

Department: Modern and Classical Languages

Course No: 235

Credits: 3

Title: French Modernity

Contact: Roger Travis (Lucy McNeece)

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: Either semester. Three credits. Recommended preparation: French 261 or 262 or instructor consent.

A portrait of France in the 20th Century through contemporary French literature: exoticism, sexuality, war, colonialism, feminism, end of the century, related films and works of art.

Course Information: The course introduces students to critical issues in recent French cultural history through the study of selected literary texts and related media. Students read a variety of French and Francophone authors and study documentary materials on the period and the context of the literary production.

Course requirements:

Students are expected to attend class, pass four quizzes, take a mid-term and a final exam, and write a short paper as well as prepare an oral presentation.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: a. Students develop critical perspectives on a range of cultural issues from a variety of literary and non-literary texts. They are encouraged to ask difficult questions of the material and to debate with their peers. They learn that “answers” are never ultimate, and that human communities and their representations are constantly evolving, so that the application of unexamined abstract criteria is necessarily problematic.

b. Students expand their understanding of the ways in which literature can shed light on questions of cultural history, and learn to appreciate the complexity of debates too often reduced to assessments of merely “right” or “wrong.”

c. Students enlarge their understanding of the medium of literature by learning to analyze formal components and seeing how they translate social and political questions. They also learn to appreciate the conditions in which the texts were produced and their impact upon different groups.

d. Students come to understand that literature, whether written or oral, functions differently in different cultural contexts.

e. Students develop a sensitivity to the complexity of issues too often viewed as if all cultures and situations were identical with their own. While being encouraged to compare their own experience to what they read, they learn to recognize that specific problems reflect cultural values as a whole, and that they need to be assessed as part of a system of belief and experience that may be different from that of mainstream American culture. Students are encouraged to recognize analogous debates in the

U.S., but they learn to suspend judgment while they explore the evolution of a given problem in the foreign context, and to appreciate the impact of factors that may not operate as they do in much of American culture.

f. Students should leave the course with a heightened awareness of the diverse uses to which the conventions of literature may be applied, and of the ways in which literature engages with society. They will be therefore better able to understand the specific function of various literary genres. They learn to appreciate the degree to which literary forms are themselves products and vehicles of ideological investments, and therefore intimately connected to history. They also come to understand the different conceptions of narrative and artistic representation issuing from different traditions.

g. Students are coached to become more conscious of their own assumptions and habits of reading and interpreting both literary and social phenomena.

CA1 Criteria: 1. Investigations/critical analyses of human experience: Students in this course are asked to develop a critical perspective on a cultural issues by close examination of selected literary texts. They also read essays by members of various communities that involve philosophical, political and artistic reflection, as well as accounts of the way the literary industry operates.

3. Investigations into symbolic modes of representation: Students are taught to understand the ways in which literary language/discourse articulates a variety of cultural phenomena, and draws upon a number of cultural “codes.” The course gives students tools for understanding a variety of cultural “languages.”

4. Comprehension of written and/or graphic performance/art forms: Students learn that “reading” is a complex activity, as is writing, and that it engages both the individual and the community in a most crucial manner. As the intersection of history and the subject, it involves a range of modes of knowing.