



Friendship

I always felt that the great high privilege relief and comfort of friendship was that one had to explain nothing. -Katherine Mansfield

Here, Mansfield states one of the primary ideals we hold about friendship, that it trumps all other relationships and is uncorrupted by them, that each person brings out the best in the other and can anticipate the other's thoughts almost before they are formed. But the other side of "having to explain nothing" is that by explaining nothing, we have apparently neglected to create a broadly understood and accepted language for thinking about friendship. This program is designed to call into question these relationships that are usually taken for granted, but hold a central place in our lives.

We will study a wide variety of friendships: of the past and the present; across age differences; across cultural settings; within other cultures; male friendships; female friendships; childhood best friends. We will read about friendship as explored by classical authors such as Aristotle, Cicero, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Cervantes and Austen. Although the primary concerns of the novel are family and romantic love, some contemporary novelists are interested in friendship as well. Toni Morrison's *Sula*, about a friendship between two black girls, Jonathan Lethem's *Fortress of Solitude*, in which two young men—one black and one white—befriend each other in Brooklyn, and Jose María Arguedas' *Deep Rivers*, which discusses formative relationships among boys in a Peruvian boarding school, are some examples. Filmmakers are especially good on friendship, as all those "buddy movies" and "road movies" attest. We will view films such as *Thelma and Louise*, *Sideways*, *My Life As A Dog*, *Harold and Maude* and *Central Station*.

After an initial focus on individual friendships, we will expand our studies to the communities from which friendship groups emerge and in which they are embedded—groups like Latino communities in the U.S., sports fans and sports teams, people who chat on the Internet and communities of scientists.

Students will explore their own and others' experience of friendship by writing (both fiction and exposition), by interviewing, and by considering theoretical lenses through which to look at a variety of phenomena, including friendship. Throughout our studies, we will be guided by these questions and others we'll invent as we go along: What cultural work does friendship do, in our lives and in societies? What makes a good friend? What makes a friendship last, or not last? How can we best find friends? Where do online friendships stand in our description? What happens when online friends meet face-to-face? Is there anything about friendship now, in the U.S., that we'd like to change?

Students will develop skills in writing, interpretation, oral history, research, critical thinking, film analysis and cross cultural perspectives.

Level: Core

Enrollment: 69

Credits: 16 / quarter

Credits awarded in: writing, cultural anthropology, oral history, philosophy, and film studies