GE Submission Form
RS 116
Statement of Rationale

Overview:

I am proposing RS 116, The Apocalypse, for credit for Reading Imaginative Literature as a special version of the course to be offered on Europe Semester in fall 2024. For this singular iteration of RS 116, I have incorporated post-biblical literary fiction (William Langland, *Piers Plowman*; the short stories collected in John Joseph Adams, *Wastelands*; and Anna Smails, *The Chimes*) and visionary literature (1 Enoch; Shepherd of Hermas; Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*). Please note that, in addition to the Religious Studies department chair, I have also consulted with the English department on the proposal. Cheri Larsen Hoeckley (the department chair), Carmen McCain, and Rebecca McNamara have all given their approval to the course.

Although extrabiblical texts have been added to RS 116 for this iteration of the course, biblical apocalypses themselves are also imaginative literature—full of dragons, stars falling from the sky, heroes remaining faithful to their proclamation despite persecution. Revelation and other early Jewish and Christian apocalypses, including 1 Enoch and the Shepherd of Hermas, make use of the same devices as any imaginative literature – plot, character development, dramatic tension, irony, repetitive imagery. These works are comparable with contemporary magical realism and speculative fiction. Recognizing the literary elements of an apocalypse is necessary to its interpretation.

Moreover, the imagery, stories, and ideas of apocalyptic literature reappear in fictive and visionary literature throughout history. In the medieval period in England and Europe, people used the imagery and theology of apocalypses to respond to disasters like crop failure, war, and the plague. Likewise, the threat of the environmental crisis and now the global pandemic inspires modern apocalypses. We will explore ancient apocalypses, medieval works, and modern apocalyptic fiction as part of the larger genre of apocalyptic literature, as well as in terms of their interpretations, reuse, and intertextuality with biblical apocalypses.

Across the course, we will analyze the construction of meaning within biblical and post-biblical texts based on their literary attributes. We will also explore the ways these texts construct interpretations of the world—the worlds of their own days, and our worlds as readers. The approach of the class emphasizes close reading—a goal both of the RS department's program learning outcome of hermeneutical competence, and of the Reading Imaginative Literature GE area. We will attend to the use of imagery, plot, characterization, drama and irony, allegory, and intertextuality, among other concerns. Appreciation for and careful interpretation of apocalyptic texts will be central to this iteration of RS 116.

Detailed explanation:

Reading Imaginative Literature Certification Criterion 1: Courses fulfilling the GE category for Reading Imaginative Literature requirement (i.e., English, Modern Language, Theatre Arts) will focus on written works that are imagined, invented, fictive. At least 75% of material assigned in the course (both in terms of titles and page count) will consist of written works of the imagination (i.e., plays, poems, or prose fiction—either novels or short stories) as opposed to literary criticism, critical theory, scholarly writing, textbook readings, or any other form of non-fiction.

- In RS 116, students will read and compare apocalypses from the first-third centuries, the medieval period, and our own day to construct an understanding of "apocalypse" as a genre, the ways it is used, its literary motifs, and intertextual echoes.
- The primary reading material for the class is imaginative literature: the book of Revelation, 1 Enoch, Shepherd of Hermas, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and contemporary short stories and novels. Secondary resources will be used to support students' understanding of primary texts, but will not themselves be a focus of the class.

Reading Imaginative Literature Certification Criterion 2: In courses fulfilling the GE category for Reading Imaginative Literature, students will engage in close reading of imaginative texts, analyzing at the level of the individual sentence or line not just *what* the text means but *how* the text means what it means.
- The development of "close reading" skills is a primary element in RS 116. Students will particularly hone their skills through preparation for class, the Revelation manuscript study, and class discussions.
- The interpretation of texts—biblical and post-biblical—will be central in class discussions, the reflective essays, and the final exam. The analysis of literary characteristics, plot, characterization, and more will help students see both "what the text means" and "how the text means what it means."

Reading Imaginative Literature Certification Criterion 3: Courses fulfilling the GE category for Reading Imaginative Literature will include the following student learning outcomes:
  ➢ Students will be able to distinguish among genres (or sub-genres) of imaginative literature by identifying the defining characteristics, authorial purposes, and thematic implications associated with various literary and dramatic forms.
  ➢ Students will be able to analyze imaginative literature to indicate an understanding of language beyond its literal level by offering a close reading that demonstrates at the level of the individual sentence or line not just *what* the text means but *how* the text means what it means.
- I have collapsed the learning outcomes together with the RS program learning outcome of hermeneutical competence in the first course learning outcome for RS 116: Students will analyze the genre, literary styles, imaginative imagery, and theologies of biblical and post-biblical apocalyptic literature in support of thoughtful, considerate interpretations.
- This outcome will be developed and assessed through primary readings, supplemental readings, the Revelation manuscript study, class discussions, and brief writing assignments.