Syllabus
English 490.01: Seminar in Literature: Prison Literature
Fall 2006, MW 4:00-5:15, SBS F125

Professor: Dr. Molly Youngkin
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Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30 pm, 5:30-6:30 pm, and by appt.
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E-mail: myoungkin@csudh.edu
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Phone: 243-3941 (my office)
Phone: 243-3322 (English dept)

Course Description and Objectives:

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Michel Foucault examines the history of the prison and focuses on the transition from physical punishment to mental punishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This course will take as its foundation Foucault's claim that how we think about imprisonment changes from one historical period to another, and that understanding the historical context for images of the prison and prisoner in literature is key to understanding the representations of prisoners in literature. We also will take up how the issues raised by prison literature relate to our perceptions of ourselves and others as “free” or “restricted” in our own twenty-first century culture.

English 490 is the capstone experience for undergraduate English majors; therefore, this course is intended to allow you to draw on the critical reading and writing skills you have learned in other English classes, but it also is intended to build on these skills, in preparation for life beyond the undergraduate degree. Specifically, we will focus on increasing your research, argumentation, and documentation skills, as well as your ability to incorporate literary criticism into your writing. You should also emerge from this course with a writing sample appropriate for graduate school applications, should you be interested in applying.

Required Course Materials:


Note: All texts are available at the CSUDH Bookstore. Please try to use the editions I have specified above. It is difficult to have productive discussions if people are using a variety of texts and editions, all with different page numbers.

Recommended Course Materials:

An English handbook, which covers grammar, mechanics, and usage. Two good examples are *The Little, Brown Handbook* and *The Everyday Writer*.

If you don’t already own a good dictionary, such as *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, buy one now.

Grade Breakdown:

Seminar Paper 25%
Position Paper 15%
Research Exercise 10%
Annotated Bibliography & Lit Review 20%
Participation 20%
In-class Writing Assignments 10%

Course Requirements:

Seminar Paper: The seminar paper is the major writing assignment for this class and acts as a capstone to the rest of the work you will do this term. Your paper should be 8-10 pages and should articulate a clear but complex argument about one of the texts we've read in this class. You should demonstrate a critical awareness of the topic you choose by incorporating a range of secondary (and possibly primary) sources; the research exercise and annotated bibliography will help you gather the materials for your paper. A statement of your paper topic (typed, at least one paragraph) is due Wed., Oct. 11. You must also submit a progress report (typed, at least 2 pages), detailing how you are constructing your argument on Wed., Nov. 22, and you must meet with me during the last two weeks of classes to discuss your progress report. The paper is due by 4 pm, in my mailbox, on Mon., Dec. 11. If you do not complete all aspects of the assignment (statement of topic, progress report, individual conference, and final draft), you will not get credit for the paper.

Position Paper: You will be asked to write a shorter position paper (3-4 pages, typed), about one of the literary texts we are reading in this class. The paper should draw on at least one outside critical, theoretical, or historical source not already assigned for the course. On the day you turn in your position paper, I will ask you to briefly present the ideas in your paper to the class. This is not a formal presentation; I will just ask you to say a few words about your argument, to get our conversation going.

Research exercise: This exercise is designed to help you learn how to find and choose appropriate critical articles, using the MLA database. The exercise will be given out during the fifth week of class, and it will be due at the beginning of class on Wed., Oct. 11.

Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review: The annotated bibliography is a list of 8 secondary sources, with brief summaries and analyses of the contents of those sources, on any topic related to this course. The literature review is a 2-3 page essay, summing up the materials in the annotated bibliography and analyzing how these materials can provide a framework for the seminar paper. I recommend that you choose the topic you plan to develop in your seminar paper, since annotating the sources will take significant time and effort. I'll give you more details about this assignment in class. Due date: Wed., Nov. 8, at the beginning of class.

Participation: In a seminar, participation is an absolute must. I expect you to come ready to discuss the readings for the day with enthusiasm, and I expect everyone to contribute to the discussion at least once during every class. Attendance is also a must. You are allowed 3 absences, and I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused. Save your absences for emergencies (death in family, severe illness, work-related issues). If you miss more than 3 classes or are habitually late, there will be a significant reduction in your participation grade (1/3 of a letter grade per absence). You may not miss the day your position paper is due, or the day the annotated bibliography is due. Part of the assignment is being in class to present your findings.

In-class writing assignments: Occasionally, we will start the day's discussion with an in-class writing assignment, which will focus on the reading for the day. If you miss a day on which we have an in-class writing assignment, you cannot make it up. If you miss one in-class writing assignment, your grade will be calculated using the number of assignments you completed. If you miss more than one, a zero will be entered for all assignments missed except the first one missed.
Grading Scale and Criterion:

The grading scale is based on the 4.0 system approved by CSUDH. I will assign numerical grades for all assignments, and I will use the final grade sheet attached to this syllabus to figure final grades. The numerical/letter grade correlation is as follows: 94-100=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B+, 84-86=B, 80-83=B-, 77-79=C+, 74-76=C, 70-73=C-); 67-69=D+ and 64-66=D, 60-63=D-, 0-59=F. My grading criterion is this: for all major writing assignments (the seminar paper and the position paper), I am looking for what I call “academic writing,” writing that expresses a complex argument with specific examples as evidence and does so in an engaging, sophisticated manner. See attached handout for more about what constitutes academic writing.

Late Assignments:

Expect deductions for late assignments. Typically, I deduct 10 points per 24 hours; for example, a paper that earns 90 points and is a day late will drop to an 80. No papers will be accepted via email, and no double submissions (same project submitted for another class) allowed.

Electronic Equipment in the Classroom:

No cell phones, pagers, CD players, tape recorders, or other electronic equipment in the classroom. If you want to bring a laptop to class, record lectures, or bring a guest to class, you must get my approval first.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else’s ideas or words as your own. It is a serious academic offense and may result in a failing grade for the assignment, a failing grade for the course, and/or university disciplinary action. For more details about the university’s policy on this issue, see the University Catalog. If you are unsure about how to integrate others’ ideas or words into your work without plagiarizing, consult your English handbook and/or come talk to me. I’ll be glad to help you avoid plagiarism!

Drop policy:

The University requires a “serious and compelling reason” for drops after the third week of the semester, and I (and the department chair) must be willing to accept the reason for the drop and sign the drop form. Poor performance in the course does not constitute a serious and compelling reason. If you need to drop the course after the third week, be prepared to provide a serious and compelling reason and the documentation to support this reason.

Resources for Students:

Tutoring Center: The Tutoring Center is located in SCC-11-311 and 325. Experienced tutors are available to help students who wishes to improve their writing. To make an appointment, call 243-3827.

Advising: For questions about the undergraduate English curriculum, see an adviser in the English department. If you are an English major and you haven’t talked to an adviser yet, you should do so as soon as possible.

Disabled Student Services: Persons with disabilities are welcome in this classroom. If you have a disability and need specific accommodations, please register with Disabled Student Services and then talk to me. DSS is located on the first floor of Welch Hall, and the phone number is 243-3660.
Class Schedule

The dates and activities listed below are subject to change. You are responsible for noting all changes in the syllabus. Read the assigned materials before coming to class.

Week 1:

M, 8/28: Introduction to Course

W, 8/30: Late-18th and Early-19th-Century Conceptions of the Prison

Excerpt from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (provided by Dr. Youngkin)
Byron, “Prisoner of Chillon” (provided by Dr. Youngkin)

Week 2:

M, 9/4: Labor Day—No Class


Week 3:


Week 4:

M, 9/18: Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, chapters 40-49 (XL-XLIX)

W, 9/20: Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, chapters 50-60 (L-LX)

Week 5:

M, 9/25: Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, chapters 61-end (LXI-end)

W, 9/27: Reading from the MLA Handbook about Research and Writing (pp. 3-63). Pay especially close attention to sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.6. You can skim the other sections for now, with a plan to return to these sections as you get further along with the seminar paper.

In class: Discuss research exercise and seminar paper proposal

Week 6:

M, 10/2: Late-Nineteenth Century Penology

Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (pp. 26-43) and excerpts from *De Profundis* (pp. 1-14, 28-34)

W, 10/4: Wilde, more excerpts from *De Profundis* (pp. 41-51, 54-62, 82-86, 91-92) and “To L.L.” (pp. 48-50 in *Ballad of Reading Gaol*)
Week 7:
M, 10/9: Early Twentieth Century Women’s Resistance
Smedley and O’Hare, pp. 61-89 in Franklin

W, 10/11: No reading: Research exercise and Statement of Paper Topic due at the beginning of class
In class: Discuss Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review assignment

Week 8:
M, 10/16: Holocaust Literature
Borowski, *This Way for the Gas*, pp. 11-81

W, 10/18: Borowski, *This Way for the Gas*, pp. 82-142

Week 9:
M, 10/23: Borowski, *This Way for the Gas*, pp. 143-80

W, 10/25: The New Journalism and Prisoners in the 1950s
Capote, *In Cold Blood*, Part I

Week 10:
M, 10/30 Capote, *In Cold Blood*, Part II


Week 11:

W, 11/8: No reading; Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review Due
In class: Share findings in small groups

Week 12:
M, 11/13: Black Power
Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Mumia Abu Jamal, pp. 147-155, 200-214, 350-357 in Franklin

W, 11/15: Chicano Prisoners
Jimmy Santiago Baca, pp. 252-256, 357-365 in Franklin
Week 13:

M, 11/20: Imprisonment Issues in Fiction

Kim Wozencraft, from Notes from the Country Club, pp. 306-318 in Franklin
Chris Abani, Becoming Abigail, pp. 11-54

W, 11/22: Progress Report Due

Chris Abani, pp. 55-end

In class: Course Evaluations

Week 14:

M, 11/27: Individual Conferences

W, 11/29: Individual Conferences

Week 15:

M, 12/4: Individual Conferences

W, 12/6: Individual Conferences

Seminar Paper due on Monday, Dec. 11, by 4pm, in my mailbox.
Molly Youngkin  
Grade Calculation Sheet  
English 490

Student ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Numerical Value</th>
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<td>Position Paper</td>
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<td>Research Exercise</td>
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<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>In-class Writing Assignments</td>
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Numerical Total ________

Final Grade ________

Final Grade Scale

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Directions

1) Fill in the appropriate numerical value for each assignment; 2) Multiply that value by the percentage weight in the second column; 3) Add the amounts in the “total” column; 4) Use the “final grade scale” to calculate your final letter grade.
Below is the grading criteria for the Position Paper and the Seminar Paper. In this set of criteria, when I refer to the paper’s thesis, I am referring to the main statement of your argument, which I expect to see early in the essay. When I refer to the argument, I mean the way in which the thesis is developed in the rest of the essay, through clear statements about where the argument is going at key points in the essay. Finally, when I refer to supporting evidence, I mean the specific examples from the text you are using to flesh out your argument. If you have not written this type of paper before, feel free to come talk to me about how to go about it.

A= All material required for the assignment is present. The paper’s thesis goes way beyond the obvious, and the argument presents a precise, informed, incisive, and satisfying critical investigation of the topic. The implications of the thesis are fully developed through the use of supporting evidence. The ideas within the essay are well-organized, and the language used in the essay is appropriate to the audience. The essay is written in MLA format, with in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

B= All material required for the assignment is present. The paper’s thesis goes beyond the obvious, and the argument presents a clear and accurate investigation of the topic. There is some strong supporting evidence for the thesis, but the ideas may not be fleshed out as fully as they might be, or some readings may not be as precise as they could be. The ideas within the essay are well-organized, and the language used in the essay is appropriate to the audience. The essay is written in MLA format, with in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

C= All material required for the assignment is present. The essay has a thesis and details to support that thesis. The argument is adequate, but does not fully explore the implications of the topic or does not present a critical viewpoint that goes very far beyond the obvious. The supporting evidence for the argument may be adequate but not as fully developed as it could be and less convincing than it could be. The ideas within the essay are appropriately organized, and the language used in the essay is appropriate to the audience. The essay is written in MLA format, with in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

D= Material required for the assignment may be missing. The essay has a weak thesis, and details to support the thesis are not developed adequately. The thesis does not go beyond the obvious or is more descriptive than analytical. Supporting evidence for the thesis may be missing or is so far off-base to be unconvincing. The ideas within the essay are not well-organized, and the language used in the essay may not be appropriate to the audience. The essay may lack items related to MLA format.

F= Material required for the assignment may be missing. The essay has a very weak thesis or no thesis, and details to support the thesis are not developed adequately or are missing. The thesis does not go beyond the obvious or is more descriptive than analytical. Supporting evidence for the thesis may be missing or is so far off-base to be unconvincing. The ideas within the essay are not well-organized, and the language used in the essay may not be appropriate to the audience. The essay may lack items related to MLA format.