benefits of the community garden, and contribute to the growth of community resilience.



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Innovating for Change

Wendy Seligmann

As a Professor of Practice in Business, Wendy Seligmann enjoys using design thinking to tackle real-world challenges through creative, human-centered solutions. She is passionate about helping students move ideas into action by working collaboratively with community partners to address meaningful problems. When she's not in the classroom, Wendy can often be found experimenting in the kitchen and exercising (perhaps to balance her love of food!).

Do you wish you could make a difference in your community or even in the world? In this course, we explore design thinking as a creative, human-centered approach to solving meaningful problems. We examine how innovators understand people's needs, define challenges, generate ideas, and develop practical solutions through experimentation and reflection. The course emphasizes hands-on learning and collaboration. As part of the seminar, we partner with a community organization to address a real challenge the organization is facing. Working in teams, students will apply the core stages of the design thinking process to develop thoughtful and responsible proposals grounded in a community context.

Nurturing Nature and Spiritual Wellness: Finding Awe, Spirituality and Sense of Place in Nature

Jill Overholt

Dr. Overholt is a professor of Outdoor Leadership with experience as an Outward Bound instructor, environmental educator, camp professional, and Peace Corps volunteer. In their spare time, they enjoy hiking, cooking, making music, doing puzzles, and playing with their daughter, dog, and two cats.

Have you ever felt a connection to something bigger than yourself when spending time in nature? Spiritual well-being is a broad and personal concept tied to a wide variety of worldviews, rituals, and practices—some religious, some not. Together, we explore these ideas through the lens of connection to community and to the natural world, and grapple with questions such as "What is the role of nature in a good life?" and "How might taking care of the natural world be a form of spiritual practice?" We consider ideas of awe, sense of place, community engagement, and the interconnectedness between self, nature, community, love, and belonging.

The Music Video

Beck Banks

Dr. Banks is an Assistant Professor of Communications with over twenty years of experience working in media and education. They hold a PhD in Communication and Media Studies from the University of Oregon and a MA in Media, Culture, and Communication from NYU.

This course takes students through the history of the music video, focusing on groundbreaking and controversial works that have shaped the form. Using a cultural lens, students examine how these videos were produced, the artistic and industrial contexts in which they emerged, and the social and political messages embedded within them. Through close analysis, discussion, and creative practice, students explore how music videos function as visual storytelling and cultural commentary. The course also provides hands-on experience in conceptualizing, planning, and producing an original music video.



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The Disneyfication of American Culture

Paula Garrett

Dr. Garrett teaches 19th-century American literature and culture, Queer Studies, Southern studies, the novel, and the short story. She lives in Swannanoa with her wife and son. When she isn't teaching, she can be found on her bike or at Warren Wilson sporting events!

This class examines "Disney" and its relationship to American culture. The main idea of this course is that Disney represents a major cultural force in the United States, a force that is central to the development of the American way of life since the early 20th century. This course examines the nature of Disney; its presentations of race, class, gender, and sexuality; and how it has come to assume the role it has in our culture both in its direct and indirect relations with us. It is a powerful lens to use in studying the "American Way of Life" and can serve to help us better understand what our culture is, who we are, and how we got to be this way.

Latin America Through Film

Ben Feinberg

Dr. Feinberg is a professor of cultural anthropology who has conducted research in southern Mexico. He is currently writing a book about the relationships between cave explorers and indigenous people in Oaxaca.

This class introduces the history and cultures of Latin America through classic and contemporary films, from *Black Orpheus* to *Roma*. We use the films to explore key concepts in cultural anthropology and Latin American history, such as representation, globalization, gender, race, colonialism, migration, and more. In addition, through collaboration with a partner, students research the relationship between culture and the experience of death, dying, and memorialization. The class provides opportunities to develop critical skills as well as an appreciation for enjoying film collectively on a big screen. Films and class content include intense themes that may not be suitable for some.

Utopia

Cris Culton

Dr. Culton is from Los Angeles, California and comes from a family with roots in Mexico. They proudly identify as trans and bring that perspective into both their life and work. Cris teaches history because they believe that understanding the past is essential to building a better future. Outside the classroom, they enjoy art, music, games, and—above all—reading, reading, and more reading.

Utopia is viewed by many as the automatic path towards dystopia. "Experts" tell us that we should strive for what is "reasonable." But, how will we be able to create new worlds if we aren't even allowed to imagine them? This course celebrates the pursuit of utopia and draws on global history and literature for examples of that pursuit. We will center reading, writing, art, as well as community partnerships whose focuses relate to queerness, immigration, and nature.



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Dialogue Across Difference

Shannon Spencer and Evan Snelling

Rev. Dr. Shannon Spencer is the Chaplain of the College and is trauma-informed-care certified and a licensed counselor associate.

Evan Snelling is the Director of the Office of Inclusive Excellence.

This course examines how meaningful dialogue can bridge differences in identity, belief, and lived experience across diverse communities. Students will explore theories of communication, conflict, and social identity while practicing skills such as active listening, empathy, and respectful disagreement. Through discussions, case studies, and experiential activities, the course emphasizes the challenges and possibilities of engaging across lines of difference. Students will reflect on their own perspectives and learn strategies for fostering inclusive, constructive conversations.

Memento Mori: Living on Purpose

Lindsey Kass-Green

Lindsey Kass-Green is the Associate Dean of the Center for Experiential Learning at Warren Wilson College, where she draws on her background in career exploration and clinical mental health counseling to help others navigate their paths with clarity and purpose. She is passionate about the power of education, the goodness of people, and living with intention—as well as a lover of puns, climber of rocks, and collector of dogs.

Memento Mori—Latin for "remember you must die"—is not meant to instill fear but to inspire reflection on one's purpose, authenticity, and gratitude. This course invites you to explore what a meaningful life looks like for you through personal reflection, philosophical inquiry, psychological research, biographical stories, career theory, and community engagement. We will explore a variety of theories and perspectives on living a purposeful life, and in partnership with a community organization, we will examine how an awareness of mortality can deepen this understanding. By considering what death teaches us about living fully, you will explore how to design a life of intention, impact, and fulfillment. This course fosters open dialogue and self-reflection on profound topics, including purpose, death, and legacy, in a supportive and thoughtful environment.

Storytelling for the Earth and Her People

Renée Mazurek

Renée is a geologist with nearly 20 years of experience in earth science, translating complex topics into relatable materials. She enjoys being outside in the mountains, near the water, and in her garden. She also has a meditation and journaling practice that serves both her personal and professional lives.

Educating and informing broad audiences about environmental science in a relatable way is an important skill. In this course, we will explore different storytelling styles and mediums—including audio and video recordings, ArcGIS StoryMaps, and more—to tell the stories that are important to you and your community. We will also partner with local conservation and environmental organizations to learn more about their work and the stories that they tell about it.