

GCL195a “Fictions of Equality: Where is the Good life?”

Grand Challenge Course - Inequality and Cultural Understanding pathway.

This course satisfies the General Education Criteria for Literature and the Arts.

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What does it mean “to live the good life” in the 21st century? Does it still mean economic solvency and security, upward social mobility, and meaningful relationships? In the United States, those goals are closely linked to the “American dream,” a concept that implied that it was in an egalitarian land of opportunity where they could in fact be attained faster than anywhere else. Yet recent research shows that the US provides, alongside the United Kingdom and Spain, the least economic mobility of any of the 13 richest, democratic countries in the world. Moreover, within American society the perception of structural economic and social inequalities as impediments to personal development has increased consistently in the past decade.

The course will present a critical look at these two inter-related concepts and how they are articulated, supported or questioned in several types of texts (short stories, hip-hop music, journalistic articles, documentaries, films) and cultural contexts, both domestic and international. Special attention will be paid to the way “the good life” is understood and attained differently by diverse ethnic, racial and socio-economic groups. We will finish by considering current re-evaluations of both the idea of “a good life” and “the American Dream”.

Experiential component: Class assignments will also include experiential components that will help students understand the way location shapes the reality and the perception of the “good life,” as well as the possibilities to access its benefits.

Learning outcomes will include: Critical analysis, Intercultural competence and social awareness, and communication skills.