

City University of Hong Kong

Information on a Gateway Education Course offered by Department of English with effect from Semester A in 2013/2014

Part I

Course Title: America: Peoples and Cultures of the United States

Course Code: GE2115

Course Duration: one semester

Proposed Area:

- Arts and Humanities
- Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations
- Science and Technology

No. of Credit Units: 3

Level: A2, B2

Medium of Instruction: English

Medium of Assessment: English

Prerequisites: (Course Code and Title) generally none

Precursors: (Course Code and Title) generally none

Equivalent Courses: (Course Code and Title) generally none

Exclusive Courses: (Course Code and Title) generally none

Part II

1. Abstract

“Reading and Writing America: Peoples and Cultures in the United States” is an interdisciplinary course that will use literary texts and popular culture to introduce students to the ways American identities and cultures have been articulated in a global context in the 20th and 21st centuries. Using a thematic focus on American people and their identities—immigrant, class, race, gender, regional, and others—the course will trace the ways these identities have been configured in the last century and represented through diverse literary forms and media. Students will read and analyze fiction, poetry, drama, film and new media to apply their discoveries about the basic elements of literature to promote an active engagement with social issues. Though the focus is on literature, students will learn how a diverse factors—history, geography, language, class, etc—act in the development of culture and identity. By reading a variety of texts and producing literary critiques, the students will actively engage the material given and will be invited to reflect on their own experiences and knowledge about culture; group work will promote meaningful and active learning through peer interaction.

2. Course Aims

This interdisciplinary course aims to enhance students’ knowledge of the basic elements of literature and social issues as they pertain to American cultural production in the 20th and 21st centuries, including fiction, poetry, drama, film and new media. It will also develop students’ abilities to analyze critical issues and approaches in the study of American identities and cultures as they have been configured in the last century. The thematic focus on American people and their identities—immigrant, class, race, gender, regional, and others—will enable students to comprehend the theories, concepts and methods needed in order to analyze and appreciate a range of cultural texts. The interdisciplinary approach, which draws from history, geography, linguistics, media studies and social sciences, will promote the students’ discovery of the meanings and possible articulations of culture. Students will increase their general and world knowledge as they examine texts and performances and be invited to relate these topics to their own cultural contexts, promoting reflection and generating creative approaches to cultural production. In addition, through class presentations, readings, critical writing, group activities, and team projects, students develop the ability to think critically about issues germane to identity formation in America and to communicate their ideas orally and in writing.

3. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

No.	CILOs	Weighting (if applicable)
1.	Recognize formal elements—structures, narrative perspectives, style, rhetorical strategies, etc.—in American literature and other cultural productions of the 20 th and 21 st centuries and relate them to major	

	genres and theories.	
2.	Analyze the aesthetic and creative aspects of contemporary American cultural productions evidenced by the particular structures, styles, and thematic elements in each text.	
3.	Apply critical thinking and reading skills in the interpretation of diverse American texts (essays, fiction and poetry, art and music, film and other media) of the last century, highlighting their local and global significance, and identifying connections between different traditions.	
4.	Understand and be able to describe how culture and identity develop from the interrelation of diverse factors—history, geography, race, class, gender and religion, among others—and identify the ways these factors individually mark self-representation. Apply this new knowledge to their own experience of cultural paradigms.	
5.	Reflect on the diversity of personal, cultural, and social human experiences and make intelligent connections between texts and cultures. Generate creative and critical responses to cultural productions	

4. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

(designed to facilitate students' achievement of the CILOs - Some TLAs may address more than one CILO.)

TLA	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
Lectures: Critical introductions to essential concepts and theories open the discussions of specific texts. Students will also be asked to read critical articles to contribute to the discussion.	1, 5	
Discussions: Each week students will be introduced to literary and cultural texts in the lecture and will be required to discuss the texts in tutorials. Students will learn to apply theoretical knowledge to critically discuss the issues related to forms of identity and culture in America and discover how these issues relate to their own experience of culture	1-3, 5	
Writing critiques: Students will be introduced to the conventions and structures of literary critiques. Students will actively demonstrate their understanding and application of their theoretical readings by writing reasoned discussion of particular texts or issues, which will require some research.	1-5	
Group work and presentation: Students will be required to choose a topic from among those discussed in class and do further research on the topic. They are encouraged to	1-4	

structure their presentation around a cultural product: a novel, a film, music, or art and make relevant connections with issues of American cultures and identity. They will then make a presentation to the rest of the class that emphasizes the ways this cultural product reflects the issues they are analyzing. This activity requires critical reading, thinking and speaking skills.		
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5. Assessment Tasks/Activities

(designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs –Some assessment tasks/activities may address more than one CILO.)

Type of Assessment Tasks/Activities	CILO No.	Weighting (if applicable)	Remarks
<p>Individual written assignments: literary critiques/essays (3)</p> <p>Students will demonstrate their understanding and their own interpretation of the themes and issues discussed in the assigned readings through essays of different lengths.</p>	1-4	50%	
<p>Class participation and critical reflection</p> <p>Students will be required to participate actively in class discussions and demonstrate their active learning process through short in-class writing assignments and group discussions.</p>	1-5	20%	
<p>Quizzes Students will be required to do 3 quizzes to assess their reading and understanding of the texts.</p>	1-3	15%	
<p>Group project and presentation</p> <p>Students will be required to choose a topic from among those discussed in class and do further research on the topic. They should produce a creative or critical project that demonstrates their learning and reflection on a topic. They will then make a presentation to the rest of the class.</p>	1-5	15%	

6. Grading of Student Achievement: Refer to Grading of Courses in the Academic Regulations.

Assessment form: Individual written assignments: literary critique and creative writing, including reading journal (50%)

Marks	Grading criteria in relation to CILOs
40-50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critiques are extremely well-reasoned, thoughtful and well articulated • There is intelligent understanding of themes in the texts; • The purpose of critiquing and sharing perspectives on texts is completely achieved.
30-49%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critiques are competently reasoned and articulated; • There is very good recognition of themes and their significance in the texts; • The purpose of critiquing and sharing perspectives on texts is achieved.
20-29%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critiques are adequately reasoned and the discussion is reasonably good • The recognition of themes and their significance is adequate; • The purpose of critiquing and sharing perspectives on texts is partially achieved.
10-19%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critiques are sketchy and not clearly reasoned or articulated; • The recognition of themes and their significance is limited; • The purpose of critiquing and sharing perspectives on texts is not fully achieved at all.
0-9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critiques are highly inadequate and analysis of texts very poor; • There is almost no recognition of themes and their significance; • The purpose of critiquing and sharing perspectives on texts is not achieved in any way.

Participation and Reading Journals

Marks	CILOs 1-5
16%-20%	Has made significant contributions to in-class group work. Is inquisitive and asks questions. Shows a great deal of self-development in the journal entries Demonstrates that s/he has read productively.
10%-15%	Has generally been on task during the in-class group work. Has not distinguished her/himself as an active participant in the class. Shows only some areas of self-development in the journal entries.
0%-9%	Has not made much or any contribution to class discussion. Shows little reflection on learning and reading. Does not demonstrate that s/he has not read anything from the reading list.

Group Presentation and Projects

Marks	CILOs 1-5			
	Content	Comprehensibility <i>(Use of vocabulary, accuracy, and fluency)</i>	Interaction <i>(Listens and handles questions from audience. Able to give additional information)</i>	Group Management <i>(Organization of students' contributions)</i>
12-15%	The topic has been extensively investigated and presentation is through and well thought out.	Entire message understood. All speakers notably good.	Students are active listeners and provide thoughtful and accurate follow up responses to questions	The group is well organized. Each member has a significant and well defined role. The handover between students is smooth. All parts of the presentation are well thought out.
9-11%	The topic has been investigated well and the speakers provide and well constructed examination of the topic.	Entire message understood. Most speakers notably good. Some weaknesses in one area of comprehensibility.	Students are able to understand most of the questions and deal with them appropriately. Some disagreement or confusion in answering questions.	Each participant makes a significant contribution to the presentation. Group management is mostly successful with only a few minor problems.
6-8%	Only part of the topic has been investigated. More work could have been done in providing a comprehensive examination of the topic.	Messages sometimes hard to understand. Speakers not notably good in most areas.	Students do not demonstrate an ability to handle questions well. After some time can give responses.	Only some of the group's members are able to perform as a group. Some disorganization and unclear handover.
0%-5%	The topic has not been investigated well. The audience has not been well informed and much more work could have been done in presenting the topic.	Message hard to understand. Lots of breakdowns and/or hesitations in pronunciation, accuracy or vocabulary.	Students confused when asked questions. Are not able to give adequate replies to the questions.	Group management attempts are unsuccessful and inappropriate.

Part III

Keyword Syllabus:

United States of America; literature; genre; film; media; music; popular culture; language; dialects; creativity; stereotypes; immigration; race; class; identity; region; religion

Please provide information about the tentative weekly schedule under Part B of the Annex to this Form.

Recommended Reading:

Text(s):

Theory (we will use excerpts from some of these texts):

Colombo, Gary, Robert Cullen and Bonnie Lisle, eds. *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2010.

Kottak, Conrad Phillip and Katryn Kozaitis, eds. *On Being Different: Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream*. McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Maasik, Sonia and Jacob Solomon, eds. *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2009.

Moser, Joyce and Ann Watters, eds. *Creating America*. Prentice Hall, 2001.

Takaki, Ronald T. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Little, Brown & Co., 1993.

Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling-Estes. *American English: dialects and variation*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Literary Texts (we will use excerpts from some of these texts):

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Ballantine Books, 1969.

Barry, Lynda. *One Hundred Demons!* Sasquatch Books, 2005.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Penguin, 1984.

Diaz, Junot. *Drown*. Riverhead Trade, 1997.

Gillan, Maria Mazziotti and Jennifer Gillan, eds. *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*. Penguin, 1994.

Gillan, Maria Mazziotti, ed. *Growing Up Ethnic in America*. Penguin, 1999.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Interpreter of Maladies*. Mariner Books, 1999.

Momaday, N. Scott. *The Names*. University of Arizona Press, 1997.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams from my Father*. Crown, 2007.

Potok, Chaim. *My Name is Asher Lev*. Fawcett Crest, 1972.

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Vintage, 1991.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. Dover, 1993.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. Delta, 1969

Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery in Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Norton, 2003.

Films and other media:

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Gone with the Wind

Malcolm X

My Big Fat Greek Wedding

Smoke Signals

The Namesake

The Godfather

American Tongues (documentary on American dialects)