

Reality and the Americas, Course Design, and the Seven Capabilities

Design: Reality and the Americas's three units are designed to help students engage the concepts and questions listed above (in the "Contents" section). The first unit focuses on how we construct real and non-real categories in which we place information on past events, the second focuses on present perceptions of reality, and the last unit focuses on contemporary changes in how we perceive reality and non-reality, and how the two categories blur and work together. Each unit will give you an opportunity to practice the Seven Capabilities (in *italics*, below) associated with UMass's General Education Critical Analysis Requirement.

The Seven Capabilities:

Critical Thinking will be the goal of every assignment and in-class activity. During our first unit, students will identify the perceptions of reality and the history of the Americas about which they were formally instructed. Then, they will reflect on how those perceptions and representations affect their meta-cognition and on how the scope of those definitions could be altered. The second and third units encourage an increase in your ability to challenge and problematize constructions of reality. These units allow students to view the authors of our course readings as models of productive and flexible thinkers, but not as infallible thinkers; we will analyze their claims and seek to improve them.

You will practice **Careful Reading** when distinguishing between academic writing and academic language, and when recognizing the different categories of writing (e.g., scholarly articles, case studies, research journalism, and descriptive essays) used in different disciplines. We will practice distinguishing among primary sources, secondary sources, supporting sources, and original sources.

Homework assignments will help you progress toward the **Clear Writing** that will be required in your three major papers. We will explore the different strategies used by the authors of our course readings, and apply those strategies to our own writing. You will also learn to recognize what an academic community recognizes as valid research as you relate course sources to definitions of reality, representation, virtual reality, and re-representation.

Information Technology and **Information Literacy** capabilities will be fostered during our weekly computer lab/library components and during your final research project. We will focus on efficiently locating relevant and authoritative electronic and print sources, and on evaluating those sources.

Your ability to present yourself and your ideas, in other words to **Speak** and **Listen** in an academic context, will develop incrementally. At the beginning of the semester, you will explore a sampling of sources from various Western Hemisphere sources and periods during class, and complete group work (i.e., **Team Work**). Later in the semester, you will give an oral presentation on your final research/self assessment project.

You will perform academic **Self-Assessment** continually in this course as you assess your and your classmates' emerging definitions of reality. As the semester progresses, your critical reading and thinking abilities will become increasingly sophisticated, and you will be able to explain precisely what the implications of describing something as real and/or non-real are. You will also learn how

to review your own and your classmates' papers.

N.B. UMass Boston's Seminar Assessment Committee developed the quoted passages above in this syllabus.

