

Critical Strategies & Great Questions

Collegiate Seminar 1 (section 03)

Prof. Jose A. Feito
Fall Semester, 2012
TTh 11:20-12:50pm
Dante 219

Office: Seminar Arcade Telephone: 631-4161 Email: JFeito@stmarys-ca.edu
Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 10:10-11:10am & 2:50-4pm, by appointment MWF.

Course Description:

Welcome to Collegiate Seminar! Since 1941, Seminar has been at the core of the academic experience of St. Mary's students. It will introduce you not only to great texts and authors, but to a method of reading as a group and building an understanding of texts through discussion. Our task is to read each work carefully and to enrich our understanding of it by shared inquiry and discussion.

This is the first of your student-centered seminars and it is also the first time this new course is being offered to incoming freshmen. You are participating in an experimental pilot of a new course designed to introduce students to the seminar method. The grand majority of your peers will take this course in the Spring but you are taking it early to help us refine it. As such, we will all be collaborating in shaping the future Seminar curriculum for years to come. All seminars are participatory learning environments where we all work together to learn but this one is even more so than usual. Over the course of this semester, I will be asking you for ongoing feedback on your experience of the readings and the discussions so that we can make course corrections along the way.

At the most basic level, a good discussion depends on everyone coming to class prepared: having read and thought about the material. It also depends upon our ability to be good, respectful listeners. All ideas are welcome at the discussion table. We are here to learn from, and to encourage each other to see more than we would have seen alone, and to ask questions we may not have thought to ask in reading alone. As a reading community, you are, then, responsible for each other's experience of both the text and the discussion. Please remember that the conversation is yours. Try to ask questions not only of the text, but of each other, in the spirit of understanding better each contribution, thought, and interpretation.

Learning Outcomes:

These are the kinds of things we hope you will learn in this course:

Critical Thinking: As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:

1. Distinguish the multiple senses of a text (literal and beyond the literal).
2. Identify and understand assumptions, theses, and arguments that exist in the work of authors.
3. Evaluate and synthesize evidence in order to draw conclusions consistent with the text. Seek and identify confirming and opposing evidence relevant to original and existing theses.
4. Ask meaningful questions and originate plausible theses.
5. Critique and question the authority of texts, and explore the implications of those texts.

Written and Oral Communication: As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:

1. Recognize and compose readable prose, as characterized by clear and careful organization, coherent paragraphs and well-constructed sentences that employ the conventions of Standard Written English and appropriate diction.
2. Recognize and formulate effective written and oral communication, giving appropriate consideration to audience, context, format, and textual evidence.
3. Analyze arguments so as to construct ones that are well supported (with appropriate use of textual evidence), are well reasoned, and are controlled by a thesis or exploratory question.
4. Use discussion and the process of writing to enhance intellectual discovery and unravel complexities of thought.

Shared Inquiry: As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:

1. Advance probing questions about a common text or other objects of study.
2. Pursue new and enriched understandings of the texts through sustained collaborative inquiry.
3. Reevaluate initial hypotheses in light of evidence and collaborative discussion with the goal of making considered judgments.
4. Engage in reflective listening and inclusive, respectful conversation.

Course Requirements:

I) **Class Participation** 50%

Students will be graded on both the quantity and the quality of their responses to the text, and to each other, as we weave the strands of a real, meaningful, and exciting conversation. I will keep careful track of your classroom participation and inform you of your grades via Moodle on a weekly basis. We will talk about the grading process for seminar participation as we go along and it will be more fully explained in a separate handout.

The following two kinds of writing will also contribute to your overall participation grade. There will be a penalty for any missed assignments:

- 1) **Peer Observations** – Students will be assigned to observe one particular peer a few times throughout the semester. At the end of the observation week, they will write a brief assessment of the peer’s seminar participation and turn it in anonymously. These will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. More specific guidelines will be forthcoming.
- 2) **In-class writing** – We will often use reflective writing as a way of thinking during class session. These will usually be some form of short free writing on a prompt. The prompts will ask you to reflect upon the readings, and our discussions, in an “off-the-cuff” manner. Sometimes this kind of writing will take place before our discussions, sometimes in the middle as an extension of discussion, and sometimes afterwards as a synthesis.

II) **Exploratory Writing** 20%

The purpose of exploratory writing is not to improve your writing skills so much as to stimulate thinking about issues, questions and problems raised by our readings. This kind of writing lets you “think out loud” on paper (or a computer screen) without having to worry whether your writing is effective for readers. So organization, correct sentences structure, neatness and spelling won’t matter as much in this format. The default format of these assignments will be 15-minute “focused freewrites”. When you free-write you put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write non-stop for a set period of time. The “focused” part will

be a question or prompt that I give you beforehand to guide your writing. You will receive more detailed tips on how to do this as I begin to introduce these assignments.

There will be a steady stream of these short exploratory writing assignments due on a weekly basis. These assignments will be part of your regular preparation for class and will accumulate in an online portfolio that will be graded at midterm and at the end of the term. We will often use our exploratory writing in some active way during our class sessions so you should always bring a copy with you so you can share it with the class. If you miss a class for any reason, make sure to check the Moodle announcements to see if any writing was assigned.

III) Formal Analytic Essay..... 20%

The exploratory writing described above will include assignments that slowly introduce essential seminar-related reading and writing skills over time. These will offer you the building blocks you will need to tackle a more formal analytic essay – one that asks you to form a focused thesis and carefully support it with a logical argument and evidence from the texts you are analyzing. During weeks 10-13, we will work in stages (e.g. trial theses, outlines, drafts) on just such an essay project. There will be a variety of due dates related to each stage and these will be explained in detail in a later handout.

IV) Self-Assessment 10%

As we near the end of the term (weeks 14-16), I will ask you to think more carefully about how you have progressed in your reading, writing and discussion skills across this first semester. I will work with you to create clear account of your strengths, weaknesses, challenges and triumphs. This account will enter an online database so that your future seminar instructors will be able to access it. So when you begin your second seminar class in your sophomore year, your instructor will be able to read about your experience in Seminar 1 before he/she meets you. This self-assessment process will continue throughout your four semesters in the Collegiate Seminar Program and culminate in a reflection process in your senior year.

Attendance:

Class attendance is an essential part of the learning experience. Roll will be taken regularly at the beginning of each class. Three absences will be excused (although they may impact your discussion grade). After that, each subsequent absence will remove 5% from your final grade in the course (I'm serious about this!). Any class missed, for whatever reason, is considered an absence. Three late arrivals or early departures from class will count as one absence.

Moodle:

When you log into your My Saint Mary's account, you should see a link for GaelLearn (Moodle). If you enter that system you will find a site for our course. This is a place for posting assignments, accessing course documents and receiving important announcements. All of our online work will happen there. Take a moment to visit it soon so you get a sense of how it functions. Let me know if you have any trouble accessing it.

Office Hours:

Students are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss any aspect of the class or to just talk about psychology. Please feel free to make appointments if the posted hours are problematic.

Accommodations:

Reasonable and appropriate accommodations, that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities, are extended through the office of Student Disability Services. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Coordinator at (925) 631-4164 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint Mary's website:

<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/student-disability-services.html>

Required Texts:

In the past, the Collegiate Seminar reading list has been largely chronological, beginning with the most ancient texts of the Western tradition and moving forward in time over the course of the four-year sequence. Past freshmen reading lists have focused mainly on ancient Greek texts. This course uses a new approach. Rather than starting exclusively with ancient texts, we have created a reading list that blends texts from across many time periods, various genres and different cultural perspectives. The texts have been chosen based on their accessibility to freshmen, their relevance to modern life/modern questions, and their importance in human history. The focus has been on texts that best allow students to practice the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry outlined in the learning outcomes described above. As participants in the pilot, you will have a unique opportunity to give us feedback about how this new reading list facilitates your classroom experience.

Spiegelman, *Maus: Survivor's Tale, vols.1&2* (Random 9780679748403)

Sophocles, *Three Tragedies* (UCP 9780226307923)

Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Hackett 9780915145690)

Homer, *The Odyssey* tr. Fagles (Penguin 9780140268867)

Photocopied Course Reader (available on the first day of classes)

Course Schedule

Aug. 28

Plato, *"The Allegory of the Cave"*

Aug. 30

LeGuin, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*

Sept. 4

Woolf, *How to Read a Book*

Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*

Sept. 6

Al Ghazali, *Manners to be Observed by Teachers and Students*

Seneca, *Moral Epistle #88*

Sept. 11

Spiegelman, *Maus (Vol. 1, chs.1-3)*

Sept. 13

Spiegelman, *Maus (Vol. 1, chs.4-6)*

Sept. 18

Spiegelman, *Maus (Vol. 2, chs.1-2)*

Sept. 20

Spiegelman, *Maus (Vol. 2, chs.3-5)*

Course Schedule

(continued)

Sept. 25

(No new reading)

Sept. 27

Epictetus, *The Handbook*

Oct. 2

Alexie, *What You Pawn I Will Redeem*

Oct. 4

Martin Luther King Jr, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Oct. 9

Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*

Oct. 11

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Oct. 16

Thucydides, *The Melian Dialogue (from the History of the Peloponnesian War)*

Oct. 23

U.S. Supreme Court, *Korematsu v. the United States (1944)*

Oct. 25

Johnson, *Melvin in the 6th Grade*

Oct. 30

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book 9*

Nov. 1

Cervantes, *The Man Who Was Recklessly Curious*

Nov. 6

Ovid, *Metamorphoses (selections)*

Bettleheim, *Uses of Enchantment (selections)*

Nov. 8

Ptolemy, *Almagest (chs. 1-7)*

Nov. 13

Galileo, *Starry Messenger*

Nov. 15

Mo Tzu, *On Universal Love*

Matthew 5 – 7, *Sermon on The Mount*

Nov. 20

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring (chs, 2 & 12)*

******Thanksgiving******

Nov. 27

Homer, *The Odyssey (Bks. I-IV)*

Nov. 29

Homer, *The Odyssey (Bks. V-IX)*

Dec. 4

Homer, *The Odyssey (Bks. X-XIV)*

Dec. 6

Homer, *The Odyssey (Bks. XV-XVIII)*

Dec. 11 (*Tuesday of Finals week, 11:30am-1:30pm*)

Homer, *The Odyssey* (Bks. XIX-XXIV)