MLS610  Diverse Identities: Contemporary Non-Western Literature

Contact Information

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Course Objectives

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand cultural metaphors conveyed in contemporary non-Western fiction and non-fiction.
2. Compare some of the ways in which non-Western cultures maintain strong cultural identities.
3. Assess the legacy of western viewpoints in the interpretation of non-Western cultures.
4. Understand the contributions of non-Western cultures to the pursuit of human expression in art, literature, and film.
5. Explore the question, is there common ground among diverse cultures?

Required Texts

- The Gangster We Are All Looking For by Le Thi Diem Thuy (paperback, Anchor Books, ISBN: 0-375-70002-1)

General Description of Course Activities

We will read novels, short stories, articles, essays and a memoir that show the how and why of cultures far different from our own. There is one assigned film toward the end of the course, but students may also want to rent the other suggested films (mentioned in several of the units and available at most video stores) to give them some background on the histories and current life in cities and villages around the world. All these works will
ask us to reflect on why a culture's struggles and triumphs shock and frighten us. They ask us to move from fear and find the human core. These voices speak out with humor. They speak out with direct and astounding eloquence. They also show us how America looks from a fresh perspective.

Our course includes a Preliminary Week of Background Study, three main instructional units (Units 1-3), an interview project, and a final paper (Unit 4). In addition to the books we’ll read, there are a number of e-reserve readings. Always check the CALENDAR for the current assignments and deadlines because this course may change somewhat according to the instructor and the number of weeks in a given semester.

When using e-reserves, look for the item you want by its title. E-reserve items are sorted alphabetically by title.

During each week, students will post an Initial Comment on a discussion prompt. The length of an Initial Comment should be at least 450-500 words) except in Week One (see below). Each student is then expected to choose three Initial Comments posted by other students to reply to.

*Week One*—Week of Preliminary Background Study. Your Initial Comment on the e-reserve readings should be 1-2 pages long. See Learning Area, assignments, for more details. This is the only week in which you need to make an Initial Comment this long. See below under Discussion Forums, “Initial Comments,” for details about Initial Comments for the other weeks.

The Interview Project is weighted 20% of the final grade. Detailed instructions are given later in the syllabus. It is important to call the person you are going to interview early in the semester and make your appointment. I advise completing the interview early enough so that you have sufficient time to organize, revise, and/or to make another appointment or phone call with your interviewee if necessary. You are required to interview an immigrant from a non-Western country *in person*. This person does not have to be planning to stay permanently in the West.

The Final Paper (with three one-page replies to other classmates' final papers) is weighted as 40% of the final grade. Three replies to three other classmates’s final papers is required. Failure to do so will affect the grade of your own final paper. Each reply must address significant issues raised in the chosen paper and explain why this paper particularly interested you. Each reply should be about 450 words in length.

In addition, interactive weblink activities (learning objects) are interspersed throughout the course. These include such activities as "Choose Your Country," "Passport," "Fashion Statement," and "What's My Punishment." Keep your eyes open for these activities as you work your way through the course. *These activities are for your own enrichment and enjoyment and are not graded.*
Discussion Forums

The Discussion Forum will count for 40% of the student's final grade. I consider it to be a very important component of the class. The Discussion in each group will start with initial comments and then three replies.

Initial Comments: Students are required to post their initial comments by midnight, the fifth night of the week. (Example: if the course starts on Monday, the deadline is Friday, midnight.) Except for week one (see above), an initial comment should be at least 450-500 words and answer the question in a way that shows a mind at work. Post your Initial Comment BEFORE you make your Three Replies.

Three Replies to Initial Comments: In addition, each student is required to make three replies, one each to three other classmates' initial comments by midnight of the last night of the week. These three replies should respond to the real substance of something your classmate has said in his/her initial comment. They should be at least 100 words in length. Students may, of course, continue the discussion in any way they like. I may enter your discussion or not, depending on how it is going. I may prompt you or your group to clarify something that was said or to move you to consider a new idea.

Discussion Grading is Based on Content and Timeliness

I will grade your Discussion Forum postings on content, of course, but I will also look for the timeliness of your participation. As stated earlier, the deadline for posting Initial Comments is the fifth night of the week, midnight. To earn a grade of "A" (excellent) in the Discussion Forum (40% of the final grade for the course), I will look for excellent content and effort. That is, a student should not make it a habit to wait until the deadline to post his Initial Comment, but sometimes post earlier in the week. I will look to see how often a student tries to get a good conversation going about the ideas in the readings for the week. Anecdotal or personal experiences do not really show me that you have read the material carefully. An "A" in the Discussion Forum component of this course also means that the student, when possible, posted his/her Three replies to other classmates before the weekly deadline The weekly deadline for three replies to others is midnight of the last night of the week.

Media (Movies, Videos, or Other Outside Assignments)

Preliminary Week of Background Study

1. Recommended but optional: Indochine (1992) directed by Regis Wargnier (English subtitles, distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, 153 min.)
The following films are recommended but optional. For those of you who wish to see a film recommendation to go along with Unit 1, you could view:

1. *Pushing Hands* (1992) directed by Ang Lee, with English subtitles, 105 minutes. For another great recommendation, although it is a film about Irish immigrants (our course is on non-Western literature), view *In America* (2002), directed by Jim Sheridan, 105 min.


**Unit 2 – Post Colonialism**

1. Recommended but optional: *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) directed by Mira Nair. (English, distributed by USA Films, 114 min.)

**Unit 3 – Responses to Extremist Ideologies**

Recommended but optional:

1. *To Live* (1994), directed by Yimou Zhang. (English subtitles, 125 min.)
2. *Kandahar* (2003), directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf. (English subtitles, 85 min.)

**Required:**

3. *Color of Paradise* (2000), directed by Majid Majidi (English subtitles, 90 minutes);

   **OR**

4. *Children of Heaven* (1997), directed by Majid Majidi (English subtitles, 89 min.)

Other Iranian film recommendations for interested students are both directed by Samira Makhmalbaf: *The Apple* (1998) and *Blackboard* (2000).

**Other Projects**

An Interview Project—check Calendar for due date-- will comprise 20% of final grade. This project will consist of choosing an immigrant from, or a person born in and expecting to return to, a non-western country (not Northern Europe, including Spain and Italy; not Canada, not Great Britain). If a student cannot find a first generation immigrant to interview, a second generation person from a non-Western culture may also be an appropriate interview subject. (Again, no Northern European, Canadian, or British people may be interviewed for this project.) This interview is to be posted in the appropriate Discussion Forum and will enhance our course of study. The interview will also personalize the course for the individual student.
Detailed directions are given at the end of Unit 2 regarding what kind of questions to ask, how to conduct the interview, and what is expected in writing it up. You will also be able to watch a video of Professor Seabrooke doing a sample interview that you can "click on" in Unit 1. Call up your interview subject and make a firm date with him/her as soon as possible. *In-person interviews are required.*

**Papers**

There will be a **Final Paper** (40% of final grade). Check the Calendar for the due date of the final paper. It should be approximately five-seven pages long.

Students also must make three substantial replies to three other classmates' final papers. Posting of three replies is due by the date indicated on the Calendar. Make the three one-paragraph replies to three classmates' final papers on the Discussion Board. **Failure to do so will affect the grade of your final paper.**

There will be at least one alternative paper topic that will be given in the course “Announcements”—look for it.

**How Graded**

- Discussion Forum participation: 40% of final grade
- Interview project: 20%
- Final Paper and three replies: 40%