The vampire is one of the most popular and enduring images in the world, giving rise to hundreds of monster movies around the globe every year, not to mention novels, short stories, plays, TV shows, and commercial merchandise. Yet the Western vampire image that we know from the film, television, and literature of today is very different from its eastern European progenitor. Nina Auerbach has said that "every age creates the vampire that it needs." In this course we will explore the eastern European origins of the vampire, similar entities in other cultures that predate them, and how the vampire in its look, nature, vulnerabilities, and threat has changed over the centuries.

This approach will provide us with the means to learn about the geography, village and urban cultures, traditional social structure, and religions of eastern Europe; the nature and manifestations of Evil and the concept of Limited Good; physical, temporal, and societal boundaries and ritual passage that accompany them; and major historical and intellectual periods (the settlement of Europe, the Age of Reason, Romanticism, Neo-classicism, the Enlightenment, the Victorian era, up to today). We will examine how the vampire first manifested itself in European literature and how it "shape-shifted" its way into the entertainment (and commercial) media of today, through numerous and various readings of fictional, ethnographic, and scholarly works, the analysis of folklore materials, as well as the viewing of movies, television shows, and Internet sites, not only from the U.S. and Europe but from around the world.

By the end of the course, students will be able to discuss the origins, classifications, functions, natures, and evolution of the vampire and what that can tell us about historical periods and our own contemporary cultures.