I. Description

In a 1923 letter, the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote, “All human knowledge takes the form of interpretation,” and with that sentence he captured the epoch: the collapse of Objectivity.

In this multidisciplinary colloquium, we will investigate the collapse of Objectivity in the first half of the 20th century: its origins, its manifestations, its consequences. Our work will include examinations of two 20th-century discoveries that are understood, and perhaps misunderstood, as dismantling the much-vaunted Objectivity of mathematics and the sciences, including Einstein’s Theories of Special and General Relativity and Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems as well as explorations of how “relativity,” “incompleteness,” and “subjectivity” reflect cultural, historical, and philosophical trends across the arts and humanities.

Following the model of previous colloquia, we will meet twice each week, and different members of the faculty will lead most meetings.

II. Components

Texts

Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro*
William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
Harry Frankfurt, *On Truth*
Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America*
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Additionally, instructors will provide you with many additional electronic and paper texts.

We will encounter a wide range of texts this term. While your interests will ebb and flow, you must read actively: write on the texts, take reading notes, and identify points of confusion, elucidation, and fascination. Do not merely read the information: assess it. The more thought you put into the reading before class, the better our discussions will be.

Sessions

With two exceptions, the colloquium will meet on Mondays from 4:55-6:25 and Wednesdays from 6:45-8:15. On Thursday, 24 September, and on Tuesday, 27 October, the colloquium will meet from 4:55-6:25.

Prior to each session, you should review your own reading notes, and by the time class begins, you should be prepared to further explore your own thinking as well as the thinking of your classmates. Accordingly, you should strive to adhere to the following principles:

1. During class, have your texts and notes available, refer to them frequently, and ground your comments in the works and readings themselves. When listening to your classmates, encourage them to refer to specific aspects of works or moments in the readings to support and clarify their ideas.
2. When trying to enter the conversation, ensure that the person speaking is finished. When speaking, avoid repeating what has already been said.

3. Refer to others by Name, not just “she said, he said, they said.” Speak to one another—making eye contact—not just the instructor.

4. If you do not understand what someone says, ask her to try to say again what she means. When listening, try not only to understand what she thinks but also how and why she thinks it.

5. Use the class discussion not as a place to present ideas you have been sure about all along but as a place to try out your developing ideas and responses to the readings.

6. Regardless of the format of a particular class, you should take and retain notes.

**Writing Assignments**

You will have several writing assignments.

During the first half of the term, you are to keep a Course Journal with your reactions to each topic we explore: your personal reflections and responses to, your notes and questions about, both to the preparatory work you conduct—readings, screenings, etc.—and to the sessions themselves. Your Course Journal is a place for informal, non-argumentative writing.

Each Friday during the first half of the term, you will place a printed copy of week’s entries to your Course Journal in my faculty mailbox by 3PM. I realize submitting work on days when a class does not meet is challenging, but given the odd structure of our course, this is the only way for me to be able to respond to read and respond to your work in a timely manner that can influence our upcoming sessions.

On Monday, 5 October, you will submit an essay of approximately 1000 to 1200 words that serves as an analytical reflection on your experience in the course thus far. Although you will not simply cut-and-paste from it, your Course Journal will rely heavily on it for this essay. The more thought you put into your Course Journal each week, the easier—and better—this essay will be.

During the second half of the term, you will have the option of either continuing the Course Journal project or undergoing your own independent project in which you would work with an individual faculty member on a topic of your choice relevant to our course. Either option will yield an essay of approximately 3000 words due during the Extended Period week.

In addition, individual instructors may assign work for their sessions(s).

**III. Expectations**

**Class Guidelines**

Without explicit permission otherwise, you may not use ANY electronic devices during class time, i.e. using a smart phone, typing notes into a laptop, recording lectures or discussions.

**Writing Guidelines**
Without explicit permission otherwise, you may not use ANY secondary (re)sources—except dictionaries—for any of your work in this course. This includes on-line (Wikipedia, Spark Notes, termpapers.com, for example) and print (re)sources.

Even though you are not to use secondary (re)sources, please review the Academy’s statement concerning academic honesty:

Honesty is the basic value on which this community rests. Academic honesty is demanded by the very nature of a school community. Honesty in the academic area means claiming as one’s own only that work which is one’s own. All scholarship builds upon the ideas and information of others; the honest person makes clear in written work exactly what the source of any borrowed information or idea is, whether it be library materials, the Internet, classmates, or family members. Since words are the bearers of both information and the unique style of the writer, the words of others, if borrowed, must be properly acknowledged. In addition, work done for one course may not be used to secure credit in another. It is not acceptable to submit one piece of work (e.g. notes, computer programs, lab reports, papers, etc.) to more than one course without prior consultation with and written permission from all instructors involved. – The Blue Book

Should you receive ANY assistance in your written work for this course, please indicate your collaborator(s) and the nature of your collaboration at the conclusion of the work. Acceptable assistance includes peer editing, use of the Writing Center, and discussions with classmates. Unacceptable assistance includes gaining input from family and friends.

Grading

To determine your term grade, we will consider the quality of your weekly preparation for, and participation in, class meetings—including your assisting in the learning of others—as well as your mid-term and final essays.

IV. Schedule

Preparations for individual sessions will take between 30 and 180 minutes. As in many undergraduate courses, you will need to plan ahead and manage your work as you proceed throughout the term.

7 September  Objectivity and theFeat of Interpretation
In this introductory session, we will explore developments in objectivity, photography, and hermeneutics.
    David Fox, Instructor in English and Art History
    Preparatory Work: watch the Rodney King video and read Mr. King’s biography, Judith Butler’s “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” and Adam Liptak’s “Exclusion of Blacks from Juries Raises Renewed Scrutiny”; watch Stanley Kubrick’s Paths of Glory.

9 September  Terra Incognita: Cartographic Incompleteness and Subjectivity During the Age of Discovery
The Sidney R. Knafel Map Collection provides a unique, multifaceted view into the roles of Incompleteness and Subjectivity in the attempts of early modern Europeans to chart and depict lands and peoples beyond those which had previously been known to them. This seminar will explore a small selection of antique/historical maps from the collection in order to better understand how maps, as both visual and textual sources, reveal dynamic, but incomplete and
subjective understandings of the world from the perspective of early modern European cartographers, map consumers and empire builders.

Nile Blunt, Instructor in History and Geographer At-Large  

14 September  The Free Republic of Greenwich Village: Marcel Duchamp and Anarchism  
Our goal is to situate Marcel Duchamp's radical irony within the debates that animate early 20th Century Anarchism -- both "individualist" and "communist," both in America and in Europe -- in order to explore how Duchamp's art objects and texts undermine the western tradition of metaphysical authority that sustains bourgeois art and culture.  
John Bird, Instructor in English  
Preparatory Work: read selected writings by Marcel Duchamp.

16 September  Einstein’s Relativity I  
In this first session on Einstein’s Relativity, we will discuss the origins of non-Euclidean geometry in the 19th century and its influences on Einstein’s Special Relativity.  
Sue Buckwalter, Instructor in Mathematics  
Caroline Odden, Instructor in Physics  
Preparatory Work: none

21 September  Filling the Missing Middle: Questioning the Metanarrative in Dom Casmurro  
This novel presents us with a narrator, Bento Santiago, who in old age decorates his house exactly like his childhood home and decides to write his autobiography as a project of self fulfillment, to "fill the missing middle" of his existence and attempt to become whole in the process. We will examine the narrative structure of the novel and the "text within the text" of Bento's fragmented account and decide if his project of creating a reverse *bildungsroman* becomes successful, as well as examine how it subsumes the other characters' lives and perspectives under its agenda.  
Flavia Vidal, Instructor in English  
Preparatory Work: read Machado de Assis’s *Dom Casmurro*.

23 September  No Session

24 September*  Freud and Modern Brain Science  
Right around the transition from the 19th to the 20th centuries, Sigmund Freud pioneered the study of human psychology, developing several theories to explain the inner working of the human mind and behavior. Among these were the concept of the unconscious mind and the theory of the id, ego and super-ego, highlighting the role "hidden" mental processes might play in human consciousness. While most of Freud's theories have not been validated empirically, many of his ideas have been shown to be relevant to modern brain science. For example, unconscious mental processes have been clearly shown to play a role in the makeup and function of human psychology, and his theory of the id, ego and super-ego have, in a sense, been supported by modern brain science as informed by Darwin's ideas of natural selection, sexual selection and more modern theories of group selection and evolutionary psychology. In this session, we will explore the intersection of Freud's ideas with modern brain science, examining the interplay of unconscious hard-wired and learned behaviors with conscious thought and action.  
Jerry Hagler, Instructor in Biology  
Leon Holley, Instructor in Biology  
Carol Israel, Instructor in Psychology
Preparatory Work: read Casey Schwartz’s “When Freud Meets fMRI,” *The Atlantic*

28 September  **Subjectivity, Truth, and Meaning**
Tom Hodgson, Instructor in Philosophy and Religious Studies

30 September  **Einstein’s Relativity II**
In this second session on Einstein’s Relativity, we will discuss fundamental ideas in general relativity as well as applications to astrophysics.
Sue Buckwalter
Caroline Odden
Preparatory Work: watch videos (specific titles forthcoming).

5 October  **The Babylon Lottery**
Calvino and Borges wrestled with ideas of relativity, mediation of meaning, and meaning-making through their fiction. Using Calvino's thoughts on the folk tale (especially his assertion that “fairy tales are real”) as a jumping off point, we will move forward and think about Guinier's assertions that the SAT and the "higher-ed industrial complex" have created problems of mediated meaning that may hinder access and opportunity for some students in the college admission process.
Ken Shows, Assistant Director of College Counseling
Preparatory Work: read Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Babylon Lottery” from *Ficciones*; Italo Calvino’s introduction to *Italian Folk Tales*, “How Much Shall We Bet?” from *Cosmicomics*, “Snakes and Skulls” from *Mr. Palomar*; Part I of Lani Guinier’s *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy*.

7 October  **Unreasonable Search & Seizure: Subjectivity & the 4th Amendment**
In recent years, dramatic advancements in technology, particularly with regard to cell phones and tracking, have meant that our lives may not be as private and protected as they used to be. This session will introduce some key U.S. Supreme Court decisions related to privacy and discuss what “unreasonable” should or should not mean in the present day.
Noah Rachlin, Instructor in History
Preparatory Work: to be determined.

12 October  **Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse I***
Catherine Tousignant, Instructor in English
Preparatory Work: read section I, “The Window,” of *To the Lighthouse*.

14 October  **Gödel and Incompleteness, Part I**
Pat Farrell, Instructor in Mathematics
Chris Odden, Instructor in Mathematics
Preparatory Work: complete problem set.

19 October  **Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse II***
Catherine Tousignant
Preparatory Work: read sections II and III, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse,” of *To the Light House*. 
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>21 October</td>
<td>Gödel and Incompleteness, Part II</td>
<td>Pat Farrell, Chris Odden</td>
<td>complete problem set.</td>
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<td>26 October</td>
<td>No Session</td>
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<td>27 October</td>
<td>Man as a Movie Camera: Benjamin Compson and the Neutral Eye</td>
<td>David Fox</td>
<td>read “April Seventh, 1928,” of <em>The Sound and the Fury</em>, pp. 3-75.</td>
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<td>28 October</td>
<td>Historiography and Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>Megan Paulson, Instructor in History</td>
<td>to be determined.</td>
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<td>4 November</td>
<td>Exploiting Time and Space</td>
<td>Dominique Zeltzman, Visiting Scholar in Art</td>
<td>read excerpts from Kristine Stiles’s <em>Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art</em>.</td>
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<td>9 November</td>
<td>The Body Visible</td>
<td>Zachary Fine ’11</td>
<td>read from Rene Descartes’s “Optics” and Villem Flusser’s “Orders of Magnitude.”</td>
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<td>11 November</td>
<td>Signifying Nothing? Faulkner’s Ordered Place</td>
<td>David Fox</td>
<td>read “April Sixth, 1928” and “April Eighth, 1928” of <em>The Sound and the Fury</em>, pp. 180-321.</td>
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