AESTHETICS, VALUES AND AUTHORITY

The faculty of the Honors College have cast the third year seminar in terms of three fundamental elements: aesthetics, values and authority. In this seminar we will build our experiences, in part, around critical questions related to the three elements that underpin the third year Honors Seminar. Below are the questions that drive our inquiry:

Fall 2003

AESTHETICS
What is the meaning of Aesthetics?
What is the effect of Aesthetics?
What is the scope of Aesthetic thinking?

VALUES
What is the source of Values?
What is the power of Values?
How are Values manifest in societies?

AUTHORITY
What is the power(s) of Authority? What is the source of Authority?
Is there more than one source of Authority?
What effect does the source of Authority have on the power of Authority?
Is there a difference between legitimate and illegitimate Authority?

Spring 2004

SYNTHESIS
What is the combined result of AESTHETICS, VALUES and AUTHORITY?
What is worthwhile?

CONFRONTING AMERICA

In recent years it has become commonplace for American citizens to look critically at the behavior of the nation and its people. The idea that it is a good thing for citizens to actively critique and criticize the government and the people is alive and well in the United States. Today there is a spirit in this nation that supports challenges to authority and individualism, and is often more taken with the frontier than with tradition. This spirit is protected by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The American experience is grounded in this spirit and the authority associated with citizenship empowers all to participate in the process of governing the nation. Evidence of this is obtained by considering the struggles and changes which mark the evolution of the nation from its inception. Beginning with a reading of the Deceleration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights we will examine personalities and phenomena which give America meaning.
Utilizing selected readings, films, and other cultural artifacts, as well as through individual and group projects we will examine the character of America in terms of three fundamental elements of the seminar: aesthetics, values and authority. The Fall term will focus on efforts directed at understanding the foundations of the American character while the Spring term will focus on the analysis of contemporary issues identified by seminar participants and in an effort to begin to answer the synthesis questions: what is the combined result of aesthetics, values and authority and what is worthwhile?

**FALL 2003: DISCOVERING AMERICAN CHARACTER**

The seminar will begin by examining cultural artifacts, personalities and events that have shaped the character of the people of America form the founding of the nation to the 1980’s. Recognizing that it is not possible to consider all of the forces that shaped the American character, specific themes have been identified which provide a basis for understanding and appreciating the aesthetic dimensions of the nation, the values which are central to the people of the nation and the authority which empowers the people and the nation. This foundation will serve as a base-line for the analysis of contemporary issues in American life during the spring semester.

**SPRING 2004: EXAMINING THE AMERICAN CHARACTER**

The spring seminar will focus on issues of interest in contemporary American life that have been selected by seminar participants. The intent of the Spring seminar is to provide participants with opportunities to answer the two synthesis questions noted above: what is the combined result of aesthetics, values and authority and what is worthwhile?

**Goals of the seminar are to:**

- engage students in critical thought
- create and maintain a simulating intellectual experience for all seminar participants
- advance each seminar participant's understanding of the importance of aesthetics, values and authority in establishing a national character.
- demonstrate the interrelationships linking aesthetics, values and authority in shaping a world view
- identify the issues which will serve as the central themes for the spring seminar

**ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR**

**Organization**

The seminar is organized around questions rather than answers or chronology. For this reason our readings and discussion will not necessarily flow historically. Rather, we will consider various issues and questions and, at times, enjoy the benefits of hindsight.

**Format**

As this course is offered in the seminar format, it is expected that meetings will include regular and lively focused discussions. The seminar facilitator has the responsibility for setting the themes, making assignments and respecting the contributions of well prepared seminar participants in all discussions. The
participants have the responsibility to come to meetings prepared, actively participate in discussions, act respectfully towards all seminar participants and to complete all assignments in a timely fashion. It should be understood that participants who arrive at seminar meetings unprepared are by definition disrespectful to the seminar.

Because the seminar meets for 2 hours and 45 minutes there is plenty of time for discussion. The seminar has been developed to facilitate the showing of films and accommodating guest speakers. Each meeting will conclude with a summary discussion in which all participants are expected to become involved.

Special activity

In general the seminar will meet at the regular time and place. However, participants may decide to arrange an off-campus meeting. If such a case arises it is expected that all participants will make every effort to participate fully in this activity.

Requirements

Reflective Papers: 30%
At intervals noted on the seminar calendar students will submit reflective papers of no more than 5 pages. These papers will consider the seminar experiences to date in relation to the general topic *the formation of the American character*. Although 4 reflective papers will be assigned only the 3 highest grades will be computed into for the final grade.

Group Project: 20%
Participants will join a reading group and, after reading the assigned novel, collectively prepare a paper of no more than 8 pages relating the story to the theme of *the formation of the American character*. Additionally, the group will make a presentation of approximately 30 minutes in length to the seminar and entertain questions.

Take home mid-term examination: 20%
Students will respond to 2 of 3 questions on a take home examination. These questions will be drawn from the experiences of the seminar up to the point of the examination. Students will have one week to complete this task.

Final synthesis project: 20%
Each participant in the seminar will be expected to develop and present a project with synthesizes the seminar experience. Students electing to develop a paper will be limited to a 15 pages of text. Students electing to develop a non-traditional project should discuss their project with the instructor and establish guideline acceptable to both parties.

Participation: 10%
A seminar is only as good as the participants make it. Grades will be awarded that reflect the quality of participation in seminar activities. It should be understood that quality is significantly more noteworthy than quantity.

Guidelines for all written work.

- All written work should be submitted on standard paper, doubled spaced and typed using standard 10 or 12 type font.
• It is expected that all written work done outside of the seminar will be proofread and corrected thoroughly.
• Students should follow a manual of style when preparing written. Any standard style is acceptable.
• Names and student numbers as well as page numbers should appear on each page of a written assignment.
• All work should have a title page (not counted in page limits).
• Written work should be submitted without covers — only one staple in the upper left.
• Students may submit written work via e-mail to fains@fiu.edu. Students should keep a copy of all written work submitted.
• Work received after deadlines may be marked down for lateness.
• ALL STUDENT WORK IS TO BE ORIGINAL. PROPER REFERENCES ARE REQUIRED WHEN USING THE WORK OF OTHERS IN YOUR PAPERS. VIOLATORS OF THIS POLICY RECEIVE A FAILING GRADE FOR THE ASSIGNMENT AND MAY BE AWARDED A GRADE OF "F" FOR THE SEMINAR.

Attendance and punctuality

Attendance and punctuality are a vital in the seminar since participants are dependent each other if the collective is to reach its potential. Therefore, attendance is expected. Should a participant miss one meeting of the seminar she/he must understand that each subsequent absence will reduce the final grade one full letter.

The seminar will begin 5 minutes after the hour. This will allow participants to be courteous to others and avoid difficulty in crowded halls, elevators and parking delays. It is expected that the seminar will begin on time and it is understood that tardiness detracts from the quality of the seminar. Therefore, participants who are late more than twice will have their grade for class participation reduced by 50%.

Grading

90-94 = A-     95-100 = A
80-83 = B-     84-86 = B     87 - 89 = B+
70-73 = C-     74-76 = C     77- 79 = C+
60-63 = D-     64-66 = D     67- 69 = D+
BELOW 60 = F

Criteria*:

Written work and presentations will be evaluated using the following criteria:

a) responds to the assigned task
b) is well organized, free of most writing errors (no body is perfect)
c) reflective of critical thought and imagination
d) directly linked to seminar readings and/or discussions
e) offers new insights into the problem or issue

* the instructor will consider each submission of student work independently and determine if a plus (+) or minus (-) is warranted.

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A work responds to each of the five (5) criteria noted above.
B work responds criteria a, band c and either d or e
C work responds to criteria a, band c.
D work responds to criteria a and b.

The participation grade will be determined using the following criteria:

a) attendance and punctuality
b) the quality (not quantity) of contributions made to the seminar
   1) connections with readings and previous discussions
   2) building on the contributions of others
   3) demonstrated respect for individuals and the group
c) accepting and meeting responsibilities for group work
d) contributing to the general effectiveness of the seminar

Since it is assumed that all participants in the seminar will meet the above criteria each student begins with a grade of A in the area of participation. However, when evidence is presented demonstrating a failure to meet the stated criteria the grade of A will be lowered accordingly.

REQUIRED TEXTS:


COURSE PACKS (only available at the FIU Bookstore) Readings also available at FIU Library reserve.

GROUP PROJECT BOOKS (only one is required; selections to be made during the seminar):