Notions of Home: Aesthetics, Values, and Authority in an Ever-Changing World

“Read whole books, not just snippets out of anthologies and textbooks. Provide a rich experience about the big questions in life...Literacy and a love for books is the single most important element in a first-rate education.”

-Benno Schmidt Jr., former president of Yale University

Course emphasis:

This course will use a variety of materials to explore the themes of Aesthetics, Values, and Authority when different ideas and cultures or groups come into contact and even conflict. The course materials include a political book, a novel, two memoirs, and other assignments that we will analyze as we attempt to determine how the three themes evolve over time. Moreover, these course materials will provide the basis for our discussions of how different cultural ideas affect our nation and our city at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Course materials:

I. Current Events

1) Bob Woodward, Plan of Attack (journalistic analysis).
2) The Battle of Algiers (film).

II. Coming to America

1) Frank McCourt, Angela’s Ashes (memoir).
2) El Super (film).

III. Conflicting American Values

1) F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (novel).

IV. Closer to Home

1) Carlos Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana (memoir).
2) Bread and Chocolate (film).
Classroom policy:

Because of the importance of classroom discussion in the Honors College, timely attendance is absolutely mandatory in this course. The Honors College requires a serious commitment from each student, so I expect you to keep up with your reading and to be in class every day at 9:30 a.m. without fail. In order to emphasize the importance of classroom work and discussion, your final grade will be lowered by a full grade for every two absences.

Class work and grading:

The class will require two five-to-six page papers on sections I and II (Woodward and McCourt) and a ten-to-twelve page research paper on either sections III or IV (Fitzgerald and Eire). In addition, in order to determine whether you are keeping up with the reading, we will have announced and unannounced quizzes on each of the four books.

You will be as follows:

1) Woodward and McCourt papers: 25% each.
2) Research paper on Fitzgerald or Eire: 40%.
3) Periodic announced and unannounced quizzes: 10%.

Grading policy:

As Honors College students, I expect that you will prepare well-written, convincing papers on the material we cover in class. You will be graded principally on 1) the content of the report, 2) how closely you stick to the topic and lead to a persuasive conclusion, and 3) the way that you support your ideas, especially with direct references to the readings. In addition, an A paper will also be presented in a professional fashion in accordance with the guidelines of the Modern Language Association, which we will cover in class. Finally, in order to help you develop your writing and research skills, I will return your first two papers (on Woodward and McCourt) with comments and suggestions, and then allow you to resubmit a revised version. Your final grade can go up by an entire letter grade, for example from B- to A-, but it will never go down.
HONORS COLLEGE MYTHS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. Myth #1: The Honors College is fun, not work.

   I honestly hope that you enjoy this course, but that will only happen if you enjoy working. If you have a good attitude towards learning, you will soon see that this is not as bad as it may sound.

2. Myth #2: Everyone gets a good grade in the Honors College.

   Only the people who deserve it. Many people receive a B or C in the Honors College, and on occasion an even lower grade. There are no guarantees here.

3. Myth #3: Since I’m a junior, I only have to worry about my major.

   I certainly expect that you will do well in your major, but the Honors College requires a similar commitment of time and effort for you to succeed. Fortunately, the Honors College allows you to study with people with diverse academic backgrounds, so you should find a wider variety of experiences and opinions than you would in your major classes.

4. Myth #4: Now that I’m in the Honors College, I can stay until graduation.

   We hope that you will graduate from the Honors College, but you will have to make a maximum effort and keep your grades up in order to earn the gold medal.

5. Myth #5: The good thing about the Honors College is that I can just sit back and soak up the information that I get from my teachers and fellow students.

   The best way to soak up information is to come to class fully prepared and to participate as much as you can. We believe in active learning, so the more you put in, the more that you will get out of the Honors College experience.

6. Expectation #1: The Honors College will provide me with close contact with FIU faculty.

   One of the unique features of the Honors College is that it allows you to be in a relatively small group of fellow students, and with the same professor for two or sometimes more semesters. Since the College allows you this contact, we certainly encourage you to stop by our offices if you have questions or if you need any help with your classes. We are always available when you need us, so please take full advantage. If you are not active in and out of class, then you are missing out on an important part of your educational experience.