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ENG 3009-001: Myth and Culture

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ENGLISH 3009G-001: Myth and Culture

Course Description and Goals:
This class will serve as an introduction to the study of myth, but not as a survey of myths from around the globe. There are some 6800 languages spoken on the earth today, each of which constitutes a relation between a people and their world—a “culture,” if you will. Each culture has its own stories that help explain the relations between its members, other cultures, and its environment. This number, however quickly it may be decreasing, is far too large to imagine covering in this course. Alternatively, we will engage in a series of texts questioning received notions about myth—the “myths” about myth—and, I hope, allowing us to think about the possibilities for myth in our technology-addled universe. And sometimes we will reflect on why it is that we do not often think “mythically” anymore. This course centers on myth; therefore, the primary medium of communication will be speech, since myth, in general, implies an oral-based culture. That is, we will approach our subject by attempting to mimic it. To that end, I expect you to participate extensively in class discussions, and visit me during office hours, so that we can chat.

NOTE: Students are expected to spend two hours outside of class for every hour in class (at a minimum), meaning you must spend at least five hours per week outside of class to complete this course satisfactorily.

Prerequisites:
Satisfactory completion of ENGL 1001G and 1002G or their equivalents.

Texts:
Course Reader, available at Copy Express at the Union.

Cassirer, Language and Myth
Erdoes/Ortiz, American Indian Myths and Legends
Geertz, Local Knowledge
Rosenberg, World Mythology
Shelley, Frankenstein
Sproul, Primal Myths

Course Objectives:
In this course students will learn to:
• improve skills in critical reading and analytical writing based on the reading of myths
• identify the works and themes of a wide variety of myths
• recall and define terms associated with myth and culture
• appreciate the unique ideas and contributions of these cultures
• understand how these myths reflect the forces and traditions that shaped the periods and cultures in which they appeared
• recognize the contributions of these myths to current visions of culture
• write analytical papers demonstrating an understanding on how myths create meaning
• develop the ability to evaluate and criticize the writing of classmates
• economically incorporate and correctly document outside sources of ideas and information; this means expanding beyond your personal experience and engaging with the arguments published by others
• revise, revise, revise your writing
• copy-edit your drafts so that they are grammatically sound and readable

Conferences:
As I get to know your writing better throughout the semester, I will require that you meet with me on an individual basis. In these conferences, we will discuss where you think your writing and critical skills are improving or need more work.

Attendance:
Class participation plays a significant role in your final grade and your regular attendance is crucial. I will not take attendance, but I will note if you are often absent. Although excessive absences will compromise your ability to pass the course, please do not contact me about “excused” absences. If you know you will be missing a class, please contact someone in the class to collect distributed materials and to take notes on the class and on upcoming assignments. At the beginning of the third week of the semester, I will give you time during class to set up a small (three or four person) telephone/email network for this purpose. It is contingent on you to make up for missed class time and work. If you do not bring your textbook to class, I will interpret this act as a sign that you are not interested in receiving a passing grade in the class-participation component of this course. Any use of cell phones, text messaging, or other e-distractions will likewise result in an extremely low class-participation grade. I will provide you with a provisional class-participation grade half way through the semester in order to let you know how you are doing.

LATE POLICY: Essays—and all other take-home assignments—are due at the beginning of class.
Late final versions of essays will be marked a full grade lower for every class day late. This policy is, unfortunately, zero tolerance: no excuses, whether of a personal or technological nature. Essays turned in a week past the deadline will be given a “zero.” In-class writing assignments (and quizzes) must be turned in by the end of class, and cannot be made up at a later date.

Turning in a LATE DRAFT of an essay means that
  a) you will not receive written feedback from the Professor
  b) you will not be able to make up peer-editing (if you miss peer-editing days)
  c) you will receive a lower grade on the final version of your essay
Course Evaluation:

Class Participation (15%)
This includes attendance, overall preparedness for class (having done the reading, brought the appropriate texts, etc.), and contributions to class discussion.

Summary of a Critical Work and Presentation (10%)
By mid-semester, I will require you to hand in a summary of one critical work (i.e., secondary source) on Frankenstein. This summary should be no longer than a page in length, double-spaced. You must hand in a copy of the summarized article with your assignment (graded). You will also present a brief presentation to the class on the critical text you have summarized (ungraded, but required). You must provide me with the text you are planning to summarize by the end of Week 2.

Papers (40%)
Over the course of the semester, you will be writing three essays, worth 40% of your final grade. These need to be typed and on time. That means the BEGINNING of class on the day each is due. See “Late Policy,” above, for more details. All papers must be turned in to pass this course. Your paper should include a title and a staple. Your name should appear on each page next to the page number. You may include a title page for your paper if you wish, but do not include any other information on the pages of your paper other than its title. That is, please do not hand in papers that have more white space than printed material. Use double-spaced, 12-point (or smaller) Times New Roman font with one-inch margins. Papers not of required length, and papers using unnecessary material or strategies to pad their length will lose a full grade. Submit your papers using correct MLA format.

Midterm (15%)
The midterm will cover material from the first half of the course, both readings on the syllabus and class lectures. All questions will have an essay component. You must take the midterm to pass this course.

Final (20%)
The final will cover material from the entire course (again, the readings and class lectures). Its format will be similar to that of the midterm. You must take the final to pass this course.

Work Evaluation:
My methods of evaluation vary from assignment to assignment and paper to paper. For in-class writing assignments, exercises, and essay drafts, you will be graded on a scale of √+, √, or √-. Work that is strongly engaged and on-topic will receive a √+. Satisfactory work that is on-topic will receive a √. Work that shows little engagement or is off-topic will get a √-. Criteria for the grading of papers are included on the assignment sheets, and will usually include a combination of scholarly analysis of assigned reading and general skill with the English language (spelling, grammar, paragraph structure, and so on). You will receive a handout documenting grading criteria early in the semester.
Grading Scale for individual assignments:
A 93% and above
A- 90-92%
B+ 87-89%
B 83-86%
B- 80-82%
C+ 77-79%
C 73-76%
C- 70-72%
D+ 67-69%
D 63-66%
D- 60-62%
F 59% and below

Academic Honesty:
Directly quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing the ideas of others without specific identification of the sources, and handing in work which is not the student’s own all constitute plagiarism. I have reported and failed students whom I caught plagiarizing at EIU. If you have any questions whatsoever about what constitutes plagiarism, it is thus in your best interest to ask me before turning the paper in. And remember, when in doubt, CITE YOUR SOURCE! Here is the English Department’s statement on plagiarism:

“Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

Office of Disability Services:
If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you will need to contact the Office of Disability Services. Their phone number is 581-6583.

Writing Center:
The English department strongly recommends that you use the Writing Center to improve your writing for this class and any others you may be taking. Tutoring services are available, and online services may be available if needed. The Writing Center is located in Coleman Hall, room 3110. Their website is www.eiu.edu/~writing.
English 3009G: Schedule of Classes, first half—subject to revision
The schedule for the second half of the course will be distributed at a later date. Subject to revision, as needed. Especially during the Shelley week, we may need to revise, depending upon how long the presentations take.

R = Reader

WEEK ONE
T 1/10 Introductions; Cruse, "To the Reader"
Th 1/12 Popul Vuh

WEEK TWO
T 1/17 Popul Vuh; Black Elk, "Wasichus in the Hills" (R)
Th 1/19 Black Elk; Plato (R)

WEEK THREE
T 1/24 Plato (R); Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (R)
Th 1/26 Benjamin (R); Joseph Campbell, "The First Storytellers" (and handout)

WEEK FOUR
T 1/31 America in 1492 (handout)
Th 2/2 "Prometheus" (R); Paper #1 due (2-3 pages)

WEEK FIVE
T 2/7 Shelley (presentations when applicable)
Th 2/9 Shelley

WEEK SIX
T 2/14 Shelley; P.B. Shelley (handout)
Th 2/16 Shelley; Adam Smith (handout)

WEEK SEVEN
T 2/21 Midterm Exam
Th 2/23 Shelley

WEEK EIGHT
T 2/28 Corbin, "Keeping Time" (R)
Th 3/2 Corbin, "Keeping Time" (R)