

Department: Modern & Classical Languages (French & Francophone Studies)

Course No: 1176 [184]

Credits: 3

Title: Literatures and Cultures of the Postcolonial Francophone

Contact: Roger Travis

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: Literatures and Cultures of the Postcolonial Francophone World. Three credits. Either semester. Open to sophomores. Conducted in English. Evolution of literatures and cultures formerly under French colonial rule. Language, Identity, Religion, Art and Politics as they shape affect these societies' passage to cultural autonomy.

Course Information: A. Description. This course examines cultures once under French rule as they emerge from various forms of indenture to take their place in a global culture. It addresses the challenges of postcolonial societies seeking to accede to a modernity that in many respects has been complicit with their former indenture. Women's roles are studied as pivotal figures for understanding a culture's self-representation, but also because of the critical part they have played in postcolonial cultural expression as guardians of a cultural legacy that often resisted appropriation. Students are exposed to the paradoxical elements involved in the passage to 'nationhood' as well as to the acquisition of true cultural, rather than purely political, independence. They discover the varied ways by which indigenous traditions, whether linguistic, religious, social or artistic, become distorted under foreign rule, requiring an arduous and often painful reassessment of history. The course addresses the role of memory as it relates to forgotten histories, looking at its role in reshaping cultural identity and redefining the very concepts and values that were once used to silence it.

B Course requirements : Students read a variety of short texts (stories, poetry, drama, essays) by representative postcolonial authors from various areas. They also watch selected films and documentaries concerning these regions, and are introduced to artisanal production of various kinds as well. All works will be presented in English. The students hone their writing skills in having to write three short papers, prepare one project, and take a final exam to complete the course.

C. Major themes, issues, topics, etc., to be covered. Students are encouraged to recognize that in different cultures at different times, cultural forms, such as art or religion or poetry, have different values or functions, so that, for example, both sculpture and medicine may be intimately tied to religious practices in one culture, and writing may be considered 'suspect' in one while oral discourse

carries legitimacy in another. Students are encouraged to examine the logic behind received notions such as 'civilized', 'primitive' and to redefine what constitutes 'progress', as well as considering different conceptions of knowledge and their authority in a given culture. Eventually students are led to understand the relativity of many of the beliefs they have assumed to be universal, and to see the role that many other factors, such as material contingency or power relations play in determining cultural ideals.

- Meets Goals of Gen Ed:**
- a. Become articulate: Significant emphasis is placed on oral and written expression in the course, by means of regular oral exchange and debate, and by means of written exercises which are graded for their logic and effectiveness.
 - b. Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility: The geographical breadth and variety of the cultures studied in the course is matched by the several discourses explored in relation to each. Students are coached to make connections between seemingly discrete aspects of culture and to understand how each of these engenders different points of view.
 - c. Acquire critical judgment: Cultural expressions are examined from multiple perspectives rather than from a Manichean viewpoint, so that much of the material of the course involves complex comparative criticism.
 - d. Acquire moral sensitivity: Students are exposed to unfamiliar traditions and are encouraged to place themselves imaginatively in a variety of hypothetical situations. They learn to discern analogies as well as to appreciate differences and to see that reductive judgments arise out of anxiety and that they close off the possibility of self-understanding as well as that of others.
 - e. Acquire awareness of their era and society: The course deals with material from the 20th century, and studies processes that are still at work in many regions of the world. They are encouraged to relate what they learn to their own experience and to knowledge they have already acquired, and to identify corresponding features of their culture with unfamiliar ones. Finally, they are obliged to understand the interconnections between seemingly unrelated events in the world, and to recognize systemic features of cultures in different guises.
 - f. Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human experience: This is built into the material of the course, but also functions as part of the course's methodology. Students are constantly required to place themselves imaginatively in unfamiliar situations, and to take positions that might be remote from their own in order to consider all cultures as communities of subjects rather than objects of study.
 - g. Acquire a working knowledge of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and to use knowledge: Students make use of a variety of sources for information in the class, and learn to evaluate and to respect the particular function of each. They are also expected to be responsible for the ways in which these sources are utilized. They become conscious of themselves as researchers but are reminded of the limits of that objectivity, and of the tendency to project upon others one's own issues and biases. Finally, students are taught to appreciate the enormous complexity of studying other cultures and their expressions, but also the degree to which such study contributes to their understanding of their own lives.

CA1 Criteria: This course deals primarily with literature and the arts, cultural productions that are defined by this rubric. It attempts, however, to give students a greater understanding of precisely what

these mean within a culture under certain pressures, and of how the arts and humanities relate to other cultural productions in different cultural contexts. Students will emerge with a greater sensitivity to the specificity of literary discourse, but also of its myriad connections to other cultural discourses.

CA4Criteria: the course involves the study of cultures and traditions outside of Europe and the U.S., and emphasizes the ways in which cultures which received the imprint of French language and culture nonetheless have developed in extremely diverse ways. This diversity, which France long sought to occult, has since independence proven to be these cultures' greatest asset. The course explores different forms of knowledge and the different ethical ideals as well as different ideals of artistic perfection that were either perceived as dangerous or inferior by the French colonial system. It also examines the different roles played by literature and the arts from those operative in Europe now, while finding similarities with earlier periods of European history that have been forgotten.

Role of Grad Students: Graduate teaching assistants would grade papers and hold office hours and/or discussion groups. They would be prepared in a week-long workshop at the start of the year, and would meet weekly with the professor to discuss techniques, etc. The professor will supervise all their work