PHL 300 Philosophy and Literature

Prof. Eckert
Online: July 16 – August 14
meckert@umassd.edu

Course Description

This course explores the relationship between texts and media we consider "philosophical" and those considered "literary." One might associate philosophical material with arguments for positions regarding highly general ideas, such as what is good, true, just, real and beautiful. And one might associate literary material with narratives/stories about particular beings in particular situations. These associations may not be as clear and useful as one might assume.

Is it true that a story about a particular person can't express and raise questions about abstract issues and ideas? Is it true that general, highly abstract theories can't relate to or infuse individual narratives? How far is literature from philosophy (and vice-versa) anyway?

Readings are essential in this course. Students will complete a written assignment for each set of readings in the course. Each assignment will differ, adapting to the sort of materials and ideas we cover with each reading and or topic. There will be discussion boards each week and other low-stakes challenges to support your learning and inspire thinking about particular aspects of life and the stories well tell each other about it.

Required Texts

Stranger (Trade Ed)
Edition: 2nd
ISBN: 9780679720201
Author: Albert Camus

History of Love
ISBN: 9780393328622
Author: Nichole Krauss

Kindred: a Graphic Novel Adaptation
ISBN: 9781419709470
Author: Otavia Butler
Note: You may substitute the novel Kindred in regular novel format. The graphic novel provides an alternative experience in reading that I hope you will explore.

Other short fiction and media is provided on our course website free of charge. Please, let me know if you have difficulty affording or accessing any of the required texts. I am often able to assist students in acquiring and accessing books.
Course Assessments

Response Writings  75%
Discussions and Challenges  25%

Response Writing

Each section of our course includes a written response assignment. Written responses should be approximately three full pages. Ideas for these assignments will be provided by prompts, often with options to choose. Each response should demonstrate:

a) You have read the materials and studied your lecture notes – your full familiarity with the material. Importantly, vagueness, hand waving, inaccuracy do not help you make your case (see (b) below).

b) You have formed a viewpoint about the material. You may agree or disagree with the author/s – you may see something from a unique perspective – It doesn’t matter as long as you explain why. Justify your viewpoint!

c) The quality of your thinking matters in this course. Responding to literary works is an interpretive endeavor, however this interpretive dimension is not a license for making stuff up and/or freedom from answering why you think and feel the way you do.

Response Writing Objectives and Outcomes

Response Writings have the objective of helping students to meet the Content Outcome of describing, analyzing and explaining the readings and topics assigned.

Response Writings also have the objective of helping students to meet the Skills Outcomes of locating, analyzing and synthesizing philosophical ideas and arguments in primary and secondary texts. Students will acquire skills evaluating information and its sources critically and using the information to generate, develop or defend their own points of view.

Discussion Boards and Other Assignments are intended to help students achieve these objectives and inspire their imaginations and curiosity.

Course Policies:

1) If you have any problems keeping up with due dates or experience any emergencies or difficulties, please contact immediately, if not beforehand. Proactive and responsible arrangements can be made ahead of time, and I am willing to try to make such arrangements.

2) Make-up Assignments and other work require a verifiable medical or legal excuse or other excuse of a serious nature.

3) Copying the works of other scholars and/or students and presenting this work as your own is known as plagiarism, and this is a very serious academic offense. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for this course. UMD policy on Plagiarism is explained in the Student Handbook:
   http://www.umassd.edu/studenthandbook/academicregs/ethicalstandards.cfm
   http://www.umassd.edu/specialprograms/info_lit/plagiarism.html
All quoted and/or closely copied material in your essays must be properly cited (footnotes or endnotes). Whenever in doubt, use citations, even and especially for any Internet reference material.

4) SafeAssign Notification: Students should be aware that suspect assignments (e.g., those without drafts, without works cited pages, or with large departures in style) will be submitted to SafeAssign by the instructor for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism. Submitted assignments will be included in the UMass Dartmouth dedicated databases of assignments. These databases of assignments will be used solely for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism during the grading process during this term and in the future. Students must provide an electronic copy of their assignment to the instructor for submission to the service when plagiarism is suspected, in order to receive a grade on the assignment and to avoid possible sanctions.

5) Students with Disabilities: In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, please meet with the instructor at the beginning of the semester and provide the appropriate paperwork from the Disabled Students Services Office. The necessary paperwork is obtained when you bring proper documentation to the Disabled Students Services Office (DSS), which is located in Group I, Room 016, phone: 508-999-8711.

6) As proof that you have read this syllabus, please send a picture of an adorable cat to Prof. Eckert at meckert@umassd.edu.

7) Incompletes: According to the university catalogue, an incomplete may be given only in exceptional circumstances at the instructor's discretion. The student must be passing at the time of the request or be sufficiently close to passing. If the work is not completed within one year of the recording of the incomplete grade, the grade will become an F(I). The incomplete policy for this course is that at least 70% of the course must be already completed and an exceptional circumstance (i.e. medical issue) must exist.

8) Email is the best means to contact me. Responses to emails will be made within 48 hours or less. Weekend email will be answered on Mondays, although you may get lucky.

**Class Calendar:** July 16 – August 14

Week 1 (partial)
Tuesday July 16
Sunday July 21

Jorge Luis Borges’ Short Stories
And Paradoxes (Zeno, Self-Reference), Appearance/Reality Distinction

Week 2
Monday July 22
Sunday July 28

Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*
And Sartre reading, “Existentialism is a Humanism”
Week 3
Monday July 29
Sunday August 4

Nichole Krauss’ *History of Love*
And (1) Philosophy and Refugee Crisis, (2) Philosophy and Anti-Semitism, (3) Meta-fiction

Week 4
Monday August 5
Sunday August 11

Otavia Butler’s *Kindred*
Philosophy of Race: Charles Mills, Audre Lorde, Kimberle Crenshaw

Week 5 (partial)
Monday August 12
Friday August 16

Ted Chiang’s “Story of Your Life”
And Philosophy of Time

Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas
And reading on Utilitarian Ethics