

GEC Rationale and Assessment Plan

5. Capstone: Issues of the Contemporary World

English H597.04 Interdisciplinary Approaches to Narrative in the Contemporary World

Goals:

By drawing upon multiple disciplines—philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science—Interdisciplinary Approaches to Narrative in the Contemporary World coursework provides a capstone experience that helps Honors students enhance their understanding of the production and reception of contemporary narrative, a mode of communication that is increasingly important in our globalized world.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from a range of disciplines vis-à-vis narrative. (ELO 1)
2. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting majors across the university campus. (ELO 2)
3. Students write about or conduct contemporary research on narrative using the tools of the different disciplines that include philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science. (ELO 3)

I Rationale and Assessment Plan

Rationale: By means of theoretical and empirical texts, together with significant narratives instantiated in many and diverse forms, students in this capstone honors course will become acquainted with certain workings of art and science, knowledge and imagination, in a unified manner. This approach is based on the observation that narratives implicitly or explicitly contain worldviews, ethical stances, cognitive approaches, and emotions. Also, implicitly or explicitly, they are all situated in time and space, overdetermined by history and geography, so to speak. Studying how these different elements come together in specific instances contributes powerfully to our general understanding of the production and reception of contemporary narrative.

a) The course goals address the general and specific expected learning outcomes as follows:

1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from a range of disciplines vis-à-vis narrative. Weeks 1 through 10 students will read a range of user-friendly theoretical and scientific readings in philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science. Students will demonstrate the application of this knowledge in written assignments throughout the quarter; depending on the iteration this will variously work in the form of assigned weekly journals, essays and exams.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting majors across the

university campus. Make readily visible majors and specific interests of students to foster dialogue that builds on each student's disciplinary strength. Throughout the quarter students will present to the class what they have learned and synthesized as it relates to their specific field and interests.

3. Students will write about or conduct research on narrative using the tools of the different disciplines that include philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science. Regular writing assignments and classroom discussion will allow students to explore how different disciplinary concepts and tools enrich the understanding of regularly assigned narrative fictions.

b) How do the assigned readings address the general and specific expected learning outcomes above?

The course readings consist of interdisciplinary research of various kinds and narratives of various kinds. The students have the task of relating the research and the narratives, and that task will require them to see not only how theory influences the interpretation of narratives but also how narratives can challenge and lead to revisions of theory. In a similar way, they can both draw on the perspectives of their own disciplinary homes and come to understand the limitations of those perspectives. As they discuss the readings in class and write their own analyses, they will be learning not only about narrative and theory but also about how interdisciplinary knowledge gets constructed, challenged, and revised.

c) How do course topics address the general and specific expected learning outcomes above?

The course will not only move back and forth between the challenges of individual narratives and the findings and proposals of interdisciplinary research but will also continually return to the question of narrative in the contemporary world. For example, in one version of the course, each week's theoretical and narrative readings (and in some cases viewings) focus on general and specific ways of understanding how emotions inform the construction of and our engagement with narrative art. To provide foundational knowledge, the course begins with more framing questions such as "What Emotions are, and are Not" and ends with more specifically focused rubrics such as "Tele-visuals, Cruelty, and Aggression".

d) How do the written assignments address the general and specific expected learning outcomes above?

The written assignments require students to focus on the interaction between interdisciplinary research and individual narrative. Journal assignments, for example, will allow the students to follow a thread of analytical thinking that explores (and experiments with) the use of a specific concept or tool in their analyses of several narratives. The formal essay assignments allow them to work more systematically with

the interactions of the concepts, tools, and narratives. These assignments will help sharpen their skills as both close readers and clear writers.

II

Assessment Plan

Macro:

1. At the midterm of the course, the instructor will evaluate the class performance by spending 15 minutes to ask students to answer the following questions:

- a. Are readings clear and relevant to the topics?
- b. How can we improve this?
- c. Are the different disciplinary approaches clear thus far?
- d. Do you understand how the different disciplinary approaches enrich our understanding of the narratives?
- e. Is discussion and lecture allowing you to see how they might apply the theory to the understanding of issues in the contemporary world?

2. A quantitative assessment of a random sample of essays collected during a five year period will be used to evaluate if the class is meeting the three Expected Learning Outcomes as evidenced in their writing assignments. The grid is as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
Essay is creative (ELO 2)							
Essay is organized (ELO 1)							
Essay is analytical (ELO 1 & 2)							
Essay is written in unique style (ELO 3)							

Definitions:

- Creative: While the essays are argumentative, they should also pay certain attention to aesthetic qualities and presentation in ways that engage the reader.
- Organized: A well-organized essay builds from paragraph to paragraph a systematic analysis that substantiates the thesis.
- Analytical: An analytical essay uses critical tools and concepts to build an argument that explores a central idea generated from a given narrative fiction. Analysis involves a focused look at specific aspects of a given narrative fiction as well as demonstrating the

relationship between the subordinate arguments and overall controlling ideas. Analytic essays shun summary and description.

- Uniquely Stylized: A uniquely stylized essay has the "Wow Factor"; the *je ne sais quoi* that comes from a skillful and personalized writerly voice.

Micro:

1. Direct measures:

- a. The essay assignments to analyze a given narrative fiction using the concepts and tools learned during the quarter provide a way to assess how well the students are comprehending the material and able to utilize their judgment in the selecting of appropriate concepts and tools.

2. Indirect measures:

- a. The quantitative SEIs. All items are relevant and will be tracked over successive iterations of the course.
- b. A course specific discursive evaluation form will be filled out by the students at the end of each quarter. The prompt on the form will ask the students not only to evaluate the course and the instructor's performance but also to ask how well it achieved its Expected Learning Outcomes, as spelled out above.

Plan to Improve Student Performance:

- a. Feedback loop: Based on the findings, the instructors will restructure and modify the course whereby the student is engaged with material but that meets all three Expected Learning Outcomes.
- b. After each iteration of the course, the instructors will compare the findings of the indirect and direct measures for that iteration with previous iterations to assess the extent to which the course is meeting its GEC goals. If it is not, the instructors will re-examine and revise some or all of the various means that have been selected to meet those goals: the syllabus, lectures, writing assignments, and exams, to improve learning quality.