HASS 307: “Explorations in Comparative Literature” is a midlevel elective. Typical enrollment is 40, with approximately 16 seniors, 16 juniors, and 8 sophomores representing all CSM departments. Having taught this course since 08, and having taught at Mines since 05, I thought the course (and its instructor) would benefit from a critical reconsideration of its objectives, organization, and delivery techniques—even if the core literary texts featured in the syllabus underwent little modification.

The career trajectories of the current CSM student cohort will likely bring them into connection and collaboration with individuals or groups from other world regions possessing distinct aesthetic, moral, and political traditions and tensions. This course is designed to make students both more curious about the complexity of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century world, and more confident in their capacities to navigate tensions and contribute productively to projects with transnational scope.

Convincing education research on linkages between student values, motivation, and learning has informed the redesign of my course. Each course unit seeks to develop students’ responsiveness to attainment values, intrinsic values, or instrumental values. (See Ambrose, Susan, Michael Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marsha Lovett, and Marie Norman, How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press), Ch. 3.

The overall purpose of the course is to extend students’ exposure and recognition of major developments in 20th-century literary production across distinct world regions—foremost Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. Our reading and writing will guide students toward clearer recognition and explanation of literary works’ connections to contemporary history, philosophy, sociology, and politics. Through these connections, students will also gain clearer understanding of the relevance and inadequacies of commonplace theories or assertions of “globalization.”

Learning outcomes:
LO 1): Identify and describe major authors and primary sociological factors guiding the emergence of existentialist philosophy in nineteenth-century Europe.
LO 2): Summarize fundamental concerns, patterns, and rifts in the moral and sociopolitical convictions of existentialist philosophers and artists from the mid-nineteenth century to World War II, integrating discussion of the relationship of existentialism and “absurdism.”
LO 3): Identify and describe major artists and primary sociological factors guiding the rise and dominance of realism in nineteenth-century Europe, integrating discussion of corresponding changes in contemporary visual and literary arts.
LO 4): Identify and describe major artists and the primary concerns and passions driving in the origins and development of magical realism in Europe and Latin America, integrating discussion of corresponding changes in visual and literary arts.
LO 5): Identify and describe connections and rifts between major literary authors and works seen to typify realism, modernism, and magical realism.
LO 6): Define and explain some of the differences in motivation, as well as representational strengths and limitations, of conventional realist-linear and nonlinear narrative designs, as evidenced in works of major twentieth-century Arab novelists.

Nature of redesign: Greater emphasis on active learning in every class, planned according to distinct learning outcomes, and also to the learning strategies that resonate most with a given student cohort. Various classroom assessment techniques, which I haven’t used before, will also be integral in the planning and delivery of the redesigned course.

Example: Instead of simply reading my expectations for student conduct from the syllabus, students will actively develop, via small group and whole group work, the collective norms of collaboration that we will all need to adhere to over the course of the semester. Students will thus collectively draft our rights and obligations as “class citizens.”

Dr. Straker received his Ph.D. from Emory University. A central ambition of his as an educator is to encourage students to seize opportunities to travel, study, and work abroad, and to help them cultivate skills and sensibilities crucial to productive cross-cultural interaction and the spread of cosmopolitan feeling and action wherever their careers may take them.

Jay Straker
Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

Banner: "Trefny I² Center Innovative Instruction"

Summer 2018 Cohort