Fall 2017 Graduate Institute Preceptorial Descriptions
St. John's College - Annapolis

All preceptorials are open to students in any of the Fall 2017 segments: Literature or Mathematics and Natural Science.

Recent Poetry in English

Description: An introductory focus on poems by four American poets: Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Gwendolyn Brooks. In addition, and when relevant, we will also read poems, In English or in translation, by other poets who precede or succeed them, including W.H. Auden, Louise Bogan, Philip Larkin, Edward Thomas, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott. From time to time, we will read short essays related to poetry, a particular poet, or a particular poem.

Required Text: Most of the poems are available online at the Poetry Foundation website, often along with audio versions: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/. Poems for the class will also be provided by the tutor.

First Assignment: Robert Frost, *Acquainted with the Night*

Tutor: Pamela Kraus

Digital Technology

Description: "Computer science touches on a variety of deep issues," writes Richard Feynman in his *Lectures on Computation*. "It has illuminated the nature of language, which we thought we understood: early attempts at machine translation failed because the old-fashioned notions about grammar failed to capture all the essentials of language. It naturally encourages us to ask questions about the limits of computability, about what we can and cannot know about the world around us. Computer science people spend a lot of time talking about whether or not man is merely a machine, whether his brain is just a powerful computer that might one day be copied." Our readings will help us explore these and other deep issues of computing by considering its elements. Authors will include Feynman, Leibniz, Lovelace, Turing, Peirce, and Searle. Practica will include building and programming a simple mechanical computer, Boolean logic exercises, and testing whether simple algorithms can yield highly complex results. No prior knowledge of computing or programming is needed.

Required Texts: Richard Feynman's *Essays on Computation* and a packet of essays compiled by the College.

First Assignment: from the reading packet, Hans Jonas, *Toward a Philosophy of Technology* in the Hastings Center Report 9.1: 34-43.

Tutor: Emily Langston

An Introduction to Ancient Greek

Description: In this preceptorial, our approach will be to learn Greek while thinking a lot about English and about language in general. We will also discuss the content, not just the language, of many passages and, eventually, of whole works that we read in the original Greek.

Required Text: Mollin and Williamson, *An Introduction to Ancient Greek*

First Assignment: Please study carefully pages 2 through 5, especially with a view to memorizing the Greek alphabet.

Tutor: Paul Ludwig

William Faulkner's, *Absalom Absalom*

Description: This preceptorial will be devoted to reading and discussing Faulkner's masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom*.

Required Texts: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom* and the Bible

First Assignment: 2 Samuel 1-19. Students might also want to read 1 Samuel for background.

Tutor: Mark Sinnett

Virgil's, Aeneid and Georgics

Description: The *Aeneid* may be the greatest of all classical epics. We accompany Aeneas as he struggles to navigate between the hazards of excess in love and death. We may learn how to build the earth. First by taking up the hard-won values of eternal Rome: "to establish Justice through law, insure peace, battle down the proud, and spare the conquered." Then in the Georgics we delve into the pastoral strength of the earth and nature itself.

Required Texts: Virgil, *Aeneid* and *Georgics*

First Assignment: *Aeneid*, Book One

Tutor: David Townsend

John Dewey's Experience and Nature

Description: John Dewey, one of the three principal developers of classical pragmatic philosophy (along with Charles Sanders Peirce and William James), here provides a wide-ranging response to fundamental questions about our ability to make sense of our experience of our selves and the world we encounter. This book is a presentation of Dewey's metaphysics, understood by him as a "generic insight into existence." His "insight" is founded in part on the model of the empirical sciences, which has implications for the nature of being, knowledge, and truth that stand in opposition to a large body of philosophical tradition. But Dewey is also concerned to give full credit to the richness of human experience in determining our broader relationship with the world and with each other as reflected in the development of our own being as persons, the use and nature of language, the foundations of human virtues, and the arts we employ to convey our regard for those things in us we wish to celebrate or condemn.

Required Text: *Experience and Nature*, John Dewey. (The Dover edition is required for ease of reference.)

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First Assignment: (The following two articles are readily available online.)
How to Make Our Ideas Clear, Charles S. Peirce, *Popular Science Monthly 12* (January 1878)

The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology, John Dewey, *Psychological Review*, 3 (1896)
Experience and Nature – *Preface*

Tutor: Tom Crouse