

Senior Seminars at UC San Diego Offer Broad Range of Topics to Bolster Students' Majors & Spark Intellectual Curiosity

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Seniors at the University of California, San Diego are getting "a short, no-risk example of what a graduate seminar is like" in a *Senior Seminars* program that offers senior students elective seminars in small class situations on a wide variety of topics for one credit unit.

"The reading load and participation expectations are similar (to graduate seminars) but there's no paper, project or grade," says April Linton, assistant professor of sociology, about the requirements for her seminar, *What's for Dinner? Local and Global Perspectives on Ethical Food Consumption*.

What's for Dinner? is one of more than 20 senior seminars offered during winter quarter. Requirements and hours vary from seminar to seminar. Topics range from *Design and Development of Drug Delivery Systems* to *Sex and Love in the Middle Ages* and from the *Philosophy of Social Justice* to *Oil and the Future of America*.

Along the way there are such topics as *Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the Sciences*; *Climate Change, Global Warming*; *Music, Acoustics, and Architecture*; *Contemporary Social Movements in San Diego*, and *Fiction and Metaphor in the Law*. And more.

A whole new menu of seminars will be offered in Spring Quarter.

What's for Dinner? involves reading two books, *The Way We Eat: Why our Food Choices Matter* by Peter Singer and James Mason and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan. The seminar looks at how experts on social movements, globalization, and international development tackle the question, *What's for Dinner?*

Bioengineering professor Robert Sah is teaching *Design and Development of Drug Delivery Systems*, an overview of major dosage forms, oral, IV, ocular, and transdermal, and the development and application of such systems. Sah taught a senior seminar last quarter on *Cartilage Tissue Engineering* and he also has taught freshman seminars, which were inaugurated in 2003 to provide freshman the opportunity of a small class environment, more intimate contact with professors, and wide-ranging topics to explore.

"The small class size is a wonderful opportunity to work closely with a group of students," Sah says. "In bioengineering our freshman seminars tend to be completely full (20 students with a waiting list) whereas the senior seminars are much smaller, allowing even closer interaction."

Sah says his seminars are presented as "a studio type course for a group design project" and that this format works exceptionally well for serving a major purpose of the seminar - participation by all group members.

How do the seniors react to these new seminars as opposed to freshmen? "The freshmen seem to have a great deal of inquisitive energy," Sah says, "whereas the seniors tend to have more perspective and very directed efforts."

Philosophy professor Gerald Doppelt is teaching the *Philosophy of Social Justice*, which he also taught seniors last quarter and he has taught freshman seminars as well. The seminar examines John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and criticism of the theory made by feminists, libertarians, communitarians, theorists of race and defenders of multi-culturalism.

"The most successful seminars are when the students make short presentations," Doppelt says. At each session, he assigns each seminar senior five or 10 pages to read for which they are responsible for giving a presentation. "This is not a summary," Doppelt points out. "The students pick out something that catches their attention, something that they agree or disagree with or that raises a question and gets a discussion going."

Doppelt jumps in to clear up misunderstandings and help guide discussion.

"The seniors are more disciplined and better prepared to read and to embrace these intellectual ideas," Doppelt says. "They take the seminars because they are interested in the topic."

Jorge Mariscal, professor of literature, who also has taught freshman seminars, is teaching the senior seminar, *Contemporary Social Movements in San Diego*, along with David Pellow, associate professor of Ethnic Studies.

"While the freshman seminars help students adapt to university life, senior seminars provide students a window on to the world beyond the university," says Mariscal. "The idea of a seminar on social activism appealed to Professor Pellow and me because - in spite of the stereotype of apathetic young people - we have seen a tremendous desire among undergraduates to become agents of social change."

The Mariscal and Pellow seminar format includes readings, films, discussion and dialogue with local activists.

Expressing great enthusiasm for his senior seminar experience is Ivan Evans, associate professor of sociology, who is teaching *Oil and the Future of America*, which he also taught last quarter.

"I feel extremely positive and gung-ho about the senior seminar," says Evans, who adds that he feels lucky to have such committed and interested students in the issues of oil, global warming and U.S. foreign policy. "This passion is a tremendous benefit because it requires no prompting from me to get them to read and debate in class. Most importantly, the seminar is a great success precisely because they are seniors ... primed with information, examples, and statistics.

"What excites me about these seminars is seeing students become animated, not only about the seminar theme but about the sociological perspective we use to analyze the world."

The *Oil and the Future of America* seminar will be among those repeated in the Spring Quarter, along with a host of new topics, including *Beatniks, Hippies, Surfers, and Punks: California Subcultures*; *Advanced Slide Rule for Seniors* (the initial seminar on the slide rule was offered in *Freshman Seminars*); *UC-made Nuclear Weapons: Good or Bad?*, and *Careers in Veterinary Medicine*.

UCSD Senior Vice Chancellor Marsha Chandler initiated the *Senior Seminars* program, which also is being shepherded by Mark Appelbaum, associate vice chancellor for Undergraduate Education.

According to Appelbaum, "Faculty members craft these special seminars, often concentrating on a specific topic of interest that they are excited to discuss with students." The intent is that the passion the faculty member has for his or her unique topic will be passed along to, and enhanced by, the participating seniors.

As Appelbaum says, the students are "a part of the process, not just the recipients of the knowledge."

For further information on Senior Seminars, visit the website at <http://academicaffairs.ucsd.edu/svcaa/r/ugsem.htm> or contact Appelbaum at (858) 822-4358 or mappelbaum@ucsd.edu

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