To outsiders or unbelievers, the rituals and dogmas of any creed may seem silly. But it’s bad manners to mock them. So we forbid readers to laugh at the following courses that major universities offer during the 2014–15 academic year.

Elite schools today may not demand much in the way of foreign languages, mathematics, or science, but they are fulfilling their high moral purpose: forming future leaders in West-hating multiculturalism, Marxist suspicion, and utilitarian hedonism.

And don’t pay too much attention to those price tags (derived here by dividing the college’s annual tuition, room, and board by the eight courses per year most schools require of full-time students). Such is the price of admission to a very exclusive club. Courses like these will teach you the club’s secret handshake.

1. **Brown University: “Global Macho: Race, Gender, and Action Movies”**

   *Spend four months (and $7,925) at an Ivy League institution figuring out why guys like to watch things blow up and learning new ways to tame them and render them harmless.*

   “Carefully sifting through an oft-overlooked but globally popular genre—the muscle-bound action [film]—this class asks: what sort of work does an action movie do? What is the role of women in this genre? How should we scrutinize these supposedly empty trifles of the global popular? How should we think critically about movies that feature—often without apology—a deep, dangerous obsession with masculinity, patriarchy, war, and lawlessness, with violence outside of civil society. In short, from Hollywood to Hong Kong to Rio to Paris to Mexico City, what makes the action movie genre tick?”
Wesleyan University: “Critical Queer Studies”

Ah, Wesleyan. Where you can fulfill your science requirement by taking “The Biology of Sex.” Where the Queer Resource Center has lent students videos like Goat Boy and the Potato Chip Ritual. And where, if you’re an American Studies major, this class can be your required junior colloquium—as long as you send your $7,616 to the bursar.

“Although ‘queer’ is a contested term, it describes—at least potentially—sexualities and genders that fall outside normative constellations. However, as queer studies has been institutionalized in the academy, in popular culture, and in contemporary political movements, many argue that today, ‘queer’ shorthands gay and lesbian (or LGBT . . .), is too easily co-optable (e.g., Queer Eye for the Straight Guy), or that queer studies’ construction of the body, desire, and sexuality effaces or ignores crucial material conditions, bodily experiences, or cultural differences. This course, a reading-intensive seminar, will address these debates. After a brief exploration of some of the foundational works in queer theory, we will focus on the relationships—and disagreements—between queer theory and other social and cultural theories designed to illuminate and critique power, marginality, privilege, and normativity: critical race theory, transgender studies, queer anthropology, Marxism, feminist theory, and disability studies. Rather than understanding queer studies as a singular or coherent school of thought, we will continuously problematize queer studies as a field and a mode of analysis.”

Princeton University: “Isn’t It Romantic?”

Congratulations, you got into Princeton. Now you can skip that Milton course and instead take this English Department offering on “The Broadway Musical from Rodgers and Hammerstein to Sondheim.” The “reading list” includes The Phantom of the Opera and A Chorus Line—all for just $6,930.

“Song. Dance. Man. Woman. These are the basic components of the Broadway musical theatre. How have musical theatre artists, composers, lyricists, librettists, directors, choreographers, and designers worked with these building blocks to create this quintessentially American form of art and entertainment? Why are musicals structured by love and romance? This course will explore conventional and resistant performances of gender and sexuality in the Broadway musical since the 1940s.”

Rutgers University: “Politicizing Beyoncé”

How can a women’s studies professor take an avowed Christian who is a successful capitalist, a wife and mother, and a registered Republican and turn her into an icon of radical change? Spend $4,924 to find out.

“Beyoncé Knowles-Carter is known as many things: singer, songwriter, actress, performer, half of hip hop and R&B’s most powerful couple, even fashion designer. But few take her seriously as a political figure. This course will attempt to think about our contemporary U.S. society and its current class, racial, gender, and sexual politics through the music and career of Beyoncé. On the surface, she might deploy messages about race, gender, class, and sexuality that appear conservative in relation to social norms, but during this course we will ask: how does she also challenge our very understanding of these categories? How does Beyoncé push the boundaries of these categories to make space for and embrace
other perhaps more ‘deviant’ bodies, desires, and/or politics? We will attempt to position Beyoncé as a progressive, feminist, and even queer figure through close examination of her music alongside readings on political issues, both contemporary and historical. We will juxtapose Beyoncé’s music with writings on black feminism and the black female experience in the U.S. (and beyond), to attempt to answer: can Beyoncé’s music be seen as a blueprint for progressive social change?”

5. Bryn Mawr College: “Queens, Nuns, and Other Deviants in the Early Modern Iberian World”

Skip lightly over Shakespeare, Molière, and Cervantes and complete Bryn Mawr’s single required literature course by studying Spanish texts in English through a modern feminist lens, for only $7,353.

“The course examines literary, historical, and legal texts from the early modern Iberian world (Spain, Mexico, Peru) through the lens of gender studies. The course is divided around three topics: royal bodies (women in power), cloistered bodies (women in the convent), and delinquent bodies (figures who defy legal and gender normativity). Course is taught in English.”

6. Georgetown University: “Dogs and Theology”

This Jesuit-scented college retains its trace Catholic identity by requiring two theology courses—a survey on the “problem of God” or “biblical literature” and then a choice of electives like this one ($7,453).

“There is not much clarity among Christian writers about whether and how animals will have a role in the next life. We will appeal to material in the earlier part of the course—contemporary concerns about the environment and Christian theological approaches to nature—to construct and test out possible ethical norms that arise out of a Christian world view (including the traditional view that humans have a distinctive and privileged place in God’s plan and that ethics must reflect that anthropocentric priority). Finally, the course will consider the possibility that animal life, past and present, will be redeemed and share in the world to come. Dogs present a particularly interesting case in that they are partly the result of human intervention (humans as co-creators?) and have come to occupy an often-cherished role in the human community.”

7. Stanford University: “History of Ignorance”

You might think that this course considered Socrates’s notion of learned ignorance, mystical approaches to God via negation, or the epistemology of skepticism. That just shows how clueless you are. That will be $7,963, please.

“Scholars pay a lot of attention to knowledge—how it arises and impacts society—but much less attention has been given to ignorance, even though its impacts are equally profound. Here we explore the political history of ignorance, through case studies including: corporate denials of harms from particular products (tobacco, asbestos), climate change denialism, and creationist rejections of Darwinian evolution. Students will be expected to produce a research paper tracing the origins and impact of a particular form of ignorance.”

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