

Instructor: Meesh McCarthy
meesh.mccarthy@umb.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays
Office: Academic Support Programs, CC-1300s
Peer Mentor [an experienced student TBA]

Blended Course: Computer Lab
and Classroom locations
Library Contact: Janet DiPaolo
Healey Library
Advisor: Linda Hamilton
Advising, CC-1500s

Class Meetings: Tu/Th 9:30-11:15

Course website: www.faculty.umb.edu/meesh_mccarthy/G114webOCW.htm

Course weblog: fysg114.blogspot.com

**First Year Seminar G114: Investigations Across the Curriculum:
Reality and the Americas
OCW version**

Course Objectives and Content

University Wide First Year Seminar Objectives: "This course is a First Year Seminar (FYS). First Year Seminars welcome new students (with fewer than 30 credits) to UMass Boston with small-sized courses designed to prepare them for a successful college experience." "A major goal of First Year Seminars is to practice the following habits of mind essential to university level educational success: Careful reading; Clear writing; Critical thinking; Information literacy and technology; Working in teams; Oral presentation; Academic self-assessment."

"All First Year Seminars meet 4 hours per week and carry 4 credits. A mentor and a staff academic advisor are assigned to each seminar. Among other things, the mentor(s) can help you with computer accounts, e-mail, and with library research. The advisor will visit the class once or twice during the semester, and can be contacted for help with choosing courses and major, with financial aid, and any problems with university life in general."

"If you entered UMB with 30 or more transferable credits, you should not be enrolled in this course. If you entered UMB with fewer than 30 credits but have more than 30 credits now, you still need a First Year Seminar (a G100 or 100G course, like this one) if you have not yet taken one. Note: If you have taken another G100- or 100G-level course in any department at UMB, you cannot receive credit for this one. Please note also that courses taken at UMass Boston before matriculating do not count as transfer credits. Thus, for example, if you took 36 UMass Boston credits as a special student and then applied for admission, you still need to take a First Year Seminar."

FYS G114 *Reality and the Americas's* Objectives and Content (i.e., *this* FYS section's Objectives and Content): This course examines how reality and fantasy are understood and constructed by, across, and in the Americas. We will use materials drawn from across the curriculum to problematize our definitions of reality, fact, truth, fiction, fantasy, magical realism, myth, virtual space, and corporeality. As students gain the ability to defend their positions about how categories such as reality and fantasy differ and overlap, we will begin to examine reality as a construct by asking questions such as: From what viewpoints do Americans define reality? Which perspectives of reality are/were acceptable in dominant society? How do definitions of reality/fantasy change as eras and viewpoints change? In the humanities? In the physical/social sciences? Is there a distinct or a blurred boundary between reality and non-reality in education and/or the world at large?

As we explore relationships between reality and the Americas, students will work on the Seven Capabilities that all FYS courses introduce to their students. Like other First Year Seminars, this is an intensive course which meets four hours per week. You will be expected to think, rethink, and

then challenge or change your premises and think again. You will be expected to focus (and to help your classmates to do so) in classroom, computer lab, and library settings. At the end of the course, you will have begun to construct a filter/framework with which you can critically examine constructions of reality presented by any other course or other life experience.



FYS Courses and Referrals and Assessments

"Student Referral Program: If it appears to the teacher that you might not pass this First Year Seminar, and if the instructor cannot figure out how to support your success in the course, the instructor might inform the director of the Student Referral Program (CC-1100; 287-5500). The staff in this program will attempt to help you address the difficulties that are interfering with your success in the class. If you do not want your instructor to let the Student Referral Program know that you are having difficulty, please let your instructor know."

"Accommodations: Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, CC 2-2100, (617-287-7430). If this applies to you, you must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Add/Drop period."

"Student Conduct: Students are required to adhere to university policies on academic honesty and student conduct." To engage *Reality and the Americas's* course themes, students must develop a basic understanding of the differences between authentic, credible, adapted, borrowed, and plagiarized work. Students should review "[t]he current Code of Student Conduct, including information about academic dishonesty" at <http://www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/students/CodeofStudentConduct.html>.

"Assessment of these Courses: In addition to course evaluation forms that are routinely administered at the end of each course at UMass Boston, an assessment committee will look at randomly chosen student writing from First Year Seminars. Please save all your writing in this course so that if you are randomly chosen you will have your work available. The purpose of this is to improve the program and to improve particular courses, as necessary. You may remove your name from your papers if you choose to submit them anonymously."

Course Components and Grades

Weekly components:

Participation: Reading preparation, attendance and class participation including group work, computer lab and library work (15 weeks at 1 point each, 15% of the final grade)

Homework: Writing assignments will include double entry responses, and peer and self assessments (15 at 1 point each, 15% of the final grade)

Papers:

Two papers with accompanying portfolios (20% of the final grade each)

Final paper/project/presentation with accompanying portfolio (30% of the final grade)

Note that great improvement over the semester may positively affect your grade, and that poor attendance may negatively affect it. As in any FYS, students with over 3 absences may be asked to withdraw and/or at risk of failing the class. Be sure to attend an office hour immediately before or after any absences to receive handouts and missed assignments, because discussing an absence is not an appropriate use of class time. "UMass Boston is a wonderfully diverse community. We hope that you will take advantage of the opportunity to learn about the rich array of" perspectives "and experiences that will inevitably be present in this class."

Course materials

Required.

College-level English-English dictionary (you may bring other language dictionaries, in addition)

College ruled paper for any handwritten class- or homework

Charles C. Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*

Course readings (see Course Bibliography); we will discuss how to access these

floppy disks, zip disks, and/or USB keys to save your work on—we will discuss this in more detail

Other course handouts distributed in class

Recommended:

Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, with 2009 MLA and 2010 APA updates, or another current style guide

Never throw away any work, including drafts, that you complete in this course, as your own work is also part of your course material.

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.

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