To the Members of the Academic Policy Committee:

We are proposing that a new course entitled Trauma in History, Art, and Religion (CGS HU 425) be added to the expanded list of courses that CAS students may take to fulfill their divisional studies requirement in the humanities. We are Joshua Pederson (Assistant Professor of Humanities, CGS), Ellen DeVoe (Associate Professor of Social Work, SSW), and Shelly Rambo, (Associate Professor of Theology, STH), and we built the curriculum with support from an Interdisciplinary Course Development grant jointly sponsored by the Provost's Office and the Center for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching.

According to the terms of the grant, we will offer the course three times in the next four years, first in Spring 2016. In support of our request, we are detailing the ways in which course objectives for HU 425 address student program learning outcomes developed by the CAS Academic Policy Committee for humanities divisional studies courses. Also copied below is a syllabus and course schedule. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

**On completion of a Humanities course, students will be able to:**

1. **Demonstrate familiarity with a discrete body of material — texts, artifacts, stories, ideas — in the humanities, and with the history of how that material has been created and received (Content)**

By the end of CGS HU 425, students will have a basic understanding of psychological trauma a wide-ranging familiarity with the ways that the insights derived from trauma psychology have been appropriated and deployed by writers, visual artists, historians, literary critics, theologians, and social theorists.

Special attention will be paid to the ways in which the concept of trauma has evolved over time. The earliest comprehensive theories of the phenomenon originate in the works of Freud and Janet, but trauma does not gain widespread clinical or popular attention until the 1970s, when Vietnam veterans, second-wave feminists, and advocates for abused women and children bring new focus to the diagnosis. This push culminates in 1980 with the inclusion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). New editions of the *DSM* are evidence of specialists’ evolving understanding of the ways trauma affects both individuals and communities. It is in the eighties and nineties that trauma also begins decisively to shape discourses in other fields of inquiry, notably literary criticism, theology, history, and social theory.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of concepts, methods, and terminology, as well as scholarly resources, within a specific field in the humanities (Methods and Tools)

By the end of the course, students will have a firm understanding both of psychological trauma and of the ways trauma theory has developed in a variety of fields, among them literary criticism, theology, history, gender studies, and African-American studies. Students will learn not only how specialists apply their understanding of psychological trauma in the clinical setting but how scholars in other fields use these same insights to interpret art and literature, analyze social systems, re-envision the historical record, and revise our understanding of religion and spirituality. Students will be exposed to seminal trauma texts from a variety of fields and will be asked to do both database and in-library research to enhance their understanding of the phenomenon in its many manifestations.

The course will also help students better understand the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of academic work within the humanities. A raft of journals—among them Composition and Computers, Expositions, Impact, Interdisciplinary Literary Studies, ISLE, the Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies, MELUS, and Religion and Literature—attests to the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of humanities research, and this course seeks to demonstrate the ways reaching into other fields can enrich our understanding of literature, art, film, etc.

3. Evaluate arguments about texts and topics in the humanities, and construct responses using research findings and direct evidence persuasively to support an analysis or interpretation (Argumentation and Analysis)

Throughout the course, students will not only explore the discourses of trauma but will also be asked to confront the ways in which political, social, and economic forces shape (and sometimes misshape) those discourses. In two major research essays, students will be required to identify, summarize, and analyze multiple outside sources that both deepen and complicate our understanding of trauma. They will also be required to integrate that outside research into their own original arguments about the study of trauma.

4. Read (view, listen) interpretively, and demonstrate clarity and precision in thinking, conversing, and writing about material in the humanities (Communication)

Course discussions in HU 425 will regularly return to the ways in which the narratives and tropes of trauma are depicted in art, literature, and film. Students will also be exposed to the most prominent literary critical strategies for approaching trauma in these works; early in the course, students will be acquainted with the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, and Susan Brison. These theories will shape and fuel students’ interpretations of creative material.
Written assignments will make up the lion’s share of graded material in the course, and students will be held to a high standard of quality both in terms of the substance and style of their essays and responses.

5. Discuss how humanistic practices of critical interpretation attend to public questions of meaning, purpose, conflict, and value (Application)

Course material will be extremely relevant to contemporary, real-world situations. Students will energetically engage a number of very pressing public questions: what is the relationship between trauma and race in a post-Ferguson United States? How does the vocabulary of trauma shape our understanding of the sexual assault crisis on American college campuses? How should the government—and the public at large—address the proliferation of PTSD among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan? How do money and politics influence the ways specialists diagnose and treat trauma?
CGS HU 425: Trauma in History, Art, and Religion
Spring 2016
Mondays: 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

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Course Description

Though trauma first came to prominence over a hundred years ago as a diagnostic category in the works of psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, today trauma is everywhere. It haunts the lives of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. It afflicts the survivors of 9/11 and witnesses to the Boston Marathon bombings. It colors the lives of victims in the rape epidemic still unfolding on American college campuses. It shapes the way we talk about race after the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice. It is a lens through which we look at the historical horrors of the past century. And it provides new insights into the ways we read literature, view art, and watch television and film.

This course is a co-taught, interdisciplinary seminar that aims to explore the many ways that psychological trauma manifests itself. Students will use tools and techniques borrowed from a variety of fields, among them psychology, social work, literary criticism, theology, history, sociology, and gender studies. In the process, we will look at the ways trauma is defined. We will track how its meanings have changed over time. We will see how it affects individuals and communities, victims and perpetrators. We will try to understand what it means to suffer from trauma and wonder what means to heal.

Course Objectives

In CGS HU 425, students will be expected to make progress in attaining the following goals:

--Attain a basic understanding of the profile, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological trauma.

--Learn how individuals working in other fields adopt and deploy the vocabulary of trauma in their own work.

--Develop strong oral communication skills; work to become active, persuasive participants in academic conversations.

--Improve as a writer, striving to craft clean, concise, compelling, effectively structured prose.
--Enhance both library and online research skills.

Materials Required for Purchase

The following course materials are available for sale at the BU Bookstore. You may search out used copies of the textbook on the web, but it is your responsibility to assure they will be delivered promptly. Search by ISBN to ensure that you get the correct edition.


A variety of shorter course readings will be made available on the course web site. You are required to print out copies of these supplementary readings and bring them to class on the day that they are assigned.

Course Readings

The readings for this course are complex, but they are all eminently manageable. Read slowly and carefully; re-read if time permits. Pay close attention to the way that our authors (or translators) choose their words. *Always read with a pencil in hand.* Take notes in the margins or in a separate notebook. In your notes, point out tensions that exist within the text, emphasize what seem to be key ideas or phrases, and ask questions about difficult passages. Look up words that are not familiar to you.

Assignments and Grading

There will be five components to the student’s course grade: three papers, regular discussion board posts, and attendance and participation. Essay topics are previewed below; comprehensive assignment descriptions will be made available later in the semester.

The grading breakdown for assigned work is as follows:

Weekly responses: 10%
First paper: 20%
Second paper: 25%
Final paper: 30%
Attendance and participation: 15%
Four writing assignments make up the bulk of the student’s course grade:

1. **Discussion Board Posts**: Each week, students will be asked to compose a 150- to 200-word discussion-board post in response to a question relevant to that week’s assigned material. These responses must feature clean, polished prose; further, to receive full credit, each post must a) directly or indirectly quote at least one passage from the week’s required readings, and b) address a point raised by a classmate in a previous post. Each week’s response must be posted to the course Blackboard site by the evening before class at 6 p.m.

2. **First Paper**: The first paper will require students to do further research on one of the practical or theoretical challenges in the field of trauma studies discussed in Week 4. In composing the essay, students must identify and summarize no fewer than three outside sources that deepen our understanding of the challenge in question. Students will devote the rest of the essay to proposing strategies that trauma specialists might use in addressing the challenge and making trauma theory more resistant to critique.

3. **Second Paper**: The second paper will require students to apply insights from the first half of the course in developing a trauma-theoretical interpretation of a poem, short story, novel, or film of their choosing. They may take one of two approaches: a) relying on the clinical and psychological material outlined in Weeks 1 through 4, assess and diagnose a fictional character from a novel, short story, or film, making sure to address both psychological/attachment and cultural frames; b) using the essays by Caruth, Hartman, and Pederson as a guide, write a trauma theoretical reading of a poem, novel, short story, or play; identify the site of the trauma, and explain how the author’s depiction of trauma shapes both the content and the style of the piece in question.

4. **Final Paper**: Each week of the course is organized around a major question. For the final paper, students will select the question that most interests them and develop it beyond the reach of the readings and class discussions. The aim of the paper is for students to familiarize themselves more fully with experts who have contributed to the question and to begin to craft a response. The best papers will develop a focused research program and provide responses that make a contribution to an audience or community that matters to them. Such papers will also gesture outside of the walls of the classroom by bringing students’ best thinking and writing on the topic of trauma to a compelling line of inquiry that we have discussed in the course.

**Class policies**

Regular attendance is expected. Each student will be allowed one absence; further absences will result in a lower grade for the class. Students who come to class without the necessary materials will risk being marked absent. Students who accrue more than four absences will fail the course. If you anticipate a long absence from the course due to illness, please contact the professors as soon as possible. Athletes must provide signed letters from the athletic department if they are to be excused for game-related conflicts, and only listed conflicts will be excused.

All formal writing assignments will be accepted electronically and must be submitted in a Microsoft Word-compatible format (e.g., .doc or .docx) to our course Blackboard page.
Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the due date and will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day late.

**Plagiarism**

According to Boston University’s Academic Conduct Code, to which every incoming freshman promises to adhere, plagiarism is “representing the work of another as one’s own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or restating the work or ideas of another person or persons in any oral or written work (printed or electronic) without citing the appropriate source, and collaborating with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. Plagiarism can consist of acts of commission – appropriating the words or ideas of another – or omission – failing to acknowledge/document/credit the source or creator of words or ideas.” Plagiarism is forbidden in Humanities 425. Confirmed instances of plagiarism in student work will be part of the student’s permanent record and can result in a variety of punishments, ranging from lowered grades to suspension to, in egregious cases, expulsion. Students who have any questions about plagiarism should consult the professors.

**Sustaining Practices and Self-Care**

Given the topic, the readings and discussions in this course will impact you in ways that you may not anticipate. Each member of the class is encouraged develop (or continue) a practice that sustains her/his mind, body, and spirit during the course of the semester. This may be a form of exercise, artistic expression, bodywork, or practice of prayer. Throughout the course, we will also be introducing you to forms of self-care, and we welcome you to share other practices that you find helpful. (Suggestions: singing in a choir, yoga, meditation, walking, breath-work, dance, painting.) A good book to consult for practices of self-care in relationship to trauma is *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsly and Connie Burk.

**Class Schedule**

The following schedule may be revised as the semester unfolds and supplementary readings are added; all changes will be announced in class. Make sure you consult your syllabus if you are absent.

**Week 1 (Monday, January 25): What do we talk about when we talk about trauma? Where are you in the study of trauma?**

*Defining trauma, self-care, and reading trauma texts*

Readings: syllabus (available online).

**Week 2 (Monday, February 1): How is trauma now different from trauma then?**

*History and development of the term*

Readings: Morris, *The Evil Hours*, chapters 2 and 3; Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, chapter 1.
Week 3 (Monday, February 8): Can I see trauma on a brain scan? How do we see trauma in contemporary settings?

*Trauma in neurobiology; trauma in the clinical setting*


Week 4 (Tuesday, February 16): Should we abandon the term “trauma”?

*Challenges and tensions in the field of trauma studies*

Readings: Watters, *Crazy Like Us*, chapter 2; Cvetkovich, “The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma”; *Crash* (film).

Week 5 (Monday, February 22): Can I inherit trauma?

*Collective, historical, intergenerational, and vicarious trauma*


Week 6 (Monday, February 29): Is trauma raced?

*Trauma and racism*


Friday, March 4: FIRST PAPER DUE

*Spring Break*
Week 7 (Monday, March 14): How does literature communicate trauma? Can art trigger trauma?

*Trauma, art, and literature*

Readings: Caruth, “An Interview with Geoffrey Hartmann”; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, introduction and chapter 1; Pederson, “Speak, Trauma”; Carver, “A Small, Good Thing”; Howe, selected poems; Wiman, selected poems; Lukianoff and Haidt, “The Coddling of the American Mind.”

Week 8 (Monday, March 21): Why did I stay? Why did I leave?

*Trauma, sexual assault, and rape myths*


Week 9 (Monday, March 28): How does war traumatize?

*Trauma in the military setting*


Monday, March 28: SECOND PAPER DUE

Week 10 (Monday, April 4): Do victims and perpetrators suffer the same way?

*Trauma versus moral injury*


Week 11 (Monday, April 11): Does trauma happen for a reason?

*Trauma, theology, and theodicy*

Readings: Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*.
**Week 12 (Wednesday, April 20): Can religion heal trauma?**

_The healing power of spirituality_

Readings: Silko, *Ceremony*.

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**Week 13 (Monday, April 25): What is after trauma?**

_Healing, growth, hope, forgiveness, despair, and the end (?) of trauma_

Readings: Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*; *Forgiveness: A Time to Love and a Time to Hate* (film); *Melancholia* (film)

**Monday, May 3: FINAL PAPER DUE**