



Course

FALL QUARTER 2012

HUM 597A

SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY IN QUESTION (1 credit, C/NC)

Instructors: Celia Lowe (Anthropology and International Studies) and
Gaymon Bennett (Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center)

Course Meeting Dates and Times:

Monday, October 29, 9:30-11:20 am, Communications 202
Monday, November 5, 9:30-11:20 am, Communications 202
Tuesday, November 13, 9:00 am-6:00 pm, Communications 202*
Wednesday, November 14, 9:00 am-1:00 pm, Communications 202*
Monday, November 19, 9:30-11:20 am, Communications 202

**Synthetic Biology Conference - times subject to change*

Designed for graduate students across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professions, this course aims to prepare students to engage with and reflect on a two-day conference on “Synthetic Biology in Question,” to be held at the Simpson Center for the Humanities on November 13 and 14, 2012.

Over the last decade, engineers, social scientists, funders, and the media have established synthetic biology as a prominent new brand of bio-engineering, one promising the routinized and standardized engineering of living systems. The brand’s success has turned on its claims to technical novelty and a re-imagined future of health, wealth and security, as well as the fact that proponents offer a unified story to justify and draw together divergent research programs—from the modularization of genetic circuits to the production of biofuels. Crucially, synthetic biology’s rise to prominence has been facilitated by the sustained engagement of scholars from the human and social sciences, who have helped make talk of ethics, openness, and security part of synthetic biology’s self-definition.

This micro-seminar will examine synthetic biology’s rise to prominence, and pose the question of the extent to which synthetic biology may be exemplary of the dynamics of new engineering and scientific subfields as well as the political, ethical, and cultural conditions of their rise and stabilization. It will examine the ways in which social scientists, philosophers, anthropologists, and others have involved themselves in synthetic biology’s formation, and raise the question of the ethics of such attempts at collaboration.

“Synthetic Biology in Question” is part of Biological Futures in a Globalized World , a jointly sponsored project of the University of Washington and the Center for Biological Futures at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.