



KEAN
UNIVERSITY
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WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

First-Year Seminar (FYS)

Develop University-level skills while engaging with fascinating and relevant topics in multiple disciplines.

School of General Studies
Kean University

What is the First-Year Seminar (FYS)?

The **First-Year Seminar** is open to first-year, first-semester students exclusively. Among a small group of peers, students in the FYS courses will be encouraged to find satisfaction and enjoyment in reading and seminar-style discussion. Students will develop critical thinking skills that are transferable to multiple genres and disciplines in order to prepare them for the various materials they will be reading in college.

Each FYS course addresses a unique theme in order to engage first-year students in relevant topics from interdisciplinary perspectives. These courses fulfill a general education distribution requirement in the Humanities.

Topics for these courses range from disability activism and the role of the arts in social justice movements to the study of monsters and bioethics in research to body shaming that ways in which we respond to the fact that “life is hard.” See the full course descriptions below.



Goals of the First-Year Seminar?

- To promote interdisciplinary inquiry
- To introduce students to college-level academic work
- To reinforce students' awareness of different sources
- To prepare students for more advanced readings
- To build community through a small class experience

ALL MAJORS WELCOME!



[Sections Offered for Fall 2023](#)

GE1855*01: Disabled Pasts, Presents, and Futures

Disabled Pasts, Presents, and Futures interrogates the longstanding fight for civil rights conducted by disabled activists. We will read works by disabled authors, artists, and activists to consider how disabled people saw themselves, honed a culture, and pushed against normative lifeways from the 1600s to the present day. Grounding our analysis in history, we'll consider the rise of the disability rights movement, the evolution of our current disability justice movement, and the future of disability activism.

Recommended Majors: History, Sociology, Education, English, Political Science, and Pre-Med Majors

Dates: [Monday 11am -1:45pm](#)

Faculty: [Nicole Schroeder, PhD](#)

GE 1855*02: Intersectionality and the Arts: Identity and Experience in Meaning-Making, Performance, and Movements for Justice

What does it mean to be different, and why does it matter? Intersectionality is a theory that helps us understand how people's various identities—race, class, gender, dis/ability, etc.—interlock within larger social systems/structures, impact their experiences, and ultimately shape their understanding of the world. It has been utilized by activists seeking justice for those whose differences are often cast as deficits within education, healthcare, and other aspects of our society. At the same time, intersectionality has been criticized for suggesting that identities can fit into neat social categories. How can our intersectional movements for equity not leave behind those whose identities are unstable and unexplainable? Who can't check one box or another? One way is to forefront the way in which, as Oscar Wilde poignantly stated, "life imitates art far more than art imitates life." As such, the focus for discussion and inquiry in this course will be works of art that incorporate music, film, visual art, and/or spoken word. Texts spanning a broad range of disciplines—critical legal studies, critical race theory, women's and gender studies, African American studies, performance studies, queer theory, and dis/ability theory—will be utilized to help support our collective understanding of the art, the subject matters it (re)presents, and how we can address societal inequities in our communities.

Recommended Majors: Majors within the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts

Dates: Friday 9:30 am - 12:15 pm
Faculty: Tara Schwitzman-Gerst, EdD

GE 1855*03: *Life Is Hard*

To varying degrees, nearly all of us experience a host of challenges throughout our lives, from sickness and injury through injustice and failure to grief and loneliness. Even the most fortunate among us still often wrestle with the feeling that our entire human experience may be absurd, with the world seemingly indifferent to our plight. This course asks us to face these difficulties in life. Armed with Kieran Setiya's book *Life is Hard: How Philosophy Can Help Us Find a Way*, we will explore scholarly and literary attempts to grapple with life's hardest, most profound and personal problems.

Recommended Majors: Majors within the College of Liberal Arts, particularly Psychology, Sociology, and English majors

Dates: T/Th 12:30 - 1:45 pm
Faculty: Sean Keegan-Landis

GE 1855*05: NJ Poetry, Protest, and Civic Engagement

This interdisciplinary course foregrounds dissent as integral to the American project and analyzes forms of protest and civic engagement in the U.S. past and present by centering the voices of NJ writers. We will read the poetry and prose of artists and activists local to New Jersey, among others, and explore how our course texts might be defined as "protest literatures." We will examine regional examples and expressions of dissent from the past, and also analyze the myriad ways in which community engagement, dissent or protest is enacted in contemporary culture. Texts studied may include works by the following: Walt Whitman, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Alice Paul, Dorthea Lange, Allen Ginsberg, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Paula Neves. We will also be reading excerpts from Kean's 2023-2024 Common Read text, *The Future Is Disabled*.

Recommended Majors: All majors, especially College of Liberal Arts majors

Dates: T/F 11:00 am to 12:15 pm
Faculty: Bridie Chapman, PhD

GE 1855*06: *Study of Monsters*

This course will analyze the cultural constructs that create monsters, especially

beings that are so diverse that we are repelled yet fascinated. Each week a different monster will be analyzed within a selection of literature. A targeted lens where "human" and "monster" intersect will explore societal boundaries, and how the stark contrast of acquiescence and opposition coalesce to examine what it may be like to live as an-Other, anyone or anything created or forced to live outside limits of acceptance. Each monster will also be analyzed as to how it represents a cultural, social, philosophical, ethical, historical, and scientific construct and boundary. The course will culminate in a student-chosen and focused presentation and writing assignment.

Recommended Majors: All majors, especially College of Liberal Arts majors and Hennings College of Science, Mathematics and Technology

Dates: M/TH 2:00 to 3:15 pm

Faculty: Dena Arguelles

GE 1855*07: *The Body Is Not an Apology*

This course aims to unpack topics such as body shame, gender identity, sexuality and race politics, and many other contemporary topics through the lens of the body as an anchor to identity. We will move from the personal to the political by unpacking and unlearning shame-based ideas at work in our world and move toward learning to repackage them in radical self love.

Recommended Majors: All majors, especially recommended for College of Liberal Arts majors, particularly Psychology and Sociology

Dates: Thursday 4:30-7:15 pm

Faculty: Tamara Hart

GE 1855*08: *Bioethics, Social Justice and The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

This Interdisciplinary Seminar series is designed to introduce students to readings from a variety of genres and disciplines using the anchor text: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Ms. Lacks' story raises questions about ethics, race, and genetics, encouraging students to think about the dark history of experimentation on disadvantaged communities, the birth of bioethics, and the legal battles over who owns and controls genetic material. Her cells enabled a scientific revolution and contributed to numerous incredible developments and lifesaving treatments. Through faculty guided readings and small group discussions, students will be encouraged to explore ideas, build an understanding of the topic and explore themes of social justice and bioethics. Freshmen will be introduced to deeper questions on what it means to do

research ethically and morally. Using a debate model, the course would involve students in analysis and reflection on ethical and social justice issues in the field of medicine, giving them a platform to increase their critical reading and thinking skills.

Recommended Majors: Biology, Public Health (Major and Minors), Biomedicine, Chemistry, Molecular Biology, Sociology majors and Philosophy Minors

Dates: Wednesday 12:30–3:15 pm

Faculty: Sharmistha Das-Iyer

GE 1855*09: *A Different Way of Being Human*

The "normal brain" is a myth that has been perpetuated in society as the standard to which all humans must conform. The Neurodiversity movement has its roots in the Autistic Rights movement that emerged in the 1990s, when the term was first coined by Judy Singer, an autistic Australian sociologist. Neurodiversity has broadened to include not just autism, but all forms of neurodivergence such as ADHD and Dyslexia. Just as Biodiversity is crucial to the health of our ecosystem, Neurodiversity represents the beautiful and necessary variation of the human brain. The dyslexic mind has incredible visuospatial gifts advantageous in jobs requiring 3D thinking such as molecular biology, engineering, graphic design, and genetics. People with Williams syndrome have heightened musical abilities and those with ADHD display greater levels of novelty-seeking and creativity making them phenomenal entrepreneurs. In this seminar we will explore Neurodiversity by examining works created and/or written by neurodivergent folks. We will also learn about finding strength in being a neurodivergent college student and learning important advocacy skills in a neurotypical world. As Dr. Temple Grandin, an autistic scholar, said “some guy with [autism] developed the first stone spear; it wasn't developed by the social ones yakking around the campfire.”

Recommended Majors: All majors, especially College of Education

Dates: Tuesday 9:30 am – 12:15 pm

Faculty: Mahchid Namazi, PhD

GE 1855*35: *The Future Is Disabled: A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Perspective*
GE*1000*35 – Must be taken at the same time as this course.

This course will focus on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) from the provocative perspective of the Common Read text, *The Future Is Disabled*. The

class will read the Common Read and discuss and expand on the various themes in the book. This course will foster interdisciplinary inquiry and analyze the themes in the book from psychological and sociological perspectives. Students will have an opportunity to review their personal experiences, as well as gain an understanding of their views on themes from the book. The course will explore various concepts related to students with disabilities and their connectivity with society. In addition, students will be introduced to and gain an understanding of new terminology and research methodologies, as well as gain experience with current research on DEI topics and literature reviews.

Recommended Majors: All majors

Dates: T/TH 11:00 to 12:15 pm

Faculty: Kim Daniel-Robinson, PhD



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