

# Periodisk evaluering av ENG4415: Horror Writing in English

Spring term 2016

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6 out of 11 students responded to the questionnaire. This report is based on the questionnaire, the grade, drop-out and complaints statistics, the course's earlier evaluation from autumn 2014 (also by me), and student feedback both in and outside the midway evaluation. The other potential information sources mentioned in the evaluation form don't exist for this course.

## 1. Gi en vurdering av:

**Pensum (innhold, omfang):** ENG4415 covers a wide but eclectic historical range of horror writing, from the nineteenth century to the present day, aiming to explore specific topics and tropes within horror writing, and to reflect on horror writing theoretically, rather than to give a historical overview. Based on my experience in the classroom as well as student feedback in class, in the anonymous midway evaluation, and in the questionnaire, this worked well – students expressed enthusiasm for the texts, there were unusually creative and involved discussions, and the students' written work showed powerful and engaged responses to the syllabus.

In the previous evaluation (autumn 2014), I expressed a need to make it easier for students to know what to focus on in a sprawling and un-chronological syllabus based on a genre students are often unfamiliar with studying in a critical context. This time around, I addressed this issue in three ways: by setting a basic introductory text (which I ended up using very little) and a critical companion to act as guideposts and 'frames' for the students' own thinking, by being more explicit in the introductory pack and in the classroom about how the course's focus works, and by extending the length of the course from 10 to 14 weeks. This last change meant that I could expand, rather than cut the syllabus, while still giving students enough time for each text. Based on the midway evaluation and this final evaluation, this seems to have worked well. The one syllabus-related comment that came up more than once in the teaching evaluation was a desire for more in-class engagement with the theoretical texts, and I did my best to address this in the second half of the course.

**Undervisning:** This class was taught through 14 two-hour seminars, with an obligatory qualification essay (with feedback provided on an optional first draft). In my view, this structure worked well. Questionnaire feedback on this area is 100% positive, although considering the small number of responses and the relatively general questions asked, it's hard to draw clear conclusions from this.

The midway evaluation and spontaneous student feedback was generally strongly positive in this area. While rare comments ask for a more teacher-led structure, the comments generally suggest I was able to strike a better balance between student participation and teacher-led structure this time around: several comments note that one of the strengths of the course is that it allows students to develop and express their own ideas freely. I started to use more detailed and guiding reading packs this term, and I think this worked well; both the comments on the questionnaire comment specifically on it.

**Ressurser og infrastruktur (undervisningsrom, audiovisuelle hjelpemidler, bibliotek-ressurser m.m.):** No specific problems to report. Last time I taught this class I requested a circular desk setup, and I was able to use that this time. It was a great success, allowing for much more active and relaxed student interaction.

**Eksamen (eksamensordning, vurderingsform):** Students were evaluated by a three-day take-home exam. Out of 11 students, 5 received an A, 4 received a B, and 2 received a C. The last time I taught this course I suggested that switching from a semester paper to a more guided form of examination would be a good idea, and it definitely was. Students seemed to have done more, rather than less, research this time around, and having (even fairly open) questions to use as a starting point seemed to spur rather than diminish fresh thinking. This was an immensely strong set of exam responses, showing, in particular, great originality, critical ability, and independence of thought. This is obviously down to the ability and hard work of the students, but I think the main things I did to help create good conditions were: a) encouraging independent thought and research in class, b) encouraging critical risk-taking, among other things by making “do something you've never done before” an optional part of the qualification essay assignment, and c) trying to write exam questions that I thought would spur students' imaginations.

2. **Gir læringsutbytteformuleringene i emnebeskrivelsen en god beskrivelse av hva studentene skal kunne etter avlagt eksamen?** Yes.

3. **Fungerer emnebeskrivelsen tilfredsstillende?** Most student feedback suggests that the course description is working well. Two respondents are only somewhat satisfied with the information given about syllabus and reading requirements, which I think could be due to secondary reading not being included on the online syllabus – this is obviously not ideal in terms of students being able to prepare a long time in advance, but it's a trade-off against me being able to adjust the secondary reading as we go along according to my perceptions of student needs and interests. In my view, the subject is correctly placed in relation to its level and to other courses. It is specific in its remit and has a fairly high difficulty level, making it a good fit as an MA-level course.

4. **Har du gjort noen endringer siden forrige periodiske evaluering? Hvilke?** Yes, as described above. The primary changes have been in expanding/revising the syllabus and course plan, changing the exam form and hence the number of course weeks, adding critical companions to the syllabus, and some more detail-level changes in teaching style.

5. **Forslag til forbedringer.** I'm extremely happy with the course as taught this time. If I were to teach the course again I would probably only make minor changes:

- I would cut the Wisker introductory text from the syllabus – it may have been useful to some students, but we didn't end up using it actively in class, and it could just as well be a possible recommended text.

- I would make more active use of the theoretical texts in class throughout the term.

- The syllabus as it stands has a good range in many ways, but remains very white and Anglo-American, which is a clear limitation – I'd want to address that in the next draft of the syllabus.