

B·H·S

BEACON HILL SEMINARS

Fall 2025
Course Catalog

Fall 2025 BHS Course Details & Descriptions

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Amy Tsurumi

Trailblazers in Science: Women Driving Innovation

Friday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 17 - November 21, 2025

Online

Max Class Size: 35

Lecture with Questions

Weekly Preparation: none

This course features a dynamic lecture series showcasing pioneering scientific and health promotion programs led by women faculty at leading research institutions across Boston. Each week will feature two lectures followed by interactive Q&A sessions, giving course participants the opportunity to engage directly with prominent women scholars. A wide variety of topics will be covered, including, but not limited to, emerging biotechnology and AI, pioneering healthcare and emergency response strategies, breakthroughs in engineering, advances in computer science, and other cutting-edge developments across the sciences and the medical field. No prior scientific knowledge is expected from course participants, and no weekly preparation is required.

Profiles of featured speakers can be found here:

<https://www.trailblazerstransformingtomorrow.org/women-driving-innovation>

Bio:

Amy Tsurumi is an Assistant Professor at Mass General. Her research interests are in machine learning applications for biomarker discovery in aging, neurological diseases, and infections. She received her PhD in Genetics from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry and a master's degree in Epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Beth Sanders

Seed to Civilization: History of Food and Culture

Thursday, 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM

6 sessions: October 9 - November 13, 2025

Beacon Hill Friends House

Max Class Size: 35

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 1-2 hours

This course will explore the evolution and culture of the human diet from the hunter/gatherer to the gourmet with selected readings and images of art. How did fire change the human diet? What is the role of religion and belief in our diet? How do colonization, conquest, and cultural exchange influence what we choose to consume?

Bio:

Beth Sanders studied gastronomy with Jacques Pepin, Julia Child, and other well-known chefs at Boston University, along with writing about food at Radcliffe Seminars. She co-authored a cookbook in both French and English featuring recipes from more than 40 countries.

Liz Cabot

Two Centuries of British Poetry

Monday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 20 - November 24, 2025

Church of the Advent

Max Class Size: 25

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 1-2 hours

This course will step back in time to look at some British and Irish poets of the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries: the Romantics, Pre-Raphaelites, Victorians, and early Modernists and Seamus Heaney. Because the group leader will choose some of her favorite works, as she has done in previous courses, this will not be a comprehensive view of the selected poets. It is up to class participants to go deeper, and this will be encouraged. The selected verses cover a wide range of subjects and styles to highlight the diversity of poetry in those eras and share common themes of nature, art, love, death and war. All the works should be available online. Liz Cabot is looking forward to class participants' insights in discussion.

Bio:

Liz Cabot has taught six literature courses for BHS. She previously taught college students at UMass Boston, Boston University, and other Massachusetts colleges. Liz received a Ph.D. from BU and a Master's in Teaching from Harvard Ed School. She's taught and tutored ESL (ELL) to classes and individuals for over 25 years, and currently works with four in-person and virtual learners. Both of these outlets keep her mentally and culturally challenged and excited in her "retirement" years.

Marc Mittelman

Infectious Disease and Society: From Galen to Fauci

Tuesday, 10 AM to noon

4 sessions: October 21 - November 18, 2025 (no class November 11)

The Engineering Center

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture with Questions

Weekly Preparation: 1-2 hours

Over the past 4,000 years or so of “recorded” history, there have been numerous references to cataclysmic events affecting humankind. In addition to earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions, there are descriptions of both recognizable and unknown diseases affecting humans and animals. From the beginning, these diseases—along with earthquakes and other natural disasters ---were associated with supernatural events. In both animist and theistic societies, the causes were ascribed to human behaviors that displeased one or more deities. Attempts to otherwise characterize diseases (and other significant occurrences affecting human life) by the early philosopher-scientists were often met with derision and, in some instances, persecution. Vestiges of this anti-science view persist today. This lecture/discussion series will provide a survey of infectious diseases over time, highlighting their impacts on the development and decline of entire societies. It is hoped this series will provide attendees with a better means to combat some of the falsehoods surrounding the characterization, prevention, and treatment of infectious diseases.

Note: This course will not meet on Tuesday, November 11 and will resume the following Tuesday.

Bio:

Dr. Marc Mittelman is a principal with Mittelman & Associates, a professional services firm specializing in microbiology consulting. He was previously an Associate Professor in the Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry, and director of the Centre for Infection and Biomaterials Research (CIBR) at the University of Toronto. Over the past 40 years, Marc has also held positions in the pharmaceutical and technical consulting industries. The majority of his research, teaching, and consulting work has been in detection and mitigation of microbiological contamination for pharmaceutical/biotechnology, clinical, and industrial applications. Marc has published over 85 peer-reviewed scientific works.

Sally Ebeling

Remember the (First) Ladies: Their Unique Private and Public Personas

Tuesday, 10 AM to noon

5 sessions: October 7 - November 4, 2025

Beacon Hill Friends House

Max Class Size: 20

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: None

America's First Ladies have often been regarded as "paper-doll" supports for the presidents. They were long expected to be accessories, who could, as Bess Truman put it, "sit beside her husband, be silent, and be sure her hat is on straight." A closer look reveals, however, that the women who assumed this unelected role shaped it from their own singular perspectives in their time and place.

Each session will focus on two of ten amazing women who did it their way. Northern First Ladies with Boston ties are Abigail Adams and Jackie Kennedy. Others rooted in New England include Edith Roosevelt and Grace Coolidge. From warmer climes, with their quintessentially Southern hospitality, are Dolley Madison and Rosalynn Carter. Strong midwestern values mark Bess Truman and Helen (Nelly) Taft. Finally, moving west and southwest, we'll explore the individualism of Lady Bird Johnson and Lou Hoover.

Bio:

Sally Ebeling, besides being a local history buff, is a seasoned tour guide with more than 40 years of experience, including the creation and adaptation of women's history walking tours for Boston By Foot. She also volunteers with the Paul S. Russell Museum of Medical History and Innovation at Mass General Hospital (both as a guide and in the hospital archives) and is a docent at the Public Garden and the Massachusetts State House.

Amy Golahny

Vermeer: Light and Line

Tuesday, 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM

4 sessions: October 14 - November 4, 2025

Online

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: None

Vermeer (1632-1675) is among the most major painters of the Dutch Baroque era, culturally and intellectually opening that world to us. He painted only about 40 pictures, and eight of these are in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Frick. Perhaps his best known painting is the "Girl with the Pearl Earring," which inspired a novel and a movie. Vermeer worked slowly and carefully, using high quality pigments and possibly a camera obscura, a box with a pinhole allowing one to see a reflected image. Although little written material concerns him personally, circumstantial evidence and various documents establish his family circumstances and professional success. He was elected twice to head the painters' guild in Delft, and he was known to foremost art connoisseurs. His subjects are most often quiet interior spaces with one or two figures playing music or reading letters; these are glimpses into life in the comfortable bourgeois world of Delft. This course will be an excursion into current and past interpretations of his mesmerizing paintings.

Recommended authors of Vermeer monographs include: Arthur Wheelock, Michael Montias, Albert Blankert, and Lawrence Gowing. See also exhibition catalogues from the Washington National Gallery (*Vermeer and the Masters of Dutch Genre Painting*, 2017; *Johannes Vermeer*, 1995); the Metropolitan Museum of Art (*A View of Delft: Vermeer and his Contemporaries*, 2000); and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (*Class Distinctions*, 2014). Vermeer website: essentialvermeer.com. Dutch art in general: Wayne Franits, Mariët Westermann, Gary Schwartz, Peter Sutton.

Bio:

Amy Golahny lives in Newton, having grown up there and moved back after a teaching career at Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. She now teaches at Boston College. Amy has published books and articles on Rembrandt and other topics, and organized exhibitions for the Lycoming College Art Gallery. She has given presentations at international conferences and universities, and served as president of the Historians of Netherlandish Art, an organization that promotes the art of the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern Europe in a global context. Some of her articles are posted on the free sites academia.edu and ResearchGate. Recent publications include *Rembrandt: Studies in His Various Approaches to Italian Art* (Brill, 2020), and *Rembrandt's Hundred Guilder Print* (Lund Humphries 2021).

Liz Goodfellow Zagoroff

The Art Projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude 1960-2021

Thursday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 9 - November 13, 2025

The Engineering Center

Max Class Size: 20

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: None

The focus of this seminar will be the artist Christo and the public art works created with his wife Jeanne-Claude over the course of 60 years. It is largely based on the group leader's personal experience, together with her husband Mitko, Christo's and Jeanne-Claude's consulting engineer. The course also relies on articles, books, and interviews with the Christos.

The course will begin with the early lives of Christo and Mitko, including when they each left Bulgaria, how Christo met Jeanne-Claude, and how they later became friends and teammates with Mitko, who helped them create numerous public art works in America, Australia, and Europe from the 1960s to 2021. Major projects in the U.S. included Valley Curtain in Colorado; Running Fence and The Umbrellas in California; Surrounded Islands in Miami; and The Gates in Central Park, New York City. The class will talk about how the projects were conceived and accomplished, and the reactions they elicited, both for and against, by the art world and the public.

The course will examine how the artists convinced all those people who had to say "yes," from Colorado ranchers to Japanese farmers, local councils to the German Parliament, the mayors of Paris and New York City, ecologists and preservationists, and a variety of local residents. It will also explore how projects were financed by the Christos, and their ability to attract and retain the range of expertise and enthusiasm needed to accomplish their projects.

Bio:

Liz Goodfellow Zagoroff grew up in the United Kingdom and in 1965 came to America, where she has lived mostly in Cambridge. Her future husband introduced her to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, with whom she became friends and participated in many of their major projects. Liz's early career was in marketing at the Orson Welles Cinema Complex in Cambridge and The Genesis Project in New York City. She also owned and managed two companies with her husband. She later studied landscape history and design at Radcliffe, where her thesis was called "Christo the Landscape Architect," and then gained an MA at the Architectural Association in London. Liz has enjoyed Beacon Hill Seminars for many years and recently moved from Cambridge to Harbor Towers on Boston's waterfront.

Merilee Grindle

Elusive Neighbor: Mexico from Ancient Times to Modern Challenges

Thursday, 10 AM to noon

6 sessions: October 9 - November 13, 2025

Chilton Club

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: None

For more than five thousand years, Mexico has provided a wealth of insights into the human experience, beginning from extraordinary ancient civilizations, to the age of conquest and the Spanish Empire, to epic initiatives to create a nation and ensure its survival. This course considers critical moments in the country's history and its problematic relationship with the United States—forming ancient civilizations; participating in empire; contesting institutions and sovereignty; creating a nation; fostering revolution and stability—and how they were (or were not) resolved. It will conclude with a discussion of current challenges of immigration, democracy, and drug violence. To personalize the experience, participants will be introduced to Zelia Nuttall, a prominent anthropologist who lived from 1857 to 1933 and who added much to what we know about Mexico's past. Participants may wish to purchase a book about her life and times, but there are no required readings.

Bio:

Merilee Grindle is a professor emerita from Harvard University, where she taught international development at the Harvard Kennedy School. She has been the president of the Latin American Studies Association and the director of Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. She has written a dozen academic books and recently published a biography of Zelia Nuttall (*In the Shadow of Quetzalcoatl: Zelia Nuttall and the Search for Mexico's Ancient Civilizations*).

Tony Merzlak

“Kiss me Kate”*: Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew

Monday, 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM

6 sessions: October 6 - November 17, 2025 (no class Oct 13)

Beacon Hill Friends House

Max Class Size: 16

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: 2-3 hrs

“Shakespeare's comic genius was just as good as his tragic.” This seminar will test that claim with a famous early comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*. The battle of the sexes between Kate and Petruchio will entertain you, especially in performance. The resolution, where Shakespeare flips and contrasts his two plot lines, may surprise you.

The Norton Critical Edition will place *The Shrew* in its early-modern contexts of folklore and patriarchal ideology. Then the class will sample some adaptations, read some essays, and get the feminist response. Lastly, YouTube selections will enhance the readings and reveal his *Shrew* as a founding text for Shakespeare's later comic triumphs.

Note: *This course will not meet on Monday, October 13 and will resume the following Monday.*

Bio:

Tony Merzlak is Emeritus Professor of English at Suffolk University, where he taught Shakespeare, Dante, and much else. A Cambridge resident from grad school days, Tony now enjoys exurban life with his partner, Patricia Geran.

Bradford Conner & Benjamin Sears

Robert Schumann and the Romantic Century

Wednesday, 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM

6 sessions: October 8 - November 12, 2025

The Engineering Center

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture with Questions

Weekly Preparation: none

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was respected as a writer, a critic, and a musician. His marriage to one of the greatest pianists of the nineteenth century, Clara Wieck, could easily be the basis of a modern love story. While having written some of the greatest masterpieces in all genres, oftentimes his music and influence are underestimated. Frequently misunderstood by his contemporaries, not only did he absorb the influences of previous composers, but his compositions influenced many who came after him, beginning with Johannes Brahms and Pyotr Ilyitch Tchaikovsky. Schumann's output falls into distinct periods of concentration, including piano music, lieder, and many years devoted to orchestral music. His periods of intense focus likely were caused by a bipolar condition that eventually contributed to his death. After his death Clara and Brahms strove to ensure his legacy, though not always with the best results. This seminar explores his life, music, and writings in unexpected and fascinating ways.

Bio:

Bradford Conner and Benjamin Sears have been performing together since 1989 and lecture regularly on the music they perform. Conner and Sears are leading scholars of Irving Berlin, having recorded six CDs of his songs and contributed articles about Berlin and other Great American Songbook songwriters to numerous scholarly publications. Sears, a graduate of Ithaca College and editor of *The Irving Berlin Reader*, contributed a chapter to the book *Adapting the Wizard of Oz: Musical Versions from Baum to MGM and Beyond*, and is in the early stages of developing *The Fred Astaire Reader*. A graduate of West Virginia University, Conner also studied at the University of Salzburg (Austria) and the American College of Salzburg. A "Renaissance individual" with degrees in business, musicology, and foreign language, he has lectured and written on his interests in music and world history. Both opera and history lovers, Conner and Sears have taught numerous courses at Beacon Hill Seminars and are recipients of the Jack Curtin Award.

Lawrence DiCara

Boston Past, Boston Present, Boston Future

Wednesday, 10 AM to noon

4 sessions: October 8 - 29, 2025

The Cathedral Church of Saint Paul

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: none

The first three sessions of this course will explore the political history of Boston--past, present, and future. The group leader will make references to available texts for those who might want to review them and will share thoughts given his active participation in the life of the city for over 50 years. Although there will not be any assigned reading, relevant books of interest will be suggested to class participants.

For each of the three lecture classes, Larry will deliver prepared remarks augmented by stories and recollections. Then the class will be opened up for lively questions and discussion. For the fourth session, class participants will see a private screening of a well-received documentary in which Larry is featured, dealing primarily with his role in public life in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bio:

Larry DiCara was the youngest person ever elected to the Boston City Council, where he served for ten years as both a member and president. He has been an active citizen of the Greater Boston community for five decades and has been appointed by mayors and governors to serve on a number of public boards. He chaired A Better City and the Boston Municipal Research Bureau, was an officer and member of the executive committee of the Boston Bar Association, and chaired the Audit Committee of the City of Boston for 30 years. While on the City Council, he actively participated in many of the decisions which made Boston the city it is today, including Quincy Market, Copley Place, and the Charlestown Navy Yard. As an attorney in private practice, Larry has represented a wide array of clients in cities and towns across the Commonwealth.

In September 2022, Larry was the recipient of the Shattuck Award for "Providing the City of Boston with a quality of leadership that serves as a model for all who work for the public good. A lifetime commitment to bettering government, our community and following in the footsteps of Henry L. Shattuck by providing extraordinary public contributions."

Larry is a trained mediator and has been appointed to the Standing Committee on Dispute Resolution of the Trial Court. Also a published author, his *Turmoil and Transition in Boston* tells the story of Boston in the 1970s. He frequently lectures and writes about public policy issues. Larry is a graduate of Boston Latin School, Harvard College, Suffolk Law School, and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is also the recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Massachusetts.

Mark R Yessian

E Pluribus Unum? Searching for the Meaning of America as we Approach our 250th Anniversary

Wednesday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 15 - November 19, 2025

Chilton Club

Max Class Size: 20

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 3 hours

July 4, 2026! A momentous national birthday. Fireworks and parades for sure. But it is also an important time to step back and reflect on our nation. How durable are the ties that bind us? Do we share core ideas, expectations, and concerns that sustain enough solidarity for us to govern effectively at a national level? As we look back to our founding, can we find ways to celebrate it that resonate more fully with who we the people are today? Can we somehow generate a greater sense of oneness by more fully recognizing the democratic vitality so often found at state and local levels?

In our discussion-focused course addressing these and other questions, we will draw on the works of provocative thinkers, past and present, who are relevant to our worrisome moment of time. These will include Carl Schmitt, a German philosopher who saw friend-enemy distinctions as the essence of politics; James Davison Hunter, a contemporary sociologist who underscores the importance of culture in shaping national polities; and Timothy Snyder, a historian/philosopher who urges us to look to freedom, the quintessential American value, in a much more positive, enriching way.

Be warned: in our six weeks together, we will not answer fully the big questions we will confront, but as we deliberate on them, we can reasonably expect to frame our thinking about them. And just maybe we will end up adding something extra to our celebration of the forthcoming big holiday.

Bio:

Mark Yessian has a Ph.D. in political science, three decades in government service at the federal level, and, most importantly, an abiding curiosity about political philosophy and American political history and governance. That curiosity has deepened with the many courses he has led over the years at Beacon Hill Seminars and the Harvard Institute of Learning in Retirement.

Francesca Piana

The Dark Middle Ages

Monday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 6 - November 17, 2025 (no class Oct 13)

King's Chapel Parish House

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture and Discussion

Weekly Preparation: 3 hours

Why would almost one thousand years of European History -- from the beginning of the Fifth Century CE to the end of the Fourteenth -- matter to us? Why would a period of history ravaged by invaders, lacking in institutions to provide law and order, influenced profoundly by Christianity and its dogmas; an age of superstition, lonely monasteries, pilgrimages and Crusades; an age of knights errant who made war their profession and chivalry their escape from brutality; an age of feudalism fed on servitude and economic disaster, which finally ended with the incipient rebirth of towns, commerce and universities, be of interest to us?

Should we look into this darkness out of simple curiosity? Or should we at least ponder and question, how is it possible that the creativity, splendor, brilliance of the human mind which exploded during the Greek and Roman times disappeared during the Middle Ages.

Can we, sophisticated inhabitants of Planet Earth in the Age of Technology and AI, learn something from this period of forgotten history? Or should we just read about it for entertainment, wondering occasionally how time after time empires and civilizations have disappeared under a cloud of darkness.

Members of the Seminar will be asked to read assigned chapters of *The Making of Europe* by Christopher Dawson.

Note: *This course will not meet on Monday, October 13 and will resume the following Monday.*

Bio:

Francesca Piana received both B.A. and M.A. degrees in history from the University of San Francisco, and an M.A. in Spanish literature from the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain. She taught history, international relations, and Spanish literature at the University of San Francisco, Phillips Exeter Academy, and Phillips Academy in Andover before retiring. She was also the director of summer programs for Phillips Exeter and Phillips Academy in Salamanca, Spain and director of the School Year Abroad in Barcelona, Spain.

Jeremy Bell

William Hogarth -- One of Seven Painters who Changed the Course of Art History

Wednesday, 10 AM to noon

6 sessions: October 8 - November 12, 2025

The Engineering Center

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture with Questions

Weekly Preparation: none

Seven Painters who Changed the Course of Art History, a book by Brian Thom McQuade (2012), will serve as an introduction to a course about the British satirical artist William Hogarth (1697-1764). Known as the “father of British art as well as the political cartoon,” Hogarth pioneered what we now know as the Conversation Piece. He started Britain’s first public art gallery.

The course will examine the profound effect that Hogarth had on successive British painters, from his own time to the modern artists who have copied his works. Hogarth also inspired the literary works of Henry Fielding and Charles Dickens, and was influential in America, where his popular prints were widely distributed.

Each class session will examine one of Hogarth’s series of paintings – from *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731) to *Marriage a la Mode* (1745). The study of individual works from each series will expand on each theme. Prints of the artwork will be shared with the group along with some originals from the speaker’s personal collection. Proposed site visits will allow participants to view other originals at the MFA and Harvard Art Museums. (Class participants should be aware of the recurring sexual element in Hogarth’s work.)

Bio:

Jeremy Bell was born just 40 miles from Hogarth’s House in England and has spent 20 years studying the artist. He has written several books on art history, one of which was named Editor’s Choice at *The British Art Journal*. Reviewers of his books have called them “Delightful and insightful” (Martin Rowson, *The Guardian*) and “Witty and provocative--Bell makes art history accessible and entertaining, providing intriguing avenues for future research” (*Artist’s Book Review*).

Jeremy has lived on Beacon Hill for five years and was known as ‘The Pinckney Piper’ for bagpiping during the COVID lockdown. He has moved “from the hill to the fill” and now lives in Back Bay. He studies at the Boston Athenaeum on the silent 5th floor - shhhhhhh!

Kevin M. Levin

The History and Controversy Surrounding Civil War Monuments

Thursday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 9 - November 13, 2025

The Cathedral Church of Saint Paul

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture & Discussion

Weekly Preparation: 1-2 hours

The monuments created in the Civil War's wake tell different stories about this conflict. Some celebrate Union victory and the coming of Emancipation; others, such as those that celebrate the Confederacy, glorify famous generals and the common soldier. Hundreds of Civil War monuments have been removed in towns and cities across the country since 2015. This course will explore the history of these monuments going back to 1865 and how they illuminate the often conflicting ways in which Americans have chosen to remember and commemorate the Civil War. It will also explore how the city of Boston has responded to this controversy by examining our local Civil War monuments on the Boston Common and the Public Garden.

Bio:

Kevin M. Levin is a historian and educator based in Boston. He is the author of three books on the Civil War era and has written op-eds for *The Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *Slate*. You can learn more about his work at his newsletter: <https://kevinmlevin.substack.com/>

Kaitlin Rhee

Science in the News

Monday, 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM

6 sessions: October 6 - November 17, 2025 (no class Oct 13)

Online

Max Class Size: 25

Lecture with questions

Weekly Preparation: 1-2 hours

In this seminar series, local scientists, researchers, and medical and industry professionals will share their passions and lead interactive discussions. Participants will hear a unique combination of interesting historical anecdotes and fun modern stories of the discoveries and innovations that are influencing the future of science and medicine today. In addition to bringing fresh perspective to popular issues, this seminar aims to highlight a variety of fascinating niche topics which you may have never heard of or thought about before, but which have real impact on all our lives.

Favorite topics explored in past courses have included:

- Plant-based nutrition for maintaining strength and preventing falls
- Recent innovations in therapeutics and the study of cancer, malaria, and bacteria
- Climate change and plant strategies for water desalination
- Using diamonds as tiny quantum sensors
- Digital health, health technology, and artificial intelligence in healthcare
- Why computer speed matters and how it's changing over time
- Building nature-inspired cities: windows based on shrimp skin

No prior knowledge is required – just bring your curiosity!

Note: This course will not meet on Monday, October 13 and will resume the following Monday.

Bio:

Kaitlin Rhee has been a chemical biology PhD student at Harvard since Fall 2022, doing research in the Zhou Lab at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Her research focus is engineering antibodies to manipulate biology in cancer cells. In her free time, she enjoys mentoring and is passionate about making science more accessible to the public.

Andrus Madsen

Mystery Sonatas

Monday, 10 AM to Noon

6 sessions: October 6 - November 17, 2025 (no class Oct 13)

Online

Max Class Size: 35

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 2 hours

The course will spend six weeks looking closely at the Mystery Sonatas by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber. One of the sessions will include a live performance with Andrus Madsen and Susanna Ogata.

The Mystery Sonatas by Heinrich Biber are a set of 15 sonatas and an unaccompanied solo violin written by Passacaglia and dedicated to the Prince Bishop in Salzburg, Max Gandolph von Kuenberg. Each sonata in the set is a musical meditation upon the fifteen mysteries meant to be pondered during the practice of rosary devotion. During the 17th century the mysteries were divided into three sets of five, the "Joyful Mysteries," the "Sorrowful Mysteries," and the "Glorious Mysteries." It was not uncommon to arrange visual depictions of the fifteen mysteries in churches during the 13th-17th centuries as visual aids to Rosary meditation. Biber's Mystery Sonatas tackle the same mysteries with musical rather than visual depictions. Given its enigmatic nature, it may be that musical depictions come closer to the true spirit of mystery. The course will explore rosary devotion and meditative practice, and how it connects to Biber's music. It will also look closely at some of the unusual extended techniques, including scordatura, that Biber applies to the violin to evoke each mystery.

Note: This course will not meet on Monday, October 13 and will resume the following Monday.

Bio:

Andrus Madsen is an active performer on the organ, harpsichord, clavichord and fortepiano. He is the founding director of Newton Baroque and also plays with Exsultemus. He spearheaded a project combining the forces of Newton Baroque and Exsultemus to perform the entire Harmonischer Gottesdienst cantata cycle of Georg Phillip Telemann during the year 2011. Madsen is known for his eloquent Baroque style improvisation. He strives to play written repertoire as if he is improvising, while his improvisations often sound as if they had been notated. His recording of keyboard music by Pachelbel has received significant critical acclaim, including the praise, "superb recordings of superb instruments by a musician who deserves to be better-known" from Michael Barone of pipedreams.org. This album, played on organ, harpsichord, and clavichord, is available on Raven CD Recordings.

Diane C Thompson

“The dream is the truth”: Reading Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Friday, 10 AM to Noon

5 sessions: October 10 - November 7, 2025

Online

Max Class Size: 30

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 3-5 hours

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) wore many (stylish) hats during her lifetime. Sometimes all at once. She was a novelist, anthropologist, folklorist, essayist, and playwright. Hurston was one of the stars of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of Black creativity that began after World War I and ended with the onset of the Great Depression. Written in seven weeks and considered a classic of the Harlem Renaissance, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Hurston’s best known novel. In it, she tells a beautiful coming of age story of Janie Crawford, a young Black woman growing up in the rural south. In this course, we will travel to early 20th century Florida and experience the people and culture through Janie’s eyes. We will join her as she grows from girl to woman, breaks societal norms, and learns to live life on her own terms.

Bio:

Diane C Thompson holds a MA in counseling psychology from Lesley University, an MLS in Library Science, an MFA in creative writing, and an MA in African American studies. She has over fifteen years of experience as an adjunct writing instructor.

Carroll Perry & Richard Wells

Pursuing Environmental Sustainability in Troubled Times

Tuesday, 1 PM to 3 PM

6 sessions: October 14 - November 25 (no class Nov 11)

Chilton Club

Max Class Size: 30

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 1.5 hours

Sustainability is perhaps the greatest challenge that we and our grandchildren's generations will face. Yet governments and businesses are pulling back from their sustainability commitments even as the challenges become more evident with catastrophic climatic events, climate-induced conflict and migration, increasing inequality, biodiversity loss, and emerging issues associated with new technologies.

This will not be a course to "teach" sustainability, though it will describe the key issues and concepts. Rather, we will combine our collective experience and knowledge to explore the role of sustainability in a "just" society. As government has retrenched on sustainability, what should be the role of business? Does business have the long-term need to address sustainability as well as the resources and talent to do so? If so, what is the role of markets, of individual firms and their shareholders, of stakeholders and of public and private institutions? What alternatives exist? What are the challenges and the opportunities?

Note: This course will not meet on Tuesday, November 11 and will resume the following Tuesday.

Bio:

This course will be co-led by Richard Wells and Carroll Perry. Richard Wells has had a 45-year career consulting on environmental management and sustainability. He has led major projects on business sustainability strategy, regulatory analysis, and public-private partnerships for national governments. For ten years he taught, "Leadership for Sustainability" and "Scenarios for Innovation" in person and online for Mexico's EGADE Business School (recognized as one of the top business schools in Latin American). Richard is a graduate of Harvard College and holds a master's degree in law and diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, as well as an MS in management from MIT's Sloan School of Management.

Carroll Perry taught economics at Phillips Andover for the last twelve years of his career. Prior to that, he spent 25 years as an international banker with BankBoston. He has lived in Latin America and Asia. Carroll is a graduate of Williams College and has an MA in international relations from Johns Hopkins. After college, he and his wife served in Brazil as Peace Corps volunteers.

Robert Manning

The Odyssey: Books 1–6

Friday, 10 AM to noon

6 sessions: October 10 - November 14

King's Chapel Parish House

Max Class Size: 16

Seminar

Weekly Preparation: 1 hour

“Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven far journeys after he sacked Troy’s sacred city. Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.”

So begins the Odyssey, the extraordinary and monumental epic of the long-suffering, shrewd Odysseus who, ten years after the fall of Troy, longs to return home where his wife is fending off suitors who presume the hero is dead and his son yearns for a father he has never known. In this story, we will experience Odysseus’ fabulous encounters with the Cyclops Polyphemus, the enchanting witch Circe, the luring sirens, the deadly Scylla and Charybdis, and many other gods, creatures, and peoples. We will follow Odysseus as he returns home in disguise and faces dangers to his life as he tries to restore his kingdom, family, and identity.

This course will be a book-by-book close reading of books 1 through 6 of the Odyssey. In this seminar-style course we will examine the text, language, narrative, society, and traditions that shaped this epic, as well as the influence it has had in history, literature, archaeology, and art. The Odyssey is Homer’s great tale of the wanderings, sufferings, and return of Odysseus, the man of many ways, the war hero and adventurer, who yearns for home and family.

Bio:

Robert Manning is a labor arbitrator and graduate of Providence College and Boston University School of Law. Before becoming an arbitrator, he represented workers and labor unions across a range of industries. In addition to his legal career, Robert is deeply passionate about the classical world and the humanities. After law school, he pursued this interest by studying Greek, Latin, German, religious studies, screenwriting, classical literature, and philosophy. He is a member of the Classical Association of New England, where he has served on both the Steering and Finance Committees.

For Beacon Hill Seminars, Robert has led courses on Oedipus Rex, the film Pandora’s Box, and a book-by-book close reading of Homer’s Iliad. He has chosen to serve on the Board because he values the promotion of continuing education and supports the mission of Beacon Hill Seminars to provide a stimulating and collegial environment for lifelong learners.