POSSIBLE SEMINAR TOPICS FOR 2025-26

**Community and Technocracy**

The term community is ubiquitous in our public discourse: community organizing; the Black community; the LGBT community; community development; the business community; the Evangelical community; the academic community;etc.It might be interesting to take a deep dive into how & why this term is deployed so widely. A good starting point might be Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between *gemeinschaft* (community) versus *gesellschaft* (society), that is social relations based on personal relations, traditions, and deeply shared values versus mass society organized around formal, impersonal, contractual relations. Our contemporary widespread usage of “community” suggests a recognition something positive and essential to human relations, perhaps solidarity and connectedness, that is diminished by modernity.

Prompt questions to explore might be:

1. Is “community” possible in contemporary technocratic society?
2. Does social media promote community?
3. Does community depend on proximity and personal interaction?

**Rewritten Masterpieces**

Recently there have been some notable rewrites of masterpieces: Percival Everett’s retelling of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, *James*, David West Read (*Schitt’s Creek*) and Max Martin’s reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, *& Juliet*; and Sandra Norman’s reworking of George Orwell’s *1984*, *Julia*. What all these efforts have in common is a post-modern critique of the masterpieces, a de-centering and deconstruction of main characters – Huck Finn, Romeo, and Winston Smith are given a back seat to Jim, Juliet, and Julia. We could explore what is gained and what is lost in these efforts. Are these “legitimate” literary exercises or simply transgressive escapades.

These three examples vary a lot in their level of nuance and artistry, but they all suggest some interesting questions:

1. Are these “legitimate” literary exercises or simply transgressive escapades.
2. What is a masterpiece and how much reverence should we accord such works?

**Fascism**

The term *fascism* is tossed around quite a bit these days. Often it is used as a synonym for *authoritarianism* and can deployed by both the left and the right as an epithet rather than an empirical description. It might be interesting to take explore it as a political economic system. Some intellectual historians trace its origins to the 1891 encyclical, *Rarum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII to address the conflict between labor and capital. The nascent Fascist Party in Italy championed women’s suffrage and 8-hour workdays. Moreover, ideologically it resonated *syndicalism* and *corporatism* of the early 20th Century. Obviously, it took a toxic turn as it adopted increasingly ultra-nationalist and ethno-centric values.

Possible Prompt questions:

1. How can we define fascism?
2. What is the basis of its appeal?
3. How can we distinguish fascism from other forms of authoritarian rule?
4. What is the relationship between fascism and capitalism?

**Comedy**

It might be interesting to explore comedy as a genre. What makes something funny? What is the relationship between comedy and society. Is there something that connects comedy over time…what might Aristophanes (*The Frogs*), Petronius (*Satyricon*), and Moliere (*Tartuffe*) have in common with Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, George Carlin? Might be fun to view and discuss some stand-up as well as scenes from plays or movies?

**Cryptocurrency Seminar Proposal**

This seminar will explore the rapidly evolving world of cryptocurrency, beginning with foundational concepts such as blockchain technology, digital wallets, mining processes, and the mechanics of decentralized finance. We will explore practical understanding of major cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum, learn about trading platforms and security protocols, and examine the technical infrastructure that enables peer-to-peer digital transactions. We will address cryptocurrency's broader societal implications, including its potential to revolutionize traditional banking systems, enable financial inclusion for unbanked populations, and reshape global economic structures. We will critically examine both the opportunities and risks, discussing regulatory challenges, environmental concerns related to energy-intensive mining, market volatility, and the role of cryptocurrency in illicit activities.

**Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) Seminar Proposal**

This seminar will examine the phenomenon of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP), formerly known as UFOs. We will explore the historical evolution of UAP reporting from early aviation mysteries to modern military encounters and recent declassified reports from agencies like the Pentagon's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO). We will cover scientific methodologies for investigating aerial anomalies, including radar analysis, photographic evidence evaluation, and atmospheric physics principles that could explain unconventional flight characteristics. Beyond the technical aspects, the seminar will examine the broader implications of UAP phenomena for national security and scientific inquiry, while addressing the sociological impact of UAP disclosure on public perception, media representation, and cultural narratives about extraterrestrial life.

**The pursuit of happiness**

250 years ago, the Declaration  of Independence declared the unalienable rights of life , liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Some argue that this phase is a variation of John Locke’s statement on life, liberty and property. What were the Founders expressing by the change in wording? What is *the pursuit of happiness*? Should foundational documents be subject to originalist interpretation to understand the intent of the Founders? The 21st century person may not differentiate greatly between property and happiness. Have our values changed in 250 years so that we are missing a distinction in meaning. Should a historical document be cherished as a relic or revered as a value statement for the present day?