

FYEX 103 – 107 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

SPRING 2027

FYEX-103 Aesthetic Expression

Blank Space: Taylor Swift & Media Studies (1st/2nd)

Alexis de Coning

Taylor Swift's two-decade career has made her one of the most visible and debated figures in contemporary American pop culture. But beyond the music, what can her public image, storytelling, and media presence teach us about how media works?

This course uses Taylor Swift as a case study to introduce key concepts in Media Studies, including rhetoric, semiotics, cultural meaning, and media industries. Through the analysis of music, videos, performances, and media coverage, students will examine how meaning is produced, circulated, and interpreted in popular culture.

Swifties are welcome, but this course is for anyone interested in learning how media shapes identity, narrative, and power. Rather than focusing on fandom alone, the class invites students to step back and analyze the broader systems that influence how cultural icons are created, received, and debated.

Soundtrack to the Revolution (1st plus honors seats / 2nd plus honors seats)

Molly Clever

This course examines how social and political dissent are artistically expressed through music. Students will explore American social movements of the 20th and 21st centuries within the areas of racial, gender, sexuality, and economic justice by examining popular protest songs.

Game Design (1st)

Jon Benjamin

This course will introduce students to the process, theory, history of game design as well as current trends in gaming. Students will also learn the basics of coding using Lua to create their own video game in Roblox.

Documentary Film for Social Justice (2nd)

Jon Benjamin

In this course students will learn how to analyze documentary films that address social justice issues including: sexism, ableism and racism. Students will also learn how to create a short documentary film.

Intro to Improvisation (1st / 2nd)

Greg Mach

Students will explore the nature of comedy and scene structure as they create original works of theatre in a variety of formats. Through prompts and parameters, students will learn the give and take of improvising short scenes adhering to the rules and traditions of this exciting and challenging art form, and how these exercises can lead to scripted works.

Femmes Fatales (1st/2nd)

Ashley Lawson

The femme fatale is a character type that has been an object of fascination among artists for millennia. From Salome to Mata Hari to Taylor Swift, from Edgar Allen Poe to film noir to Marvel movies, this dangerous and seductive female character is meant to both draw us in and repel us, and a lot can be learned from our complicated responses to these women. Whether the femme fatale is the protagonist of her story, the villain, or something in between, her existence—and our continued fascination—reveals to us cultural biases about what a woman can and should be, as well as the penalties that women who cross those lines have suffered.

Exploring Scale and Proportion in Paper Mache (1st)

This class introduces three-dimensional design work through paper mâché, focusing on scale and proportion as design principles.

Crystal Brown

Experimental Watercolor (2nd)

This class introduces experimental watercolor techniques. Students will learn the basics of color mixing and 2-D design Principles through various watercolor processes.

Crystal Brown

Craft & Chill: A Make & Take Workshop (1st/2nd)

Deidra Casto

Trade your daily stress for hands-on crafting and creativity. This course introduces students to basic design principles, material exploration, and tactile art-making through interactive, low-pressure creative sessions. You will explore fresh materials and techniques to unwind, gain practical skills, and make cool stuff. Projects range from quick single-session creations to multi-class designs. Zero artistic talent is required, and you will walk away with completed pieces ready to display, gift or enjoy.

FYEX-104 Cultural Expression

The History of Parks (1st/2nd)

Coty Martin

This course will examine the creation of the American national parks system and discuss the purpose of parks as a public good. Students will also learn about the creation of the West Virginia state parks with the opportunity to visit at least one park during the course.

Banned Books (1st plus honors seats/2nd plus honors seats)

Erin DiStefano

This course explores how book bans limit access to important and diverse stories that help us understand different cultures, histories, and viewpoints. Students will investigate how power and privilege shape censorship and its effects on marginalized communities locally and globally. Through reading banned children's books and other texts, students will sharpen their skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking while learning to connect literature to larger social and political issues that affect our world.

Married in the White House: Presidents and their First Ladies (1st plus honors seats)

Katharine Antolini

This course explores how presidential administrations are not only shaped by the man sitting in the White House's Oval Office but also by the woman standing at his side. By discussing aspects of presidential administrations and presidential marriages, the course reveals the complementary and challenging relationships between 19th and 20th-century US Presidents and their First Ladies, revealing how such powerful couples defined America's political and social history.

Understanding the Heart of Appalachia (2nd plus honors seats)

Katharine Antolini/Tamara Bailey

The coal industry is emblematic of Appalachia. Poor whites struggling to make a living digging coal from the depths of the earth is at the heart of regional stereotypes. This interdisciplinary and collaboratively taught course will search beyond the popular stereotypes and delve into the history of the coal industry within the region and its socioeconomic and environmental legacy. Throughout the course, faculty from multiple departments will explore the topic of coal and Appalachia from the perspective of their disciplines as a means to introduce students to a multifaceted approach to regional studies.

WVWC History (1st/2nd)

Paula McGrew

Learn about the origins of WVWC and how it has grown since 1890. Meet some of the people behind the names on the buildings, and those who have shaped your new Home Among the Hills.

Chernobyl – Honors Only (1st)

Tamara Bailey

This Honors-only course examines the 1986 Chornobyl nuclear disaster. Students will explore the events leading up to the disaster, the human and environmental consequences, and the political, social, and technological factors that contributed to the catastrophe. Students will consider questions of government secrecy, scientific responsibility, crisis management, and the human cost of institutional failure.

FYEX-105 Ethical & Spiritual Inquiry

Faith & Doubt at the Movies (1st/2nd)

Debra Dean Murphy

This course uses the medium of film to explore questions of faith and doubt. Students will develop a basic film literacy (the ability to recognize and interpret a movie's visual composition, sound elements, and narrative structures), while also examining doubt and faith as enduring realities of our being human.

Death Cultures (1st plus honors seats/2nd plus honors seats)

Leslie Malland

This course looks at various rituals surrounding death and the dead around the world. We will also discuss the modern death care industry and Death Positive movement.

Ethical Issues in Computing (1st/2nd)

Don Tobin

This course is a journey through a number of impacts and ethical implications brought on by modern technologies and the "always connected" modern life. Open-ended questions will be posed in areas such as freedom of speech, police/government surveillance, privacy, intellectual property, and liability when humans are injured or killed by computing systems. Other topics will be explored as time allows looking at the sociopolitical costs of modern living.

FYEX-106 Empirical Inquiry

Test Taking Strategies (1st)

Kimberly Baughman

This one credit hour course introduces students to an overview of the field of nursing and various career opportunities and professionalism. Topics presented include, but are not limited to, history and evolution of nursing, education and licensure requirements, career path options, requirements for Clinical Exchange, and nursing responsibilities. Students will also focus on what is health and illness, related risk factors, and holistic patient care and will be introduced to nursing care equipment, skills, and simulation. Students will also be introduced to stress management and coping skills for student nurses, test taking, and study strategies.

Mixed Signals: Alien Communications across the Iron Curtain (1st plus honors seats/2nd plus honors seats)

Timothy Olszanski

For as long as humans have stared at the stars, we have wondered if we are truly alone in the universe. Today, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) is a large-scale effort to search for and detect possible signals from ETs using radio telescopes (including West Virginia's own Green Bank Telescope). At the height of the Cold War, SETI fostered one of the few channels of dialogue between US and USSR scientists, forming a fascinating intersection of science, and geopolitics. This course will focus on exploring both the science of SETI and its Cold War history through a reading of Rebecca Charbonneau's new book, "Mixed Signals: Alien Communication Across the Iron Curtain", where she breaths vivid life into this untold chapter of scientific history while asking the ultimate question "how can we communicate with extraterrestrials when we struggle to communicate amongst ourselves?".

Mathematical Thinking (2nd)

Jesse Oldroyd

This course covers uses and abuses of mathematical thinking in diverse areas, ranging from warfare, the lottery, investment scams, and more.

Board Game Biology (1st/2nd Honors Only)

Joseph Niederhauser

Games imitate life. In this class, we will explore the science of life imbued in board games. Specifically, we will explore the biology behind the popular board game Wingspan! While building an aviary to attract birds, we will examine biological topics such as habitat, diet, nesting, behaviors, and naming of birds. This course will introduce you to the experimental inquiry lens as you take a deep dive into the biology of a birding board game.

FYEX-107 Personal & Societal Wellbeing

Are You Prepared to Save a Life (1st/2nd)

Dan Martin

In this course, students will apply standard health care practices to develop the basic knowledge and skills necessary to save lives in health care emergencies. Health care emergencies covered will include sudden cardiac arrest and narcotic overdose. Students will learn skills including the appropriate uses of CPR/AED and Narcan training, as well as the trends in community and public health that affect the occurrence of these health care emergencies. Certifications will be available upon the successful completion of the course.

A Brief History of Sports (1st/2nd)

Rigel Wilson & Cole Bracken

In this interactive course you will first learn about the history of several sports as well as the current rules and regulations of game play. Then you will apply that knowledge by playing those sports in class.

Unlocking Focus: ADHD, Time Management, and Academic Flourishing (1st plus honors seats)

Theresa Black

The transition to college brings unprecedented freedom and complexity, requiring new strategies for time management, task initiation, and self-advocacy—especially for students navigating ADHD or executive function challenges. Focus, Flow, and Function offers a supportive, evidence-based space to explore how the ADHD brain works and to build personalized, sustainable systems for academic and personal success.

Beyond the Mat: Somatics, Mindfulness, and Self-Discovery (2nd plus honors seats)

Theresa Black

Navigating the transition to college requires more than academic preparation—it demands self-awareness, stress resilience, and tools for personal well-being. Beyond the Mat introduces first-year students to the foundational practices of yoga, somatic movement, and mindfulness as practical frameworks for personal growth and academic success.

The Voice Inside Your Head: When to Listen & When to Ignore (1st/2nd)

Scott Biola

This class aims to help students better understand when to listen and when to ignore our inner-dialogues. The course focuses intensively on Ethan Kross's national best seller "Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why it Matters, and How to Harness It." Kross has a knack for making findings from the research-world relatable. This means the class will help students learn to discover better ways to manage their self-talk via a basis in research.

Introduction to Personal Finance (1st/2nd)

Anthony Sanders

This course will be an introduction for students on how to how to manage your personal finances. Topics of discussion will include how to manage a budget, write checks, insurance, and an introduction to investments. This class will include both lecture and hands-on demonstrations to prepare students to manage their finances throughout their college careers and in the future.

Movement for Awareness and Performance (1st/2nd)

Emily Grimany

A daily physical and vocal regimen designed to develop discipline and consistency in training – thus the good health, efficiency, strength and stamina for performance and public speaking.