Spring 1-15-2007

ENG 5008-001: The Multicultural Origins of American Literature

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"L'Amerique, mais c'est la deconstruction. [America is deconstruction.]" –Derrida

"Early American Literature"—not so long ago considered solely the domain of white Anglo-Americans—is now understood to include the oral (and early written) literature of Native Americans, the earliest emergence into American literature of African Americans, as well as the writing of various European colonials (Spanish, French, English, German). In this course, we will consider early U.S. literary traditions in the context of the colonial contest for cultural authority.

One difficulty of considering early American literature as, essentially, comparative literature, is that we are inevitably trying to examine more work than can possibly be covered in a single course. Native American literature, the literatures of Spanish, French and English colonizers, early African-American literature: each of these, considered in relation to relevant cultural, historical, and literary contexts, could easily occupy us for the entire semester.

There are advantages, however, to offset this challenge. We will certainly examine a fuller picture of the reality of early American literature and culture than could be obtained through an Anglo-centric approach. Moreover, our reading should challenge various neat categories: periods, genres, national boundaries. In addition, you will be introduced to the field of early American literature as it is actually constituted today. Finally, we will have the opportunity to make a true seminar out of our class: ideally, each of us should be developing expertise in different areas and sharing what we learn along the way.

To make this work, it will be important for you to decide early on a general focus for your seminar project, whether it will be focused in a particular ethnic tradition or comparative in focus; what methodological approach(es) you will take; what primary texts you will address.

In addition, I will do my best to tailor the course to the interests of the seminar members, as we will discuss today. This means I will need to get to know each of you at least a little, and that you'll need to be patient with me during the first few weeks as I work out a detailed reading schedule.
Texts to Be Issued By TRS

Allison, ed., *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*
Brown, *Edgar Huntly*
De La Cruz, *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*
Mulford, ed., *Early American Writings*

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book review</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar paper</td>
<td>50% (including final presentation)</td>
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Attendance

As in any seminar, your regular attendance and participation are essential. I expect that you will let me know ahead of class time if illness or an emergency will prevent you from attending class. Unexcused absences will affect your grade.

Academic Honesty

Dishonesty of any kind in this course can result in a failing grade for the course and a report to Judicial Affairs. For the record, the English Department’s Statement on Plagiarism follows: “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 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.”

Disability Information

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
**Book Review**

The assignment will be to write a review of a scholarly book that could assist you with your paper(s) for this course. You may choose a work of literary criticism, history, or theory. You will also need to identify a scholarly journal that would be likely to publish a review of the book you’ve selected and prepare your review following the conventions and format used by that journal. (Conventions include length, typical amount of summary versus evaluation, etc.) I will distribute a list of books you might find useful, but you may also choose a book not on that list.

**Weekly Response Papers**

For each class (except for dates when formal writing assignments are due; see schedule), bring to class one or two pages of writing about the week’s reading. If we are reading more than one text, choose ONE or TWO. Your writing should be primarily response, analysis, and synthesis. You should demonstrate familiarity and engagement with the reading by referring directly to the texts. Aim for something that will provoke class discussion.

Each week, I will ask some class members to read their responses out loud. You should be prepared to read your response any time, though of course I will welcome volunteers on weeks when you’re particularly eager to share what you’ve written.

**Seminar Paper**

Ideally, a seminar paper should be an essay worthy of being revised and expanded to submit for publication. Minimally, it should yield an idea that could yield a conference presentation. The length of your seminar paper reflects its in-between status: The paper should be 18-22 pages, not including notes and bibliography.

If you haven’t been asked to develop your ideas on this scale before, don’t panic. In order to make the most of this project, I will work with you beginning this week to help you select a topic early, and I will ask you to turn in parts of the essay throughout the semester, since a publishable article rarely emerges from two weeks’ worth of work at the end of the semester.
Very Partial Schedule

(A detailed reading schedule will be distributed next week.)

Jan. 11  Introductions.

**Individual conferences between Jan. 11 and Jan. 18**

Jan. 18  1. Before your conference with me, skim the introductions to the major sections of Early American Writings (major introductions begin on pp. 1, 23, 140, 159, 358, 426, 479, 698, 758, 942, and 1109).


Jan. 25-  Readings TBA
Feb. 22

Mar. 1  **Book review and focused topic for seminar paper due** (no response paper)

Mar. 8  No class

**Individual conferences regarding seminar papers**

Mar. 15  Spring break

Mar. 22  **Bibliography and abstract (or introduction or outline or partial draft) of seminar paper due** (no response paper)

Mar. 22-  Readings TBA
Apr. 19

Apr. 26  Presentations

May 3  Presentations

**Seminar paper due**