CAS LF343: La France à Paris: Paris in Literature (4 credits)
Professor Irit Kleiman, Boston University

Contents: The city of Paris is the main text in this multidisciplinary course. We will explore the city as a symbol, as a metaphor for all of France, and as a character in her own right. Through visits, written assignments, and oral presentations, each student will strengthen his/her spoken and written French, knowledge of France’s literature and history, and contact with Paris. By combining approaches from across disciplines, students will learn how to engage critically with a wide range of textual materials, but also how to read and interpret the physical space of the urban landscape around them.

We will begin by exploring the history of Paris from the Middle Ages through the 19th century. Each morning we will discuss a mosaic of texts and images, and each afternoon we will deepen the morning’s analyses through on-site explorations. We will then emerge into the heady atmosphere of Paris during the Belle Epoque, and continue our journey through time all the way forward into Paris’s present-day role as an international melting pot, and a place where vibrant literary and cultural encounters take place every day.

Books and materials: A source book containing all of the texts to be read in class will be distributed to you. Poems will be read in their entirety, while longer works will be provided in extract. Instructions for accessing online materials such digital photography archives of the Paris commune will also be included in the sourcebook.

Visits: There will be five structured group visits, and an equal number of suggested itineraries which students can complete alone or with a partner.

Readings and discussions include:
- Historic maps of Paris from the 16th century through today
- Poems by Eustache Deschamps and Rutebeuf
- Guillebert de Metz’s schoolboy view of the medieval university town
- Louis Sébastien Mercier’s Tableau de Paris, glimpses of a 24/7 metropolis on the eve of the French Revolution
- Charles Baudelaire, writings about the modern city and the disappeared past.
- Walter Benjamin, Paris capitale, one of Modernity’s foundational texts.
- Poems by Artur Rimbaud, along with original photographs of the Paris Commune
- Writings on love and wandering by surrealists André Breton and Louis Aragon
- Patrick Modiano’s troubling and nostalgic novel Dora Bruder
- Literary high jinks from the OUVvoir de Littérature POtentielle: works by Jacques Jouet, Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Roubaud, and you.
- Films, posters, graffitis, and other ephemera from the Revolution of May 1968
- Contemporary works about Paris’s future, such as La Haine, or La Ville en Blanc

Grading:
Ongoing homework and written work 40%
One short oral presentation 10%
Mid-term exam 20%
Final exam 20%
Participation 10%