Course Description:
This survey course examines British literature and culture of the “long” eighteenth century, c. 1660-1800. This vital period sees the invention of the modern British nation and the expansion of the British empire; scientific and philosophical investigations of the natural world and the human mind; the growth of a capitalist, consumerist economy, founded on slavery and the extraction of resources from colonies; the development of radical thought about freedom and equality, which spurs political revolution, the movement to abolish slavery, and feminist dissent; the emergence of a public sphere of rational debate and satirical critique, as well as a transformed experience of the private sphere: family, friendship, and the feeling body.

Texts that address these issues, among others, will provide us with the opportunity to think historically about literature: how can we account for the emergence of new styles of writing, or the falling from fashion of others; what gives coherence to cultural texts from this span of time; and in what ways did these authors shape the world we now read, write, and inhabit?

As a participant in this course, you will:

— learn about authors, texts, and ideas that are central to British literature and culture, c. 1660-1800. Authors include: Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Gray, William Cowper, Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Immanuel Kant.

— hone skills of close, critical reading and formal analysis by studying narrative, figurative language, and generic conventions in a range of poetry and fiction, as well as works not typically considered literary, such as scientific and philosophical treatises, the periodical essay, letters, diaries, and biography.

— interpret cultural texts from a historical perspective, exploring the ways they comment on and even direct change in the political, economic, and social contexts from which they emerge.