

Comparative Studies 275 Introduction to Visual Representation

Rationale for GEC Visual and Performing Arts Category and Assessment Plan for the Course

General Course Description

Comparative Studies 275 currently fulfills the GEC Arts and Humanities: Cultures and Ideas category. We are proposing here that the course instead fulfill the Visual/Performing Arts requirement. We propose that change in status because the course has been significantly reconceptualized by two faculty members, namely Dr. Philip Armstrong, who has a Ph.D. in History of Art (UCLA), and Dr. Ruby Tapia, whose research focuses on visual studies. Both have published widely in the field of visual studies.

The course offers an in-depth analysis of significant aspects of modern forms of visual expressions. As presently conceived, the course focuses mostly on the 20th century. Students are required to develop analytical abilities that enable them to analyze works of visual art both with regard to their aesthetic dimensions and their cultural meaning. The course reviews key artistic developments of the twentieth century, aesthetic strategies, and signs of social and political significance in selected genres of modern visual culture (such as photography, painting, and film). In addition to its social, cultural and political contextualization of works of art, the course develops students' understanding of aesthetic forms of visual expressions as well as their skills with regard to the interpretation of visual expressions. Students are introduced to basic questions and critical vocabulary that enables them to analyze works of visual art in their various dimensions. Students consider how paintings, photographs, films and other visual objects both shape and are shaped by the concepts, values, and meanings that constitute cultural life in contemporary society. Weekly readings cover a number of different themes pertinent to a broad survey of visual material, with the aim of establishing a critical vocabulary for students to discuss and write about visual representations from different perspectives.

General goals of the GEC Arts and Humanities, Analysis of Texts and Works of Art requirements:

- Aesthetic and historical response and judgment: Students develop a vocabulary for the analysis of the aesthetic dimensions of works of art; students consider the historical development of a range of visual genres as these affect and are affected by social, political, and economic conditions.
- Interpretation and evaluation: Students learn about the methods used in visual studies approaches to the interpretation and evaluation of different genres.
- Critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing: Students become active and critical viewers and learn to analyze works of visual art in a series of writing assignments.

- Experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience: Students learn to be active viewers of a range visual arts genres and to analyze their own experiences in light of the interpretive skills they acquired.

General learning objectives of the GEC Arts and Humanities, Analysis of Texts and Works of Art requirements:

- To have direct contact with major forms of human thought and expression as distinctive and as interrelated cultural phenomena, and to nurture informed responsiveness to them and heightened participation in them. Students are exposed to a range of 20th century visual arts genres.
- To acquire a perspective on human history and an understanding of the force of the past in shaping human activity. Such a perspective should enable a student to examine the present cross-culturally and cross-temporally; to view cultural phenomena in context; and to be aware of human interaction with the material world. Students learn to examine critically the relationships between visual arts and changing social, political, and cultural contexts.
- To develop a capacity to comprehend and evaluate critically the personal and social values of one's own world as compared with those of other communities in time and space. Students are encouraged to examine the ways in which their own values and perspectives are shaped by various visual arts genres.
- To contribute to a student's sense of social and cultural diversity and sensitivity to problems of inequity and of individual similarity and difference (e.g., race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion, and class). The course emphasizes the ways in which different forms of visual arts may disrupt or reinforce stereotypical thinking about social and cultural differences.
- To examine the cultures of major regions of the world and through such study to develop international and global perspectives. This course focuses on US and European visual arts.
- To contribute to a student's understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior. Students analyze the ways in which visual artworks play an important role in shaping values and beliefs in American and European societies.
- To learn to appreciate and interpret significant writings (e.g., literary, philosophical, or religious). The focus of this course is on becoming critical viewers and knowledgeable interpreters of visual art. Students read a variety of critical essays about the history and production of American and European visual arts.
- To develop abilities to be an enlightened observer or an active participant in a discipline within the visual, spatial, musical, theatrical, rhetorical, or written arts. Students are

encouraged to become lifelong analysts and critics of the visual arts and to understand the role visual arts play in shaping their own values and beliefs.

Assessment plan for the course:

Assessment is embedded in the grading criteria for the assignments; that is, assignments will be evaluated based on the goals and objectives of the course. Specifically, the course will evaluate whether students' written and oral assignments indicate that they have learned to

- write and speak with clarity and precision so as to advance thoughts and arguments coherently and persuasively
- engage in critical analysis of visual arts genres in social, cultural, and political contexts
- understand research methods used in the fields of visual arts
- achieve an understanding of and develop an appreciation for ethnic, gender, racial, and class differences as these are expressed in visual artworks
- appreciate the role of visual artworks in shaping their own cultural values and beliefs

The instructor will assess the degree to which the main objectives of the course, as stated above, have been achieved in the various course assignments. In particular, the assessment will focus on students' ability to express a critical understanding of the aesthetic dimensions of visual artworks and on the social and cultural meanings of visual artworks.

In addition, students will be asked to fill out narrative evaluations at the end of the quarter. Narrative evaluation forms used in Comparative Studies ask detailed questions regarding the effectiveness of the course, including the teaching materials. Based on the comments of the students, but also including the instructor's assessment of the course (which includes an evaluation of the materials and pedagogy employed to reach the objectives of the course), appropriate changes will be made to the syllabus.