

Instructor's report: **NORAM 1510**

ILOS, Spring semester, 2011

NORAM 1510 has three goals: an introduction to "classical" texts on American culture studies; critical thinking about culture concepts through the application of historical context and inter-textual reading; learning to write an academic essay. The students produce two essays in the course of the semester. Students received both a reading and commentary of essay #1 and an individual conference with the instructor.

Improvements over 2010: The course was originally designated 1520 was a 20 point course and had included lectures in NORAM1506. There was an exam-essay format. The two elements were discordant—thematically and methodologically—and confusing to the students. For this year, we separated 1520 into 1506 (offered in the fall semester) from 1510 (offered in the spring). The result was a much better course and a far lower drop out rate.

This course represents a new departure for an introductory course in North American Studies at the University of Oslo. We have gone from a presentation format revolving around factual information and unexamined interpretative frameworks to a hermeneutic approach.

Students generally like the challenge presented by this course—"very inspiring"; I liked "analyzing texts, working with perspectives and ideas"; I appreciated the "way the teacher expressed different views, both controversial and factual; how the teacher made us think and create opinions"—though some will resist interpretative freedom once granted to them: "The questions were un-necessarily complicated . . . the "goal"/objective of the essays could have been more clearly articulated"; and "ideas were interesting, but left somewhat vague."

Some students didn't like that we were reading mostly 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century texts, but there was less resistance to this than I thought there would be.

Most students were appreciative of the emphasis on writing and felt better able to write essays after having taken the course.

For 2012 the course will move to a 3 hour format two hour lecture and one hour group class. The "lectures" will be informal and the group classes will be focused on student questions, group work and essay writing. We will face the problem of making sure that students attend all three hours a week.

What I expect from the administration: I asked for support from the departmental administration and received funding for two additional hour sessions for students. Students will now receive three hours of instruction per week instead of two.

Mark Luccarelli  
North American Studies  
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