November 17, 2008

ENGLISH MATTERS

What’s Next?
Life After English 52

English 100 is the transfer-level writing course that all students need in order to transfer to a 4-year college or university. As of fall 2009, all students will be required to take English 100 for A.A. degrees.

But what comes after that?

You’ll need to fill your humanities requirement for transfer to UC or CSU campuses. Want to broaden your experience? If you’ve completed English 52, consider a 200-level literature course in Spring 2009:

- English 221B Lit. in the Bible
- English 222 Children’s Literature
- English 223 Chicano/a Literature
- English 232 Readings in Poetry
- English 234 Readings in Short Fiction
- English 235 Readings in the Drama
- English 236 Women’s Literature
- English 248B Masterpieces of World Lit

Time to Transfer?

Fall application time is upon us, and students who hope to transfer to a 4-year college or university should begin the application process now. If you plan to attend a CSU or a UC in fall of 2009, the priority deadline is November 30, 2008.

Many students don’t fully understand the opportunities they have for studying at the University of California or the California State Universities. The UCs love Cerritos College students, because unlike students coming directly from high school, Cerritos students have already proven themselves as college students. Cerritos students have a strong track record of success in college classes from their years at Cerritos, and admissions officials at UCs and CSUs have told us that Cerritos students tend to do better academically than students who came to the university directly from high school. These schools actively compete to enroll students who began their college education at Cerritos College, and they’re looking for you. But they won’t find you unless you apply.

Not sure about whether to transfer, or need further assistance with writing personal statements? Choose an English instructor whose class you’ve enjoyed, and make an appointment to talk with him/her right away. English faculty will be happy to help you make your application a success.

Join us in welcoming new English department full-time faculty member Anya Booker!
English 223: Chicana/o Literature

Victor Villasenor’s latest book, Crazy Loco Love, released in September of this year, begins with his father explaining to the soon to be sixteen year old Victor that to be an hombre—a man, an adult, one must have a strong unwavering sense of self.

As they take a walk across their ranch, Victor’s father tells him, “… if a man doesn’t know who he is and who he isn’t, then no matter how much he knows about right and wrong, he will always be like a fish out of water.” (1) With this advice to guide him, Victor heads straight into what he calls his “crazy loco years” when as a young adult he desperately searches for his own true identity.

Interestingly, Victor’s father had no more than a third grade education and was barely able to read, yet, I find, he offers here one of the best reasons to be a student and, in particular, a student enrolled in a literature course. With the help of a literature course, reader’s can more clearly see themselves reflected in books written by, for example, Victor Villasenor or Sandra Cisneros.

How reassuring to know that we are not alone in experiencing feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty. And for those of us who are searching for who we are and who we aren’t, a literature course can help us imagine who we have yet to become.

Chicana Literature, English 223, is offered spring semester, Tuesday and Thursday from 12:30-2:00 and will be taught by Lydia Alvarez.

English 232: Readings in Poetry

When the word "poetry" or "poem" surfaces in a conversation, do your eyes gloss over, do you tune out, do thoughts of flowers, trees, the stars, the ocean instantly dance across your mind? Do phrases like "your eyes are windows to your soul" scream to the forefront of your consciousness? Does the notion "cheesy Hallmark card" fill your thoughts?

If so, you have an anemic experience with poetry. But do not fret, for though anemic, it is a notably familiar experience with poetry that you share with all of us. Poetry is not occluded, confusing, or intended for a select few. Poetry is alive, vibrant; it sings to us, it touches us, it moves us. Essentially, poetry reflects us at our core.

In English 232, we will study a wide range of contemporary poets and poetry—yes, not just modern, but contemporary—poets who are still alive, still writing and publishing, still on the reading circuit today. Poetry is not outdated and poets do not have to have been dead for 100 years. There are lots of endearing, dynamic poets who are alive right now, who write with modern English idiom, not ancient colloquialisms, who write about contemporary, social, political, human issues not just about unrequited love.

These are the poets and the kind of poetry we will study.

The first part of class will deal with poetry in general, its devices like images, sound, rhythm, etc. The second part of class will focus on two contemporary writers—Sharon Olds and Genny Lim, who are powerful voices—but different voices—in their circle today. And if there is time, we will take our stab at writing a little poetry ourselves. Come see what poetry can be.

Readings in Poetry, English 232, is offered spring semester, MW 9:30-11 by Philip Hu.

English 236: Studies in Women’s Literature

This course is a survey of literature by women reflecting women’s changing roles and identities in society in various historical, political and cultural settings. Works studied are drawn from the genres of poetry, fiction, drama, essays and journals.

In a 1933 diary entry, Virginia Woolf wrote, “I thought, driving through Richmond last night, something very profound about the synthesis of my being: how only writing composes it: how nothing makes a whole unless I am writing; now I have forgotten what seemed to be so profound.” English 236 will explore the profound moments of women’s lives and experience in women’s writing.

Offered spring 2009, W 12:30-3:30, by Barbara Mueller

...lifting the stalks to my mouth, the ripest berries fall almost unbidden to my tongue, as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words like strengths or squinched, many-lettered, one-syllable lumps, which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well in the silent, startled, icy, black language of blackberry-eating in late September.

from “Blackberry Eating,”
Galway Kinnell

The Road to Cerritos

Students in many sections of English 52, 100, 101, 102, and 103 are reading Cormac McCarthy’s The Road.
English 234: Readings in Short Fiction

Mark Twain’s famous apology to a friend for a long letter can help explain the delights and profound truths to be found in the study of short fiction. Twain apologized for his long letter saying that he had not had enough time to make the letter shorter. The short stories we will read and study in this course all illustrate the kind of hard work, skill, and careful attention to language and revealing detail that is not always found in longer and sometimes rambling works of literature. These stories will also help us understand the many levels of meaning in Hawthorne’s remark that “easy reading is damned hard writing.” The best short fiction wastes no words and wastes no time.

We will meet writers who are working at the highest levels of creativity and competence. While the reading is not easy, as in undemanding or shallow, students will experience the power of masterfully used language to take the human mind and human heart on intense and revealing journeys into other worlds, other lives, and into ourselves.

Most of the stories can be read in one sitting, but most will call readers to a second reading. We will read short fiction from around the world, written by writers of every background and experience. The stories will invite contemplation, revelation, awakening, curiosity, self-evaluation, thoughtful discussion and lead us all to a deeper understanding of the art and insight into the human condition that masters of this genre can produce. William Faulkner once said that his best advice to any aspiring writer would be "to get down to the marketplace and stay there." The marketplace of the human condition is where we will be spending all of our time as we read some of the very best of the world’s short fiction.

Readings in Short Fiction, English 234, is offered spring semester, Tuesday and Thursday 12:30–2 by Robert Chester.
Alice Walker’s “An Open Letter to Barack Obama”

On November 5, novelist Alice Walker published a letter to the newly-elected President of the United States, a letter published by the website The Root (www.theroot.com). Below are excerpts from her letter.

**Dear Brother Obama,**

You have no idea, really, of how profound this moment is for us. Us being the black people of the Southern United States. You think you know, because you are thoughtful, and you have studied our history. But seeing you deliver the torch so many others before you carried, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, only to be struck down before igniting the flame of justice and of law, is almost more than the heart can bear. And yet, this observation is not intended to burden you, for you are of a different time, and, indeed, because of all the relay runners before you, North America is a different place. It is really only to say: Well done. We knew, through all the generations, that you were with us, in us, the best of the spirit of Africa and of the Americas. Knowing this, that you would actually appear, someday, was part of our strength. Seeing you take your rightful place, based solely on your wisdom, stamina and character, is a balm for the weary warriors of hope, previously only sung about.

I would advise you to remember that you did not create the disaster that the world is experiencing, and you alone are not responsible for bringing the world back to balance. A primary responsibility that you do have, however, is to cultivate happiness in your own life. To make a schedule that permits sufficient time of rest and play with your gorgeous wife and lovely daughters... From your happy, relaxed state, you can model real success, which is all that so many people in the world really want. They may buy endless cars and houses and furs and gobble up all the attention and space they can manage, or barely manage, but this is because it is not yet clear to them that success is truly an inside job. That it is within the reach of almost everyone...

...All else might be lost; but when the soul dies, the connection to earth, to peoples, to animals, to rivers, to mountain ranges, purple and majestic, also dies. And your smile, with which we watch you do gracious battle with unjust characterizations, distortions and lies, is that expression of healthy self-worth, spirit and soul, that, kept happy and free and relaxed, can find an answering smile in all of us, lighting our way, and brightening the world.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

In Peace and Joy,
Alice Walker

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See the full letter at http://www.theroot.com/id/48726