

State University of New York, College at Oswego
College of Arts and Sciences
English Department

- I. **Course Number and Credit:** English 347; three (3) S.H.
- II. **Course Title:** Contemporary Native American Literature
- III. **Course Description:** An in-depth study of aspect(s) of Native American literatures. The course will explore issues of identity, community, authenticity, representation, textuality, and discourse as they are played with and played out in Contemporary Native American literatures.
- IV. **Prerequisites:** sophomore standing or instructor permission
- V. **Justification:** Native American literature continues to be one of the most rapidly growing and increasingly significant elements of both the expanding American literary canon and the contemporary American literary scene. Even a cursory survey of recent American literature anthologies, publisher offerings, and scholarship will bear witness to the vitality of the field and the range of work being done both creatively and critically. This particular course will allow students and instructor to explore selected genres and themes as they are played with and played out in the texts read and discussed. Relevant secondary materials will help students understand the histories, cultures, and communities grounding texts and authors. The course will also give Native American studies students another option to choose as they design their inter-disciplinary program.

English 347, Contemporary Native American Literature, is a Literary Histories, Cultural Aesthetics, and Transformation of Powers course for the English major. The course is expected to be offered once a year or once every three semesters (1r) and have a cap of 35 students. Given its focus on Native American literatures, and therefore on cultures and worldviews that are non-western, the course is intended to be an option in the World Awareness--Humanities category, the learning outcomes of which are that students will be able to demonstrate --knowledge of *either* a broad outline of world history; *or* the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of one non-Western civilization (WA--H LO1); and --knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas in the General Education program (WA--H LO2).

Additionally, with its focus on identity and diversity and accompanying concerns with and examination of issues of equality and social justice, ENG 347 is also intended to be an option in the Diversity, Identity, and Social Justice in the United States category, the learning outcomes of which are that student will be able to --investigate or analyze the role complex networks of social structure and systems play in individual and group identity formation and the creation and perpetuation of dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression in the United States (DI&SJinUS LO1); and

--demonstrate an understanding of how one or more marginalized groups in the United States construct and maintain multidimensional individual and group identities and their underpinning worldviews (DI&SJinUS LO2).

VI. Course Objectives: Advanced exposure to contemporary Native American literature enables students to recognize, investigate, and analyze issues of identity, authenticity, and “Othering” being articulated by Native writers in and with their texts. Beginning with Europeans’ first encounters with the indigenous peoples of North America and continuing to today, Natives have had their identity scripted for them by first the explorers and then the colonizing powers, a scripting that positions the indigene as other than and subordinate to the colonizers then and now. That binary privileges the latter at the expense of the former and in so doing creates and perpetuates structures and institutions whereby the sovereign subject has power and privilege at the expense of the *indian*, to use White Earth Anishinaabe Gerald Vizenor’s italicized term referring to the construction created and perpetuated by the dominant society. In response, Native literary artists produce in and with their texts a Native literatures, another discourse if you will, one grounded in the histories of particular Native nations and specific indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. As a corpus, Native American literatures asks its readers to think about author and authorship, influence, and authority, as well. Moreover, in tacitly asking readers to think about authority and why and how it is conferred, the texts encourage us to see how Natives have been positioned as *indian*, as Other, with the attendant lack of possibility, opportunity, and privilege that follows.

Upon completion of the course, students will be in a position to demonstrate the ability to:

- * recognize and critique the complex of historical and political events and texts; social forces; and representations produced by the dominant society that position Natives as Other both individually and as a whole; (Course LO1, DI&SJ inUS LO1)
- * articulate distinctive characteristics of specific Native cultures as they are manifested in and by the texts read and discussed; (Course LO2, WA-H LO1, DI&SJinUS LO2)
- * make clear an understanding of alternative literary traditions and aesthetics; (Course LO3, WA-H LO2, DI&SJinUS LO2)
- * recognize and situate contemporary Native written texts in relation to their oral and written antecedents; (Course LO4, WA-H LO1&2, DI&SJinUS LO2)
- * position the Native American literary tradition in relation to the American literary canon. (Course LO5, WA-H LO2, DI&SJinUS LO1&2)

VII. Course Outline: The general title of the course and its justification afford the instructor the freedom to craft a number of different offerings, each of which will explore the issues articulated in the course description. For instance, A course on contemporary poetry and the “problem” of mixedblood identity could examine, for instance, the works of Heid Erdrich, Kimberly Blaeser, Linda Hogan, Wendy Rose, and Simon Ortiz. A novels course might focus on the ways in which contemporary fiction by Native Americans appropriates, interrogates, and revises elements of the Master Narrative of the Nation and its literary canon as well as how Master Narrative and literary canon serve to enshrine the *indian* as Other while cementing power and authority for the settler-colonial society and its members; for example, one could pay attention to the ways that works by Gerald

Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louis Owens, Linda Hogan, and other plays with the Westering tendency of the Nation. Finally, a course on contemporary Native American non-fiction prose might examine the relationships between photographic and written texts as they are used by Vizenor, Owens, Silko, and Momaday. No matter what form and generic emphasis it takes, the course would include both cultural overviews of relevant Native groups, with particular attention paid to their oral tradition(s), and historical overviews of relevant Native groups, from both Native and non-Native perspectives. Thus, no matter its particular iteration, an English 347 offering will include the following:

1. **Theorizing Native texts: colonizing -vs- tribally-centered perspectives**
Here, important work includes that by Homi Bhabha on the location of culture; Michel Foucault on discourse, power, and authority; Gayatri Spivak on the subaltern, privilege, and transnational literacy; and work by Native scholars and artists such as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), Kimberly Blaeser (White Earth Anishinaabe), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux), Daniel Justice (Cherokee), Louis Owens (Choctaw), Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Anishinaabe), Robert Warrior (Osage), Jace Weaver (Cherokee), and Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee) (Course LO1&3, WA-H LO1&2, DI&SJinUS LO1&2)
2. **Positioning Native texts: considerations of historical and cultural contexts**
Here, sovereignty in all its manifestations in Native Studies--legal, political, cultural, intellectual, aesthetic--would feature, along with the historical and cultural contexts of particular Native nations, or even bands. Thus, for instance, texts from writers of the Southeastern nations would need to be situated in relation to Removal and the Trail of Tears, particulars of life in Indian Territory and present-day Oklahoma, and in what Native Studies scholars term the Mississippian Ideological Interaction Sphere (MIIS), while a course devoted to Anishinaabe writers of the White Earth band would need to attend to Euroamerican settlement in present-day Minnesota, the 19th-century treaties between the Anishinaabe and the Federal Government, Indian Agencies on the reservation, the role the Federal Government and Christian religious denominations played in the Boarding School era, how the logging industry at the turn of the century contributed to the dispossession and disenfranchisement of the White Earth people, and the intertwined histories of the Anishinaabe, the Lakota, and the Dakota--in addition to Anishinaabe culture and worldview. (Course LO2, WA-H LO1, DI&SJinUS LO1&2)
3. **Reading Native texts: considerations of genre** (Course LO3&4, WA-H LO2, DI&SJinUS LO1&2)
4. **Fixing the canon** (Course LO5, WA-H LO2, DI&SJinUS LO1&2)

VIII. Methods of Instruction: Lecture and discussion

IX. Course Requirements: Assigned readings, class discussion, exams and essays on assigned materials and discussion of same.

X. Means of Evaluation: Performance on assignments, class participation, exams, and class presentations may be used in evaluating students.

XI. Resources: No additional resources are needed for this course, although further strengthening of the holdings at Penfield and the Learning Resources Center should be an ongoing process handled through the standard procedures for placing orders. The department has the faculty resources and expertise to offer this course. We have verified with computing services and the library that we have sufficient resources to offer this course.

XII. Bibliography

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