

Call for Proposals for First-Year Seminar

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL

UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or** any **other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first-year seminar requirement.

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| COURSE NUMBER: | FSEM 100 | | |
| COURSE TITLE: | DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE | | |
| SUBMITTED BY: | Mara Scanlon | DATE: | 11.3.2014 |
| <i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i> | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

COURSE DESCRIPTION. In the space below, provide a one- to two-sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner and will also be used in other publications about the first-year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

In Lewis Carroll's classic story *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the title character falls into a land of magical and unpredictable characters, actions, and communications, which is an experience you might share as you enter the new world of college. This seminar will have at its core Carroll's literary works and photography in a study that will lead us into examinations of philosophy, identity, sexuality, language, authority, hallucination, justice, visual art, madness, ethics, gender, psychology, film, logic, childhood, mathematics, the body, narrative, education, social codes, memory, time—and reality itself.

RATIONALE. Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM's basic components and new student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and why this course should be approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement.

For several years I have taught the very successful FSEM “Ethics and Literature,” so I come to this new class experienced with the FSEM goals and population and with a good deal of work under my belt establishing best practices for FSEM pedagogy. The course proposed here is organized differently, around a controversial central figure of whom the students are likely to have knowledge. As such, it lends itself to helping students experience the work of analysis, theory, context, and so on in re-encountering a text, which I hope will naturally support a greater understanding of critical thinking.

“Down the Rabbit Hole” will include the required components of FSEMs and will support the student learning outcomes. The class will run consistently in small and large group discussion, and reading will include not only primary literary works but other primary materials such as photographs, films, and critical/philosophical/cultural essays about Carroll and related topics. As the syllabus and even the description above shows, the class is in some ways designed around the very *idea* of exploration, of negotiating places, ideas, and language that are unknown. My classes regularly integrate students' own responses to and engagement with the course topics, and the FSEM will do so more formally, with an ongoing meta-awareness of how college is its own challenging adventure.

I worked for some time in my current FSEM on meaningful approaches to the learning outcomes for the course, and have shared my assignments with members of the original QEP committee. Work in the class will include frequent analytical, thesis-driven writing, from close reading of texts to a dialogue with a theorist; a library research assignment that will require scholarly search techniques building on a class session of training with Peter Catlin; discussion in large and small groups; and more formal public speaking events.

SYLLABUS. *Attach a course syllabus.*

SUBMIT this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Dave Stahlman (wdstahlm@umw.edu). All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

FSEM 100
First-Year Seminar: Down the Rabbit Hole

Dr. Mara Scanlon
335 Combs Hall
Phone: ext. 1544
mscanlon@umw.edu
Office hours: MWF

TR
and by appointment

Fall 2015
Combs 322
01: MWF
02: MWF

Course Description

The phrase “down the rabbit hole” refers to Lewis Carroll’s classic story *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, in which our title character follows a white rabbit into a land of magical and capricious characters, inexplicable actions, and incomprehensible communications—a place where things are, to put it succinctly, “curiouser and curiouser.” Over time the expression has exceeded Alice’s story, suggesting not only an adventure but also a physical or psychological journey into the unknown, into chaos or the unpredictable, even into danger. Like Alice, you enter a new world of sorts when you come to college, a world where it’s sometimes hard to figure out how to act, who and what to believe, what words mean, what is right and wrong, how to get people to listen to you, who’s in charge, and how to navigate.

Though Carroll’s work is sometimes dismissed as nonsense or simple fantasy for children, it may help us think about many very sophisticated and important things indeed; arguably Carroll could just as easily be discussed as a major thinker with a tremendous cultural influence. Approaching this complicated writer who has himself become an object of many interpretations, we will place Carroll’s literary works and photography at the core of our seminar, and will also view various films that represent or respond to those creations, considering the interpretation of Carroll’s works for different audiences and purposes. Guided by our class’s insights and by the analyses of scholars, our study will lead us into examinations of philosophy, identity, sexuality, language, authority, hallucination, justice, visual art, madness, ethics, gender, psychology, film, logic, childhood, mathematics, the body, narrative, education, social codes, memory, time—and reality itself.

Our course will develop in two spaces: the classroom and our collaborative website, which can be accessed at http://*****.umwblogs.org. Additionally, we will use Canvas for exchanging assignments and assessments.

Texts

Lewis Carroll. *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*. Wordsworth Library Collection.

Richard Brian Davis, ed. *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*.

Melanie Benjamin. *Alice I Have Been*.

Scanned documents on our blog, including excerpts or chapters from *The Logic of Alice: Clear Thinking in Wonderland*; *The Zen of Alice*; *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture*; *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as seen through the Critics' Looking Glasses 1865-1971*; *Inventing Wonderland: Victorian Childhood as seen through the Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and A.A. Milne*; *Alice Beyond Wonderland: Essays for the Twenty-first Century*; and biographies of Carroll.

Photos and other resources through www.lewiscarroll.org

Course Requirements

As a whole, our assignments are designed to support the shared learning outcomes for first-year seminar. It is agreed that, while successfully completing an FSEM, students will

- utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- improve development and organization of written arguments;
- demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; and
- communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.

Assigned Readings: This course has a demanding and constant reading load, sometimes from very challenging texts. You should have completed assigned readings before class and should bring the necessary works to each meeting, including those from the blog (printed or on laptop).

Note: "Completing" the reading does not mean simply skimming your eyes over an assigned number of pages. It means assuring that you've understood the language of a text by researching unfamiliar terms and ideas, and also beginning the process of critical engagement with the concepts in those assigned pages, even if you only feel prepared to formulate a few sophisticated questions. Throughout the semester we will be working on active reading skills.

Class Participation: Discussion and Free Blogging (15 pts.): This course asks you to respond thoughtfully in several ways to our readings. A primary way is through discussion, which will be our principal format for class meetings. You needn't be an "expert" to participate. Remember that asking a good question is as—or sometimes more—valuable than offering a completed thought. Some of the readings we do this semester may evoke strong responses; I should not need to say that I expect respect and civility even in disagreement, and this applies equally to the blog.

In addition to acting as a course management system with announcements, assignments, etc., the blog will function as a place to develop threads we begin in class; to introduce topics of interest we didn't talk about; to supplement our knowledge with outside materials, links, or information; to respond personally to the literature we read; and more. Original posts and comments on posts are equally valuable; this should emerge as a dialogue, not a series of disconnected monologues. Occasionally I may give a prompt for blog posting, but most of the time the writing will be done on your own initiative. **All class members should be reading the blog on a regular basis, and you should plan on posting and commenting quite regularly.**

An unusual feature of the blog is that it is a site you will share with my other section of the Down the Rabbit Hole FSEM. I understand that the danger in this is that part of your audience will be students you don't know intimately, and that may shift the way you frame your writing or develop your voice in complicated, but not necessarily negative, ways. The benefit is that you will have the intellectual power of two times as many students supporting your own learning this semester; since class discussion and interests are somewhat fluid and student-centered, the blog posting done by the other section may expose interesting threads of analysis that never came up in your own class.

I don't want you to think about class discussion or the blog chiefly as a time to impress me; this seminar's success depends on our commitment to one another as a community of learners, and being willing to take risks and able to listen are essential for this dialogue to flourish. You will need to revise any sense you have of the classroom and blog as a place for passively receiving knowledge. Instead, these are places where we will think, write, share, and learn together collaboratively.

Participation is required in both fora and will be assessed for frequency and quality. To some degree, this portion of your grade is up to you—your engagement with the course material, your commitment to sharing ideas verbally and in writing. **If you miss four or more classes (except in extraordinary circumstances), the portion of your grade for participation will be substantially lowered.** Chronically tardy arrivals are not acceptable. It is your responsibility to find out what you have missed when you are absent.

►► **Extra Credit (huzzah!)** ◀◀

You may earn extra credit for class participation in the following way:

- Attend a production of one of UMW's fall plays. The plays for this season are XXX.
- Afterward, write a response to or analysis of the play and performance that is about 500 words. This is not a straightforward review; rather, I ask you to think about the play in terms of the concerns, themes, theories, and questions that shape our discussion in this particular class. Your analysis may consider both the play itself (that is, the language and themes of the text) and the performance or production (for instance, how lighting, movement, costuming etc. affects the presentation of the subject matter or the audience). Your response is due within two weeks of your seeing the play.
- You may do extra credit for both productions if you want to.

Speech on Childhood and Memory (10 pts.): This assignment will challenge you early in the semester to become comfortable speaking in front of the seminar and to begin polishing your formal speaking skills. Each student will give a speech (5-6 minutes) that will be essentially personal in nature. Memory is something that we agree is subjective, idiosyncratic, and even changeable, and yet for most of us it is also something we rely on heavily to establish our identities as individuals, within communities and families, and in or at certain spaces and events. For this assignment, you will choose one visual aid (object or image) on which to focus your reflection on your childhood. Your speech should a) narrate for or explain to us the significance of the object or image and what very specific memory it represents, and b) reflect on what that memory illuminates about you now, how it illustrates or prompted the person you became.

Writing Practices (5 at 5 pts. each = 25 pts.): These assignments accomplish more than one objective. Careful focus on the texts will enrich understanding of course themes as they develop and shift throughout the semester. And the practices will also build or reinforce essential critical reading, thinking, and writing skills you will use throughout college, with the goal of improving those proficiencies through

steady feedback and revision. Because they are short-ish, they demand excellent focus, meaningful development, and lucid prose. Each will be assessed for the depth and sophistication of its thinking and the grace, correctness, and clarity of its writing.

Length: maximum 600 words

Submission: as word document or pdf on Canvas

Due: NO LATER than midnight on the due date

Library Orientation Tutorial (5 pts.): Use this link (<http://libguides.umw.edu/orientation>) to complete the online introduction to library services, including the worksheet. The librarian will confirm your completion of the assignment for me. This assignment must be submitted by midnight on September 18.

Library Research Assignment (20 pts.): With this assignment, you will begin to gain

- 1) familiarity with the methods of appropriate scholarly research, a task in which we will be aided by UMW Librarian Peter Catlin;
- 2) training on assessing the quality of sources through the provocatively named CRAAP test;
- 3) practice in summarizing texts and, importantly, assessing and responding to them.

The first product of this research will be an annotated bibliography of four sources related to one of the following topics that shape our seminar:

- Cultural, historical, or psychological models of childhood
- Illustrators of Carroll's works
- Alice and/in drug culture or gaming culture
- Medicine and/in Alice (e.g., Alice in wonderland syndrome, mercury poisoning, mental health)
- Literary analyses of qualities like Carroll's use of satire, of linguistic play, of the genre of the *bildungsroman*
- Legal codes and the Alice books
- Ethics in/from the Alice books
- Politics in/of Alice books or films
- Topic of your choice approved by Dr. Scanlon no later than Wednesday, October 7.

More information on your process and the requirements of an annotated bibliography will be posted to the blog. The due date is midnight on Monday, October 19, submitted as a document or pdf in Canvas.

Oral Presentations of Research (15 pts.): This is the second product of your Library Research Assignment. Like your more personal speech, this is an assignment designed to improve your formal public speaking skills. However, in this case, rather than a personal subject, you will be talking about a scholarly topic, informed by expert voices from your research. That task will require different organization, incorporation of materials and concepts, and use of visual aids. All speakers must present for 7-8 minutes. The oral presentations of research will have several options for their format and purpose, from analytical/argumentative to informative. Details TBP on the blog.

Final Project (10 pts.)

Policies and reminders

- Grades of B and A are reserved for work that is distinctly above average or excellent.
- Unless otherwise specified, your written assignments will be submitted in Canvas as url links, word documents, or pdf files.
- I will use Canvas for returning feedback on graded work and maintaining the gradebook.

- Due dates are not estimates and are not flexible except under extraordinary circumstances (as determined by me). **You should contact me as soon as possible if you anticipate a problem with a due date so we can discuss an extension.**

The [Speaking Center](#) and the [Writing Center](#), both located on the fourth floor of the ITCC, are excellent resources for this class, and I urge you to use them. Trained consultants can help with planning and can provide targeted feedback on speeches and pieces of writing. The Speaking Center also has a collection of instructional materials on topics from posture to speaking anxiety to organizing a speech to constructing effective visual aids, found here: <http://academics.umw.edu/speaking/speaking-center/useful-handouts/>. Likewise, the Writing Center also has numerous reference handouts on writing, grammar, references, and more, which are available here: <http://academics.umw.edu/writing-fredericksburg/printed-resources-and-links/>.

A note on academic integrity: All work in this course is covered by the UMW Honor Code, and I expect you to adhere to it at all times. This refers to the promise you made to your fellow students and the UMW community not to lie, cheat, or steal. Details of the UMW Honor System are available [here](#).

Plagiarism, like all cheating, is a serious offense. It means presenting another person's work as your own—whether that person is a friend, writing center or speaking center tutor, professional, or published author. Copying passages or paraphrasing ideas belonging to another person without acknowledging the source of those ideas is plagiarism. You can avoid this offense if you simply cite and reference the source you use, if any. I am quite willing to help you understand strategies for quotation and citation but I am not willing to be lenient on plagiarism, so please consult with me if you need to.

Disability services: The Office of Disability Resources has been designated by the University as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through ODR and require accommodations for this class, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss confidentially your approved accommodation needs and bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. If you have not made contact with the Office of Disability Resources and need accommodations, their phone number is 540-654-1266.