

CULTURE & EXPRESSION
FALL 2023
SEARCHING FOR TRUTH IN TROUBLED TIMES

HUHC 011: Professors: Colburn, Doubleday, Frisina, Gostenhofer, Lee, Limnatis, Singer

HUHC 013: Professors: Bergmann, Burignat-Kozol, Keller, Lay, Ogumah, Rustici, Sills

It may seem as if separating truth from false information has never been harder. Some mainstream politicians lie with impunity, sometimes in ways that lead to extraordinary electoral success. The old adage “seeing is believing” has been relegated to the dustbin, as artificial intelligence drives technology capable of creating fake photos, audio recordings and videos vilifying one’s enemies and promoting one’s own agenda. Moreover, these strategies and innovations seem to be fueling a debilitating and divisive polarization that is shaking the very foundations of deliberative democracy within the U.S. but also across the globe. Many now openly wonder whether a way of life founded on honest debate, political compromise, and a shared commitment to democracy is sustainable in this “brave new world.”

As it turns out, however, our experience is not unprecedented. In the first half of the semester, we’ll discuss ancient Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Hebraic, Roman and early Christian writers and artists who wrestled with political intrigue no less complicated than what we face in our time. They wondered, as we do, about how appearances sometimes mask realities, and whether there is any place to stand where one can truly “know the truth.” They, like us, were keenly aware of the power of human vanity, and the ways in which we lie to ourselves as much as to others. Some use humor as a tool for unmasking such deceptions.

About midway through the semester, we’ll step away from Western thinkers and discuss how Chinese (Confucian and Daoist) and South Asian (Hindu, Sikh) as well as European musical traditions broaden the discussion of human reason by emphasizing embodied forms of discernment and meaning-making.

During the latter third of the semester we’ll return to Western works, in which writers like Christine de Pizan challenge authorities who were attempting to gaslight women into believing they were less capable of sorting out truth from falsehood than their male counterparts, and Michel de Montaigne who called out as self-deception what we now recognize as nascent forms of white supremacy. As the semester wraps up, we examine the pursuit of truth in troubled times through the eyes of Shakespeare (*The Tempest*), Francis Bacon (who claims that the scientific method is the answer!) and Guaman Poma, a 16th century indigenous thinker from Peru whose criticisms of Spanish colonizers continues to resonate to this day.

The C&E faculty are excited to welcome you into this semester-long conversation about “Searching for Truth in Troubled Times.” We’re convinced that, when it is over, we all will be empowered and more prepared to wrestle with the issues facing us in our own “troubled times.”

The Strategy

C&E consists of two closely interrelated courses in both the Fall and Spring semesters. **HUHC 011 and 012: Social Sciences** has its emphasis on understanding the structures and values of a culture or civilization through the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, religion, economics and geography. **HUHC 013 and 014: Humanities** has its emphasis on artistic expressions of the cultures under examination

through the disciplines of literary analysis (e.g. English, classics, Romance and Comparative Literatures) as well as linguistics, rhetoric, music, drama, dance, the visual arts, architecture and aesthetics. Faculty develop a reading list and lecture schedule that work in tandem to reinforce a student's understanding of the ancient world through to the Middle Ages and the modern world since the Renaissance. Faculty lectures twice a week set the context for student-based discussion sections.