

The **Scholars Lecture Series** is designed to encourage and promote the exchange of ideas among our faculty and students in the College of Arts and Science. The lecture series enhances the intellectual experience and social consciousness of the NYU community.

# COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE—2016–2017 **SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES**



**Irving H. Jurow Lecture Hall, Silver Center for Arts and Science  
31 Washington Place** All lectures are scheduled from 5:00–6:00 PM

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19**

## **“A MOST EXCRUCIATING TORMENT”: WRITING THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE PASSAGE**

*Jennifer L. Morgan, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and History, and Chair, Department of Social and Cultural Analysis*

How do scholars construct a history of women and children ensnared in the transatlantic slave trade when slave traders and purchasers failed to leave adequate records? How do scholars address a gap in evidence involving millions of people? In this lecture Professor Morgan discusses the sources available to historians of the transatlantic slave trade and addresses the crucial relationship between experience and historical accounting in the founding decades of the transatlantic trade.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28**

## **SPATIAL EPIDEMIOLOGY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

*Dustin T. Duncan, Assistant Professor of Population Health at the NYU School of Medicine, and Director of NYU’s Spatial Epidemiology Lab*

Research in Spatial Epidemiology has made important contributions in understanding connections between physical and social neighborhood environments, on the one hand, and health and health behavior on the other. In this lecture Professor Duncan will provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamic field of Spatial Epidemiology from a cross-national perspective. Through examples, Professor Duncan will discuss standards and emerging methods to study neighborhood characteristics, including self-report, observation, geographic information system (GIS), web-based geospatial methods, and real-time geospatial methods.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18**

## **NOT JUST A GUILTY PLEASURE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GOSSIP IN SOCIAL NETWORKS**

*Jennifer Larson, Assistant Professor of Politics*

Social networks, both online and offline, spread gossip throughout groups. Despite its bad reputation, gossip plays an essential role in the success of human groups, both evolutionarily and today. In this lecture, Professor Larson will show how social networks and the spread of gossip affect cooperation, drawing on research from the 19th century “Wild West,” contemporary rural Uganda, and the Twitter-verse of Parisians in the wake of a terrorist attack.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25**

## **WAS THERE A CULTURAL WAR? POLARIZATION AND SECULAR TRENDS IN U.S. PUBLIC OPINION**

*Delia Baldassarri, Associate Professor of Sociology*

U.S. politics over the last four decades has been characterized by increased partisanship in Congress and growing polarization of the political debate. How has mass opinion responded to elite polarization? Have American citizens become more divided in their political preferences and social networks? Have moral issues supplanted economic interests when deciding which party to vote for? Professor Baldassarri will explore these questions and possible answers in her lecture.

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1**

## **THE GENETIC NETWORK THAT FORMS A COMPLEX EMBRYO FROM A SINGLE CELL**

*Stephen J. Small, Professor of Biology and Genomics, and Chair, Department of Biology*

Body plans of individuals in most animal species are very similar to each other: for example, most humans are born with two arms, twenty digits, two eyes, etc. This consistency is no accident. There are powerful genetic mechanisms that ensure the same body plan is established. Professor Small studies these body-patterning mechanisms using the fruit fly *Drosophila*. His lecture will focus on how boundaries of gene expression divide the embryo into regions that will adopt specific cell fates, thus organizing the shape and structure of the mature body plan.

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14**

## **RACE, DIVERSITY, AND AMERICAN JOURNALISM TODAY**

*Jason Samuels, Associate Professor of Journalism*

Five decades ago, in the wake of widespread rioting in black neighborhoods in Newark, Chicago, and other cities, the Kerner Commission issued a report that included an admonishment of American news media: “Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men’s eyes and a white perspective. That is no longer good enough. The painful process of the readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now.” In this lecture Professor Samuels will survey today’s mainstream news media and discuss the industry’s persistent failure to employ, empower and elevate journalists of color.

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1**

## **HOW TO ASK A GOOD QUESTION**

*Todd M. Gureckis, Associate Professor of Psychology*

The ability to ask interesting and imaginative questions is a fundamental aspect of human intelligence. But, how do we come up with questions? How do we decide what questions are worth asking? In this lecture, Professor Gureckis will explore the cognitive science of constructing questions in order to learn and the impact question asking has on basic memory and learning processes. A primary objective of Professor Gureckis’s work is to develop detailed computational models of human behavior. His lecture will highlight the important role such models play in helping to understand human inquiry. Professor Gureckis will conclude by discussing implications of this work for machine learning, education, and the science of human learning.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 30**

## **“A DIFFERENT KIND OF INSTITUTION”: EPISODES FROM THE HISTORY OF NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**

*Trace Jordan, Clinical Professor, College of Arts and Science Core Curriculum and Director of the Foundations of Scientific Inquiry in the Core Curriculum*

In 1830, a group of prominent citizens gathered at the New York Historical Society to discuss plans to establish a new university. A year later, the New York State Legislature granted a charter to establish the University of the City of New-York. According to Albert Gallatin, an early advocate of the university, its educational goals were to “elevate the standard of learning... and to render it more accessible to the community at large.” From these humble beginnings, New York University has grown to become one of the largest private schools within the United States and extended its global reach to 13 academic sites on six continents. This lecture examines the founding of NYU and highlights episodes from its interesting history.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7**

## **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THE EXTRA CARBON DIOXIDE IN THE ATMOSPHERE?**

*Tianning Diao, Assistant Professor of Chemistry*

The increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere significantly contribute to global warming. Meanwhile, carbon dioxide is regarded as an inexpensive and appealing chemical feedstock to introduce functional groups into organic molecules. Professor Diao’s research group develops catalysts to enable the transformation of carbon dioxide into synthetically useful organic molecules. These carbon dioxide incorporation reactions would open up essential routes for pharmaceutical synthesis.

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27**

## **HOW POLITICAL ECONOMY BECAME A SOCIAL SCIENCE**

*Andrew Sartori, Professor of History*

Books and pamphlets dedicated to understanding trade, prices, money and credit proliferated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These texts did not, however, offer an account of how societies worked. They were instead concerned with the more specialized world of mercantile activity, and with the relationship between that world and the promotion of political capacities. Yet by the mid-eighteenth century, political economy had developed into a form of knowledge that offered an anatomy of commercial society. How did this transformation occur? Professor Sartori will explore various explanations.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 2**

## **BETWEEN PORT AND PALACE: MARITIME ART AND MEDITERRANEAN SERVITUDE IN LOUIS XIV’S FRANCE**

*Meredith Martin, Associate Professor of Art History and the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU; Gillian Weiss, Associate Professor of History at Case Western Reserve University*

Mediterranean maritime art, and the forced labor on which it depended, was fundamental to the politics and propaganda of France’s King Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715). However, most studies of French art in this period focus on Paris and Versailles. By examining a wide range of artistic productions—e.g., ship design, artillery sculpture, medals—this lecture draws attention to neglected genres of Mediterranean maritime art and to the varieties of forced labor such as convicts and enslaved Turks integral to the creation of artistic forms proclaiming the power of the Sun King.

**MONDAY, MARCH 20**

## **WHY READ EARLY NOVELS?**

*Wendy Lee, Assistant Professor of English*

According to a conventional wisdom in literary studies, one of Jane Austen’s crowning achievements was to make all previous novels impossible to read. But, the implication that the field of early fiction is not only incoherent but boring has been challenged recently: not only by popular adaptations’ increasingly eighteenth-century-ist take on Austen herself (as the ultimate Mean Girl of English literature) but also in the persistence of narrative formulae from the period, mostly involving sexual violence. For better or for worse, in early novels, we find the “mother sauces” of contemporary storytelling: in books, on television, at the movies, and in so much of what counts for us as entertainment.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29**

## **NEURAL MECHANISMS OF CONFIDENCE AND ITS ROLE FOR ADAPTIVE REGULATION OF BEHAVIOR**

*Roosbeh Kiani, Assistant Professor of Neural Science and Psychology*

The degree of confidence in a decision provides a graded and probabilistic assessment of expected outcomes. Although neural mechanisms of perceptual decisions have been studied extensively, little is known about the mechanisms underlying choice certainty or how it is used to guide behavior. Professor Kiani will show in this lecture that the same neurons that represent formation of a decision encode certainty about the decision. Further, he will demonstrate that a hierarchy of decision processes governs how confidence is used to weigh the outcome of a choice for updating decision-making strategies.



# **SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES**



# 2016–2017

## COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

# SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES

## NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

### LECTURERS

**JENNIFER L. MORGAN** is Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and History. She received her Ph.D. in History from Duke University. Her research interests are focused on Early African American History, Comparative Slavery, histories of racial ideology and women and gender. She is the author of numerous articles and a book, *Laboring Women: Gender and Reproduction in New World Slavery* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). She is currently working on a project that considers colonial numeracy, racism, and the rise of the transatlantic slave trade, tentatively entitled “Accounting for the Women in Slavery.”

**DUSTIN T. DUNCAN** is Assistant Professor of Population Health at the NYU School of Medicine, where he directs the Spatial Epidemiology Lab. He received his Doctor of Science (Sc.D.) from Harvard University’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health where he completed a postdoctoral fellowship in social epidemiology. Professor Duncan’s research focuses on how specific neighborhood characteristics influence population health and health disparities. His research appears in numerous leading journals and in major media outlets including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

**JENNIFER LARSON** is Assistant Professor of Politics and an associate of the Social Media and Political Participation Lab. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Harvard University. Her research focuses on social networks: their role in people’s lives, how to measure them, and the consequences they have for various political outcomes. She collaborated on a book, *Applying Fuzzy Mathematics to Formal Models in Comparative Politics* (Springer, 2008) and her work has been published in several leading journals. Her numerous honors and awards include being an Invited Delegate to the International Academy of Achievement, 2014, and receiving the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, 2005–2006.

**DELIA BALDASSARRI** is Associate Professor of Sociology. She holds courtesy appointments in the Wilf Family Department of Politics and in the Management and Organizations Department at the Stern School of Business. She is also a Senior Researcher at Bocconi University. She received a Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Research from the University of Trento and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Columbia University. Her research focuses on economic, political and analytical sociology as well as social networks. Her current research projects include a book-length project investigating the demographic and social network bases of partisanship in American public opinion. Professor Baldassari’s work has appeared in many leading journals, and she has received several distinguished awards for her outstanding research over the years.

**STEPHEN SMALL** is Professor of Biology and Genomics, and Chair, Department of Biology. He received his Ph.D. in Developmental Biology from the University of Cincinnati. He also worked as a post-doctoral fellow at Columbia University and at UC San Diego with Dr. Michael Levine on the mechanisms that establish the body plan in *Drosophila*. He continues to study how genes control the establishment of different body forms. He has published articles in many of the field’s leading journals. He is also the recipient of the CAS Golden Dozen Teaching Award, 2009; National Institutes of Health Research Grants, 1996–2011; National Science Foundation Research Grants, 1995–2011; and the National Institutes of Health Postdoctoral Fellowship, 1991–1993.

**JASON SAMUELS** is Associate Professor of Journalism, and currently serves as the Executive Director of the Urban Journalism Workshop. He received his Masters Degree in Journalism (M.J.) from UC Berkeley. As a journalist Professor Samuels has worked at ABC News, NBC News, CNN, ESPN, HBO and BET. His work has received the most prestigious awards in broadcast journalism including three Emmy Awards, an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, and an Investigative Reporter and Editor Award. Most recently Professor Samuels served as the consulting producer of the broadcast documentary *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement* (2016).

**TODD M. GURECKIS** is Associate Professor of Psychology. He received is Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. He completed his post-doctoral training at Indiana University. His research compares the behavior of humans to intelligent machine learning algorithms. The goal of this is to discover the core building blocks of cognition that make humans such uniquely smart and adaptable learners. Professor Gureckis has published widely in the field. His work has received numerous awards including the James S. McDonnell Foundation Scholar Award for research in human

cognition and the White House Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE).

**TRACE JORDAN** is Clinical Professor in the College of Arts and Science Core Curriculum and serves as Director of the Foundations of Scientific Inquiry program in the Core Curriculum. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in Biophysical Chemistry. Professor Jordan is a first-generation college student and serves as faculty leader for the Proud to be First initiative in CAS. He is also a three-time recipient of the CAS Golden Dozen Teaching Award. Professor Jordan has received grants for curriculum development, and he has published articles on the design and assessment of science education.

**TIANNING DIAO** is Assistant Professor of Chemistry. She received her Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and conducted postdoctoral research at Princeton University. At NYU her lab develops catalysts to convert carbon dioxide into organic molecules that are precursors to pharmaceuticals and chemical products. Professor Diao has published numerous articles and is the recipient of the Charles and Martha Carey Excellence Award in Organic Chemistry Research, 2012.

**ANDREW SARTORI** is Professor of History. He received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago. His research focuses on modern South Asia, the British Empire, the history of ideas and the history of political economy as a form of knowledge. He is the author of *Liberalism in Empire* (University of California Press, 2014) and *Bengal in Global Concept History* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). He has also coedited several volumes of essays including (with Samuel Moyn) *Global Intellectual History* (Columbia University Press, 2013). He also serves as a co-editor of *Critical Historical Studies*.

**MEREDITH MARTIN** is Associate Professor of Art History and the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU, where she teaches courses in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European art. She received her Ph.D. in Art History from Harvard University. She is the author of *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de’ Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Harvard University Press, 2011), and, more recently, a co-editor of *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World* (special issue of *Art History*, 2015). Professor Martin is currently working, among other projects, on a co-authored book (with Gillian Weiss) entitled *The Sun King at Sea: Maritime Art and Slavery during the Reign of Louis XIV*, for which they have been awarded a Collaborative Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies.

**GILLIAN WEISS** is Associate Professor of History at Case Western Reserve University. She received her Ph.D. in History from Stanford University. Her research focuses on France and the Mediterranean world during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She is the author of *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford University Press, 2011). She is currently co-writing a book with Meredith Martin for which they have been awarded a Collaborative Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies.

**WENDY LEE** is Assistant Professor of English. She received her Ph.D. in English Literature from Princeton University. Her research engages connections between early philosophies of emotions and the history of the novel; affect and cognitive studies; Jane Austen; animal studies; and Asian American literature. Her current book project, *Failures of Feeling: Insensibility and the Novel*, argues for the importance of unfeeling in the emergence of what we now call psychological fiction. She is also the recipient of numerous national awards including the Woodrow Wilson National Fellow Foundation, 2010.

**ROOZBEH KIANI** is Assistant Professor of Neural Science and Psychology. He received his Doctor of Medicine (MD) from Beheshti University and his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in Neurobiology and Behavior. He completed his postdoctoral studies at Stanford University. Professor Kiani’s research explores neural mechanisms of perceptual and mnemonic decision-making, visual object recognition, and motion perception. He has published articles in many of the field’s leading journals. He is the recipient of the gold medal of the International Chemistry Olympiad, 1995; Donald B. Lindsley Prize in Behavioral Neuroscience, 2010; Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellowship, 2014; McKnight Scholar Award, 2016; and Pew Scholarship in Biomedical Sciences, 2016.