



Tuesday, May 29, 2012

General Education and I-Series Course Submission and Review

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ENGL250 Introduction to Literature by Women

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General Information

Title Introduction to Literature by Women

Course Number ENGL250

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

Linked Course None

Diversity Understanding Plural Societies

Course Questions

General Questions

Please give a brief description of the course:

ENGL250/WMST255 explores various literary expressions by women and the reception of that writing within a number of different historical periods and genres. The course considers such topics as what a woman needs in order to write, and what role gender plays in producing, consuming, and interpreting literary and other sorts of cultural texts. We will also explore how women may comprise a distinct literary subculture created out of what all women have in common as women, despite the important differences in race, class, sexuality, physical abilities, and nationality that distinguish and at times divide women from one another. Interpretation of texts will be guided by feminist and gender theory, a set of specific ways of reading that have emerged as an important field in literary studies over the last four decades.

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.):

The breakdown for grades is as follows: 25% – Regular, unannounced quizzes and in-class writings (in lecture and in discussion sections) and course discussions online (at the Blackboard site). Out of 10 discussion board topics, you must participate in at least 5. 10% – First paper, a 2-p. response; DUE September 16th. 15% – Second paper, a 2–3 pp. interpretation of a text; draft DUE Oct. 21st, final paper DUE Oct. 28th. 25% – Third paper, a 5–6 pp. interpretation of texts, building on previous work and engaging some literary criticism; draft DUE Dec. 2nd, final paper DUE Dec. 9th 25% – Final comprehensive examination, a mixture of brief identifications, short interpretations, and a short essay. Tuesday, December 20, 1:30–3:30 p.m. If you come to lecture, participate in discussion section, in discussion boards online, and complete your three papers, this examination will serve as a refreshing review of what you have learned. Our examinations are straightforward and are opportunities for you to survey what you have learned and now know and so build your confidence.

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:

ENGL250/WMST255 is an existing and very popular course, and we are making changes to it via VPAC. The main change will be the new title, "Reading Women Writing."

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 is discussed, examined, and critiqued in its historical, cultural, social, national, and literary context, whether the readings start with Julian of Norwich or with English and American writers in the early nineteenth century (the course can be configured to cover different time spans). All texts are viewed using a contextualizing lens such as that offered by the critical work Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which looks back through the history of writing from the Medieval and Renaissance periods to the early twentieth century (Woolf's present) to view the material, psychological, social conditions of women, particularly in their relation to cultural, especially literary, production. Terms such as feminist, woman, female, feminine are consistently probed and taken-for-granted cultural practices of nomenclature that assign Miss, Mrs., and Ms. for one gender and only Mr. for the other are reflected upon and discussed in the context of the larger social and cultural realities they remark. The importance of literary genealogies is explored in various contexts. Whether women could own or served as property, were franchised (had the right to vote), had access to literacy and education are all examined in their relations to literary production. Lectures and texts are multimedia, with music, television, movies, paintings, and other cultural productions augmenting and contextualizing the literary texts. Sexual and gender identities and their receptions throughout society as expressed in legal systems and cultural practices are central issues in many of the texts, so study of women's literary history necessarily involves the study of women's rights and the way that history is both revealed and contested in these texts. So reading through these lenses of feminist and gender theory students will engage various literary texts, focusing on their textual manifestations and resonances with cultural and social evolutions. Students will be consistently called upon throughout the semester, in class discussions, informal and formal written assignments, group

presentations, and the final exam, to use these critical tools in their analysis of the literary texts and literary history. Quizzes are given to assess student reading comprehension as well as the understanding of key terms and concepts; students are then required to use the terms and concepts intelligently in the papers they write.

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

Learning literary analysis is a primary goal of this course. Through intensive close reading strategies, students will attend to genre, character development, place, plot, themes, and language usage such as syntax and diction. Their participation in both lecture and discussion sections requires honing these close reading skills. Students' close reading skills will be further demonstrated through the graded writing assignments focused specifically on conducting analytical close readings using considerations of gender and sexuality to explicate texts. Understanding and analyzing representation in literary texts is, then, the most fundamental skill required for the study of literature, and this is also the case in this course studying literature by women. Students generally think of a literary text as a transparent transcription of what they call "reality," a way of knowing that is immediately apparent from reading the surface of the text. Teaching students how to decode a text, how to read the representational signs that allow us to decipher a text is basic to this course. In a similar fashion, this course also aims to challenge students' understandings of women and their historical contexts, as well as their understandings of gender, sexuality, and woman as immediately visible and/or fixed. Instead, the course encourages students to decipher the social and cultural construction of understandings of woman, gender, and sexuality through an analysis of literary representations. Students are taught to understand the aesthetic representations of a text and the way a particular text also generates and is generated by political and ideological issues and by historical contexts.

...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.

Each week students will be assigned literary texts—essays, poems, short stories, and/or novels—that will serve as a basis for lectures and critical discussion. Students will demonstrate their critical thinking and literary analysis skills through participation in discussions and through their various formal writing assignments. One writing assignment, for example, is a close reading of a text (such as a scene or specific passage from a novel, a line or stanza from a poem, a particular scene from a film from a film) that takes into account the gender and its inscriptions in and inflections of literature through character portrayal, situation of action, of the reader, and so forth. In other words, students will explicate texts in order to explore their independent meaning as well as their situated meanings within larger contexts. This assignment is designed so that students learn reading is about contexts as well as texts and that characters, their situations, points of view, language and style, metaphors and symbols, speech and silence, conflict and resolution all work to make meaning. Emphasized throughout are ways in which gender and its intersections with class, race, sexual orientation influence any and all of these components and any reader's sense of them.

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

...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.

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

Students will demonstrate their ability to formulate a thesis related to literary analysis and to support the thesis with evidence and argumentation in gender-inflected close readings. This series of formal writing assignments require students to have a complete thesis (what=topic, how=attention to language, theme, and form; why=the significance of the passage, why should we care=how these elements are used by the author to engaged the audience). The thesis should address these points (what, how, why, why should we care) without being a catalogue of responses.

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.

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

Over the course of the semester, students are presented with a glossary of key words as well as concepts such as a women writer needing “a room of her own” that describe literary, cultural, social, legal, and historical issues and events that are necessary to know in order to analyze the circumstances and status of women writers and ways in which those circumstances frame women writers’ work. These are all contextualized in terms of race, class, and sexuality, as well as in terms of gender. For example, terms important to know are feminist, woman, female, feminine as well as the taken-for-granted cultural practices of nomenclature that assign Miss, Mrs., and Ms. for one gender and only Mr. for the other. And those modes of salutation resonate differently in different social circumstances, especially those that are racially, sexually, and/or economically charged. The material circumstances necessary for any writer or artist—that each needs a place to work independently and enough food to sustain one physically—are constantly emphasized and gendered circumstances examined through the complex prisms of human difference. Throughout vastly different cultures and societies worldwide women of different races, creeds, legal status, sexual orientation, and ages share the fact that they have not had the time, physical sustenance, and independence necessary for creative and intellectual productions because those support systems are often put out of the reach of women, often as a result of women’s work being key to those life and work sustaining support systems. So besides “what is it like to read this?” students are reminded constantly to ask, of each and every text and of each and ever writer, “how have women negotiated their relationships to language, power, their bodies, families, religions, and the state, especially when their access to literacy and sociopolitical agency has been limited legally and culturally?” That basic question then proliferates in ways that are crucially important to the intersectional and comparative strategies of the course: “how have women of different races, nations, creeds, sexualities, and ages negotiated their relationships to language, power, their bodies, families, religions, and the state, especially when their access to literacy and sociopolitical agency has been limited legally and culturally by the fact of their gender?” Another question generated is how various power differentials in life and writing experiences are gendered and how what differences race, class, sexuality, and nation make in those gendered configurations.

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

Though not all women writers and the texts they produce focus directly and explicitly on the oppression and marginalization of women based on what are in effect gender-determined castes systems across cultures and societies, certainly sexism and heterosexism and the normalization of male privilege and female subjugation are noticeable throughout the assigned texts. Since intersectionality and comparative readings are repeatedly emphasized, students are asked to also consider the inflections of race, class, sexuality, and nation on gendered privileges. In students' graded assignments, specifically their close reading and critical research essay, as well as their contributions to group discussions, they are asked to consider how these factors, among others, predispose their initial reactions to texts, shape their individual understanding of texts, as well as other audiences' and critics' interpretations and analyses. Also emphasized through assigned readings and students' critical writings will be recurrent themes and motifs related to plural societies—such as independence, self-realization, alienation from society, the celebration of beauty, pleasures forbidden women because of their “proper” roles, the struggle to find voice within a context of rewarding modesty and silence that suppresses and stigmatizes women's outspokenness and independent action. That what counts as independent, self-aware, estranged, beautiful, forbidden is differentialized by a variety of contexts including race, sexuality, nation, family, religion and/or class is repeatedly emphasized.

...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.

ENGL250/WMST255 is organized around using key critical essays to establish a theoretical lens through which to read various literary texts and the ways in which their production, reception, and understanding are gendered. Because to consider any kind of sociocultural difference requires considerations of gender, race, sexuality, class, citizenship, and age, the course is intersectional and comparative, and each text is situated in historical, social, cultural, political, class, sexual, racial, and aesthetic contexts. One key question repeatedly asked is “how have the changed social conditions of the 21st century and more than three decades of scholarship in women's studies and feminist literary criticism changed our understandings of the term ‘literature by women’?”

...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.

Investigating the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality, the required readings provide students the opportunity to learn how various “-isms”—sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism—function in conjunction with one another. Indeed, how do we in the advanced Western world understand what is meant by the category “woman”? How is the term “Woman” understood throughout the world? How is term “Woman” understood across different cultures, different societies, by different races, and by people of different classes and sexual orientations? That many of the same gendered issues arise in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, even while the latter is much more preoccupied with race, is just one of many especially instructive examples of ways in which juxtaposing different texts that nevertheless have similar strands of concerns regarding women's independence, their bodies, their expressions make clear the intersectionalities of discrimination and of opportunities. The diversity of carefully chosen literary texts speaks to comparative, intersectional, and relational frameworks to examine formations and representations of gender status across history (time), across societies, across cultures, across nations, across races, and across classes, no matter what one's sexual orientation.

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