The More Things Change...

We’re now nearly two decades into the 21st Century, and to say things have changed in the last 19 years would be an understatement. In fact, change seems to be the word that defines most everything, from how we eat, sleep, move, and play, to how we read, write, work, and learn. And it happens fast. Go to the store, take a shower, make some soup. Once done, you can be sure something has changed. Life can turn on a dime. A day can be a lifetime.

This often means you have to change with the times, which is one of the reasons this will be LearningLife’s final print catalog. While we may be slow to nudge our way into this century, both the environment at large and our economy as a not-for-profit program in particular demand that we be good stewards of what we have and want to preserve.

This will not be a popular decision for many. In all candor, it’s been tough for us as well. But we are trying to think broadly (see The Common Good, page 10) and be intelligent custodians of our resources. Sometimes you can’t have it both ways.

The late journalist Sydney Harris wrote, “Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better.”

Rest assured, we will continue to produce an electronic catalog which may be viewed and downloaded via the LearningLife website. (Our printed catalogs are beautiful, but they are no less beautiful online!) We also will send informational postcards throughout the year and ensure that those without access to a computer or electronic media receive requested information in print form. (Please help us to stay in touch by reading the information below.)

The constant in all this? The “the more things change” component? That would be the sincere pleasure we take in the work that we do and the dedicated and amazing people we serve. YOU make LearningLife a worthwhile and joyous enterprise!

—Anastasia Faunce
Program Director

Intelligent Machines: AI’s Present and Future

Thursday, February 7, 7 p.m., $20 (HEDLX005)

From Samuel Butler’s Erewhon (1872) and 20th Century Fox’s The Day the Earth Stood Still to Marvel Comics’ Ultron and Clarke/Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, popular culture has long envisioned hypothetical scenarios in which artificial intelligence (AI) becomes the dominant form of intelligence on earth, only to wrest control of the planet from the human race. But how likely is this scenario? And what of the possible benefits of AI?

The field of AI has made astonishing advancements in the last few years. Every day we read in the scientific and popular press about how AI is pervasive and has the potential to affect society in major ways; the speed of its evolution is rapid and there is no end in sight.

In the not-too-distant future, intelligent systems and robots will become part of our daily lives, helping with routine tasks (logistical applications), professional services (autism diagnosis), dangerous jobs (search and rescue), and keeping us company (think: R2-D2 companion).

Join us February 7, when computer scientist Dr. Maria Gini will assess the current state of the art in intelligent systems, dig into its future developments and challenges, and highlight the specific research that is centered on increasing productivity and improving people’s lives.

Maria Gini is a Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Computer Science in the College of Science and Engineering who has earned an international reputation for her research in robotics and artificial intelligence. A Fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence and IEEE, Gini recently received the National Center for Women in Technology’s Harrold and Notkin Research and Graduate Mentoring Award.
In 2013, Jon Bonné’s book *The New California Wine* shook the wine world. More than a comprehensive guide to the must-know wines and producers of California’s new generation, the book is a consideration of “the young, innovative producers who are rewriting the rules of contemporary winemaking; their quest to express the uniqueness of California terroir; and the continuing battle to move the state away from the overly-technocratic, reactionary practices of its recent past.”

This course looks closely at today’s California wine revolution. We’ll begin with an overview of California’s wines, regions (and small sub regions), grapes, and styles, addressing key issues such as alcohol content, vineyard age, and common vs. uncommon grape varieties. We’ll then taste wines from some of these upstart producers and discuss their philosophies and techniques.

The instructor also will introduce you to the personalities who are shaping this bold approach to Golden State viniculture. While some go for terroir-driven expression, and some strive for a winemaker “thumbprint,” others are adopting ancient abandoned vineyards of obscure varietals and bringing them back to life.

The common thread is a return to an older style of winemaking, but at its core, this movement is about old vineyards, forgotten grape varieties, under-appreciated growing regions, and the iconoclastic winemakers who are changing the face of California viniculture.

Recommended: Jon Bonné, *The New California Wine* (Ten Speed Press, 2013). No wine experience necessary. A $30 fee, payable to the instructor at the first class, will cover the cost of wine.

**Jason Kallsen** is the founder and owner of Twin Cities Wine Education, a Certified Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, and a Certified Specialist of Wine.

**Tom Hanson** is Diplomat in Residence at the Alworth Institute for International Affairs at the University of Minnesota Duluth. A former US Foreign Service Officer with posts from Norway to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, he participated in the opening of new US embassies in Mongolia and Estonia, worked on the Foreign Relations Committees of the US Senate and House of Representatives, and served as director for NATO and European Affairs at the Atlantic Council of the United States in Washington, DC. Hanson earned his BA from the University of Minnesota and graduate degrees from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the Institute of Advanced International Studies in Switzerland, and the National School of Administration in France. He is currently Chair of the Minnesota Committee on Foreign Relations, Co-Chair of the Minnesota China Business Council, and an advisory committee member of Great Decisions, Global Minnesota, which honored him with their 2018 Ambassador Award.
My Ántonia

Saturday, March 9 (one meeting), 10 a.m.–2 p.m., $100 (LLX166)

In the same year that marked an onslaught of explosive immigration crises and debates, author Willa Cather’s My Ántonia turned 100, and ever so quietly, her masterpiece acquired a new timeliness.

As a writer, Cather created characters so vibrant and compelling they seem to leap off the page and into the reader’s heart. This is particularly true in My Ántonia, which chronicles the lives of Jim Burden, the narrator of the story, and Ántonia Shimerda, the child of Bohemian immigrants, as they mature, become friends, and struggle to eke out a living and make their American dreams come true on Nebraska’s hardscrabble prairie.

Because of Cather’s talent for description and dialogue, the novel has long lent itself to adaptation to the stage, and award-winning playwright Allison Moore’s moving script for My Ántonia has been reprised by the Illusion Theater.

In conjunction with the play’s run, LearningLife is pleased to offer this immersion with Cather scholar Dr. Toni McNaron, who will begin the day with an exploration of the author’s life and work, including My Ántonia.

McNaron will then lead a discussion of the character Ántonia as well as her community in Black Hawk—with all its foibles and strengths—focusing on such topics as whether Jim Burden is a reliable narrator, whether “his” Ántonia is the “real” Ántonia, and how Cather so expertly draws us into the vibrant world of Nebraska before it was “settled” fully by farmers and ranchers.

A century has passed, during which Cather has emerged as one of the leading American novelists of her time. Her creative exploration of the American immigrant experience, which is as vital today as when she was writing decades ago, may be one reason why.

Recommended: any edition of My Ántonia. Tuition includes lunch. Tickets to The Illusion Theater’s production of My Ántonia are not included in tuition. However, registered participants will receive information for discounted tickets to any performance from March 1–13.

Toni McNaron is Professor Emerita of English at the University of Minnesota where she has been the recipient of five awards for outstanding teaching, including the College of Continuing and Professional Studies Distinguished Educator Award.

Offered in cooperation with the Illusion Theater, whose Ivey award-winning adaptation of My Ántonia returns to the Twin Cities in March after a centennial anniversary tour throughout Nebraska.
Constant Craving: Of Neuroscience and Addiction

Wednesdays, March 13, 27, April 3 (three meetings), 6–8 p.m., $135 (LLX160)

The drug problem in the United States is large compared to that of the rest of the world, and depending on your perspective that may come as a surprise. But given that one in every seven Americans faces a substance use disorder at some point in their lives, it’s more likely a scenario that’s familiar to most.

In recognition of Brain Awareness Week (March 11–17), this course highlights some of the University of Minnesota’s most current neuroscientific research on addiction. These ongoing inquiries into the common features of addiction are what allow scientists and clinicians to envision and develop new therapies for this most-difficult-to-treat brain condition.

Led by University neuroscience researchers and educators, all three sessions will include presentations and ample time for Q & A.

March 13: **Mark Thomas** is a Professor of Neuroscience, the Scientific Director for the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction, and the Director of the MnDRIVE Optogenetics Laboratory. His research team is working to find a neural “switch” that can turn off relapse behavior to help people in recovery to stay abstinent.

March 27: **Jazmin Camchong** is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry who integrates brain stimulation, cognitive training, and neuroimaging techniques to investigate whether brain networks associated with addiction relapse may be altered to support abstinence. **Alik Widge** is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Director of the Translational Neuroengineering Laboratory, a member of the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction, and a MnDRIVE Neuromodulation Scholar. His research involves the development of brain-sensing therapeutic devices that respond in real time to regulate the circuits of mental illness.

April 3: **Anna Zilverstand** is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and a member of the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction. Her research focuses on brain imaging of neural circuits and big data analyses. The goal: to develop individualized approaches to addiction treatment. **Julia Lemos** is an Assistant Professor of Neuroscience and a member of the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction. Her laboratory works to understand how chronic or traumatic stress renders the brain vulnerable to disease states such as depression, anxiety, and addiction. This research will inform new therapies for addiction.

Offered in cooperation with the Departments of Neuroscience and Psychiatry, the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction, and the brain conditions area of MnDRIVE (Minnesota Discovery and Research Innovation Economy Initiative).

A project of the Dana Foundation, Brain Awareness Week is the global campaign to increase awareness of the progress and benefits of brain research.
The Double Act of Yeats and Beckett: Two Irish Writers Compared

Thursday, March 14, 6–8 p.m., $55 (LLX161)

Often seen superficially as contrasting figures, the indefatigable William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and the formidable Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) have much more in common than is typically recognized. While one could be called a mystic modernist and the other an existential humorist, these two Dublin-born Anglo-Irish authors from Protestant backgrounds are Nobel Laureates in Literature—questing authors who paradoxically made the failure of their aspiration the source of their inspiration. In fact, both writers articulated quests for a unitary and redeeming vision (whether in love, memory, or spiritual transcendence) that was elusive and that dissolved into scorn, satire, parody, or regret.

One received his Nobel Prize in 1923 as a celebrated Irish nationalist poet just as Ireland emerged into the modern world as a postcolonial state; the other received his Nobel Prize in 1969 as an existential writer in exile from an Ireland that his younger self had scorned for failing to liberate its imagination. Both argue with Ireland and neither can evade it fully.

In this seminar, we’ll examine how Yeats and Beckett are a double act whose works mirror one another’s obsessions and cultural themes.

LearningLife seminars embrace Socrates’s belief in inquiry and exchange; they include both lecture and critical discussion.

Patrick O’Donnell grew up in Dublin where he attended University College Dublin (his PhD thesis: The Irish Roots of the Guthrie Theater). He currently teaches English at Normandale Community College and is Director of Education at Saint Paul’s Celtic Junction Arts Center, where he edits the online magazine The Celtic Junction Arts Review.

Moving Beyond Perceived Limitations: Improv and Mental Health

Saturday, March 16, 1–4 p.m., $70 (LLX159)

Anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy can rob us of our vitality, making us feel like spectators rather than participants in social interactions. But did you know that improvisation can help you discover personal strengths and move beyond what you perceive to be your limitations? Fact: Embracing just a few improv foundations is a surefire way to manage your anxiety, rejuvenate your self-worth, and improve and sustain your mental health.

Offered in conjunction with Brain Awareness Week (March 11–17), this course provides a supportive, task-focused environment in which we’ll explore the physiology of anxiety and the tools that can help us realign cognitive distortions and ease inertia and helplessness—in essence, tools to help rewire our immediate responses in order to better manage dread and its demons.

Using a series of fun, carefully calibrated exercises, you’ll learn to recreate and control circumstances that feel overwhelming, and enjoy the liberation that comes from letting go, the power that accompanies living in the moment, and the humor that emerges when we embrace our vulnerabilities and self-consciousness.

We’ll also discuss the research that supports the value of stepping into anxiety with curiosity and confidence, allowing us to both honor our impulses and reframe them.

Jim Robinson, PhD, University of Southern California, teaches psychology at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. He is a sought-after improv teacher and performer, a ten-year veteran of the Brave New Workshop, and a founder of Table Salt Productions. When not on stage, Robinson is a communications specialist whose clients include Cargill, General Mills, Bush Foundation, and the University of Minnesota.

A project of the Dana Foundation, Brain Awareness Week is the global campaign to increase awareness of the progress and benefits of brain research.
The Common Good

Mondays, March 18, April 1, 15 (three meetings) 6:30-8:30 p.m., $135 (LLX165)

What is the common good? What happened to the common good? Can the common good be restored? This course looks unabashedly at these questions and considers what political commentator Robert Reich calls “the very essence of any society or nation.”

We’ll begin with a history of the common good in the United States and the ideals now embedded in law and institution that form the underpinnings of American identity. These consist of shared values, the norms we abide by voluntarily, and the ideals we seek to achieve.

Next we’ll examine the decline of the common good in American life over the past half century, with particular emphasis on the present day. What are some examples of this decline? How have vices (greed, aggression, selfishness) become virtues to be admired? What exemplifies these trends?

And finally, we’ll discuss whether the common good can be restored. How might leaders rebuild trust in the institutions they oversee? What structural changes would engender an increased sense of connectivity? Is there any such thing as Truth? Justice?

According to Reich, this last question calls for an assessment of the moral obligations of citizenship; careful consideration of how we relate to honor, shame, patriotism, truth, and the meaning of leadership; and an expansion of America’s moral imagination.


Larry Litecky, PhD, University of Minnesota, is past president of Century College, a position he held for 12 years. Prior to that he taught Humanities and American Studies at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, where he served four terms as president of the college’s Faculty Association. Litecky currently works as a college Leadership Coach through Achieving the Dream.

Genomes: Understanding Your Body’s Ancestry

Mondays, March 25, June 10, 17 (three meetings)
Session one: Continuing Education and Conference Center, 6:30–8:30 p.m.
Sessions two and three: 50 Coffey Hall, Saint Paul campus, 3-5 p.m.
$135 + genome service fee (LLX124)

This unique course will introduce you to, well, you. To participate, students should order the “Ancestry Only” personal genome service from 23andMe no later than April 8, 2019. The service (around $99) will detail a significant fraction of the genetic variations within your genome, and we’ll explore these in the second part of the course. It is important to read closely the terms of service and privacy statement at 23andMe prior to registering, and to consider the possible effects of learning such information.

First, we’ll look at the connection between our unique human genome sequence and what it reveals about our regions of origin. The instructor will survey how genomes vary between individuals, how to identify variations that trace to particular regions, and how this information may be used to estimate when an ancestor from a region distinct from that of the majority of our ancestors became a family member.

Later, we will focus on identifying and detailing the Neanderthal-derived gene variants that most of us carry and exploring your ancestors’ regions of origin.

The final session will be dedicated to using your genome sequence to illuminate relationships with your contemporary relatives, including how to identify genetic similarity between a parent and child, and what that looks like in contrast to genetic similarities with siblings, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

David Matthes is a Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Departments of Biology Teaching and Learning, and Genetics, Cell Biology, and Development at the University of Minnesota. He is a recipient of the College of Biological Science’s Most Engaging Professor Award and the Dagley-Kirkwood Undergraduate Education Award.
The Normandy Invasion: A 75th Anniversary Retrospective

Tuesdays, April 9, 16 (two meetings), 6:30–8:30 p.m., $95 (LX163)

Perhaps one of the most dramatic events of World War II came with the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, when approximately 156,000 US, British, and Canadian forces landed on five separate beaches along France's Normandy coast and forever changed the course of the war. As the world marks the 75th anniversary of D-Day, this retrospective provides details of how the historic invasion was achieved.

To begin, we'll look at the history of Norman invasions: the Vikings, the Norman invasion of England in 1066, and the subsequent projects for a cross-channel invasion that were never carried out. We'll then examine the extent of planning and preparation for the Normandy Invasion (aka Operation Overlord), which illustrates how industrialization came to dominate warfare in the 20th century.

Even with astute planning and extensive preparation, the outcome of Overlord was not secure until after six weeks of momentum inland, when the Allies broke out of the Normandy beachhead and advanced to the liberation of Paris (August 26). This then led to the surrender of Germany on May 8, some 11 months following D-Day and what was to become the largest of all amphibious military assaults in history.

John Kim Munholland is Professor Emeritus of the University of Minnesota where he taught courses on modern European history for 42 years. A frequent LearningLife instructor, he also is a Smithsonian Journeys Expert whose past and forthcoming teaching excursions include those to Normandy.

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Poetry: A ReIntroduction

Thursdays, April 11, 25, May 9 (three meetings), 6–8 p.m., $135 (LLX162)

It comes from the Greek poetica, which is derived from the verb poiein, “to make.” It’s also one of the most ancient and durable art forms. So why does poetry get such a bad rap?

While it’s true that poetry is sometimes taught in a way that makes people feel intimidated, it’s also true that poetry has long been a reservoir to help people understand and voice their relationships with the natural world and one another. (Fact: children throughout the world speak poetry long before they can speak complete sentences in prose.)

A reintroduction of sorts, this course will guide participants through three highly accessible poetry collections: Mary Oliver’s Thirst (April 11), Audre Lorde’s The Black Unicorn (April 25), and Tracy Smith’s Wade in the Water (May 9).

Each of these authors has a distinctive style and voice and despite differing subject matter, a shared passion for finding the right words to express what they have to say and to connect with their readers.

As Professor Emerita Toni McNaron discusses specific poems and highlights alternative ways to approach poetry, she also hopes to “chip away at the resistance and fear associated with little black words made into lines on a page,” so that poetry is seen not as something to be explicated but to be enjoyed.

Required: Mary Oliver, Thirst (Beacon Press, 2006); Audre Lorde, The Black Unicorn (W. W. Norton & Company, reissue 1995); Tracy Smith, Wade in the Water (Graywolf Press, 2018).

Toni McNaron, see bio on page 5.

Galileo on Trial in Italy

Wednesday, April 17, 6:30–8:30 p.m., $55 (LLX167)

Have you ever wondered what Galileo found so fascinating about the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the study of mathematics and science? Or why he was willing to risk his career, his freedom, and even his life for science?

During the Renaissance famous sculptors, artists, and painters used mathematics and science to depict history and religion. Others used their talents to honor those in power. It was also during this time that scientists began to develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. While exciting, this fostered a clash between religion, art, mathematics, science, and politics.

In this seminar we’ll learn how Galileo and his now-renowned contributions to math and science came into conflict with arguably the most powerful institution in Europe, and perhaps the world, during post-Renaissance Italy.

And while Rome, the Vatican, and the Church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva provided a backdrop to the end of Galileo’s brilliant career, we’ll reflect on what themes and issues surrounding the great 17th-century thinker might be manifested in today’s world.

LearningLife seminars embrace Socrates’s belief in inquiry and exchange; they include both lecture and critical discussion.

Laura Coffin Koch, PhD, University of Minnesota, is a Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Mathematics in the University’s College of Education and Human Development who leads an annual Freshman Seminar Abroad to Italy during which students visit Pisa, Florence, Rome, and reenact the trial of Galileo through debate and discussion.
The Fallen One: Verdi’s La Traviata

First performed in Venice in 1853, Giuseppe Verdi’s opera La Traviata (*The Fallen One*) maintains an unassailable position as one of the best-loved and most frequently performed operas in the world.

Based on *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias or Camille*), a novel written by Alexandre Dumas (the younger) just a few years earlier, the opera is notable for conjuring considerable audience sympathy for the sufferings of its main character, Violetta, a disreputable Parisian courtesan dying of tuberculosis who achieves moral redemption by renouncing her true love in order to salvage his family’s honor.

Part of *La Traviata’s* initial appeal derived from its traditional staging, contemporary with the opera’s date of composition, whereas most operas of the era were set in distant times and often difficult for “modern” audiences to relate to.

However, even today accessibility remains key, and opera novices and connoisseurs alike appreciate the easy-to-follow love story and endless variety of memorable musical ideas and motifs. Of particular note is the significant vocal demand put on the lead female singer, whose extravagant and florid passagework represents the last word in the operatic style known as bel canto.

Tickets to the Minnesota Opera’s production of *La Traviata* are not included in tuition. However, registered participants will receive information for a 20 percent discount on tickets to the performance of their choice.

Daniel Freeman is a musicologist and pianist who has taught courses in music history at the University of Minnesota and the Smithsonian Institution. He is considered the world’s leading historian in the field of 18th-century Czech music.

*Offered in cooperation with the Minnesota Opera.*

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The past two years have been met with tremendous change in the protection of human health and the environment and nowhere is this more apparent than at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Established in 1972, the EPA is charged with protecting human health and environmental systems by regulating air and water quality, drinking water quality, pesticide and herbicide use, and contamination and emission cleanups. Yet recently it has begun to move in a direction diametrically opposed to its Congressionally mandated mission.

Given the complexity and breadth of this mandate, Congress established more than one dozen scientific advisory committees to guide evidence-based EPA decisions in keeping with the best available science.

But despite opposing advice, a number of rules and programs have recently been rolled back to the benefit of chemical manufacturers and the oil, gas, and coal industries, and the detriment of human and environmental health.

Of equal concern are the changes that have been made to the EPA’s advisory committees, which have been disbanded or repopulated with industry representatives who support a deregulation agenda and have no background in gathering evidence-based data provided by independent researchers and scientists.

This seminar will detail how scientific advice is generated and used to support decisions at the EPA, and how changes to the system are being bolstered by selective and dubious scientific evidence, therefore undermining the integrity of science and the health of the earth and its inhabitants.

Deborah Swackhamer is Professor Emerita of Science, Technology, and Public Policy at Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and Environmental Health Sciences in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota, where she directed the Water Resources Center for 12 years. She served as Chair of the US EPA Board of Scientific Counselors during 2015–2018 and currently serves on the National Academy of Sciences Board of Environmental Science and Toxicology.
New Program Fund

Unique individuals, yes, but LearningLife participants may also be identified by their collective sense of wonder, and their unmistakable drive to learn. Also a trait: the infectious energy that radiates when they share this cycle of learning with their LearningLife peers and friends and family.

It’s easy, then, to understand why we are proud of the work we do and why, at every step, we believe it to be a worthwhile and joyous enterprise. We hope you think so, too.

The College recently established a fund to provide general program support for LearningLife and Headliners, and it’s our hope that this will help us to serve you for many years to come!

For more information, visit give.umn.edu/giveto/learninglife.