**I – Course Overview**

**COIN description:**

A study of selected works, from several genres, by outstanding American authors.

**Summary of Material and Topics:**

A course exploring American literature from a variety of periods and genres. Placing texts in their cultural and historical contexts, each section is concerned with specific issues pertaining to literary form and meaning and larger issues concerning literature’s role in reflecting and shaping American values and identity.

**Pedagogical Techniques and Assignments:**

Sections may be conducted in the classroom, blended, or fully online. Depending on instructor expertise, sections may identify focused historical periods (such as Early American Literature), focused criteria (such as texts that been awarded the Pulitzer Prize), or broader themes (such as Disobedience in American Literature). Assignments might include daily reading assignments, written responses to texts, online discussions, oral presentations, quizzes and exams.

*Note:* The example below provides sample texts, assignments, and a course outline for a section centered on the theme Disobedience in Early American Literature. This section surveys American literature from the colonial period through the 19th century, with a special thematic emphasis on disobedience.  From the Revolution to the women’s rights and abolitionist movements, literature in America has been used as a mode of social critique.  How and why do early American authors claim disobedience as a particularly American trait?  How do disenfranchised populations use literature to protest injustice?  How do different formal elements, generic conventions, and circulation practices impede or enable protest? Students will also consider how these early debates continue to inform our current historical moment. Genres studied include poetry, novels, plays, essays, and short stories.

**II – Learning Outcomes**

**Course-specific Learning Outcomes**

* Analyze a diverse range of literary genres, including novels, poetry, plays, essays, and short stories, using both historicist and formalist methodologies.
* Recognize the goals and conventions of a diverse range of key American literary movements and subgenres. These may include romanticism, slave narratives, sentimentalism, transcendentalism, realism, and naturalism.
* Identify formal elements and analyze how they contribute to a text’s larger meaning and effect.
* Improve reading and writing skills by using textual evidence to support arguments about literary texts.
* Consider how authors with a diverse range of experiences, backgrounds, and goals shape American literature.
* Understand how American texts are informed by their historical context and how American literature informs our current values and beliefs.

**University Studies Learning Outcomes (Cluster 3A. Literature)**

1. Articulate how literature (fiction, poetry, drama and literary nonfiction) both reflects and helps shape culture, society and history.

2. Explain how a text’s literary form, style and content express its meanings using appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to their experiences.

**III – Examples of Texts and/or Assigned Readings**

**1. Sample Anthology**

Baym, Nina *et al*, eds. *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 8th ed. Vols. A, B, C. Norton, 2011. Print. 5 vols.

Volumes A-C cover American literature from its beginnings through 1914; volumes can be purchased separately or in bundles, depending on instructor preference.

**2. Sample Individual Texts**

Early Examples:

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* (Penguin, 1998)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin, 1961)

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (Dover, 1993)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Dover, 2001)

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Norton, 1994)

**IV – Example Assignments**

**A. Example 1 – Midterm and Final Exams**

The instructor will administer midterm and final exams. The exams will include **passage identifications**, **short answer questions**, and/or **essay questions** that assess student attainment of course objectives, as listed below. *Sample artifacts for each of these components are included below.*

**Related University Studies learning outcomes**

2. Explain how a text’s literary form, style and content express its meanings using appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to their experiences.

**Examples of artifacts generated by the assignment that can be used to measure student learning:**

**1. Passage Identification (in class/closed book) –** Addressing **Outcomes #2 and #3**, this portion measures students’ ability to identify and analyze how individual formal and stylistic elements of a text contribute to its larger meaning and to use appropriate disciplinary terminology to explain a text’s meaning.

Instructions:

Select 5 passages from the list below. Identify the title of the text and the author. In about 3 complete sentences, explain the significance of the passage in relation to the text as a whole and larger course themes. Use appropriate terminology regarding literary form and historical context.

Possible Passage:

“A man’s body at auction,   
I help the auctioneer, the sloven does not half know his business.

Gentlemen look on this curious creature,   
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for him…”

Possible Answer:

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

This passage demonstrates Whitman’s celebration of the human body and his belief in equality, two themes that run throughout *Leaves of Grass*. In this passage the narrator occupies the position of the auctioneer to offer a description of a slave’s body that transcends any system of monetary value. The passage is also written in free verse, an innovative form that reflects Whitman’s revolutionary ideas.

**2. Short Answer Questions (take home/open book/open note) –** This exercise also addresses **Outcomes #2 and #3** by requiring that students know specific rhetorical and contextual foundations of literary works (i.e. “Enlightenment print culture”) and analyze how formal elements and historical contexts (i.e. “trope”) function in literary works using discipline-specific terminology. It also addresses **Outcome #4** by requiring that students put texts in conversation with one another and compare how different authors interpret and value their experiences.

Instructions:

Answer in a fully developed and carefully proofread paragraph that employs appropriate terminology (to describe genre, formal elements, and historical context). To receive credit, your answers should explain how direct quotations from the text support your position.

1) How does “On the Equality of the Sexes” demonstrate the values of Enlightenment print culture?

2) How does *Hope Leslie* engage with the trope of the Vanishing American?

3) How does *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* challenge Thoreau’s model of civil disobedience?

**3. Essay Question (take home/open book/open note) –** In addition to meeting **Outcomes #2 and #3**, this exercise also addresses **Outcome #4** by requiring that students understand the function of satire (a formal literary element) as a vehicle for social criticism. Satire is a strategy for questioning the ‘values’ society imposes on human experiences (motherhood, democracy). The take-home format rewards students who have been engaged during class discussion and lecture and allows a more nuanced development of ideas than an in-class exam.

In a 5oo word essay, explain how María Ruiz de Burton’s novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* satirizes one of the following concepts:

* Republican motherhood
* Manifest Destiny (American expansionism)
* American democracy

To receive credit, your answer must:

* Explain how direct textual evidence from the beginning, middle, and end of the novel supports your claims.
* Demonstrate an understanding of the formal element of satire, as defined in class on Wednesday, April 18.
* Be carefully proofread.

**B. Example 2 – Online Discussion Sessions**

Students will participate in small group discussions using the online discussion board. Focused discussion topics can be determined by the instructor, or student leaders can be assigned with posting discussion topics. These discussions are an opportunity for students to take risks and engage with larger questions about how literature reflects and shapes culture and how literature expresses the values of individual authors from diverse backgrounds.

**Related University Studies learning outcomes**

1. Articulate how literature (fiction, poetry, drama and literary nonfiction) both reflects and helps shape culture, society and history.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to their experiences.

**Examples of artifacts generated by the assignment that can be used to measure student learning**

Students might be asked to respond to the following discussion questions. Both are examples of how discussion questions can lead students to consider how literature might reflect and subvert social and cultural conventions (**Outcome #1**). Both also lead students to consider how literature becomes a space for authors to invent ways of expressing values and describing experiences that might not be immediately available in particular historical moments (**Outcome #4**). They thus demonstrate how literary experimentation influences language more generally. Additionally, because both examples are taken from texts that are often read autobiographically, they lead students to consider how literature should be read as an expression of the values of individual authors (**Outcome #4**). Although 21st century readers might easily categorize Whitman as “gay” or Chopin as “feminist,” the examples below predate and complicate these shorthand categories, in turn encouraging students to question their own preconceived notions of monolithic identity groups.

* Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*: Michael Warner reminds us that "the modern idea of homosexuality developed at the end of [Whitman's] lifetime; the idea of gay identity much later" (xxv). There weren't even words to describe the desire Whitman felt for other men, although many 19th c. reviews sensed and condemned the homoeroticism of his poetry. How do you see Whitman struggling with the problem of language in the “Calamus” and “Live Oak, with Moss” series? What solutions does he find?
* Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*: Although *The Awakening* is often rightly considered one of the first important works of feminist literature, Chopin’s own relationship to the women’s rights movement of her time is not so straightforward. How would you evaluate this text as feminist literature? You might consider the narrator’s characterization of Edna, or the novel’s dismissive attitude toward Miss Mayblunt.

**Grading Criteria and Guidelines for Students:**

* Comments add to the group’s understanding of how a text reflects and/or subverts the values of its cultural moment.
* Comments demonstrate active engagement with course material and class discussion, particularly in relation to knowledge of author’s biography, body of work, and historical moment.
* Substantial comments posted throughout the entire class.
* Students post and directly respond to peers’ posts.

**C. Example 3 – Written Responses**

Students will write short and/or longer (1-5 page) interpretive and analytic essays. While interpretation explains *what* a text means, analysis explains *how* a text means. A strong analysis will explain how a specific element of the text contributes to its larger meaning. Students will write to persuade a critical reader that their analysis of a text is valid and interesting. Successful papers will develop a focused argument that requires proof and will use concrete textual evidence to support that argument.

**Related University Studies learning outcomes**

1. Articulate how literature (fiction, poetry, drama and literary nonfiction) both reflects and helps shape culture, society and history.

2. Explain how a text’s literary form, style and content express its meanings using appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to their experiences.

**Examples of artifacts generated by the assignment that can be used to measure student learning:**

Instructors might offer students the following strategies for writing a critical analysis. Artifacts would be essays written in response to the following prompts. Note that all strategies are analytically oriented, and thus address **Outcome #3**.

* + - * Consider how a formal element contributes to the text’s larger meaning. This approach addresses **Outcome #2**, by asking students to identify and consider the function of a specific literary term.
* View the text through a critical lens. What does a text have to say about its historical and cultural moment? This approach addresses **Outcome #1** by asking students to consider how a text is formed by and/or challenges the cultural values (such as attitudes toward race and gender) of its historical moment.
* Compare 2 texts with the purpose of demonstrating how authors with different backgrounds and experiences use literature to express alternative value systems and interpretive practices. This approach addresses **Outcome #4**.

Examples of successful student-written thesis statements applying the above strategies to arguments that could be supported using concrete textual evidence:

* Walt Whitman’s poetry is an example of how form relates to content; his innovative free verse reflects his poetry’s radical vision of equality.
* Puritan doctrine maintains a boundary between Rowlandson and her native captors: although she describes acts of kindness and generosity, she attributes those actions to God rather than to Wampanoag individuals.
* While Thoreau argues that the potential for liberation is universally located within all individuals, Jacobs’ narrative details how social and political obstacles impede individuals marked by race and gender in ways that Thoreau does not acknowledge.

**Grading Criteria:**

Successful papers will:

* Articulate a focused argument that analyzes how a specific formal element contributes to a text’s larger meaning *or* how the text engages with its specific cultural moment.
* Support that argument with the careful analysis of concrete textual evidence.
* Demonstrate evidence of accurate and active engagement with course material, especially through the use of discipline-specific formalist and historical terminology.
* Be logically and purposefully organized and be free of sentence-level grammatical errors.

**V – Sample Course Outline**

**Disobedience in Early American Literature**

**Unit 1 – Resisting Marriage in the Early Republic (Weeks 1-4)**

Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of Sexes” (1790)

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (1797)

Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle” (1819)

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* (1827)

**Unit 2 – Transcendental Rebellion (Weeks 5-8)**

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (1849)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street” (1853)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

**Unit 3 – Protesting Slavery and Manifest Destiny (Weeks 9-11)**

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

María Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872)

**Unit 4 – The New Woman and First Wave Feminism (Weeks 12-13)**

Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1879)

Kate Chopin, “Story of an Hour” (1894)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1899)