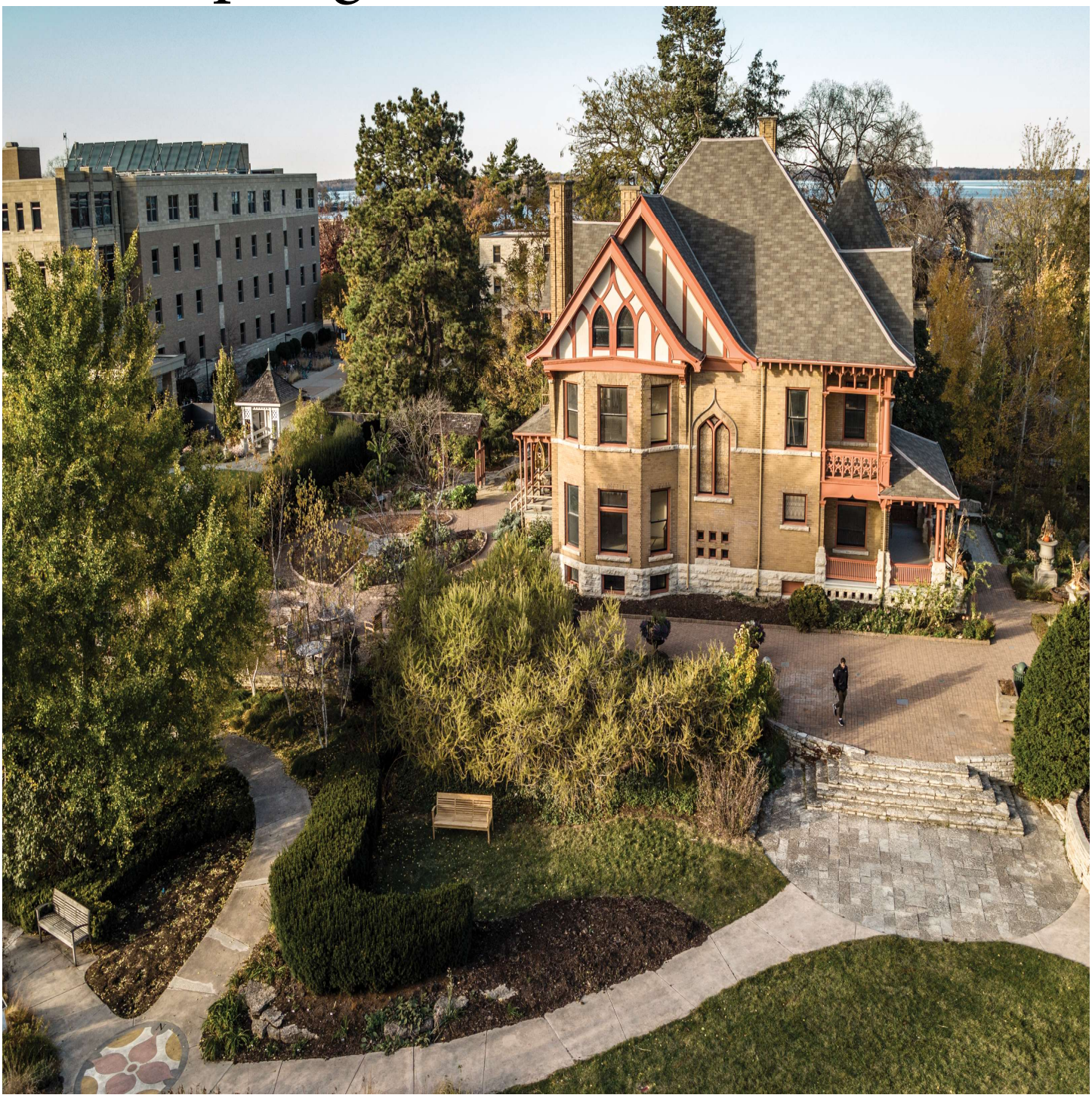
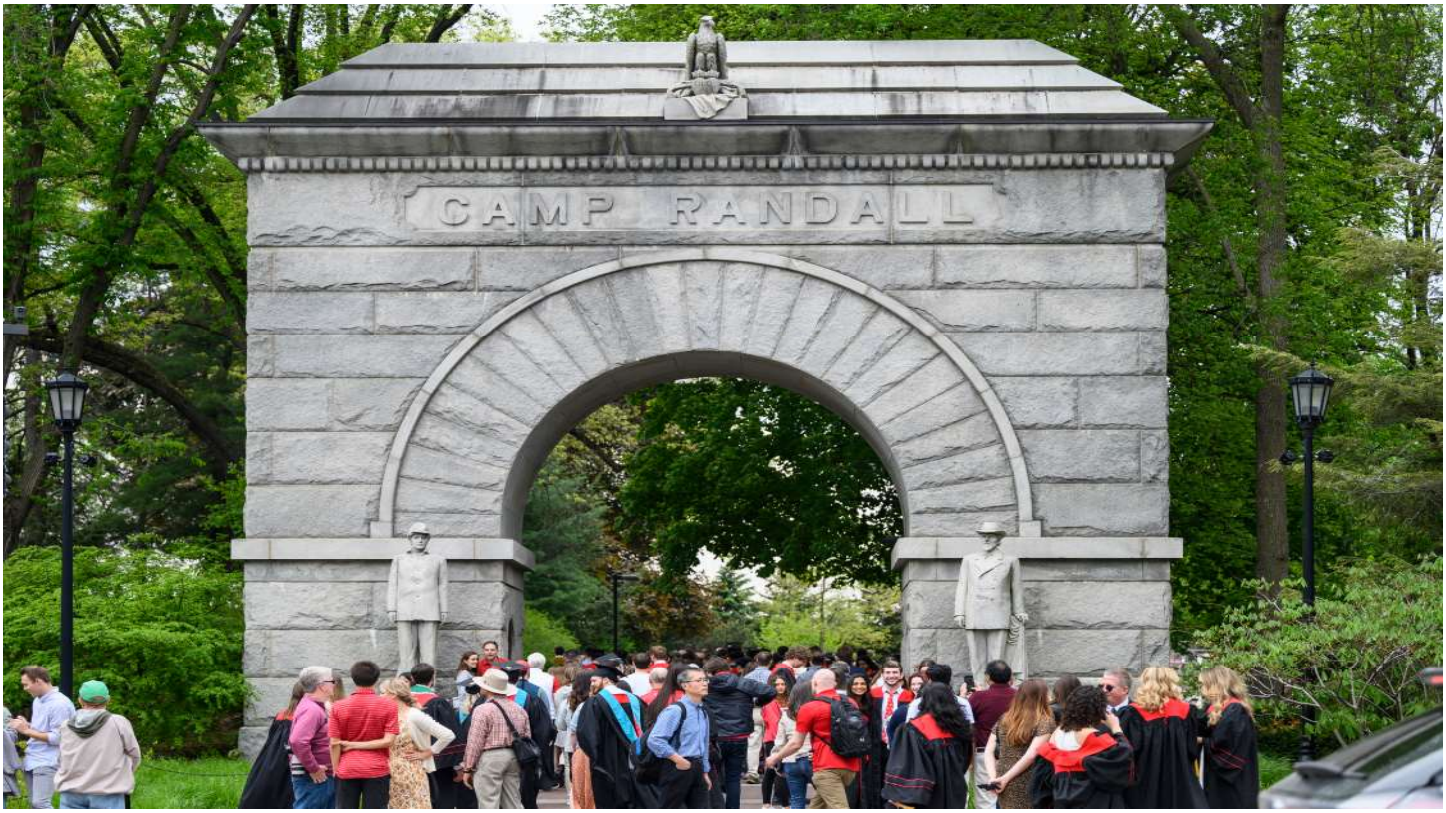
Integrated Liberal Studies Program
Spring 2025 Newsletter



Integrated Liberal Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Spring 2025

The Meiklejohn Experiment



Meiklejohn House

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Check Us Out on Social Media!

Instagram:
@ils.uwisconsin

Facebook:
UW Integrated Liberal Studies - ILS

A Message from the Chair

As I was coming into the office this morning I noticed that bulbs were coming up and the trees were starting to sprout, so it seems as though spring might finally be here. At the same time – thanks, in large part, to the work of Laura Bradley, our academic advisor, and Beth Shipman, our administrative manager – the ILS program is also flourishing. We have the largest graduating ILS class in almost 15 years, and currently have 76 students enrolled in the certificate. The Health and the Humanities certificate, which is now under ILS's wing, is also growing and currently has 136 enrolled students.

Several new faculty have expressed an interest in affiliating with ILS: Jamie Henke is a distinguished teaching professor who is proposing to cross-list a class on the "Interplay Between Music, Art, and Society"; Mosi Adesina Ifatunji is an associate professor in the Department of African American Studies and the Department of Sociology, and is proposing a class on Black Political Thought; Ida Moen Johnson teaches in German, Nordic and Slavic and is offering a popular class on "Humans and Other Animals"; Reba Luiken, the executive director of the Allen Centennial Garden, has developed a course on "Plants and Religion"; Tara Mulder, an assistant professor in Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (CANES), teaches classes on ancient medicine, science, and the history of birth and reproduction. We have also recently interviewed a candidate for a full-time lectureship position so that we can teach our popular ILS 200 lecture class, which enrolls around 200 students each semester, with more permanent instruction, rather than relying on short-term graduate-student staffing.

Julia Horn, our new ILS colleague (an assistant professor whom we share with CANES), taught her ILS 254 "Literature and Science" class to great acclaim in the Fall and is now teaching "Plagued: How Disease Shaped the World" as the ILS 400 capstone course. Also from CANES, William Aylward's large lecture class, ILS 203 (Western Culture: Literature & the Arts I), continues to be one of the most beloved courses in our curriculum and a gateway for students to discover the ILS program and to sign up for the certificate. Elsewhere in ILS, students have taken classes on subjects as diverse as "Ways of Knowing in the Sciences" and "Latin American Female Artists."

Four undergraduate students received ILS prizes this year: Claire Hoppe and Liberty Stoiber received the Pooley prize, which celebrates ILS students on the basis of their academic achievement and leadership in our community; Isabella Bellini and Breanne Born and received the Ruth Knatz Memorial prize, which celebrates truly outstanding Humanities students who have done exemplary work in ILS. These prizes were funded through the generosity of our ILS alumni donors and we are truly grateful to have the opportunity to offer such meaningful prizes to our students.

ILS would also like to thank our graduating student ambassadors, Sally Conroy and Justin Peikin, who have been fantastic contributors to the ILS program for the last few years and who have very worked hard to bring you this newsletter every semester. In their place, we welcome Jane McGill, a first-year undergraduate, who is currently a student in my lecture class, ILS 204, "Western Culture: Literature & the Arts II." We hope Jane will enjoy being an ambassador for ILS and, like Justin and Sally, that she will remain with us for many years to come.

A Message from the Chair (cont'd)

Building on Laura Bradley's work last year to increase our connections with ILS alumni, we are currently working with a class of students from the School of Journalism, whose course project, every semester, is to prepare business and marketing briefs for departments and programs around the University. So far, they have visited Meiklejohn House, asked a lot of very intelligent questions, and have enthusiastically pointed out to us that we need to revamp our social media accounts and increase our online presence to reach our recent, younger graduates. If you are an ILS alum and would like to reach out to give advice about how ILS can build community with you and your cohort, please send me an email at britland@wisc.edu and I will be extremely happy to connect with you.

We are approaching the 100th anniversary of Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College, which will take place in 2027, and we are collaborating with the University Foundation and other partners to make sure that we hold a celebration worthy of this great achievement. We plan to hold events throughout 2027 to celebrate ILS's past and, most importantly, to shape and secure its future. You can find information and anecdotes about the Experimental College here. We will be in touch over the next few months with more information as we plan our celebration. Meanwhile, in this newsletter, you will find photographs that Beth Shipman recently discovered in a closet in Meiklejohn House, taken by one our students from the 1970s for a class project. If you can identify anyone in the pictures, please email us!

ILS continues to be the hub of a strong UW community that crosses the decades and shares educational and civic values. ILS has continued its support of our affiliates' community-building events, helping to sponsor visiting speakers who have given talks in Political Science, CANES, Medieval Studies and the Center for Culture, History, and the Environment. For example, Professor Rebecca Benefiel from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA, gave a recent talk on "Public life, private grief, and community support in first century Pompeii," while Professor Jeffrey Church, a political theorist from Houston, TX, gave a talk entitled, "What are the obligations of political experts? The ethics of expertise in classical German political thought." The intellectual range of the subjects explored in the ILS program never ceases to impress me, but I am even more impressed by the way those subjects add up to a coherent program of study with demonstrable real-world applications.

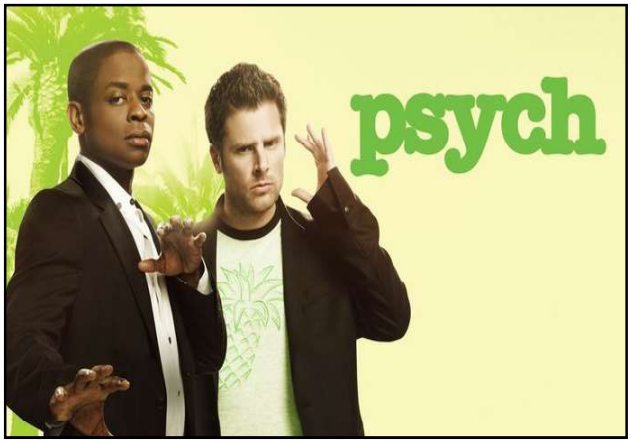
Because of our strong intergenerational connections, it is with great sadness, but also with pride and a huge amount of respect, that we commemorate the passing of Joseph W. Elder, Professor of Sociology and South Asia Studies, and a beloved member of the ILS program. Professor Elder retired from UW-Madison in 2014 after teaching here since 1961, and died in Madison at the age of 94 in January 2025. He conducted extensive research in India and Nepal, was the founder and director of the study-abroad College Year in India programs, and was a passionate advocate for peace and justice. On his retirement in 2014, he and the ILS program compiled a "Memory Book" of photographs to celebrate his career. It can be accessed here and on our website's "Archives" page. We remember Professor Elder for his generous scholarship, his community spirit, and his deeply held beliefs and principles. He embodied every value that makes the ILS program so valuable. In memoriam.

Karen Britland
britland@wisc.edu

Entertainment Recommendations

Psych is a hilarious show about psychic detective Shawn Spencer who solves Santa Barbara's most unsolvable mysteries with his best friend Gus. I first watched this show when I was in high school, but as I finish my college career, I still find the episodes as funny as the first time I saw them. Many of my friends have also watched this show and over the years have quoted the silly lines like "just 'cause you put syrup on somethin' don't make it pancakes" and "wait for iiiiiiiiiiit." If you are looking for a good laugh, try Psych!

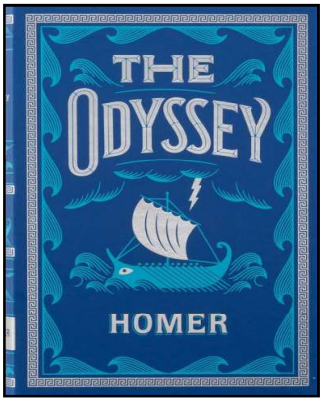
-Sally Conroy, Student Ambassador



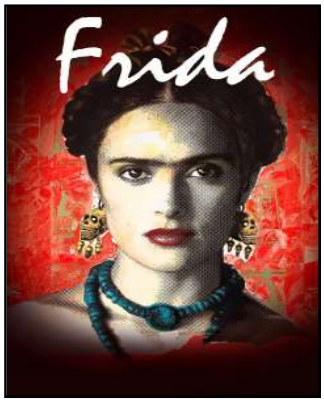
What are ILS students reading/watching in class?

To Kill a Mockingbird
ILS 200: Critical Thinking and Expression

The Matrix
ILS 204: Western Culture: Literature and the Arts II



The Odyssey
ILS 367: Literature of Migration



Frida
ILS 400: Latin American Female Literature

No spoilers! Everybody should drop whatever they are doing and dive into the newest season (7) of Black Mirror, available on Netflix. There are many reasons why you should do this. For those unfamiliar, Black Mirror is a T.V. show that explores the effects of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence or virtual reality, on society. Episodes are unrelated, meaning you can watch one or two but not be stuck on a cliffhanger. Some highlights from the new season are Bête Noire, which investigates seemingly inexplicable occurrences from the perspective of a narrator in her workplace, and Eulogy, an uncharacteristically heartwarming episode in which a man uses technology that allows him to explore inside old photographs from his past. If you haven't seen it, you have a lot to look forward to – in my opinion, no show or movie better examines the nexus of technology and society, leaving you both nervous and excited for the future.

- Justin Peikin, StudentAmbassador

INTRODUCING:
Health and the Humanities Director Anthony Cerulli

What is your role within HatH?
I am the Director of the Health and the Humanities Certificate (HatH) at UW–Madison. I am also the Director of the Center for South Asia and Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at UW–Madison. For several years prior to becoming HatH's Director, I was member of the Certificate's core faculty and steering committee.

HatH has been housed within ILS for about a year now- how is it going?
The move of HatH from the Department of English to ILS has gone very smoothly! This has been a successful move in large part because of the tremendous support we got from the faculty and staff in the English Department who assisted the transition and the great administrative and program staff in ILS — especially Laura Bradley, Beth Shipman, and Karen Britland (as well as Associate Dean Grant Nelsestuen, who previously chaired ILS and pioneered the move). What's more, the interdisciplinary nature of the HatH Certificate aligns well with ILS's liberal studies mission to foster integrated and critical understanding across literary, political, economic, historical, cultural, and artistic areas of human thought.

What is your favorite part about the HatH certificate?
I am especially excited by HatH's curricular diversity. We have superb faculty from several units on campus who contribute fascinating courses to the Certificate every semester, including historical, ethnographic, literary, art, and dance studies. They also include cultural explorations from around the world, including studies of history and society in Africa and Asia, the Americas and Europe, Oceania and the Middle East. HatH courses are also available at all levels, from entry-level courses to more intimate discussion-based seminars, such as the HatH capstone. The rich array of course offerings of the Certificate ensures that students have multiple ways to explore the many contours of health, the history of medical and health humanities as an academic field of inquiry, and the complex and many-sided nature of the human understanding and experience of illness.

Why should students consider a HatH certificate?
HatH is a terrific Certificate for anyone interested in a career in the medical profession. It's also a wonderful Certificate for students keen to explore fundamental matters of the human condition, such as mortality, sickness, and ways that the experience of disease sometimes impacts our social, economic, moral, and legal lives as much as our bodily existence. The HatH Certificate presents numerous opportunities to explore multiple perspectives and methods to engage questions and themes that affect every person. These themes might pertain directly to engagements with the social institution of medicine. They might also address matters of health and wellbeing that occur in everyday life, such as questions about gender and race, death and dying, religion and bodily autonomy, ethics in medical practice and research, among much more.

Get to Know Our Faculty: Yang Li

What is your educational background?

I was trained as a scientist before becoming a historian. I received a BS and MS in chemistry and initially pursued a PhD in the same field, focusing on catalysis and surface science. Over time, however, I found myself increasingly drawn to the humanities. I realized I didn't want reading and thinking about broader social questions—especially those around health inequality—to remain just a hobby. So I made the decision to leave the PhD program and began exploring new directions. Through extensive reading, coursework, and internship, I discovered that history offered the most intellectually satisfying tool for pursuing the questions I cared about. I focused my graduate training in the history of science through a specialized program. That path ultimately brought me here.

What are your research interests and how do you plan to approach them at UW Madison?

I study the history of science, technology, and medicine in modern China. What makes UW-Madison special to me is the vibrant intellectual community—my amazing colleagues who not only appreciate my work but are generous in discussing it with me and helping me grow as a scholar. They've already begun to open my eyes to new fields and scholarship I hadn't previously considered. I also look forward to deepening my research through conversations with graduate students, another vital part of this stimulating environment. Undergraduate teaching is equally important to my research. Preparing for courses and engaging with students helps me stay energized and focused on communicating complex ideas to a broader audience, while remaining attentive to what they care about. It pushes me to make my work not only intellectually rigorous, but also engaging and meaningful for an informed public.

What classes are you teaching, and how are they going?

I'm not teaching any courses this semester. In the 2025-26 academic year, I will be teaching the ILS Capstone "Technology, Body, and Culture: A Global History of Medicine" in the fall, and ILS 202 "Western Culture: Science, Technology, Philosophy II" in the spring. My approach in these courses will be to introduce global perspectives into traditional narratives of science and medicine. We'll see how it goes!

What do you most like about the Madison area?

The beautiful lakes. They give Madison a unique character that is hard to put into words. These lakes are small, approachable, and seamlessly integrated into everyday life. For me, they offer an ongoing, reflective conversation with both nature and history.

Course Highlight: ILS 204

Western Culture: Literature and the Arts

Taught by our chair, Karen Britland, this course investigates the development of literature and the arts from the Renaissance to the modern period. It involves discussion of figures such as William Shakespeare and Artemisia Gentileschi through Djuna Barnes and Picasso. In the course, students study literature and art in the context of society and ideas. Overall, the focus of the course is not on "art appreciation" but on how cultural contexts – the ideas and values regarding religion, philosophy, political thought, social practices, aesthetics, and related fields – shaped and made possible the various expressions of art and literature during this period.

This course doesn't presume any special background or training in the arts and literature and is introductory in scope and method. However, given the breadth of the material to be covered, the reading load is a bit heavier – but also more varied and interesting – than in some 200-level courses. Unlike a survey of a single art form, ILS 204 does not emphasize close, in-depth readings of individual works of art and literature (though we do some of this), nor is the emphasis on memorization of the titles, dates, and creators of specific artworks. Instead, you are asked to frame individual works of art within larger cultural and historical contexts. The focus is on learning to study cultural artifacts critically: "viewing" rather than merely "looking." Assignments and class projects are designed so that students can work independently and creatively with the material learned in class. We encourage you to bring to this work the experiences and knowledge you've gained from your studies and from your life outside class.

3-4 credits

3 hours/week

86 students

Featured Student: Justin Peikin!

Tell us about yourself and your journey into ILS.

I have actively participated in the Integrated Liberal Studies program since my first semester as an ILS 200 student at UW-Madison. While a neurobiology major, I have always had a passion for the humanities and knew I wanted to pursue a liberal education. My interest in reading (initially Stephen King) started to grow during the pandemic, which led me down a rabbit hole of interests in classical literature (Joyce, Hemingway, Nabokov), poetry (Frost, Octavio Paz), and philosophy, which I was excited to pursue further in Madison.

From my first semester here, I enjoyed the seminar style of the ILS and the homey vibe of the Meiklejohn House, leading me to sign up for ILS 206: Western Culture: Political, Economic, & Social Thought II and later ILS 205: Western Culture: Political, Economic, & Social Thought. I took other courses in Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Latin American Political Thought for additional breadth. And finally, I enjoyed learning about romanticism and individualism in my ILS 400 capstone course.

Outside of the classroom, I immediately leaped at the opportunity to become an ILS student ambassador due to how much I enjoyed and valued the program. Since I began doing that in late 2023, I have gotten to help write several newsletters, organize events, make class visits, meet prospective ILS students, and, most importantly, connect to a great extent with the ILS community, which I value as one of my most significant and most enriching experiences in college.

What has been your favorite class taken through ILS?

I can't pick just one, so I will offer two.

ILS 206: Western Culture: Political, Economic, & Social Thought II: This class investigated more modern Western thought - every week, we examined one thinker, such as Nietzsche, Hobbes, or Rousseau. Dr. Richard Avramenko delivered fascinating and insightful lectures on each of these figures, and my discussion section got to take an even deeper dive. One thing I remember about this class is that I actually enjoyed writing my final essay! How often can you say that?!
ILS 400. My ILS Capstone, which I took with Dr. Dan Kapust, was filled with engaging and passionate students who showed up excited to discuss the material each session. Dr. Kapust did a great job facilitating class discussions on writers and historical figures such as Frederick Douglass and Henry David Thoreau. One particular highlight was when we watched and discussed the film One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

What do you most value about ILS?

The ILS program offers opportunities for every type of student, regardless of major, interests, or plans. It provides a curriculum where you can choose one of many paths and explore everything from ancient political thought to environmental science to oratory. I genuinely believe that striving for a well-rounded education can have the added advantage of making one a more well-rounded and worldly individual and that ILS offers the perfect avenue for that. It has helped me consider questions of ethics, politics, and existence, questions that, while not a direct part of my STEM-oriented major, still deserve to be grappled with. I am more than glad I decided to join the ILS family during my time here. I will always cherish this experience!

ILS Awards 2024-2025

Ruth Knatz Memorial Prize

"The ILS program has underpinned my undergraduate education with the interdisciplinary approach I sought. As a humanities student, I tailored my ILS course load to my respective interests, which provided me with a unique opportunity to learn about my fields from a holistic perspective. I'm very grateful to have participated in this program!"- **Isabella Bellini, 2025 Ruth Knatz Memorial Prize Winner**

"I love ILS because of how it teaches and embraces the interconnectivity of different areas of study. While usually areas like STEM and humanities are seen as totally different, ILS shows their similarities and how, working together, they can delve even further into a complex and deep understanding of the material. The power of diversity and unity is one of the greatest strengths of the ILS program" - **Breanne Borne, 2025 Ruth Knatz Memorial Prize Winner**

Pooley Prize

"My favorite part about ILS is that it has allowed me to deeply engage with my wide range of interests. From sustainability to Homers epics ILS has let me take a verity of classes while feeling a sense of direction and achievement! I also love the great and supportive teachers in ILS who have guided me along the way and willingly engaged my curiosity." - **Claire Hoppe, 2025 Pooley Prize Winner**

"One of my favorite things about the ILS program is that the curriculum prompts you to question and evaluate the information you are being presented, rather than forcing you to accept it as fact. It also provides you with a new perspective on what it means to learn and the skillset to communicate such insights." - **Liberty Stoiber, 2025 Pooley Prize Winner**

Congrats ILS Graduates!!

Cindy Barbosa
Bennett Behling
Isabella Bellini
Breanne Born
Isabella Cabello
Jack Colvin
Sally Conroy
Cecilia Dennis
Alex Edwards
Jerome Evans
Madyson Friese
Sadie Goettl
Xylina Graf
Chloe Kim
Sydney Langille
Makenzie Mathys
Joseph Oberst
Ashley Palecek
Justin Peikin
Aiden Rivera
Stephen Rooke
Joshua Schierl
Sophia Shashko
Josephine Spata
Audrey Staudacher
Amelia Stephens
Liberty Stoiber
Rhiannon Teschner
Akhil Venkatesh
Yucheng Wan
Gwenyth Wiltzius

ILS Word Search

S X L U W N A Z K C F J O X B
Q R R M T W A Q T N K P I X U
X D B R E A N N E G A H D I I
M E I K L E J O H N P F C U K
W J O T K A L G S M N M J T L
E T Q R Z S N Z O D J N J Q N
S H N L K O O T H N R J G H L
Q Y F I W B B D H C Y Y I G E
Z T L B J P E Y I O K T H O R
I I M E K Z T A A D N Q I D W
T E O R M T G I H N B Y A O U
O J C T O J C M O Y G J J H E
F Z K Y S A L L Y R P X Z N N
C K H G Y P V P D Z H Q N Q J
T N J U S T I N Y W Z C T U S

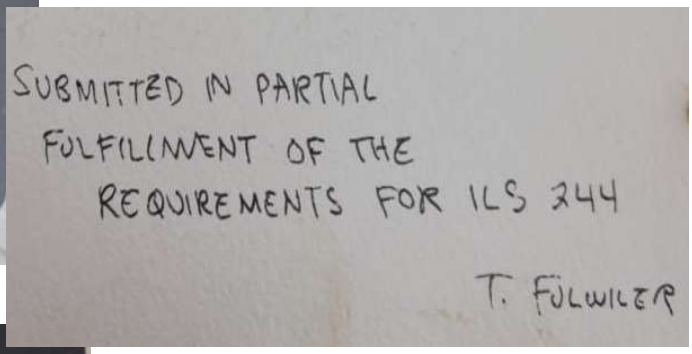
Hints:

1. ILS Student Ambassador
2. ILS Student Ambassador
3. Featured Faculty Member
4. Health and the Humanities Director
5. Pooley Prize Winner
6. ILS House
7. Ruth Knatz Winner

Answers: Justin, Sally, Yang, Anthony, Lipsett, Waikeiohan, Breanne

Photos from the Archive

Student and Professor on Meiklejohn front porch, 1972



ILS students in Meiklejohn house, 1972

An ILS scholar enjoying class, 1972

Classroom conversations in Meiklejohn, 1972

THANK YOU!

Your donations make a difference.

Help support current ILS Certificate students by donating to one of our general funds. To help foster a community between student and faculty, ask for your donation to be sent to the **ILS fund**, which is used to fund student activities.

https://ils.wisc.edu/donate/