

2011-2012 Seminar Participants

"Creative Critical Thinking"

Prof. Jared Green

I am applying for the Teaching and Learning Strategies Seminar with the intention of reconceiving my long-standing introductory critical theory course, "Acts of Criticism," to shift the focus toward theorizing and practicing creative production. The new course, which I will entitle "Creative Critical Thinking," will continue to introduce students to the key theoretical texts and methods that are necessary for advanced literary study, but will emphasize theories of linguistic and visual representation, the creative process, and criticism as a co-creative act.

Project Description:

As presently taught, critical theory is central to both the requirements of the English major and to the kind of intellectual labor I wish to model and promote. Nonetheless, I find that I increasingly regret the limited attention that I can pay to materials other than the methodologies of cultural studies and the various historicisms that continue to dominate professional critical discourse and publication. I do, of course, recognize that such focus is essential, especially for students who intend to go on to postgraduate degrees in literature, yet there has remained a part of me that vividly recalls the feeling of transport and creative inspiration that I had back when I was an undergraduate, reading in theoretical traditions that pursued aims other than those of the cultural historian. What I wish to do through the TLSS opportunity, therefore, is to develop the teaching of critical theory as an interdisciplinary art.

Interdisciplinarity has become a watchword, albeit a somewhat vague one, of the contemporary liberal arts curriculum, yet in practice this rarely signifies a sustained incorporation of creative work as a complement to or even substantial component of student course work. I am increasingly convinced that this is one of the significant gaps of the contemporary humanities curriculum, one that is manifest in the virtual non-existence of creative writing in disciplines outside of English. Even within English departments there remains a carefully policed disciplinary border between literary study and creative writing. It seems to me that the assumption institutionalized by this disciplinary segregation, namely that creative writing is somehow inimical to literary-critical rigor and that creative work must be held apart from, and perhaps even subordinated to, literary and theoretical analysis, is an error that ought to be rectified.

Indeed, I would like to argue that herein lies a challenge that can be met by critical theory and that perhaps marks a new direction for theoretical work across the humanities. It is my hope that the TLSS will allow me to develop a cross-disciplinary approach that I hope will serve as a model for similar courses in disciplines other than English. In pursuit of the best practices, the research that I intend to undertake will examine current pedagogical theories and methods in both creative writing and critical theory. Foremost among the questions that will fuel my research will be how to best generate creative

prompts for engaging with theoretical ideas and how to evaluate creative work in order to properly assess a student's grasp of the theoretical premises under discussion.

Benefit:

The timing for such a project is certainly propitious: the General Education Advisory Committee's stated goal of increasing the profile of creative production on campus can, I believe, be realized in a project such as the one I am proposing here. The enrollment of the critical theory course (capped at 15) makes this the ideal structure for the sort of intensive discussion and intimate, honest peer critique that is as essential to the theory classroom as it is the creative writing workshop. Moreover, this course would allow for both a much-needed expansion of our currently meager creative writing offerings and an additional pathway for our English majors to fulfill their required study in critical theory. Beyond the boundaries of the English curriculum, a course of this nature would further the department's commitment to taking a leadership role in developing the innovative humanities curriculum Stonehill desires.

Community Outreach Plans:

In the interest of promoting creative criticism and cross-disciplinary initiatives, the course's syllabus and assignments will be openly accessible resources to other scholars by way of a web site constructed especially for this purpose and linked to a course blog displaying student creative and critical work. On campus, I would like to share student work in a variety of venues, including exhibitions of course-related visual art, readings of student fiction and poetry, and publications in *Rolling Stonehill*. I will also seek to use my research and teaching experience to present at pedagogy conferences and colloquia devoted to incorporating creative writing into the humanities curriculum.