Foundational Component Area: Language, Philosophy and Culture

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Language, Philosophy and Culture. Courses in this category focus on how ideas, values, beliefs, and other aspects of culture express and affect human experience. Courses involve the exploration of ideas that foster aesthetic and intellectual creation in order to understand the human condition across cultures.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

ENGL 253 surveys the history, theories, and methods of contemporary cultural studies, with particular emphasis on the encoded messages in mass entertainment to teach students about the social uses and political implications of popular culture. The impact and affect of popular culture on the beliefs and ideologies which inform societies, nations, and groups around the globe is undeniable if only because its reach is so broad and deep in all our lives. Thus, it is imperative that students be trained in cultural theory—and understand it as a practice with its own history and concepts—so as to examine the meanings that are produced and circulated through the processes, products and practices of everyday life.

Core Objectives

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

Critical thinking is the primary objective of this course because students are actively engaged in the critical analysis and interpretation of texts drawn from popular culture. They must not only consider the potential "message" of a text but how it is created and disseminated to an audience. Moreover, they must take into consideration its "cultural function" as an object informed by ideology. The students learn to construct the right questions that enable one to reach answers that can be defended—such is the basic process of inquiry.

Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

This objective is achieved through two medium-sized essays, several short essays and an oral presentation made by each student to the class over their final essay topic. There is dialogue after the presentation between the presenter and the class as they ask questions and push the student to defend the critical position taken in the essay. The short essays allow me to monitor their development as writers and communicators which will be evaluated in the longer essays.

Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

The students will be exposed to a spectrum of philosophies and theories concerned with society, culture and the interaction between the two. There are political and ideological foundations to these concepts which necessitate the
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students make constant assessments about their own moral positions throughout the semester. Since no one theory is given absolute dominance the students are free to develop their thoughts about their beliefs and notions of social duty as we progress through different theories and the varied texts used as examples. There is an emphasis on diversity in terms of both the mediums we can consider and the context of the texts with regards to history, region, racial and ethnic communities, etc. The students study the topics of transnationalism and internationalism in popular culture via separate class days devoted to charting the half century long history and global uses of the Caribbean pop music called ska as well as specific examples drawn from Japanese cultural production (anime, manga and noise rock bands) that have entered the global marketplace of culture. In thinking about how different groups at different times have used these productions they learn about their own (possibly) unconscious integration into an international community composed of pop markets. This also accounts for why ENGL 253 should be granted the International and Cultural Diversity (ICD) designation.

Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making):

Students cannot help but learn about social responsibility because all the theories studied in ENGL 253 have roots in politically charged consequences. The main lesson of the class is that even the most innocent seeming "entertainment" has political reverberations for which it is our duty as citizens to be cognizant. Likewise, if we are to be cognizant we have to understand our own potential complicity with the ideas of a text. Students do not get to hide behind the statement, "It is just a movie," or "It is just a pop song." Ethical decision-making requires an ethics, ENGL 253 does not prescribe a singular morality to its students but it does teach them how we must all be held accountable for the one we support, even if unconsciously, through our pop text choices.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.