

# University of Hartford

## Spring 2019 Humanities Center Lecture Series

### EVIDENCE IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD



The University of Hartford Humanities Center Lecture Series for Spring 2019 focuses on the theme of “**Evidence in a Post-Truth World,**” developed and led by **Lauren Cook**, associate professor of cinema.

Four University of Hartford Humanities Center Faculty Fellows, three distinguished scholars, and Professor Cook and her students in the Humanities Center Honors Seminar will speak on **Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m.** between January 29th and April 23rd in the **Dana 201 (Mali 1) Lecture Hall.**

**All lectures are free and open to the public.**

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary selected “post-truth” as their word of the year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” This spring lecture series therefore explores the alarming new trend of rejecting evidence in favor of emotional appeal, “fake news” and “alternative facts” in our contemporary world. It aims to understand what has contributed to this trend, survey past and present examples, and to develop strategies for critically evaluating evidence, sources, and attempts at emotional appeal.

The schedule for the series is as follows:

**January 29:** **Lauren Cook**, Associate Professor of Cinema, will present “**Evidence and the Image: A Curated Screening of Short Films,**” a curated program of award-winning documentary and experimental films that each address issues of truth and evidence on screen. She will introduce the films by discussing the ethics of image making in a post-truth world. Professor Cook, an award-winning experimental and documentary filmmaker, holds an MFA in Filmmaking from the University of Iowa. Her films have screened internationally at venues that include the Cannes Film Festival, the Margaret Mead Festival at the Museum of Natural History (NYC) and the Sao Paulo Museum of Image and Sound.

**February 5:** **Beth Richards**, Assistant Professor of English and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow, will focus on the question, “**Is Persuasion Dead?**”, pertinent in today’s world where many disagree about what information is true or false, the validation of evidence becomes increasingly complex, and all appeals are considered gross manipulation. In her talk, Professor Richards will draw upon the contemporary applications of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and examine how persuasion might still be possible in a society where those who hold different perspectives are more prone not to consider their opponents’ side of an argument. Professor Richards has an MA from Georgia State University, an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Pine Manor College, and runs the writing program at the University of Hartford. She is currently working on a book about the natural springs in her home state of Florida.

**February 12:** **Avinoam Patt**, Associate Professor of Judaic Studies and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow, will discuss “**Confronting Holocaust Denial in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,**” exploring how, despite the easy availability of more information than ever before, Holocaust denial is on the rise on the internet as well as in European and American political discourse. In his lecture, he will grapple with how educators can engage students in the process of recognizing denial while not inadvertently sanctioning illegitimate viewpoints, how we can teach students to recognize fraudulent sources of information, the appeal of conspiracy theories that seek to bolster discrimination by questioning the past, and how, in a post-truth world, there are certain truths that cannot be denied. Dr. Patt has a PhD in Modern European History and Judaic Studies from New York University and has published widely on Jewish life and culture.

**February 26: Robert Lang**, Professor of Cinema and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow, will present on the 2013 Alexander Payne film *Nebraska* in a lecture called **“I don’t care what you think!': Traveling Through Trump Country in *Nebraska*.”** Professor Lang sees this film as an allegory of a failed society and damaged lives in the Great Plains states, a region of the country Trump overwhelmingly won. In his lecture, he will focus on two of the most singular and intertwined features of the Trump era: conspiracy theories and “fake news,” both of which he considers central to *Nebraska*'s narrative. Dr. Lang has a PhD in Film Studies from Columbia University and has published numerous articles, edited volumes and three monographs, the most recent of which is *New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance* from 2014.



**March 5: Karla Loya**, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Humanities Center Faculty Fellow, will talk on **“Teaching in Fear: Academic Freedom and Social Media,”** a discussion of the ways in which U.S. college classrooms have changed since the 2016 presidential elections due to an increasingly polarized social climate, a growing disregard for evidence and facts, and the ubiquity of technology. In her lecture, she will explore how these shifts threaten academic freedom and have led to what can be considered “teaching in an era of fear,” where anyone with an electronic device can capture any comment, post it on social media, and create a viral response, regardless of context or merit. Dr. Loya has her PhD from Pennsylvania State University and works on access, equity and diversity/identity issues in higher education.

**March 26: Hannah Smith Allen**, Assistant Professor of Photography at Adelphi University, will present **“Borderlands,”** a discussion of the photographs she took of the U.S./Mexican border landscape after the 2016 presidential election. The result, a series entitled “Borderlands,” consists of photographs, Google Maps video stills and screen-prints that illustrate the interconnectedness of the U.S. and Mexico, despite the politics that renders them separate. Professor Allen has an MFA from the School of Visual Arts (NYC) and creates artwork on issues related to war and nationhood, examining how, as she says, “images of conflict and contested lands shape American psyche and history.”

**April 2: Inés Rivera Prosdocimi**, Assistant Professor of English, will present a lecture entitled **“On and Off the Island: The Modern-Day, Time-Traveling, Transnational Maroon”** in which she explores, through a literary lens, myths of history and race that have led to the formation of perceived “truths” regarding the national identities of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the two countries on the Caribbean Island of Hispaniola. Dr. Rivera Prosdocimi holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Maryland and specializes in twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean and Caribbean American literature. Her book of poetry, *Love Letter to an Afterlife*, was published in 2018.

**April 9: Alex Symons**, Assistant Professor of Media Studies at LIM College, will speak on **“The New Importance of Satire in Post-Truth America: Trump’s ‘Carnavalesque’ War with Television Comedians,”** where he will explore the ever-increasingly blurred boundaries between comedy and journalism, evident in programs like *The Daily Show* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, which in turn lead the discussions of major news networks. The role of satire in journalism, he will demonstrate, has been further transformed by Trump’s “carnavalesque” persona, where comedians must now “outdo” Trump’s excesses in order to gain traction in the media. Professor Symons received his PhD in Film and Television Studies from the University of Nottingham and is the author of *Mel Brooks in the Cultural Industries* (2012).

**April 16 and 23:** Panels and Presentations Organized by the Spring 2019 Humanities Center Student Fellows.



The Lecture Series on “Evidence in a Post-Truth World” in Spring 2019 **is open to all students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the community.** Lectures begin at **7:30 p.m.** in **Dana 201 (Mali 1) Lecture Hall** and are free and open to the general public. The Humanities Center at the University of Hartford supports interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on the humanities through arts, sciences, technology, media, music, psychology, history, film, philosophy and literature. **For more information, contact Nicholas Ealy, Director, at [ealy@hartford.edu](mailto:ealy@hartford.edu) or follow us on Facebook at “University of Hartford Humanities Center.”**