Music, Theatre and Social Justice
This course will look at how the fine arts of music and theatre look at social justice issues such as race relations, gender equality, politics of war, and LGBTQ challenges, etc. Music and theatre are often thought of as escapist entertainment; however, this course will examine how they specifically add to the conversation about social change. The course will be taught through an interdisciplinary approach which will include the social sciences, history, literature, and the visual and performing arts.

Intersections of Science and Society
This course seeks to understand how scientific advances can shape culture and how culture and human values have shaped scientific pursuit. The course will examine how and who generates scientific knowledge and how science and technology affect society and social change. The course will develop critical thinking skills and the tools to act ethically in a world of continuous scientific innovation and change.

Eating Me: Food and Identity
Believe it or not, your typical family meal says a lot about where you come from, who you are, and about your future. Food is much more than simply nourishment, and this course will start by exploring all the things food represents to us as individuals. As the semester progresses we will use the topic of food to learn more about the world around us. Topics discussed might include changes in food consumption in the US, eating-related health issues, body-image, school lunch programs, food and socio-economic status, eating disorders, and diabetes. Food is a product of culture, and throughout the semester we will discover how our habits and attitudes about food both reflect who we are, and shape our future.

Problem Solving for Sustainability
Central College has earned a reputation among Iowa private colleges as a champion of sustainability. This course will build on that foundation with an exploration of the intersections between liberal arts education, personal identity, and the philosophy of sustainability. Students will address a major global or local sustainability challenge using research and persuasive writing and will discuss future actions they might take to live out a sustainability ethos. By exploring the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability, we will consider how solutions to sustainability problems require interdisciplinary thinking, especially creative connections between science, ecology, arts, and the humanities.

Voyages in Video & Text
You have ventured on a voyage of self-discovery by seeking “higher” education through a liberal arts experience. There is more to a quality education than just taking tests. It comes from building relationships between people and with ideas, through analyzing and making connections with other belief systems and other world-views. This will all be approached through discussion of ideas that are presented in writing and displayed in film. What makes us who we are? What are our expectations? Who do we wish to become? Who is neighbor? Who is stranger? How does my life impact others in ways I intend and ways I cannot foresee? How do we make our lives purposeful? Exploration of human nature using popular media will be the name of the game for this class.

Exploring Self, World, and Social Change (2 sections available)
Explores the interconnections between self-knowledge, understanding of the broader world, and social change. We will focus on how individual growth and greater cultural awareness can lead us to become change agents—people who work to create a better world.

Everyday (Super)Heroes: Order & Chaos (2 sections available)
Using superhero cinema and literature as a lens into human society, students will engage in a discussion of the struggle between good and evil as a motivation for behavior not only from a larger societal perspective, but also from a more focused, individual perspective. In doing so, we will examine the role of individual choice in becoming a superhero or super-villain and the implications of that choice on subsequent behavior. Students will explore aspects of human nature by considering the necessity of social change, what is necessary for social change, and what constitutes heroism in everyday life. Woven throughout this discussion of the conflicting elements of goodness and evil in society is conversation about social change, and what constitutes a desirable society.

A word of caution: students will be reading graphic novels during this course, and watching a variety of films designed to support our class discussions. These are “graphic” in both senses of the term: the tales are told visually, and the images can be quite shocking. Also, this class will meet occasionally in the evenings for movies and class discussion.

Literature as Inquiry
Examines and critically engages several core texts in Literary and Humane Studies. Literature, understood broadly, is an instrument of inquiry. Discussions will emphasize close reading and will distinguish between intellectual and moral virtues, revealing how literature opens us to intellectual inquiry rather than ready-made solutions. To learn we do not understand is the first step. Readings draw from Greek philosophy, Biblical literature and several short, classic examples of English poetry and novels.
Identity, Diversity, and Justice
Students will explore the nature of cultural/social diversity in human society. First, students are introduced to the liberal arts and interdisciplinarity, then they examine the nature of personal identity. Finally, students explore the experience and perspectives of people in various cultural/social/power positions, considering implications for social (in)justice. By understanding and empathizing with others’ perspectives, students will clarify and evaluate their own perspectives, gaining more informed approaches to engaging with diversity.

Creativity, Humor, and Liberal Arts
Through nature and nurture, this section will explore the benefits of creativity and humor and how they contribute to one’s pathway to a liberal arts education. Through course readings, class discussions, and assignments, questions to be considered will include: What is creativity? Where does it come from? How much is innate and how much is learned? How can one maintain creative thought and action throughout life? Does creativity foster happiness or growth? How is creativity enhanced by humor? To what degree and how, together, do they both result in more effective and innovative thought and problem solving?

War and Peace
Students will use the findings, methods, and writing styles of a variety of disciplines to examine War and Peace. Exploration of the causes, experiences, and aftereffects of war will lead into a serious investigation of world peace literature. Writers such as Gandhi, Tolstoy, Camus, and King prompt us to rethink our ideas of what peace is and how it can be achieved. We share our own insights through writings and presentations as we consider how the liberal arts can contribute to this important global dialogue.

The Grass Is Always Greener
People have migrated from their home countries for centuries, for all sorts of reasons: escaping natural disasters, internal conflict and war, poverty, persecution and lack of human rights, as well as simply seeking a better life elsewhere. This section examines the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of migration. We will explore in detail migration policies that let some foreigners in while keeping others out, the effects of migration on the American economy and workers, brain drain and brain gain, cultural assimilation, cultural diversity and xenophobia.

A Path Appears: Discovering Citizenship
This class serves as a gateway to the liberal arts through the study and practice of citizenship. The liberal arts approach requires us to read, think, and write about citizenship from multiple perspectives. That is easy to do because as citizens we engage a world with many interconnected pieces including culture, politics, economics, technology, and the natural world. The practical purpose of this course is to help you find your own path as a citizen through this interconnected, interdependent world. To that end we also practice citizenship during class on Fridays by bowling with persons supported by the Christian Opportunity Center in Pella. It costs each student $4 per week to bowl. The benefits are incalculable.

Food, Health, and Society
Food is integral to our survival and no one should be without food, no matter their socio-economic status. This course will explore the relationship between food, health and society around the world. Specific topics such as hunger and food insecurity, dietary guidance and health, and food production and the environment will be explored using examples from around the globe. This course will examine these and other topics in the context of public health and science, sociology, history, economics, and the environment.

Stories We Live By (2 sections available)
“We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” writes essayist Joan Didion. She might have added that we read stories in order to live as well. In this course we’ll examine who we are as tellers and readers of those stories—personal, literary and cultural—that we encounter every day.

Latinos in Popular Culture
Through the examination of literature, film, television, performance art, graphic art, and music from hip hop to rock en español, this course considers the role of Latina/o culture as a site of contemporary social practice and cultural politics in the United States. In our exploration of these texts, we will explore how artists, musicians and writers have historically rethought notions of citizenship, identity, and culture to create more fluid spaces of representation through the social uses of popular culture. We will in particular, pay close attention to the relationship between national geography and the shaping of regional identities and cultures —between the maps that nations draw and the cultural forms that cut across them. Students are encouraged to bring their own interests in popular culture to the course.

Identities and Stereotypes
A fine line separates the individual and group identities we claim from the stereotypes ascribed to us by the popular media. This class will examine how groups defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion have been portrayed in American films over the past century, and the real-world consequences of those portrayals. We will employ insights from cultural studies, film theory, and religious studies.