

## PURPOSE OF ENGLISH 363 (Mythology)

The focus of English 363 is myth, and the common motif of our studies will be the notion that myth gives us a way to see the world, one different from history and science. Many labor under the illusion that myths are stories from "Greek mythology." Such stories--as well as many others--certainly come under the purview of myth, but myth is a much more substantive and complex matter.

Central to our study of myth is the notion of story, what it is and how it comes about. Indeed, as Rita Oleyar has said, the word *myth* "derives from the Greek *mythos*, meaning *plot*." A second notion about myth we will address this semester stems from the common view that a myth is simply an idea, a statement, or a story that is not historically or scientifically true. This is accurate as far as it goes, but, as we shall see, the quest for "the true" is at best risky business. Myth is a form of language. When we consider that all language (including historical and scientific language) is symbol, removed at least one step from the reality of its referent (whatever and wherever that referent is perceived to be), the connection of myth to language has huge implications, ones with which many folks are uncomfortable. Considering the overwhelming presence of language in our lives, it is not wrong to say that we language-using humans live, not in a world of historical and scientific fact, but rather in a world of illusion, a world of the "not true," a world of myth. As the poet Muriel Rukeyser has said, "The universe is made of stories, not atoms."

Our goal in this course, then, is twofold: first, to describe myth so we may recognize and identify it, and second, to establish (or at least attempt to establish) some norm or standard by which stories can be interpreted and evaluated. This second goal is important. Recognition that myth addresses a "reality" different from that of history and science is not enough. We need also some measure of excellence by which to judge it. Without that measure we lack any standard to translate the mythic knowledge stored between our ears into actions outside our skins.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through a sequence of reading and writing assignments in this course you will learn to strengthen your (1) analytical reading, (2) critical thinking skills, (3) composing process, and (4) expository writing skills.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY (see *SHSU Undergraduate Catalogue, 2006-2008, page 74*)

Roll will be checked each class period as is required by University policy.

The University allows you one week of absences for a long semester. On a Monday/Wednesday night class schedule that equals two class periods. I will give you three, no questions asked and no explanations given. Beginning with the fourth absence, however, I will no longer read your work, but will instead score each assignment thereafter as an *F* until you and I have had a conference about this matter.

Two points to consider: First, writing papers and taking quizzes with passing scores is only part of what goes on in this course. I expect you to read, watch films, and write within the context of what occurs during class and to participate in the classroom exercises and discussions. This cannot be done if you do not attend. Second, as this syllabus makes clear, your failure to attend hurts the class and generates unnecessary work for me. I do not subtract points when you miss class, but your absences, by the same standard, should not penalize your fellow students and me, your instructor.

Suggestion: Keep track of your absences.

## CONFERENCES

I encourage you to come to me with whatever problem you may have with this course. My office hours are listed in the syllabus. I am also here at many other hours. Knock on my office door, and if I can see you, I will be glad to do so. I also encourage you to make appointments at other times. We will find a common time to meet regardless of conflicts. Email me, or call my office at the number given (top of page 1) and leave a name, phone number, and calling time. I will return your call, even if it is long distance.

This is especially important if you do not understand any markings on your papers or how to improve your writing on a particular assignment. If you believe I have misjudged a paper, challenge me. You will have a rubric (see below) with which to judge my judgment. If you can show me my mistake and it is important enough to change the

grade, I will do so. If I reread the paper and it is even worse than I thought it was on the first reading, I will not lower the grade. The grade will remain the same or go up so you cannot lose if you challenge me. I am tough, however, so arrive armed with a specific point by point argument. Don't simply show up and ask me to reread the paper and tell you what I think. You already know what I think. Your job is to change my thinking.

#### PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism means using unethically someone else's work or language to gain credit for yourself. It is a form of theft, an act of cheating. I expect you to do your own work. Cheating will result in an *F* and will be reported to the proper University authority. The rules of documentation followed this semester will be discussed in class.

#### RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS (this statement published by the Provost/VPAA, Fall 2004)

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy Section 51.911 (b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). This request must be made in the first fifteen days of the semester or the first seven days of a summer session in which the absence(s) will occur. The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable time frame in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

#### AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (this statement published by Provost/VPAA, Fall 2004)

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. Please contact the Chair of the Committee for Continuing Assistance for Disabled Students and Director of the Counseling Center, Lee Drain Annex, or by calling (936) 294-1720.

#### GRADING SYSTEM

All grades are based on a 100 point scale: 100-90=A, 89-80=B, etc. Some modification to this scale exists for a paper. See the special handout showing my rubric for scoring papers.

Scan-tron answer sheets: You will need a scan-tron 882 form for each 10 minute quiz. I expect you to arrive for the quizzes with an 882 form in hand.

10 Minute Quizzes: Dates and subject matter for the 10 minute quizzes are in the syllabus. Your lowest 10 minute quiz score will be dropped before an average is calculated. Any missed quiz will be scored as a zero. I do not give make-up quizzes so do not ask for one.

Short Papers: You will write two of these, one during the semester and one for the final exam. Any make-up assignment will require that you write an exam different from the original, and five (5) points per day (not class period) will be deducted from each day late. After five (5) days, a late paper will receive an unread *F*. Class work ends officially 10:00 p.m. Thursday, 4 May. No work other than the final exam will be accepted after that hour.

Final Exam: The final exam is scheduled in the syllabus and will be administered at the time scheduled by the University. Giving the exam earlier or at a different time is unfair to those students whose schedules are dependent upon the University's schedule.

The exam will consist of an in-class writing assignment for which you will have the full two hours. Review for the final exam is listed in this syllabus.

Term Paper: This course requires a term paper, worth fifty percent of your final grade. We will discuss this early in the semester (see the date in the syllabus), and you will receive a handout explaining the limits of the paper.

Summary of Course Grade: Since this is a writing enhanced course, well over 50% of your grade will come from writing. Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

10 minute quizzes average	}	
Mid-semester Paper #1	}	50%
Final Exam (Paper #2)	}	
Term Paper	}	50%

### SYLLABUS AND TEXTS

Bring this syllabus and the text currently under study to class each period. If you lose the syllabus, ask for another. I have extras. Any changes made in the syllabus later in the semester (this almost always happens for various reasons) will be done in class so you can mark your copy. I expect you to bring the text currently under study so we can examine specific passages. You cannot make these examinations if you do not have a text.

### TWO FINAL NOTES

Some of the readings and films in this course are considered by some folks as a little "raw." Sex and violence (both in language and actions)--whether we like them or not--are components in contemporary American myths. One myth, for example, we will examine is that of re-creation. I will illustrate this important myth with the Francis Ford Coppola film *Apocalypse Now*, a film filled with violence both in language and in action. If you are so offended by such films and readings that your nervous system will not tolerate watching and reading them, drop this course. We cannot discuss something if we are forced to avoid the something we are trying to discuss. This is an important requirement in this course, and you should give it serious consideration.

As the list of texts makes patently clear, this is a reading-- as well as writing-- enhanced course. I expect the assigned materials to be read on the days marked on this syllabus. Some will have to read every day to keep pace. I will try to help by introducing some of the works before their due dates, but no amount of help will substitute for the actual reading of the works. If you get confused while reading, don't worry about. A number of other folks will be also. Believe me, no one (authors, instructors, students, librarians, roommates) knows everything about these works so read the works and come to class. Those two things I cannot do for you, but I can help once you get here.