

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:	NOT SO ELEMENTARY AFTER ALL: AMERICAN DETECTIVE FICTION		
SUBMITTED BY:	Sheshalatha Reddy	DATE:	9/4/09
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			

NOTE: Click on the link for “first year seminar” at www.jtmorello.org/gened to see the criteria used to evaluate courses proposed to meet the first year seminar requirement. See the report entitled “General Education Curriculum as Approved by the Faculty Senate” for additional details.

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 this course we will read a range of texts from the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries to explore the ways crime and detective fiction help us interrogate the meaning and limits of genre and its historical and cultural situatedness as well as the ways in which narrative is constructed (by the text) and reconstructed (by the detective/narrator/protagonist).

RATIONALE. Using only the space provided in the box below, **briefly** state why this course should be approved as a first year seminar course.

This FSEM course asks students to question genre and generic form through the study of texts from one of the most ubiquitous and varied of genres: detective and crime fiction (and its various subgenres including hardboiled, thriller, spy, etc.). Reading texts that track the development of the genre from the nineteenth century (beginning with Poe) to contemporary reworkings in the genre (for example, the short stories of Walter Mosley) will allow us to think through the ways these texts differently use the genre to explore issues of gender, race, and class and to address wider social justice issues. Students will work together to interrogate the ways characterization, style, dialogue, tone, etc. are given as “clues” by the text to help the reader come to a conclusion about (1.) characters and/or events within the narrative, (2.) the crime/mystery that is the driving force of the narrative, and (3.) the wider historical context informing the narrative. Students will be asked to lead class discussion once during the term and participate actively in other students’ discussions in order to fulfill the speaking requirement of the course. In addition to a midterm and final exam, they will also be asked to write two papers that require both close engagement with the texts as well as with secondary sources researched at the library. Secondary readings I have assigned throughout the term will further encourage students to read this literature through a critical lens, as a literature that is produced by and engaged with the world around us.

SYLLABUS. Attach a course syllabus.

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

Instructor: Professor Reddy
Email: lreddy@umw.edu
Semester: Spring 2010
FSEM 100, Sections 0- and 0-: “Not So Elementary After All: 19-20th C Crime and Detective Fiction”
Class Time and Place: MWF ---- in CMBS ---
Office: Combs 342
Office Hours: ----

Texts:

- **“Murders in the Rue Morgue”* (1841) and *“The Purloined Letter”* (1844) by Edgar Allen Poe
 - *The Dead Letter* (1866) by Metta Fuller Victor
 - *Red Harvest* (1929) by Dashiell Hammett
 - *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932) by Rudolph Fisher
 - *Indemnity Only* (1982) by Sara Paretsky
 - *Mean Spirit* (1990) by Linda Hogan
 - *Six Easy Pieces* (2003) by Walter Mosley
 - *Native Speaker* (1996) by Chang Rae-Lee
 - *crime and mystery on celluloid
 - *secondary readings will be assigned at various points during the term and will include Raymond Chandler’s essay *“The Simple Art of Murder”* (1944), Foucault’s analysis of the construction and containment of the “criminal” in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Joseph Shaw on hardboiled dialogue in *“Dialogue”* (1939), Mary Louise Pratt’s analysis of auto-ethnographic writing in *“Arts of the Contact Zones”* (1991), excerpts from Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald’s *Shaman or Sherlock?* (2002) analyzing Native-American detective fiction, and Ben Highmore’s chapter *“Urban Noir: Mobility and Movement in Detective Fiction”* (2005)
- *Reading marked with an asterisk will be posted on blackboard or can be accessed via a weblink which I will provide. They MUST be printed out and hard copies of the readings MUST brought into class the day they are due for discussion unless otherwise noted. All other texts for this course (the ones not marked with an asterisk, including *The Dead Letter*, *Red Harvest*, *The Conjure-Man Dies*, *Indemnity Only*, *Mean Spirit*, and *Native Speaker*, will be available at the UMW Bookstore.

Course Description:

Reading a mystery novel or watching one of the many television crime shows like *C.S.I.*, the reader/viewer knows that in many ways the “story” is incomplete. Unanswered questions may include: who did it, why did they do it, and how did they do it? In some cases we learn the “facts” (the identities of suspects, possible motivations, etc.) along with the detective/narrator/protagonist. In other cases we learn these “facts” ahead of him or her and in still other cases, not at all. By reading a range of texts from the United States over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we will explore the way in which this fiction can help us interrogate the meaning and limits of genre and the way genre itself is historically and culturally situated. We will look at the ways in which narrative is constructed (by the text) and reconstructed (by the detective/narrator/protagonist) and through that probe narrativity itself. But narrators—especially if not a beloved and trusted detective like Columbo or a detective’s beloved and trusted sidekick like Sherlock Holmes’s Dr. Watson—can be unreliable. How do we know who or what to believe? In this way, reading itself is an act of detection in which the formal features of the text—tone, characterization, dialogue, thematic concerns, etc.—sometimes give readers clues about who may or may not be trustworthy, what may or may not be “true.” In all of the texts under study, these formal clues also give an indication of the larger issues at stake for the writer. The texts we will read in this class respond, question, and/or conform to contemporary ideologies regarding gender, race, and class through their constructions of crime and the criminal, through their moral judgments, and through the corpses that embody not just dead weight but a living generic tradition.

Grade Breakdown:

- 20% Attendance and Participation
- 20% Midterm
- 20% Final Exam
- 20% Leading Class Discussion
- 20% 2 Papers

100% Total

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance is mandatory and only two excused absences will be allowed; every subsequent absence will result in a drop of one letter grade in your final grade for the term. If you plan to be absent, please email me before class so that I can plan accordingly. I do however encourage that you attend each class since missing even one class can put you behind. Lateness will not be tolerated. If you plan to be more than five minutes late to class, do not come (this will count as an absence). Perpetual lateness of even a few minutes at the beginning of every class also will not be tolerated since it is disruptive to the other students. Also, all beepers, cellphones, laptops, and any other electronic devices should be turned off during class!

Participation is a significant part of your grade. I would like everyone to read the assigned material closely and carefully. Come prepared with questions, comments, issues, and suggestions that interest and engage you and that you would like to discuss in class. But I stress quality over quantity; merely talking is not enough. Substantive comments and questions drawing directly from the material under discussion are valued above generic statements about the people involved and/or the period. In addition, politeness in the classroom is key: show respect towards those being discussed and those in the classroom. Listen attentively to each other. You need not agree with the opinions and viewpoints of others but try to understand them and to engage with them critically.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability and require accommodations, please meet with me early in the semester to discuss your learning needs. If you wish to request reasonable accommodations (note taking support, extended time for tests, etc.), you will need to register with the Office of Disability Services (401 Lee Hall). The office will require appropriate documentation of disability. All information will be kept confidential.

Exams:

The first exam is a *midterm exam* which will test your knowledge of the primary and secondary readings until this point. The second exam is a *final exam* which will test your knowledge of the primary and secondary readings from the midterm until the end of the term. Failure to appear for a scheduled exam time to take the exam can result in failure on the exam.

Papers:

Two papers will be due for this course. A close-reading paper will be due in the first few weeks of the semester. A second close-reading paper will be due in the second half of the semester. You will be asked to use secondary literature and criticism on detection/crime to supplement your papers.

Course papers are always due on at the *beginning* of class. Papers will be marked as late (and points will be deducted from your grade) if you arrive late to class a day a paper is due. Papers should be submitted on 8 ½ by 11 inch white paper in 11-12 point font, double-spaced, with one inch margins. Be sure to check your spelling and grammar before handing in papers. Turning in an insufficient number of pages and/or a lack of substantive content will seriously affect your final paper grade.

Late papers will go down by one-third of a letter grade per day and will not be accepted more than a week after the due date. If you anticipate difficulties fulfilling the assignment due to extenuating circumstances, please come and see me *at least a week before* the assignment is due. I will explain more about grading later in the semester. I will not discuss grades with you the day you receive your papers back but will welcome talking about them with you after that.

Student-Led Class Discussion and Presentation:

In order to facilitate in-class discussion of a particular text, each student will lead class discussion once during the semester. I expect that you formulate questions to bring into class and share with your peers. Discussion questions should be based on your own careful reading of the text at hand and may often involve thematic or

stylistic issues about which you, as a reader, are confused or with which you would like to engage. Although you will not be expected to answer your question, you *will* be expected to broach several ways of approaching or thinking through this question. Attempting to understand the text by using your questions will then become a collective (class) enterprise.

In addition, you will be asked to research another work in a similar genre and/or exploring similar themes and present a brief five-minute summary of that text and the way in which this second, researched, text relates to the text read for class. You will hand in a brief 1-2 page analysis of this second text to me on the day of your presentation. Further details on this assignment will be provided. Missing class on the day in which you are scheduled to present or a lack of preparation for the presentation will result in a severe reduction of your final grade for the course. Students will also be asked to actively participate in other students' presentations and discussions; failure to do so will result in a reduction of your participation grade for the course.

Email Policy:

I also will not discuss grades with you over email. Email is limited to those questions that require brief answers (no more than a few lines long). If you have questions or concerns that require longer answers, please come to office hours. Please keep in mind that I generally check my email only once or twice a day.

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty is expected. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punishable by failure on the exam, paper, or project, by failure in the course, or by expulsion from the university. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1:

January 11 (Monday): Introduction and discussion of course syllabus and policies

January 13 (Wednesday): Edgar Allan Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue"

January 15 (Friday): Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter"; Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder"

Week 2:

January 18 (Monday): Martin Luther King Day—no class!

January 20 (Wednesday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*

January 22 (Friday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*; Michel Foucault on Torture from *Discipline and Punish*

Week 3:

January 25 (Monday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*

January 27 (Wednesday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*

January 29 (Friday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*; Michel Foucault on the Panopticon from *Discipline and Punish*

Week 4:

February 1 (Monday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*

February 3 (Wednesday): Metta Victor Fuller, *The Dead Letter*

February 5 (Friday): Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*; Joseph Shaw, "Dialogue"

Week 5:

February 8 (Monday): Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*

February 10 (Wednesday): Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*

February 12 (Friday): Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure-Man Dies*

Week 6:

February 15 (Monday): Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure-Man Dies*

February 17 (Wednesday): Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure-Man Dies*

February 19 (Friday): Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure-Man Dies*

Week 7:

February 22 (Monday): Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure-Man Dies*

February 24 (Wednesday): Midterm exam

February 26 (Friday): Midterm exam

Week 8:

Spring Break Week!

Week 9:

March 8 (Monday): Sara Paretsky, *Indemnity Only*

March 10 (Wednesday): Sara Paretsky, *Indemnity Only*

March 12 (Friday): Sara Paretsky, *Indemnity Only*; Ben Highmore, "Urban Noir: Mobility and Movement in Detective Fiction"

Week 10:

March 15 (Monday): Walter Mosley, *Six Easy Pieces*

March 17 (Wednesday): Walter Mosley, *Six Easy Pieces*

March 19 (Friday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

Week 11:

March 22 (Monday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

March 24 (Wednesday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

March 26 (Friday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*; Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zones"

Week 12:

March 29 (Monday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

March 31 (Wednesday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

April 2 (Friday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*; Gina and Andrew Macdonald, *Shaman or Sherlock?*

Week 13:

April 5 (Monday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

April 7 (Wednesday): Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*

April 9 (Friday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

Week 14:

April 12 (Monday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

April 14 (Wednesday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

April 16 (Friday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

Week 15:

April 19 (Monday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

April 21 (Wednesday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

April 23 (Friday): Chang Rae-Lee, *Native Speaker*

April 26-30: Final Exams Period