

LITERARY EXPLORATIONS (LE)

September 1, 2015

I. Short Description

Students will enter into varied intellectual and cultural conversations through the close reading of literary works. Courses within this theme will seek to deepen the understanding students have of the nature of literary forms and genres as well as the means by which authors develop arguments, depict and describe experience, and employ the creative resources of language to envision a range of human possibilities.

II. Thematic Core Learning Outcomes and Interpretation

A. Students will be able to....

1. analyze works through close reading with sensitivity to the interplay of ideas, genre, language, literary form and aesthetic enjoyment
2. situate their interpretations of the works within relevant literary, historical, biographical and/or cultural contexts and traditions
3. explore enduring questions presented in literature, reflecting on the harmony with and dissonance from Christian theological traditions

B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements

Courses taught with this designation should be uniquely sensitive to the power of extraordinary writers across a variety of disciplines and historical eras to change hearts as well as minds of readers, with great possibility for interdisciplinary engagement and aesthetic enjoyment. Students will be introduced to strategies of reading that treat the works formally as imaginative constructs and not just repositories of ideas.

Students will be encouraged to consider the original context of the works taught as well as their ongoing intellectual and cultural impact. While courses that aspire to this designation could grapple with *The Origin of Species* as readily as *The Brothers Karamazov*, all syllabi should include, but not necessarily be limited to, recognizably literary works as a part of the reading list.

1. Learning Outcome #1. Students will be able to analyze works through close reading with sensitivity to the interplay of ideas, genre, language, literary form and aesthetic enjoyment.

To meet this outcome requires that significant attention be paid to the nature of the works taught as artistic achievements and rhetorically powerful documents. In other words, form should be taught along with, and indeed as inseparable from, content. Students will develop sophisticated strategies for describing, in speech and writing, among other qualities, intertextual references, linguistic register, syntax, figurative language, and tone. For example, teaching St. Augustine's *Confessions* should include not only questions such as: What is Augustine's conception of the nature of free will, but also questions such as: Why did Augustine choose such a personal mode? What literary models does he imitate or invoke? What is new about his strategy of autobiographical writing? What are the ramifications of his stylistic choices, such as his extensive use of paradox? How does he integrate Scripture, particularly the Psalms, into his confessions? What is the significance of structuring the document (early personal confessions and stories, later, more philosophical argument) the

way he does?

2. Learning Outcome #2. Students will be able to situate their interpretations of the works within relevant literary, historical, biographical, and/or cultural contexts and traditions.

Students in Literary Explorations courses will be able to argue for specific textual links between works and other materials that establish literary, historical, biographical, and/or cultural contexts and traditions. Through finding and evaluating contextual materials, students will demonstrate the ways in which given texts (or students' interpretations of texts) shape and respond to contexts. Students should learn that particular reading practices, as well as the status of what have been considered to be "great, canonical, or major texts," are debatable political and ethical questions rather than transcendental givens.

3. Learning Outcome #3. Students will explore enduring questions presented in literature, reflecting on the harmony with and dissonance from Christian theological traditions.

By evoking questions that are important to the formation of the moral imagination, literary works can profoundly affect the ethos of their readers. As such, Christian readers have a unique imperative to consider the implications of a text for our intellectual and spiritual lives. Questions of central importance to the class might, for example, be: What does a particular work have to teach us about the nature of suffering? What does it mean to read as a Christian? How do fiction and other imaginative work affect the spiritual lives of readers? To fulfill this outcome, students will engage such questions explicitly in speech and writing, exploring integration beyond the simple identification of religious content in texts, demonstrating a growing ability to relate the interpretation of texts and textual forms to aspects of faith.

4. Use of Writing in Literary Explorations Courses

In courses associated with Literary Explorations, writing will be central to the achievement of all outcomes – both as a means toward achieving the outcomes and as a means of assessing achievement. Writing within the Literary Explorations courses serves as a way to both understand and respond to the rhetorical situations (purposes and audiences), effectively communicating interpretations developed according to disciplinary subject matter knowledge.

III. Guidelines

A. Expanded Description

None given.

B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal).

1. The Literary Exploration theme supports the "Christ at the Core," Holistic Learning Goal #1 by "developing strong abilities to discover and evaluate information [students] need to draw conclusions," especially in relation to literary texts and forms, enabling students to practice analytic reasoning and calling on them to present "their thoughts clearly in oral and written forms." The outcomes of Literary Explorations will focus in particular on the final piece of this goal, "developing skills in aesthetic engagement."

2. Literary Explorations supports “Christ at the Core” Wisdom Learning Goal #3, “growing in intellectual virtue and critical self-awareness through engagement with the complex questions of history, human values, and contemporary life.” Because literary texts are particularly apt for raising and engaging students in such complex questions, this thematic core has an important role in the achievement of this goal.

3. Literary Explorations courses support “Christ at the Core” Christian Character Learning Goal #3, “seeking wholeness in the physical, intellectual, and spiritual facets of their lives, honoring the God who has created each of us in his own image,” through its focus on intellectual, theological, and spiritual engagement with literary texts.

C. Examples of Assessment

A range of rigorous assignments could provide evidence that students have successfully achieved the three Student Outcomes given in section II.A. Depending on the structure of the course, one significant assignment might be relevant for assessing more than one outcome; in other cases a series of assignments will be more appropriate. A few examples and suggested approaches are offered here as *possible inspiration* of disciplinary appropriate and rigorous options, but use of these exact assignments is not required. Faculty are encouraged to go beyond these or substitute other creative assignments as they develop individual courses.

1. Assessment of Outcome 1: Students write an interpretive paper that defends a reading of a text with textual evidence and attention to the author’s rhetorical and aesthetic choices, or students engage in a sustained class conversation (evaluated by a rubric) that involves listening respectfully to others viewpoints and articulating one’s own ideas and questions clearly and with appropriate evidence and support. At the instructor’s discretion, the class discussion element could be fulfilled, or supplemented, by the effective research, preparation, and delivery of a well-supported oral presentation regarding the text in question.

2. Assessment of Outcome 2: Students write a research paper which includes discussion of a text’s original historical and milieu and how it differs from their own, engagement with questions of authorial agency, and reflection on the work in light of relevant secondary literature.

3. Assessment of Outcome 3: Students reflect on Christian themes in set of literary texts through a series of response papers or by writing an interpretive paper that identifies points where a work converges or conflicts with a Christian framework.

D. General Advice

None given.