

First-Year Seminars

2023



Albion College

I'm not going to lie, Friends.

Chances are your first semester of college is going to be strange, wild, and shot through with both joy and difficulty. It's not going to be simple or easy, is what I'm saying.

But here's one thing I want you to keep in mind: We've got your back.

And by "we," I mean lots and lots of people on campus and in the town of Albion, people seeing you and looking out for you!

Of all those people, maybe the most important are the amazing instructors, student mentors, and support staff in the First-Year Seminar Program (FYS): Your FYS crew. They are the hub of all the love and support and attention you'll get at Albion College.

So read on for a glimpse of what's waiting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nels Christensen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nels Christensen
Director of First-Year Seminar Program

First-Year Seminars, Fall 2023

All entering students enroll in a First-Year Seminar as part of the College's core requirement for graduation. Please read through the descriptions of the seminars in this booklet and identify your first four choices among these offerings.

These seminars are offered as part of the William Atwell Brown, Jr. and Mary Brown Vacin First-Year Experience.

All Power to the People!: Why the Black Panther Party Still Matters

Nels Christensen

Course Description—The Black Panther Party was the most powerful, radical, and revolutionary anti-racist organization in the civil-rights era. So why don't American public schools teach about who the Panthers were, what they wanted, and what they believed? We'll consider that question (and many others!) as we explore the Black Panther Party—its leadership and membership, its political beliefs, and its militant and loving strategies for defending and lifting up Black folks in a white-supremacist society.

Keywords: Black Panther Party, Self-Defense, Racial Anti-Racism

Instructor—Nels Christensen lives in Albion along the banks of the mighty Kalamazoo River. He loves it and wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Ancient Aliens and Lost Civilizations: Archaeology & Popular Culture

Brad Chase

Course Description—Aliens built the pyramids? Nope. This and the many other ridiculous—and often racist—claims of extraterrestrial interactions with ancient peoples are laughable to real archaeologists. Yet *Ancient Aliens* has run for *nineteen* seasons

on *History*—and similar junk regularly clogs my social media feeds. Ugh. How can you distinguish actual knowledge from disinformation? Why do some tall tales about the ancient past seem to have such traction in our popular culture? In this course you will learn how to evaluate competing claims to knowledge while exploring the cultural significance of some truly wacky ideas.

Keywords: Archaeology, Aliens, Disinformation

Instructor—Brad Chase (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison) is Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and has taught at Albion since 2008. He is an archaeologist whose research explores the Indus Civilization of ancient India and Pakistan. When he is not teaching at Albion or conducting research in India, he can be found chasing after a wily five-year old.

Black and Brown in the Classroom

Jess Roberts

Course Description—Education. Liberation. Social justice. Imagination. Play. Freedom dreaming. If any of those words grabs your mind and heart, this class is for you. Together, we'll explore what it might look like to create a system of education that sees and values Black and brown kids—really sees and values them. Expect to read, write, imagine, think, play, and dream.

Keywords: Education, Liberation, Social Justice

Instructor—Jess Roberts loves books and believes they can change the world. She loves kids and believes they can change the world, too. She reads, writes, teaches, wears Chuck Taylors, and directs Albion's Big Read.

Blues Roots

Clayton Parr

Course Description—This course is about the blues - the American music whose branches stretch worldwide. We'll go back to the African origins of this music, move through its history in America, and explore how its influence shows today, not only in rock and jazz, but in gospel music, country, and hip-hop. In addition to reading and listening, students will do research on how contemporary artists they love show traces of blues ancestry in their music.

Keywords: Blues, Africa, America

Instructor—Dr. Clayton Parr is the choir director at Albion. A long time ago, he graduated from Albion with majors in music and physics. He went away and taught in several other places (most of them in various parts of the Midwest) before returning to Albion to join the faculty in 2012. His research interests include music of Georgia (the country, not the state.) When he's not doing music, he's usually in a kayak, at the ballpark, or looking up something obscure. He walks to work every day and likes it that way.

California Screaming: Natural Disasters in the Golden State and on the Silver Screen

Michael McRivette

Course Description—California knows natural disasters! Earthquakes, floods, landslides, wildfires, and droughts are common. Volcanic eruptions and tsunamis also occur. Despite this, nearly 40 million people call this dynamic and threatening environment home. This seminar will examine the geologic and geographic causes and processes of natural disasters with specific focus on California. Case studies will be used to understand the physical, societal, and economic impacts of disasters. We will also watch a sampling of natural disaster movies to explore how Hollywood shapes conceptions of science and natural disaster processes and impacts. Includes a field trip to California during winter break. Field trip fee will apply.

Keywords: California, Disasters, Movies

Instructor—Mick McRivette (Ph.D., UCLA) is a native Californian who lived in both rural Northern California and the big cities of Southern California before moving to Albion in 2008. As a result, he is mostly cool with earthquakes, but still thinks tornadoes are a little bit scary. Mick teaches courses in geology and geography and mapping. His research focuses on the geology of large mountain systems such as the Himalayas-Tibet and the Scandinavian mountains. He enjoys most outdoor activities, playing soccer, and traveling with his family.

Cryptids and Cryptozoology: from The Abominable Snowman to the Zuiyo-Maru Monster

Emmeline Solomon

Course Description—Through cryptids we transform the things we are supposed to fear into stories, mascots, and beloved cult figures. This class

focuses on facing the thing we cannot quite see in the dark and embracing it with open arms. We will investigate cryptozoological creatures, the ideas that bring them into existence, and do some invention of our own. We will explore questions such as: What's the difference between story and reality? Why are there so many illustrations of mothman doing kickflips? Are we afraid of bigfoot or do we identify with him as an introvert icon? This class includes readings, research, discussion, drawing, and both critical and creative writing.

Keywords: Monsters, Mythmaking, Embracing the Unknown

Instructor—Emmeline Solomon (M.F.A., Washington University in St. Louis) is a Printmaker and Bookbinder. She is interested in the mundane, the holy, and their inherently interchangeable nature, folklore, superstitions, iconography, bees, people singing Robin at a subway stop at 1am, and failure. She is a semi- recent transplant to the midwest and is therefore still at least 50% afraid of cornfields.

Elements of Robotics

Moataz Khalifa

Course Description—Have you ever heard of a SONAR detector? How about a LIDAR? Have you ever heard about a servo motor? How about the word robotics? Have you ever wanted to learn what they mean? Have you ever wanted to open one of your interesting toys to figure out how it works or perhaps fix it or improve it? If any of this resonates with you, then this course might be for you. Come join us in this class where we learn the fundamentals of robotics while actually building, programing and debugging (when problems show up) robotic components.

Keywords: Robotics, Electronics, SONAR, LIDAR

Instructor—Dr. Moataz Khalifa is an eternal student who continuously nerds out on anything science or electronics related. If you have a good history of science story, you will have his attention for as long as you want. . . it is almost cartoonish how he gets entranced by these stories. He has a few good ones he likes to share as well!

Emerging Infectious and Communicable Diseases

Ola A. Olapade

Course Description—This seminar is for those who would love to explore various infectious diseases caused by microscopic germs such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa that are transferred via vectors and/or fomites such as malaria and Lyme disease as well as those directly communicable from person to person, including Influenza, Ebola, HIV, Herpesvirus and the human papillomavirus.

Keywords: Microorganisms, Society, Epidemiology, Public Health

Instructor—Ola A. Olapade (Ph. D., Kent State University) is a microbiologist with interests in Microbial Ecology, Environmental Microbiology, Bioremediation and Public Health. He teaches General Microbiology, Environmental Microbiology, Virology, and various seminars in Epidemiology and Public Health as well as the Virus Hunters and also contributes to the introductory sequence courses in the department. His research generally involves delineating the occurrences of microbial assemblages and enzymatic activities in various environments. For relaxation, he enjoys various sporting events, spending time with his family and travelling.

Fly Me to the Moon: 100+ Years of Space Exploration

Nicolle Zellner

Course Description—Do you gaze up at the sky and wonder what's out there, how do we know, and how can we get there? In this class, you will learn about the history and future of space exploration and will discuss topics related to different countries' efforts, human spaceflight, gender and other axes of diversity in the astronaut/cosmonaut/taikonaut corps, and space missions (including commercial endeavors). We'll also talk about exploring planets, moons, and asteroids in our solar system and beyond and whether or not life as we know it exists anywhere else. A trip to space/NASA-relevant sites in Washington, D. C. usually occurs. Be prepared for a college experience that is out of this world!

Keywords: Space, NASA

Instructor—Nicolle Zellner is a space geek and not afraid to admit it. She works for NASA, hangs out with astronauts, studies samples from the Moon, and has collected meteorites in Antarctica. She loves to read, travel, and dance, but not necessarily in that order.

Have Fun, Kick A** in College

Blake Darling

Course Description—Do you like movies? Music? Sports? Books? Videogames? Good, so do I. Want to keep doing those things you enjoy while also learning how to succeed in College? Then this class is the one for you. This seminar aims to teach you how to “do College” by adapting those lessons through the things you enjoy in your free time. Let's have some fun and learn habits and tricks that will help you kick a** here at Albion.

Keywords: Fun, Free-time, Habits

Instructor—Blake Darling (no Ph.D. yet) is an Albion Brit class of 2016 who is currently getting his bills paid by the Sociology Department. He enjoys basketball, fantasy novels, Assassin's Creed, movie theater popcorn, and bonfires. He is a big proponent of “work hard, play hard” just not always in that order.

Henry Ford: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

Stephen Young

Course Description—In 1903, Henry Ford forever changed transportation in the US. Ford altered how manufacturing companies operated in the early 20th Century and how his practices are still in use today. In this class we will investigate how Henry Ford changed the landscape of the American business. We will focus on “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of Henry Ford to include his contribution to business, the management strategies used, and the ethical views and challenges of Ford. A field trip to a Ford manufacturing plant is also planned.

Keywords: Business, Management

Instructor—Stephen Young is an Assistant Professor in the Economics & Management Department. Prior to Albion College, he served eight years in the United States Air Force flying the F-15E Strike Eagle and spent over 12 years in corporate America. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Ole Miss (Go Rebels!) and his PhD from Indiana Tech. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his wife, playing guitar, riding his motorcycle, working on his 1957 Ford pickup truck, and attempting to be a farmer on his farm in Albion.

Leadership

Jocelyn McWhirter

Course Description—Leaders aren't born that way! Leaders learn to lead. In this seminar, you will develop your leadership skills, starting with self-awareness and self-care and continuing with social skills such as attention, empathy, communication, visioning, planning, collaboration, and conflict management. As you learn these skills, you will practice them in your daily life and end the semester ready to make a difference as a competent leader.

Keywords: Leadership, Communication, Conflict Management

Instructor—Jocelyn McWhirter never thought of herself as a leader. Slowly but surely, however, she learned the necessary skills, starting with listening carefully to people and memorizing their names. At Albion College she has led the Holocaust Studies Service Learning Project, the Newell Center for Teaching and Learning, the faculty marshals' team and the Religious Studies Department, where she teaches Bible and Judaism.

Living the Life Fantastic: The Fantasy Literature and Authors That Have Captured the World's Imagination

Mark Hoffland

Course Description—Into Harry Potter? Game of Thrones? Lord of the Rings? Or even The Walking Dead? In this course, we will explore the biographies and shared inspirations of fantasy authors J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*), George R. R. Martin (*Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire*) J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), and Robert Kirkman (*The Walking Dead*), as well as lesser known authors. We will watch film adaptations, listen to interviews with the authors, and discover the inspirations for these unique worlds, characters, and

storylines. We will use the medium of fantasy fiction to discuss contemporary social issues and modern dilemmas.

Keywords: Fantasy, Biography, Inspiration

Instructor—Mark Hoffland is an Iowa farm boy who discovered his love of theatre and fantasy at an early age. Somehow, he has been able to earn a living dealing with both. He believes in fun and truth.

Local Advocacy and Activism

Chrissy Pfeil

Course Description—In this course, first-year students will be introduced to the Albion community through course material and field trips. Students will complete a community asset mapping exercise to become familiar with their local community. As the basis of course material, students will complete the Social Issue Shark Tank project throughout the semester. Students will identify an economic, social, political, or environmental need in the Albion community and outline potential solutions based on community-based research. Students will learn the basics of advocacy and activism in a local context.

Keywords: Advocacy, Activism, Community Engagement, Research

Instructor—At Albion College, Chrissy Pfeil is the project lead for Albion On Purpose, which encompasses Innovation Badges, Experiential Certificates, and the Co-curricular Transcript. She advises the Student Volunteer Bureau (SVB) and the Albion College Rotaract Club. She is excited to begin her Ph.D. this fall at Michigan State University in Curriculum and Instruction. In her free time, Chrissy loves to go hiking with her Great Dane, Strider, cuddle with her Sphynx cats Ivan and Wallace, and read feminist literature.

#NoJusticeNoPeace: Political Messaging and Social Movements

Ashley Woodson

Course Description—What do Paul Revere and Tarana Burke have in common? More than you think. From the beginning of the American experiment in democracy, folks have found ways to prepare, inspire and organize people to demand a more just future. In this seminar, we'll research the different strategies that activists use to amplify their message. Then, we'll work together to design our own strategic advocacy campaign about a local justice issue. We're probably going to change the world, tbh.

Keywords: Social Movements, Communication, Activism, Justice

Instructor—Dr. Ashley Woodson is a mother, teacher, and advocate for higher education access. She publishes research on high school students' racial identities, social studies and civic empowerment. She's currently writing a book about Black history in Albion. Dr. Woodson finds joy spending time with her kids in a Black history museum, writing in a coffee shop, or listening to 90s R&B on a nature walk.

Public Policy in Film

Andrew Christopher

Course Description—Are you sick of driving on roads that are falling apart? Are you concerned about American's health care system? Does climate change worry you? What about economic disparities, especially in the United States? In this class we will learn about and discuss these topics as portrayed in films and discuss options we as a society have for improving these situations. No matter what you major in or do for a career, issues we discuss in this class will have an effect on you, personally and professionally.

Keywords: Justice, Policy, Film

Instructor—Drew Christopher is a psychology teacher whose main mission in life is to keep people from being complacent and taking things for granted. He believes that if you want to complain about something, you need to be active in making a difference in whatever it is you are complaining about. He loves teaching this first-year seminar because it allows him to give students the tools to make a difference in whatever they are passionate about while they are at Albion and hopefully after they graduate.

Science of Superheroes

Kevin Metz

Course Description—This course is for folks who love superheroes and science. It is especially for people who are willing to read about superheroes and think, talk, and write about the science needed to make them a reality. If you are ready to let your science-geek out, this is your class.

Keywords: Superheroes, Chemistry, Science

Instructor—Kevin Metz is a perpetually curious science nerd. As a child, armed with a pocket microscope, he sought to understand the physical world we live in. Kevin loves stories about science, science fiction, and superheroes. He now spends too much time dreaming about what it will take to make science fiction a reality.

Science, Truth, and Other

Jeremy Kirby

Course Description—Herein we confront some perennial mysteries and consider how scientists have historically attempted to deal with them. We will attempt to disarm the paradoxical, and, in so doing, better understand the nature of science, with an eye toward formulating an answer to the question *What is Truth?*

Keywords: Science, Epistemology, Logic

Instructor—Jeremy Kirby teaches and writes on issues concerning the history of philosophy and the history of science. He has published two books concerning Aristotle’s approach to science and a number of articles relating to the history of philosophy. He lives in Albion, MI.

Supernormal Abilities

Roger Albertson

Course Description—Each of us has our own unique abilities, yet they often go undiscovered or undeveloped because the ability doesn’t fit societal norms. We will explore a variety of unique talents and how they may arise through neurodiversity, past lives, mysticism or trauma. We will observe how cultural norms can inhibit us from realizing our true nature and potential. We will consider how to use our abilities toward living a more fulfilling and successful life.

Keywords: Neurodiversity, Potential, Empowerment

Instructor—Roger Albertson explores consciousness through spiritual practice and scientific inquiry. He has been shaped by brilliant scientists, shamans, monks and countless souls he has encountered during this lifetime.

Tapestry of Humanity: The Minority Experience in America

Ari McCaskill

Course Description—In this class, we’ll investigate relations between minority and majority groups in contemporary American society, with specific attention to ethnic, religious, and racial minorities regarding prejudice, discrimination, and the historical backdrop that informs today’s reality.

Keywords: Experience, Racism, Immigration

Instructor—Ari McCaskill, M.A. is the inaugural director for Albion College’s James L. Curtis Institute for Race and Belonging. His professional and lived experiences have shaped his understanding of the places and people who, in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, “live on the other side of the creek!” an idiom of the marginalized and underrepresented.

Teaching, Learning & Diversity

Suelyn Henke

Course Description—Are you considering a future as an educator? Do you enjoy working with children and youth? In this course we will interact with students in diverse local schools and develop a sense of place while engaging in cross-cultural dialogues about education. Importantly, you will set goals and create your own path for success in college! This course is paired with EDUC 195: Education Foundations: Access, Equity, and Advocacy, which fulfills an admission requirement for Albion College’s Teacher Education Program.

Keywords: Teaching, Diversity

Instructor—Suelyn is a professor in the Education Department and enjoys working with students who want to make a difference, or are in the process of *figuring it all out*. Before she moved to Michigan, she taught in Ohio and Hawaii. She has trained a therapy dog that she often brings to campus.

The Horror!!!: Understanding Zombies, Vampires, and Other Monsters

Alli Harnish

Course Description—This course explores the evolution of monsters from their folkloristic origins to their modern iterations. By studying

horror movies new and old, including George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Jordan Peele’s Get Out* (2017), we will understand how monsters are real in their capacity to reflect back onto societies their deepest fears and their darkest secrets—be it anxieties over racism, the status of women, changing sexual mores, consumerism, climate change, or nuclear war. Students who select this first-year seminar will also be enrolled in ANTH 105: Introduction to Anthropology.

Keywords: Zombies, Vampires, Culture

Instructor—Alli Harnish (Ph.D., University of Kentucky) is an associate professor in the Departments of Anthropology & Sociology and Earth & Environment whose research and teaching focus on colonialism, conservation, environmental justice, and Indigenous communities in the US and Zambia. When not at work, she can be found hiking or camping with her husband, her two dogs, and one-year old baby, or attempting DIY home projects.

Wait, how do I write this email?

Katie Broekema

Course Description—Does the idea of sending an email to a professor overwhelm you? What is a personal or professional network, why is it important, and how do you make one? How do you talk to unfamiliar classmates? If any of these questions have you thinking, then this class is for you. Ultimately, email is the most preferred method of communication in a business setting; it’s not about what you know but who you know, and working with others is a necessary life skill. In this class, we will be exploring concepts related to learning about ourselves and improving our communication.

Keywords: Communication, Networking, Self-knowledge

Instructor—Katie Broekema, '12, is a proud Albion Alum who is ecstatic to work at her Alma Mater. She quickly found out after college that people, community, and relationships were the guiding force in her decision making and professional happiness. She spends her free time walking, trying new restaurants, and playing with yarn while knitting.

