

Prof. Cho

Literature of the Americas (?)

ELA1/04

11 September 2006

Syllabus (FFW)

What exactly is a syllabus? A syllabus is, generally, that sheet of paper that you receive in the beginning of the semester informing you of all the wonderful things you will be learning (and unlearning), all the work that is expected of you (and of me), and how you will be graded throughout the semester. In some ways, a syllabus is really nothing more than a calendar or a list of to-do's, yet it is often studied and analyzed more closely than a Shakespeare play or a Faulkner novel. Since this is the case, I have decided to forgo the conventions of the classic bullet-point syllabus this year and instead write my syllabus in prose since I will probably never get this sort of undeserved critical attention for my writing.

I should, I suppose, start with what kinds of books we will be reading in this class. It seems obvious – after all, the class is called, “Literature of the Americas” – but what exactly does that mean? This is an important question for me because a syllabus, for me, is a kind of promise and I like to be true to my promises but how can I keep my promises if I do not know exactly what it is I am promising you? Where do we begin? How do we even begin answering this question? What is Literature? Who decides what Literature is? What do we mean by “Americas?”

I am trying to keep this to one page so I will get to some things that a syllabus needs to be explicit about. No absences. If you are absent, I need a note from a parent or guardian. Three or more absences will lower your grades significantly. My pet peeves – lateness (three lateness will count as an absence), going in and out of class (take care of your needs before coming to class), and eating (no food but drinking is allowed as long as cacophonous slurping is kept to a minimum.)

Professor Sophia McClennen, who teaches at Pennsylvania State University, describes the goals of her course as follows:

- . Develop an understanding of cultural diversity in the Americas through particular attention to representations of gender and race.
 - . Read, understand, and enjoy a number of significant works of American Literature from North, South and Central America and the Caribbean.
 - . Acquire intercultural and international competence by developing the ability to establish connections among literary works emerging from various contexts throughout the Americas, and among majority and minority cultures.
 - . Employ comparative methods in order to better understand literary diversity, intertextuality and parallel development.
 - . Acquire a critical knowledge of literary themes, motifs, structures, narratives, points of view, and values that are typical of various regions of the Americas.
 - . Begin to acquire a historical perspective of the development of literature in the Americas.
 - . Identify a number of themes central to American literature and the ways that these themes have helped to shape American identity today.
 - . Consider questions of social conflict as they are reflected in works of literature.
 - . Critically analyze literary works in terms of form and style of textual analysis.
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- . Engage in collaborative learning and teamwork, especially while working on a group project.
 - . Actively participate in the creation of a vibrant and rewarding learning community.
 - . Practice techniques of literary analysis and become familiar with literary terms.
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- . Develop communication skills in essays, response papers, class discussions, presentations, and research papers.
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- . Develop and refine critical thinking, oral and written expression, and techniques.

These will be our goals for the year, too. Finally, there is the course requirements, which are as follows: Participation, Attendance, Quizzes, Journals and Assignments (40%), Papers (30%), Midterm & Final (30%). Here is a more detailed description of my grading policies. These, too, are from Professor McClennen's course:

90-100%	Student is well prepared and enthusiastically participates in all class activities; is very considerate and cooperative with the rest of the class; asks questions and responds to questions; demonstrates knowledge of course materials; consistently practices critical thinking; actively helps to create a vibrant learning community.
80-89%	Student is generally prepared and willing to participate in class activities; is relatively cooperative with the rest of the class; asks questions and responds to questions most of the time; makes an inconsistent effort to refer to readings and course topics; generally practices critical thinking; helps to create a vibrant learning community.

70-79%	Student is often unprepared and reluctantly or sporadically participates in class activities; often does not ask questions or respond to questions; rarely makes an effort to demonstrate knowledge of course materials; rarely practices critical thinking; does not show much interest in creating a vibrant learning community.
60-69%	Student is generally unprepared, unwilling to participate in class activities and unable to answer questions; does not formulate questions or responses; demonstrates little understanding of course materials; does not practice critical thinking; distracts from the creation of a vibrant learning community.
0-59%	Student is absent (physically or mentally), unprepared, inattentive, uncooperative or disruptive in class.

I look forward to our year together.