IDEA LAB

IdeaLab is a community of makers, scholars, and teachers committed to traversing and transcending traditional disciplines and course structures in order to engage students and faculty in embodied learning experiences. Our programs encourage risk, collaboration, imagination, and prototyping of ideas. IdeaLab courses have innovative, experimental structures and may be cross-listed in any — or many — other departments.

Course Listing

IL 151 - IdeaLab Special Topics
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized introductory course that has an experimental structure that is different from traditional courses. This course will have one of the following characteristics: a different/re-imagined student/professor dynamic, a new temporal course structure, a subject that is between disciplinary boundaries, a new or emerging field, or a time sensitive subject.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.

IL 161 - IdeaLab Special Topics Pop-up
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized introductory course that responds to a time sensitive subject. This course will respond to a major event, a situation where conditions are changing quickly or a subject that may disappear in the future.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.

IL 201 - PourMore: Skidmore Lava Project
Credits: 2
An exploration of how art "is made" and science "is done". In this course, students will learn how basalt melts, flows, and solidifies under different conditions. Students will study the physical and chemical properties of basalt lava and rock; they will learn how to create the tremendous heat needed to melt basalt using a furnace; and how to manage the flow and solidification of lava. Students will work in small groups to explore some aspect of basalt lava through a series of experiments during the semester. In addition, the course will culminate in a community “Lava Pour” event that will be managed and run by students.

IL 204 - Artificial Self
Credits: 2
Scholars and corporations are increasingly concerned with (a) creating effective artificial intelligence; and (b) creating new opportunities for human consciousness/selfhood to exist within virtual/digital spaces. These joint efforts mean that our world now includes technologies that meaningfully blur the boundaries between self/not-self, and even between biological/artificial intelligences. What are the boundaries between human and machine; between sentience and oblivion; between body and avatar; between innovation and mimickry? In other words: Can machines think? This course focuses on understanding the stakes and consequences of the development of increasingly compelling AI, metaverses, avatars, and programs. To do this, we will understand major debates related to selfhood, consciousness, self-awareness, and sentience. We will work with these ideas using academic readings across the cognitive sciences, including from linguistics, computer science, and psychology. However, understanding the artificial self requires “primary source” research too; we will experience artificial “self”hoods via structured direct engagement with AI chatbots and virtual worlds. We will use the tools of the virtual world to telematically interact with distance scholars/activists in shared activities for understanding virtual selves. Finally, we will partner with the Cognitive Science Society’s “Can machines think?” contest to judge their international and multidisciplinary submissions of materials explaining major debates and issues related to artificial consciousness and selfhood.

IL 206 - Gardenside Sustainability Solutions
Credits: 1
An interdisciplinary examination of fundamental sustainability concepts (including community-based climate solutions), designed to foster a sense of community and provide students with service-based experiential and experimental learning opportunities. Along with weekly mini-lectures and academic reading discussions, students will participate in tours and hands-on “work days” in the North Woods, Community Garden, and on-campus compost site. Students will also examine infrastructure, institutional systems, and personal behaviors with a sustainability lens as related to their lived experience in the residence hall and on campus. Open only to (and required of) students residing in the "Gardenside" sustainability special interest housing.

IL 251 - IdeaLab Special Topics
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized intermediate course that has an experimental structure that is different from traditional courses. This course will have one of the following characteristics: a different/re-imagined student/professor dynamic, a new temporal course structure, a subject that is between disciplinary boundaries, a new or emerging field, or a time sensitive subject.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.

IL 258 - Allies in Learning and Teaching
Credits: 2
An exploration of the theory and practice of critical pedagogy. Participants in this course will understand and analyze foundational works in the areas of democratic, abolitionist, feminist, queer, and critical teaching and learning methods. We will continually apply the insights and interventions of these works to concrete contexts, including but not limited to college classrooms, community groups, and organizing campaigns. Working with key texts and bringing them to bear on our lived environment, we will become more active and critical learners in settings at and beyond Skidmore. Course participants will practice mediation and facilitation skills in classroom settings.

IL 261 - IdeaLab Special Topics Pop-up
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized intermediate course that responds to a time sensitive subject. This course will respond to a major event, a situation where conditions are changing quickly or a subject that may disappear in the future.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.

IL 305 - Robotics
Credits: 3
An introduction to modern robotics. Students will design and construct autonomous mobile robots and manipulator arms. Topics include ethics of automation, actuators and drives, motor characteristics, motor control, sensors, linkages and joints, mechanical advantage, and error correction.
Prerequisites: *PY 213 or CS 318 or instructor permission.*
Note(s): Fulfills Senior Coda requirement.

IL 306 - Tabletop Game Design
Credits: 4
A project driven course on how to design and prototype tabletop games, including card games, board games, and role-playing games. Through readings, discussion sessions, and various assignments, students will learn about theoretical, logistical, and professional aspects of game design and publication. Lab sessions will often be spent within the IdeaLab, working collaboratively to craft and test games using the equipment and supplies there. By the end of the course, every student will have had the opportunity to design at least 4 different playable games (across multiple genres) and receive extensive feedback on each design.

IL 351 - IdeaLab Special Topics
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized advanced course that has an experimental structure that is different from traditional courses. This course will have one of the following characteristics: a different/re-imagined student/professor dynamic, a new temporal course structure, a subject that is between disciplinary boundaries, a new or emerging field, or a time sensitive subject.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.

IL 361 - IdeaLab Special Topics Pop-up
Credits: 1-4
A topically organized advanced course that responds to a time sensitive subject. This course will respond to a major event, a situation where conditions are changing quickly or a subject that may disappear in the future.
Note(s): May be repeated for credit with a different topic.