



Thursday, November 3, 2011

General Education and I-Series Course Submission and Review

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CMLT275 World Literature by Women

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General Information

Title World Literature by Women

Course Number CMLT275

College ARHU - Arts and Humanities

Department English

Submitted By Thomas Colborn Moser Jr

CORE Information

CORE Fundamental Studies No

CORE Distributive/Advanced Studies (HL) - Literature

CORE Diversity Yes

General Education Information

Fundamental Studies None

Distributive Studies Humanities

Diversity Understanding Plural Societies

Course Questions

General Questions

Please give a brief description of the course:

Titling a course "World Literature by Women" creates a series of problems. Practically, how can one design a course that exposes students to "world literature" when the length of one semester wouldn't give us time to address adequately the literature of even a single nation? How can reading a single piece of fiction from a specific culture allow us to draw any one conclusion about that nation's literature or people? If making these assessments based on such a small sampling would be unfair, then what makes this a useful method of inquiry? Likewise, why study literature by women? Is it valid to decide to read a work of literature simply because of the sex of the author? Is there a female voice that we can isolate and evaluate as being representative of "women's experience"? Is women's experience that uniform? In this class, I hope that we will always be mindful of these questions, attempting to analyze these works for how they represent the cultures about which and within which they were written, but also being careful not to assume that these works tell the entire story about a culture or the female experience. Our primary focus will be works of contemporary literature, the majority of which will be postcolonial. Some of the questions we may pose include: What are the particular challenges of being a woman in a patriarchal culture? What additional challenges are posed by being "native" in a land that's been colonized by others? What happens to culture in the aftermath of colonization and/or war? Likewise, what happens to culture as various peoples spread across the globe, often into more "modern" societies? Do these cultural losses or changes have a particular effect upon women and/or the formation of identity? What stories can literature tell that a straight history cannot? How do literature's formal properties contribute to an enhanced understanding of female experience around the globe?

Please list any pre- or co-requisites for this course:

None

If there are pre- or co-requisites, please justify them with respect to their appropriateness for a General Education course:

N/A

Please list any restrictions (e.g. majors only) placed on this course:

None

What is the approximate course size (students/academic year)?

250

Please describe how student learning will be assessed (i.e. exams, homework, papers, group projects, etc.):

Quizzes**: 15% Paper One: 20% Paper Two: 25% Midterm Exam: 15% Final Exam: 25% = 100% of course grade

**Approximately twelve quizzes will be administered. Your quiz grade will be calculated based on your ten best quiz scores. The lowest scores will be dropped.

Comments on the course that you feel may be useful for the review process. Also, if this is an existing course that you are planning on making changes to via VPAC (i.e. changing the title), please list those proposed changes here:

This is a long-standing and popular course that we are submitting without major changes. It is also offered as WMST275.

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are phrased as "*At the completion of this course, students will be able to...*". Answers are expected to demonstrate how the course will (1) give students the ability to meet the learning objective and (2) determine that students were successful in meeting the learning objective.

Learning outcomes in **this color** are **REQUIRED**

Humanities

Courses in the humanities disciplines study history and the genres of human creativity, and they include courses in the practice of architecture and the visual, literary and performing and creative arts. Under "Humanities," students will find courses in cultures and literatures in any language, creative writing, art, architecture, art history, classics, history, linguistics, philosophy, and the performing arts (dance, music, theatre) and their histories.

Must address **at least 4** of the following Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students will be able to...

...demonstrate familiarity and facility with fundamental terminology and concepts in a specific topical area in the humanities.

Each text of the course is discussed, examined, and critiqued in terms of its specific historical, cultural, and literary context, as well as in terms of the overarching frameworks of the course: feminism and postcolonialism. Since one of the goals of the course is to provide students with an understanding of the central issues in women's and postcolonial studies as these approaches are useful and modified by each context, the course will move between close readings of the texts in relation to and in conversation with broader concerns with gender, sexuality, politics, and aesthetics. Since gender, race, and nation are central issues in many of these texts, the study of world literature by women, necessarily involves sustained attention to the production of these categories and the way that history is both revealed and contested in these literary texts. Students demonstrate a familiarity with these concepts by making in-class presentations on relevant keywords (race, class, gender, sexuality, aesthetics, politics). This process will involve research that will expose them to various approaches to the keywords in different national and linguistic contexts. Students will be assessed in their quizzes, exams, and papers on their ability to define and correctly deploy these keywords.

...demonstrate understanding of the methods used by scholars in a specific field in the humanities.

Teaching students how to understand and analyze representation in literary texts is among the primary goals of this course. Students generally think of a literary text as a transparent reflection of "reality," which can be gleaned from reading the surface of the text. In the context of a world literature class, it is particularly important to teach students how to avoid generalizations as well as the assumption that terms and categories like, "women," "literature," "the world," "history,"

“politics,” and “the literary” have stable meanings across time and place. For this reason, students learn how to conduct close readings of the texts responsibly by taking into account the specifically literary and formal aspects of a text, as well as its cultural, historical, and aesthetic context. These skills are modeled for the students in lectures and reinforced in class discussion that requires students to draw from the texts as the basis for their comments. Students are assessed on their understanding as demonstrated in papers and the final exams essay. In this course students are also taught to think about canon formation and the politics of deciding what is included and excluded in the establishment of the field of “World Literature.” This last is assessed in a final exam essay, which asks students to develop and give rationales for a course that they would propose.

...demonstrate critical thinking in the evaluation of sources and arguments in scholarly works, or in the evaluation of approaches and techniques in the visual, literary, or performing arts.

...describe how language use is related to ways of thinking, cultural heritage, and cultural values.

In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argued for the significance of language as a vehicle of culture and the importance of engaging critically with the legacy of colonial languages in postcolonial societies. It would be impossible to engage with issues of gender, race, nation, and class without taking into account issues related to translation, language choice, and multilingualism. Students discuss and have quizzes on reading that directly relate to these questions. They are expected to demonstrate a concern with these issues in close readings of texts, whether or not they were written in English.

...conduct research on a topic in the humanities using a variety of sources and technologies.

...demonstrate the ability to formulate a thesis related to a specific topic in the humanities and to support the thesis with evidence and argumentation.

Students are required to write two analytical papers with a clearly defined thesis. This is an example of a topic from Megan Monserez's class, which outlines the topic as well as how to craft a good thesis statement: The works we've read since spring break concern themselves with (1) the ways in which personal lives are affected by the political*, (2) the powers and dangers of storytelling, and (3), related, the creation of identity through family history. Choose ONE of the topics above and apply it to any TWO of the works below: Ch'oe, "Whisper Yet" Kingston, "No Name Woman" Melville, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* Allende, *The House of the Spirits* Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* Argue for how you think this topic plays out in the texts. We already can assume that the topic is present in both (because otherwise you would have selected better works to write about), so be very careful that you don't just make a list that points out places where you find the topic arising—really look at what specific conclusion you think the text wants the reader to draw about it. It would be interesting to have a thesis like, "Danticat and Ch'oe focus on characters who use storytelling to help create personal identity and to preserve unpopular secret histories. However, while both works believe X, one believes that storytelling can only have Y effect on identity while the other believes that it does Z." It would not be interesting to have a thesis like, "Storytelling is important to Allende and Danticat" and then just list every example of storytelling in the work. Your goal is NOT to compare the plots; it's to compare the larger ideas. It's not interesting to note that, in two books, it's the youngest girls who write down history—unless you think that each work is using this to say something important about writing / being a woman / etc. Quote the works frequently (at least once per paragraph) to let the author's own words support your argument. Make sure that at some point, you place the works in conversation with each other, noting the similarities and differences between each work's stance. Even if their points of view are similar, they won't be identical, so take care to tease out the nuances that make their points different. Each individual argument that you make about a work does not have to have a counterpoint in the other work, but it might help you

generate ideas to see what happens when you try to put them head-to-head. I strongly recommend going back and forth between the works rather than writing about one and then the other. Overall, a good essay won't oversimplify each author's stance, but will instead reveal anything that makes the subject complicated and then analyze it thoughtfully. It likewise won't force connections between the works that don't exist, but won't be afraid to look for these connections in previously unexplored places. *Consider "the political" rather broadly: this can relate to women's rights, colonization, ethnic or national prejudice, accepted norms of female sexuality, war/political or economic conflict, etc. Feel free to propose something to me if you're not sure whether it will work.

...demonstrate understanding of the creative process and techniques used by practitioners in a specific field of the visual, literary, or performing arts.

Understanding Plural Societies

Life in a globally competitive society of the twenty-first century requires an ability to comprehend both theoretical and practical dimensions of human difference. From that perspective, Understanding Plural Societies is the centerpiece of the University's Diversity requirement. Courses in this category speak to both the foundations—cultural, material, psychological, historical, social, and biological—of human difference and the operation or function of plural societies.

Must address **at least 4** of the following Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students will be able to...

...demonstrate understanding of the basis of human diversity: biological, cultural, historical, social, economic, or ideological.

As described in the Humanities section of this proposal, each text of the course is discussed, examined, and critiqued in terms of its specific historical, cultural, and literary context, as well as in terms of the overarching frameworks of the course: feminism and postcolonialism. Since one of the goals of the course is to provide students with an understanding of the central issues in women's and postcolonial studies as these approaches are useful and modified by each context, the course will move between close readings of the texts in relation to and in conversation with broader concerns with gender, sexuality, politics, and aesthetics as defined and experienced variously in different contexts.. Since gender, race, and nation are central issues in many of these texts, the study of world literature by women, necessarily involves sustained attention to the production of these categories and the way that history is both revealed and contested in these literary texts. The readings, lectures, and discussion are all oriented to making these connections and students are assessed on their ability to navigate the tensions between local concerns and global ones into their written work for the class.

...demonstrate understanding of fundamental concepts and methods that produce knowledge about plural societies.

This course uses approaches drawn from women's and postcolonial studies, approaches that have as their center critical attention to the workings of patriarchy and colonialism and the inequalities that these systems give rise to. The writers studied in this course all address forms of oppression peculiar to women in a globalized world in the aftermath of colonialism. They address the effects of conflicting personal and social notions of gender and sexuality: violence: grief and loss; and the link between personal and historical traumas. Students demonstrate their understanding by engaging with these issues in class discussion, papers, and exams.

...explicate the processes that create or fail to create just, productive, egalitarian, and collaborative societies.

This course uses approaches drawn from women's and postcolonial studies, approaches that have as their center critical attention to the workings of patriarchy and colonialism and the inequalities that these systems give rise to.

...analyze forms and traditions of thought or expression in relation to cultural, historical, political, and social contexts, as, for example, dance, foodways, literature, music, and philosophical and religious traditions.

CMLT 275 is organized around understanding literary texts in their historical, social and political as well as aesthetic contexts. Each text is taught and discussed as embedded in its historical period and aesthetic movement, as well as in explicit engagement with other forms of cultural expression, including folklore in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, music in *The Namesake*, and religion in "The Management of Grief."

...articulate how particular policies create or inhibit the formation and functioning of plural societies.

...use a comparative, intersectional, or relational framework to examine the experiences, cultures, or histories of two or more social groups or constituencies within a single society or across societies, and within a single historical timeframe or across historical time.

The texts in this class are drawn from the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia. The texts themselves stage multicultural, multilingual, and transnational encounters that demand comparative and intersectional frameworks for analysis. Course readings and discussions are arranged to highlight the ways two or more groups can be "in conversation" with others within texts or across geographical and temporal boundaries. Students take on these issues in assigned paper topics that ask them to compare writers from different groups on topics like loss and mourning, displacement and migration, trauma and memory.

...use information technologies to access research and communicate effectively about plural societies.

Course Syllabus

View the course syllabus [here](#).

Note: Your browser may download the syllabus, in which case you will have to open it in a separate program, i.e. Adobe Acrobat or Micro\$oft Word, in order to view it.

Another Note: Some people are uploading Word .docx files (newer Word format). If your computer doesn't have a fairly recent version of Word installed (2007 or later), your computer won't know what to do with a .docx file and may try to open it as a "zip" file. You will have to either upgrade your version of Word, or install Micro\$oft's Compatibility Pack to allow earlier versions of Word to open the file.

Review and Sign-Off : Completed!