

1. Course overview

Content and scope: The purpose of this course is to increase the student's knowledge of the history and current status of dominant theories related to literary and cultural studies. The course emphasizes major contemporary trends, such as feminist and queer theory, postcolonial and critical race studies, psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, as well as the historical progression from new criticism to structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, and various forms of poststructuralist literary and cultural studies. It is a required course for MA students in the Literature in English program.

Teaching: Seminar, two hours per week for ten weeks, 20 hours total. Attendance is obligatory in at least 8 out of 10 seminars.

Examination: Portfolio: The grade for the course is based upon a 7-page semester paper in combination with a 2-hour classroom exam. Students are given the opportunity to submit an optional draft of the paper for feedback before final submission.

2. Course objectives

I believe the learning outcomes adequately describe the knowledge that students should have acquired after finishing the course.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course you:

- know key theoretical approaches and methodologies within critical studies of literature in English;
- know how literary and cultural studies have developed historically, particularly within the past century;
- understand how literary and cultural theory can be applied to texts of various kinds, preparing you for papers you will write for other courses as well as your MA thesis;
- are familiar with some of the central questions and debates that are essential to literary and cultural studies today.

3. Assessment

Grades, dropouts, complaints: 21 registered, 4 ikke møtt, 1 legeattest;
grade distribution: 4 A (25%), 7 B (44%), 5 C (31%), 0 D, 0 E, 0 F

Appropriate content, level, prerequisites: yes

Student evaluations (mid-term): (17 responses out of 21 [81%])

Professor rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.= 4.7

Course rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.= 4.3

Student responses were generally very positive at the mid-point of the course, while also citing the difficulty of course content and the challenge of attempting to cover a wide range of theoretical fields in only 10 seminars. Some suggested adding more seminars or increasing the amount of class time. The textbook by Robert Dale Parker was generally praised for its accessibility and effectiveness at explaining difficult theoretical concepts. The professor was praised for similar skills, along with his ability to be both demanding and friendly, knowledgeable and accessible, creating a safe space for discussion and engagement with students. A few students suggested spending less time reviewing key concepts from previous sessions, but the majority found the repetition essential to their attempts to understand very difficult material. Several comments indicated that the professor was one of the best the students have ever had and that the course provided an essential introduction to theories and

theorists that MA students need to know. A few comments: “Great teacher and great introductions”; “one of the better courses I’ve taken”; “One of the best lecturers I’ve come across”; “Interesting and enlightening!”; “Much better than my experience with other professors at UiO”; “One of the better professors I have encountered at UiO”; “He is among one of the best I’ve had, especially when working with material as hard as this.”

Student evaluations (end of course): (8 responses out of 21 students [38% response rate]; not very representative). While not enough students responded to allow for definitive conclusions, a few reflections might be useful based upon those who did respond. 7 out of the 8 surveys indicated agreement or strong agreement with all of the questions asked about the course and the professor, revealing a high level of satisfaction with the course. A few suggested having less repetition and review of key concepts and more in-depth exploration of the primary texts, and perhaps more discussion of how to work with the theory applied to various examples. But other comments praised the quality of the teaching, particularly given the large amount of material covered. One example of a positive comment: “Mike is a pro. His working relationship with the material at hand is obvious. He is an exemplary academic, to mind, in that he is both an expert, and still a curious mind. And his method communicates both of these characteristics to his students. I was challenged by, excited by, and ultimately bettered by, this course. Thanks, Mike, and thank you, UiO.”

4. Changes since the last periodic evaluation

This is the second time this course has been taught, with only minor changes made.

5. Suggestions for improvement

One of the challenges of this course is that it covers a lot of difficult material in a relatively short amount of time. Some students have more background with the material, but most need a relatively introductory approach when they first encounter these theories and theorists. The difficulty is to find ways to engage students at various levels of familiarity with the concepts, balancing lectures with discussion, and review with more in-depth discussions. I believe these challenges are relatively well balanced with the current course structure, but there is always room for improvement, as well as the potential for adaptation depending upon the needs of students in particular semesters. Students in the lektor program continue to think this course should be among the first they take, and I certainly agree. One of the easiest problems to fix, though, should be having the textbooks available for the students at the very beginning of the semester.