

THE 2017-2018 COLLEGE THEME: WHAT IS TRUE?

On November 16th of 2016, Oxford Dictionaries announced that 'post-truth' was its 2016 International Word of the Year. In response, we invite you to explore the question "What is True?" in your classrooms. How do we decide what is true and what is false as individuals, as an institution, and as a society? How has our understanding of the truth evolved over time? What new truths have we adopted, and what old truths have we discarded? What do we hold true today that may not be true tomorrow? Answers to these questions may be elusive even after a lifetime of study, but our lives are enriched by the asking.

AN OPEN INVITATION: PARTICIPATE IN THE THEME!

The Open Call for Participation is meant for all instructors, committees, clubs, students, staff members, and organizations to voluntarily take the theme as inspiration for one assignment, event, or gathering. Both student and faculty work will be gathered, documented, and displayed at key times so we can come together and truly connect over our shared interests and particular pools of knowledge.

CONTACT US AT GENEDTHEME@CITYTECH.CUNY.EDU

THE COLLEGE THEME: A HISTORY AND THE FUTURE

What Does Freedom Mean?

During the 2014-2015 school year, the African American Studies Department chose this question as its annual theme to encourage critical reflection about the 150th anniversary of the 13th Amendment. The department explored the theme through college events, library exhibits, and classroom activities.

In the fall of 2014, the General Education Committee was exploring the idea of developing an annual theme for the college, and, with the encouragement of the African American Studies Department, decided to use the theme as well. It became the foundation of a pilot project conducted by Gen Ed Committee members from multiple departments in all three schools. The success of the "What Does Freedom Mean?" theme inspired the Gen Ed committee to explore a new theme for the 2015-2016 school year: Knowing Brooklyn.

The purpose of the College Theme project is to create a shared intellectual experience. We want to inspire students and faculty to explore complex and compelling ideas in ways that enhance their educational experience, and to encourage all members of the City Tech community to bridge disciplinary boundaries as they ask and answer demanding and dynamic questions. Help us to grow the project by participating in your classes, your scholarly work, and your club activities.

THE CITY TECH GENEDGE

The **City Tech GenEdge** is the result of years of college-wide curriculum development and effort by the General Education Committee. We have taken the Gen Ed requirements, the students' needs, and the expectations of society to put together a meaningful approach to skills and attitudes we all can use. This is the added benefit of culture and community our students and graduates deserve as they enter the world as engaged citizens. This is the added boost our college provides to excel and the tools it gives graduates to be productive throughout entire careers.

This is the **City Tech GenEdge**.

Introducing
the 2017 Open Call
for Participation in the
City Tech GenEdge
College Theme

WHAT IS

TRUE?

WHAT IS TRUE?

The City Tech GenEdge College Theme is a simple invitation: we offer an open-ended idea you can use to drive a single lesson in your class, a project in your club, or any number of pursuits you choose to execute. This shared intellectual experience lets students and faculty from all over the college ask and answer the important questions of our day.

HOW SOME PROFESSORS WILL IMPLEMENT THE THEME IN A CLASS THIS YEAR

■ *Least Amount of Time*

SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Prof. Jonas Reitz, Mathematics

MAT 2071: Introduction to Proofs and Logic

“Truth” vs “Proof”

In mathematics, every statement is either true or false. When we ask “is it true?” in mathematics, the best answer we can hope for is a proof: Look, here is an ironclad argument that it is, in fact, true! And so we consider the question: is proof the same as truth? Has every true statement been proven (and every false statement disproven)?

In this activity, students will work collaboratively to understand a number of mathematical examples, considering for each “Is it true or false? Has it been proven or disproven?” This will lead us to the working mathematician’s daily object of struggle, the conjecture - a statement we feel must be true, but cannot (yet) prove. The activity will be used to introduce a class project in which students formulate their own conjectures and try to prove them. It will take approximately 30 minutes of class time (20 minutes group work, 10 minutes class discussion).

■ ■ *Moderate Amount of Time*

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Prof. Kerin E. Coughlin, Law & Paralegal Studies

LAW 2307: Legal Research II

What is True about Justice?

“The nature of injustice is that we may not always see it in our own times... When new insight reveals discord between the Constitution’s central protections and a received legal stricture, a claim to liberty must be addressed.” – U.S. Supreme Court, 2015 decision guaranteeing same-sex marriage, *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

As the Supreme Court has recognized, “what is true” about justice in the U.S. changes over time. What is considered just for many generations may become unjust in later ones. In this several-class unit, students will research the development of U.S. law on marriage equality, to determine what has been “true” on that subject at various times, and how and why it has changed. They will start with the source of most claims to liberty, the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause. They will research major U.S. Supreme Court decisions addressing whether that clause guarantees individuals’ right to marry regardless of race, imprisonment, and other issues – including, most recently, gender. Then students will synthesize the cases to identify why the Court has (or has not) protected the right to marry in particular situations, and draw connections among the “new insight[s]” that have led to the grant of new “claim[s] to liberty.” Finally, students will report their analysis in a research memorandum.

■ ■ ■ *Most Amount of Time*

SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

Prof. Elena Filatova, Computer Systems Technology

Faculty Research Project

Natural Language Processing (NLP): Revealing the concealed truth.

Many philosophers note that people use human language to conceal truth. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand: “Speech was given to man to disguise his thoughts.” Fyodor Tyutchev (translated by Vladimir Nabokov): “A thought once uttered is untrue.” However, every day we get a lot of information via speech and text. How do we know what information can be trusted? Researchers who deal with information in natural language have been dealing with this issue for a very long time. For example, search engines rank the trustworthiness of web sites and take this ranking into account when outputting the links for a specific query (the famous Hubs and Authorities algorithm).

Among a myriad of NLP-related projects, several research groups are working on the problem of automatic sarcasm detection. People develop the ability to identify sarcasm at a very young age: the literal meaning of a sarcastic utterance is often the opposite of what the author meant. For example, what distinguishes a news article from “The Onion” and from “The New York Times”? Which of these two sources would you use to get information about current events and why? How do you distinguish between a regular and a sarcastic Amazon review? Is it possible to build a system that can reliably identify sarcasm in text?