

ENDURING QUESTIONS

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An integrated sequence of five courses taken over two years, Enduring Questions: Texts and Conversations introduces students to literature, philosophy, history, the arts, and religious studies through direct encounters with significant works. Beginning with the ancient Greeks and the Hebrew Bible, the program traces the development of literary and artistic expression, philosophy, religious belief, and historical reflection through the centuries, extending into the modern world. Students respond to great works, challenging the ideas expressed in them and challenging their own ideas as well, thus joining a conversation through the ages about the perennial issues of human life. These issues include freedom, beauty, suffering, happiness, what it means to be human, what constitutes a good society, and the relation between the human and the divine.

Enduring Questions is open to students of all interests. This program appeals to those who like to read, discuss, and write about ideas; those who believe that learning about the past is profoundly relevant to understanding the present and those who believe that an education ought to cultivate critical minds, inquisitive spirits, and moral sensitivity.

The faculty members who teach an Enduring Questions cohort remain with the students through the courses in the standard sequence (QUEST 113-218), as fellow participants in the conversation. Students in Enduring Questions live in the same residence hall their first year and enjoy eating meals together, attending films and theater, and going on field trips throughout the program.

Students who complete the sequence can apply to participate in QUEST 280 What is Europe? The Grand Tour, National Museums, & European Identity, a **January term course** that travels to Europe (usually England, France, and Italy) in alternating years.

Intended Learning Outcomes for the Program

Admission to the Program

Students are invited to apply to the Enduring Questions program after they are admitted to the college. Selection is based on an essay whose topic is announced in the application form.

Courses

QUEST 113-QUEST 218 are offered only to first-year students and sophomores enrolled in Enduring Questions. Enduring Questions students must take these courses in sequence. Enrollment in subsequent courses is contingent upon successful completion of all prior courses in the sequence.

QUEST 113: *Heroes, Gods, and Monsters*

Students explore the philosophy, arts, and religion of the Ancient Mediterranean through works of the Babylonians, Israelites, and Greeks, usually including the Epic of Gilgamesh, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Sappho, Sophocles, and the Hebrew Bible, with modern criticism providing context. This course requires close reading of texts, critical analysis, engaged discussion, and learning in community. Students complete an intensive research project and reflect on the liberal arts and their positions as modern students of ancient texts. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward ancient studies major.

QUEST 115: *Emperors, Orators, Disciples*

The Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity posed questions about the soul, civic and religious virtue, building and resisting empire, and the use of history for political ends. Students address how Christianity was shaped by Roman culture and shaped it in turn. Works include epic, history, philosophy, oratory, canonical and non-canonical gospels, epistles, and apocalyptic works. Students practice oral presentations and debates and complete a project linking visual arts to Roman culture and religion. Offered annually during January Term. Counts toward ancient studies major.

QUEST 116: *Warriors, Mystics, Reformers*

Christian and Muslim empires rose and fell in the Medieval and Renaissance Mediterranean world. The end of feudalism and changing social structures offered platforms to marginalized speakers. This course usually includes the Quran, Christian and Muslim theology, mysticism, and authors like Augustine, Hildegard von Bingen, Dante, Machiavelli, and Michelangelo. Course themes include journeys, gender, sexuality, faith, and reason. Students reflect on the relevance of premodern Europe to today's world and their learning process thus far. Counts toward medieval studies major.

Prerequisites: QUEST 113 and QUEST 115.

QUEST 217: *Explorers, Rationalists, Revolutionaries*

From 1600-1900, classical and Biblical texts spread globally through exploration and colonization. This course addresses how Greco-Roman and Biblical thought informed not only the Enlightenment, science, and Romanticism, but also justifications of colonization and slavery. Typical authors include Shakespeare, Descartes, Milton, Sor Juana, Kant, Equiano, Wollstonecraft, Hegel, and Marx, addressing freedom, the moral life, just war, certainty, and evil. Students discuss how history is constructed from evidence and how its interpretation impacts the present.

Prerequisites: QUEST 116.

QUEST 218: *Critics, Dreamers, Radicals*

In this course, students consider the modern age in light of their Enduring Questions experience. Topics include artists and authors from the twentieth century to the present, such as Freud, Picasso, Woolf, Arendt, and Borges, addressing topics such as the rise of nationalism, rejections of colonialism, globalization, migration, and race and racism. Students identify and evaluate their own ethical views in relation to ethical theories, like consequentialism and virtue ethics, encountered throughout the Enduring Questions program. Offered annually in the spring semester.

Prerequisites: QUEST 217.

QUEST 280: *What is Europe? The Grand Tour, National Museums, & European Identity*

This course critically engages the notion of European identity by exploring the idea of the Grand Tour and the emergence of national museums. Students will experience firsthand some of the sites, artifacts, and works of art encountered in the Enduring Questions program and reflect on the ways in which the program, like the Grand Tour itself, delineates cultural borders as well as disrupts them. Offered alternate years during January Term. Apply through Smith Center for Global Engagement.

Prerequisite: completion of GCON 217 or QUEST 217 or permission of the instructor.

Faculty

Director, 2023-2024

Ibtesam âl-Atiyat

Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology
Arab society; gender; social movements; Islamic movements

Anthony Bateza

Associate Professor of Religion
Reformation studies

Brett B. DeFries

Assistant Professor of English

Daniel Farnham

Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Björn Nordfjörd

Associate Professor of Practice of English
American cinema; world cinema; crime fiction; adaptation and narrative theory

Jason J. Ripley

Associate Professor of Religion
Biblical theology; Gospel of John; imperial; gender; postcolonial interpretation

Hsiang-Lin Shih

Associate Professor of Asian Studies
Chinese literature; classical and modern eras