Sample Course Syllabus

ES 354 Literature of Ethnic Minorities in the U.S.

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Catalog Description: A WIC course studying literary works by ethnic minorities addressing issues of race, ethnicity, and class in U.S. culture and society.

Course Objectives: Because this is an upper-division course, the course content assumes that members of the class are familiar with many of the concepts and ideas important to the field of Ethnic Studies. Furthermore, students are expected to have completed a first-year writing course in which they gained practice in constructing critical and researched arguments that incorporate, synthesize, and document sources effectively and correctly. The course also assumes that students are interested in professionalizing themselves in these same respects, therefore, upon successful completion of the course, students will have been given ample opportunity to read, analyze, and write about literature and other cultural production of minority groups in the U.S. as they would as professional members of an academic community. More specifically, students who successfully complete this course will have accomplished these goals:

1. Recognize the cultural, societal, political, and artistic contributions members of minority groups have made to U.S. society and culture;
2. Examine how race and class are constructed through language, policy, and political ideologies;
3. Analyze common understandings of the minority experience to understand how race and ethnicity intersect with other identity markers such as class, language, gender, and sexuality;
4. Assess mainstream images of minorities through an analysis of how various minorities are represented in national discourse and policy;
5. Locate the significance of various forms of minority literature in the continuous negotiation of certain minority traditions/cultures and dominant Euro-American ideals;
6. Engage in a comparative, critical and analytical inquiry of minority literature so as to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how the minority experience is varied, particular, diverse;
7. Appraise both the critical and popular reception of minority literature so as to gain a rhetorical understanding of how authors and audiences situate these experiences and literatures as being/not being of “American” or of “America”;
8. Discuss the historical and contemporary issues affecting minorities in the U.S., and how these issues are represented in/through literature;
9. Research how critical audiences and scholars engage in scholarly and/or critical conversations about minority literature and the minority experience, especially as it pertains to genres, styles, formats, and conventions;
10. Engage in an ongoing critical and/or scholarly conversation regarding minority literature and/or the minority experience in a manner that corresponds to the particular audience or community that that student aspires to be a part of.
Furthermore, this is a writing-intensive course, which means that students can expect to engage in writing and research that is common to the scholarly and academic profession, as well as to members of critical audiences (i.e., bloggers, journalists, and other popular writers). In accordance with the University’s Writing Intensive curriculum, students in this course can expect to engage in writing activities, both formal/informal, graded/ungraded, that are meant to promote learning and to demonstrate the student’s mastery of rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking and writing, the writing process, and writing conventions.

Expectations: Students are expected to be familiar with—and to have practice in—constructing critical and researched arguments, which implement, synthesize, and document sources effectively and correctly. Students are expected to have made arrangements to be active participants in this class, which includes completing readings and assignments on time, as well as regularly participating in class discussions. Students are expected to “attend,” regularly by posting on time and regularly. Students are expected to communicate with the instructor in advance if they foresee a circumstance that will prevent them from accomplishing the course goals or from completing any of the assignments. Students are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity.

I offer here some ground rules for discussion:

- Agree to disagree: The Discussion Board is not the place to try to win debates but rather a place to share your ideas and learn as much as you can from each other.
- Think through and reread your comments before you offer them.
- Assume the best of others in the class and expect the best from them; assume all comments are posted in good faith and are meant to generate critical thinking and exploration of the topics and issues at hand. If you are at all unsure of a colleague’s intended meaning, ask for clarification rather than risk misinterpreting their point.
- Value the diversity of the class. Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to class.
- Be open-minded: Issues of race and ethnicity understandably can often bring up emotional responses. Try to understand where others are coming from, regardless of your agreement/disagreement with a particular point (you can learn a lot by trying to understand why someone might hold the views they do regardless of your own views on the issue at hand). Be open to challenging or confronting your own ideas or possible prejudices as well.
- Do not make personal attacks. Do not demean or embarrass others. Do not make blatantly sexist, racist, homophobic, or victim-blaming comments. Any student doing so will be blocked from participating on the Discussion Board until the issue is resolved with the instructor and any specific parties involved. Any points lost because of this will most likely not be compensated.
- If anyone becomes uncomfortable participating in the discussions due to someone else’s comments, please let the teaching assistant or the instructor know as soon as possible, so that your concerns may be addressed (given the subjective nature of our interactions, we may not see what you see, so by all means, feel free to bring concerns to our attention). Keep in mind that posts to the discussion board are public messages, and all writings in this area will be viewable by the entire class.
- Posting of personal contact information is strongly discouraged (e.g. telephone numbers, address, personal website address).
- The discussion board is your space to interact with your colleagues in relation to course
material, and that’s all.

Assignments and Methods of Evaluation: There are 100 total points possible in this class, and students earn them by
1. reading and viewing the assigned material and participating in class discussions: 30
2. completing an article précis and presentation: 25
3. completing three short writing assignments + one revision: 45

I will provide you with detailed instructions for both the group précis/presentation and the three short writing assignments.

Learning Resources: This course is delivered through Blackboard (Bb). Please make sure to check the “Announcements” tab regularly as I will post prepared comments, questions for further consideration, possible changes to the schedule, and necessary reminders on that space. Other important spaces on Bb are the “Assignments” tab, the discussion board, and the “My Grades” tab.

Texts available from the OSU Bookstore:
Justin Torres, We the Animals
Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

For textbook accuracy, please check the textbook list at the OSU Bookstore website (http://www.osu_beaverstore.com/). Syllabi may not have the most up to date textbook information!

Texts accessible through Bb as either a pdf or a hyperlink:
A Round Table Discussion with Alarcón, Halfon and Vaquera-Vásquez
Bernard Malamud, “The Magic Barrel”
Sherman Alexie, "What You Pawn I Will Redeem"
Jhumpa Lahiri, “The Third and Final Continent”
Junot Diaz, "How To Date A Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie”
Julia Alvarez, “The Rudy Elmhurst Story”
Frank O’Hara, “Personal Poem”
Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Bean Eaters”
Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B”

Texts accessible through the OSU Valley Library’s database collection:

The film you’ll need to procure on your own is:
Real Women Have Curves (Cardoso)

Important Policies:
Academic Integrity
All work you submit for a grade is expected to be your own. This discussion board posts, and especially work you submit for formal evaluation and credit. When you do use material from an outside source—whether you quote it directly, summarize or paraphrase it—you need to provide proper documentation. Recycling your own work from another class may fall under academic dishonesty, therefore, if you do borrow research or materials you’ve previously submitted for credit, make sure that you indicate that in both the document and in the list of references. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on that assignment and may result in further consequence, including a failing grade in the course and up to a formal report with the University. For more information see the Student Conduct Office at http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/regulations/index.php#acdis.

Incompletes
An “Incomplete” is granted only under very unusual and extenuating circumstances, with instructor approval, and only if the student has completed at least 50% of the course. Moreover, an “Incomplete” will only be given if the student has 1) communicated his/her potential conflict as soon as the student foresees the conflict and if 2) the student and instructor arrive at a timeline for when the course will be completed and what work the student will complete in equivalence of the stipulated coursework. Incompletes will not be granted at the end of the term with a student realizes that his/her performance has been affected by a circumstance that s/he failed to communicate with the instructor.

Students with Disabilities
Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations approved through SSD are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through SSD should contact SSD immediately at 541-737-4098.

Submitting work
Assignments are due at the date/time they appear on the schedule. All assignments have a designated place on Bb for you to submit them, and they need to appear in that place at the date/time they are due i/o/t to be evaluated, graded, and/or counted. Work is not accepted over e-mail. If you experience difficulties submitting work on Bb ask for help and we can make special arrangements and/or accommodations. E-mailing work to me does not constitute submission of the assignment and it may not be evaluated, graded, and/or counted.

Course Evaluation
We encourage you to engage in the course evaluation process each term – online, of course. The evaluation form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions through ONID. You will login to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.

Contacting the Instructor
I am happy to answer questions and/or discuss course-related issues at any time. The preferred methods of communication, in order of preference, are as follows: Post questions in the General
Forum under the discussion board. This thread is visible to all members of the course, and all members of the course can offer answers and responses to the queries posted there; make an appointment to “meet” with the instructor over chat (typically, I’ll be available to chat online at least once per week, so if this time doesn’t work for you we can arrange to chat at another time; e-mail the instructor—I typically respond to e-mail queries in 24 hours if these come in during the work week, or 48 hours if you e-mail over the weekend; request that the instructor calls you to chat in person.

Technical Assistance
If you experience computer difficulties, need help downloading a browser or plug-in, assistance logging into the course, or if you experience any errors or problems while in your online course, contact the OSU Help Desk for assistance. You can call (541) 737-3474, email osuhelpdesk@oregonstate.edu or visit the OSU Computer Helpdesk online.

There are no opportunities for extra credit in this course.