The College Seminar on “Faith, Doubt, and Reason” will explore questions of both existential and scholarly interest. What are the varieties of faith? What obstacles exist to faith? What thoughts and experiences trigger doubt? In what ways do doubt and reason undermine faith? In what ways do they reinforce faith? How might we distinguish and evaluate different forms of reason? By which criteria might we determine the validity of conflicting faith traditions? What roles do faith and doubt play in the diverse disciplines of the College of Arts and Letters? What are the roles of faith, doubt, and reason in the conduct of discussion? The seminar will explore faith and doubt not only in relation to God and religious questions, but also in relation to one’s sense of self, trust in other persons, belief in institutions, and identification with values and ideas.

The works that will guide our discussions will come from each of the College’s divisions. Readings in the humanities will be taken from such works and authors as Plato, Lessing, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Weil, Jonas, and John Paul II. Readings from the social sciences will include classical authors such as Freud or Comte as well as contemporary writers. The arts are likely to include a museum visit, a theater performance, and films by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Woody Allen.

The course will be student-centered, with considerable focus on discussion. In addition to various writing assignments, the course will include student-led discussions, classroom debates, oral interviews, and oral exams, all of which will be designed to help students develop the capacities to formulate clear questions, listen carefully and attentively, explore ideas through dialogue, argue for and against differing positions, and express their thoughts eloquently and persuasively. If the course brings as many questions as answers, another course goal, helping students recognize nuance and complexity, will have been met.