

Instructor: Nik Valdez, they/them/theirs
Class Meeting: Monday 3:30-4:15
Office Hours: Monday 3-3:30 or by appointment
Email:

1

WHUM 10100 Course Syllabus - Distance Learning Edition -
City College of New York

COURSE DESCRIPTION

City's purpose for this course goes as follows: "We will travel through history and around the world in the hope that we can come to comprehend different times and places, how the people who lived in them saw themselves, saw their lives, and the world they inhabited."

We will keep this in mind, but my primary goal for this class is to foster interrogations of the texts which are interesting and exciting for you to explore and to encourage engagement in what we will call an "intentional learning community". Moreover, I hope to create a "map" of sorts which allows you to both understand and connect the different worldviews that have shaped – and continue to shape – modernity and contemporary life. This includes but is not limited to: conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, and religion. Our goal as a class will be to craft a facility with these complicated themes across multiple and differing contexts, to close-read and comprehend complicated texts, and to develop and hone critical thinking skills.

Class meetings will be divided into two components:

- **30 minutes of asynchronous, shared work via a class-shared google doc**
- **45 minutes of discussion via zoom.**

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Asynchronous Lecture Materials

There will be one asynchronous lecture, no longer than 25 minutes, for each text we read, discussing important background, context, and other pertinent information. The goal will be to help you place the text or media historically and ideologically. Please watch **before** reading the texts.

Shared Google Doc

- I will send out a link every week to a new document.
- For each class meeting, we will spend around half the allotted time working asynchronously on a shared class google doc.
- You will access the google doc for the first half of class and respond to low-stakes writing prompts designed to help you think critically about the text(s). **Please be sure to write your responses in a document separate from the google doc and then copy and paste your responses in** – this helps keep gdoc from getting overwhelmed by so many people working at once.
- You will also respond to the contributions of others in the doc via the "comment" tool (this can be done in-doc – no need to c&p).
- You do not have to respond to every contribution, but ideally you will find at least one contribution that is interesting or exciting.

- You may post your responses any day or time prior to the allotted time, **but please ensure you respond to others who are posting within the allotted time before the zoom session begins.**

If you have disabilities or barriers that inhibit you from participating in this way, please reach out to me – there are plenty of alternatives we can discuss. The goal is to foster an intentional learning community among the class and we cannot do that unless we find ways to connect despite the distance (physical, intellectual, positional, ideological, etc.) between us. I encourage you to find joy and pleasure in this process.

Written Assignments

- **Response 1:** Pulling together (to be paired with in-class activity and discussion prior to due date.)
 - Your “pulling together” response paper will take the place of the midterm. You should demonstrate two vital skills: pulling together themes or “threads” from the different lectures, readings, and discussions, and articulating the beginnings of an analysis. We will practice these skills during the discussion and shared document portions of class.
 - Please use Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced lines, and 1-inch margins.
 - All papers should be typed and submitted via the appropriate assignment module on Blackboard.
- **Response 2:** 3-page rough draft of your final paper.
 - This draft should represent a substantial amount of work towards your final paper. For a description of the final paper, please see below.
 - This draft is graded for completion only: you receive full credit for submitting your draft by the due date.
 - Please include the following:
 - A header which includes your name & your section number
 - A page count somewhere on each page (1, 2, 3)
 - A citation page (Include future sources or possible sources). Although secondary sources are optional if you use them I will guide you.
 - For those who like to do outlines, maps, idea webs, or other brainstorming activities you can include it. This will count towards **1 page** of your draft.
 - Please use Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced lines, and 1-inch margins.
 - All papers should be typed and submitted via the appropriate assignment module on Blackboard.
- **Final Essay**
 - The goals of this paper are to:
 - Grapple with the themes and ideas that we have spent the semester exploring
 - Utilize primary source(s) to substantiate your argument (we will practice this in class).

- I encourage you to take it in any direction you find interesting and generative, whether contemporary, historical, or both.
- You will write about a topic of your choice utilizing the texts from the course (your primary sources).
- Creative/alternative projects are welcome, but please discuss them with me first.
- If you would prefer to work from a set of prompts, you should begin with the google doc that corresponds from that week's reading. If there isn't a google doc for that week or if you're still having trouble, you can always email/schedule a meeting with me. (We also have an optional one-on-one at the end of term, which we can use to discuss your paper.)
- The minimum length is 5 full pages, double spaced.
- Please include the following:
 - A header which includes your name & your section number
 - A page count somewhere on each page (1, 2, 3)
 - A citation page including all primary and secondary (if used) sources.
 - Please use Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced lines, and 1-inch margins.
 - All papers should be typed and submitted via the appropriate assignment module on blackboard.

One-on-one with instructor

In place of class the week before "reading week" (the week preceding final exams), you can choose to schedule a meeting with me. This time can be used to address any questions, concerns, or issues you may have (about your final project or otherwise). I'll also use this time to ask you questions about your experience this term (in our class and in others). **This also serves as extra credit.**

If there are assignments you feel you will not be able to complete, please come talk to me. The goal of these projects is to help you engage meaningfully with texts and ideas while also meeting CCNY's core requirements, but there is more than one way to do that.

Additional Extra Credit (Optional)

Choose a media (book, poem, music video, performance, etc.,) and analyze the content for themes we have discussed in class via a presentation¹. Presentations can occur either at the beginning of class or one-on-one. Your interest and engagement with your ideas as they relate to our class and the chosen media will determine your extra credit percentage – usually a half-grade bump at minimum, though more is possible.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Participation

Participation in discussion and activities is highly encouraged but there are multiple ways to participate, and not all of them include being the one to raise your hand (though that is, of course, always welcome). Questions, remarks, and/or responses in Zoom IM, for example, all

¹ e.g., I might choose to analyze the last episode of Noelle Stevenson's She-Ra for themes on queer family, religious fanaticism, and/or redemption.

count as participation. (**Note: I will never download the zoom chats without telling you before class**) We can discuss other alternatives where necessary.

To make this class worth your time, I will need you to be present and attentive whenever possible and in whatever ways you can. That being said, you are all people first, with lives, responsibilities, and limitations that often take precedence. In other words, flexibility is the name of the game: I have endeavored to build in as much flexibility as possible.

Community Agreements

As an intentional learning community, we will form community agreements to guide us in our conduct for this class. This is a collaborative process and I encourage each of you to think about the things that are necessary for you to create a welcoming and interesting learning environment. (If you've never encountered that, think about the things you experience that create an unwelcoming or hostile learning environment, and work from there.)

Cell Phone use: occasional cellphone use happens and I understand. I only ask you to keep in mind that this is a joint effort. If you check out, it's going to be much harder for me and the rest of the class to learn from/with you.

Respecting people's names and [pronouns](#) are not optional. I will – gently – correct you each time you make a mistake. I do not expect the same in return², but I do welcome it. Slurs and racist, homophobic, transphobic, sexist, and/or ableist language are not welcome.

Attendance

Please notify me if you will be absent or significantly late to class (this includes posting google doc responses late). There is no penalty. If you have greater than 3 absences, each subsequent absence needs to be made up with an alternative assignment, agreed upon together.

Assessment

Your goals for each of your assignments are as follows: direct engagement and grappling with the texts; effort to communicate your ideas clearly to me and other potential readers; efforts to think critically; efforts to participate in the class and engage in a collaborative learning community however possible for you.

Your grade will reflect the effort you put forth.

Accommodations

You may go through DSS or speak to me directly about any accommodations you may need. **I do not need proof of illness or disability.** You also should not feel coerced to disclose personal circumstances to me. Let me know what you can and cannot do and we will figure out a way to make this class worthwhile and useful for you.

² Harming students (in any way, but certainly by erasing their identity) in this space is not only directly against my values, it also impedes learning. Requiring students to redress that harm themselves by correcting me only exacerbates the power imbalance inherent to the classroom and causes further harm. It is my responsibility to get your names and pronouns correct and though I will mess up, as we all do, I will also ensure I correct myself the moment I realize.

For students who struggle with writing or reading assignments, or class engagement, please reach out to me. We can come up with alternative ways for you to engage usefully in this class.³

Extensions are available for every assignment, no questions asked, but we must be in communication. If you find yourself thinking about plagiarizing, please talk to me (and please: don't). You have good ideas that are worth exploring – I would like to help you explore them.

Grade Breakdown

- 40% Participation
 - 20% google doc activity (thoughtful responses to writing prompts & to other contributors)
 - 20% “class” participation, in the form of speaking, IM responses, or any alternative we have agreed upon beforehand (to be decided as a class or one-on-one, depending on the circumstances.)
- 15% Response Paper
- 15% Final paper draft
- 30% Final Paper

COURSE DUE DATES

1. Weekly lectures before starting each reading
2. Response Paper 1: On or before the week of **DATE**
3. Rough Draft of Final Paper: On or before the week of **DATE**
4. Final: On or before **DATE**

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts will be available to you via Blackboard.

Sources for low-cost books:

- thriftbooks.com
- bigwords.com

Translated and Original Texts

You are welcome to read texts in languages other than English and encouraged to discuss points of translation in class.

³ For example, if writing has historically been a task that you struggle to complete, I might have you start with one paper and continually revise throughout the semester, instead of having you complete 3 separate assignments.)

FAQ

1. How many assignments do we have?

We have 3 total assignments due at different points in the semester and 1 continuous “assignment”, which is the shared google doc that operates as a portion of our meeting time. The other 3 are: 2 low-stakes response papers, and 1 final paper.

2. How do I get an A/pass?

Most of your grade will be participation – the brunt of intellectual work, in my experience, happens in the class. To the best of your abilities, engage with the texts and the discussion in class – either through speaking, instant messaging via zoom, having an ongoing conversation in the google doc, or any other alternative we have discussed ahead of time.

The other portion of your grade will mostly be determined via your written assignments – proof of effort and genuine engagement with texts/ideas will give you a grade you will be satisfied with. If there is also demonstrable improvement, that will get you a good grade as well.

3. What if I need accommodations?

Please reach out to me – I do not need proof of an illness or disability and I do not need you to go through the school’s DSS or administrative process. You also should not feel coerced to disclose personal circumstances to me. Let me know what you can and cannot do and we will figure out a way to make this class worthwhile and useful for you.

4. What if I need an extension on a/multiple assignment(s)?

Extensions are freely given, no questions asked. Just communicate with me that you need one or several. If circumstances are continuous, we can figure out alternative assignments that are feasible for you.

5. So wait, absences/tardiness aren’t penalized?

No, not necessarily! Not being able to make class will not affect your grade, unless you have greater than 3 absences and are not completing your alternative assignments. At that point, it will begin to affect your participation grade. Tardiness will not affect your grade unless it is also reflective of an overall disinterest and lack of engagement with the text/discussion. If you show up late and still participate, you’re in the clear.

6. What if I’m not interested in creating an “intentional learning community”?

That’s totally fine, but this class may not be the one for you. You should consider taking a more traditional class, because not participating in the class will negatively affect your grade.

Community Agreements

(sample from Fall 2020 class)

1. *Take space/make space*
2. *Open to other ways of learning, teaching, and being*
3. *Intent vs. impact / attending to harm felt or done*
4. *Honesty/communication - no question is a bad question*
5. *Constructive feedback instead of negative or harsh comments*
6. *We're all responsible for ourselves, our feelings, and our reactions*
7. *Accountability / Be in community with, learn from, and be open to each other*

COURSE SCHEDULE

[Note: CCNY does not (typically) allow WHUM 101 instructors to add or remove required readings. I decided to include additional optional readings for my students (made available on Blackboard). I integrated brief summaries into my classes and drew connections between these and the standard required texts. These readings were selected to provide broader and more diverse context. Sample exercises, to be incorporated into class, can be found below the course schedule.]

CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday 8/31: Intro

- Syllabus
- Community Agreements
- Q & A

Monday 9/7: no classes scheduled

Monday 9/14: Creation Stories

- Genesis
- Selections from The Epic of Gilgamesh (optional)

Monday 9/21: The Odyssey

- Books 1-4
- Selections from Atwood, *The Penelopeiad* (optional)

Tuesday 9/29*: The Odyssey

- Books 5-12
- Selections from Miller, *Circe* (optional)

***no classes scheduled Monday, 9/28. T:M.**

Monday 10/5: The Odyssey / In-class activity

- Books 13-24 wrap up
- Response Paper 1 Q&A
- Response Paper 1 Writing Activity

* no google doc this week

Wednesday 10/14*: Intermission — **Last day to submit response paper 1**

- Optional “crisis” class

***no classes scheduled Monday, 10/12. W:M.**

Monday 10/19: Greek Theatre

- Antigone
- "[Antigone in Ferguson](#)" performance recommended
- Other performances in place of text also welcome

Monday 10/26: African Epic

- The Sundiata

Monday 11/2: Dante

- The Inferno, selected cantos

Monday 11/9: Medieval Romance

- Marie de France, selected lais, specifically “Lanval” and “Bisclavret”

Monday 11/16: Shakespeare / In class exercises, final paper Q&A, secondary sources, works cited.

- Othello
- The Laurence Fishburne film or a play performance in place of the text is most welcome

Monday 11/23: no classes scheduled 26-29. W:F. We will not be meeting this week. Last day to submit rough draft of final paper.**Monday 11/30: “The Long 18th Century”**

- Aphra Behn, Oroonoko (selections)
- Phillip, *Zong!* selections (optional)

Week of 12/7: No class. Optional one-on-one meeting can be scheduled with me, any time between 11/30 and 12/7.**Possible In-class Activities & Assignments****Dasharah Green's (CUNY, The Grad Center) Translation Cypher Activity**

- Green's [Translation Cypher Activity](#) is originally intended for graduate students, for which I also provided the materials, as I find it to be worthwhile for all levels of study.
- Refer to the [Translation Cypher Activity document](#), pg. 2, for specific activity instructions.
- Recommended adjustments for undergraduate learners:
 - Rather than assigning the attendant readings, talk directly about the goals of the original activity and your goals as a class.
 - I do recommend watching the Lysicott video, "3 Ways to Speak English", together in class.
 - I recommend choosing quotes from texts on the syllabus, but for practice, this is a good time to bring in some complicated theory and difficult but recognizable quotes that you can translate as a class.
 - Vibe-check with your learners about whether folks will prefer small group cyphers rather than large group ones.
 - My number one recommendation for any class activity: the instructor goes first!
 - The hope is that the first round of translation (as practice) alongside you with the more complicated quotes will help learners gain a greater facility with deconstructing and understanding the denser academic texts, while the translation

cyphers themselves will encourage students to reclaim & give volume to their own diverse voices.

Slave Narrative/Neo-slave Narrative "Media" Activity

- Your assignment this week is to find and read/view/listen to some representation of a slave narrative:
 - This can be a movie, TV show, music video or album, poem, book, comic, etc.
 - This can be modern or historical, fictional or based on a real experience.
 - Given the period, it should be centered on the African American slave experience and I encourage everyone to focus on authors/narrators who are themselves Black, given the over-representation of whiteness in our syllabus (Aphra Behn, despite providing us a slave narrative, is in fact White).
- You will be responsible for providing a link or citation in the google doc along with a short summary.
- We will be thinking critically about the slave narrative as a genre and also the social, cultural, and ideological repercussions of slavery as a whole, so whatever media you choose, be sure to consume it multiple times.
- We will be doing multiple activities to reflect on these narratives in different ways, such as small group discussions, “one word reflections”, among others (nb: which the learners should get to vote on), as well as draw connections between your selections and the texts we’ve been reading in class.