

Department of Comparative Literature
R&C Course Description Guidelines

Course descriptions are a distinct genre of writing: they go up on the website and function as advertisements for your class. Your audience is primarily freshmen, and the description should accordingly be accessible to students just out of high school – please keep this audience in mind as you write your description. It's also important to discuss the fact that these are writing courses, so that they're easily identifiable when students are browsing descriptions and looking for classes to fulfill their R&C requirements.

To that end, here are some guidelines to help you draft your description.

- Aim for no more than two paragraphs, one that summarizes the content of the course, and one that briefly outlines its R&C components. A single paragraph with just a few lines at the end mentioning the R&C components is also fine.
- Make it clear that this is specifically a writing course, one that emphasizes developing arguments, drafts, and revisions. R1B should mention the research paper requirement.
- For courses on topics that are likely to be unfamiliar to freshmen, consider ways to introduce your topic as accessibly as possible. For instance, you might connect it to a contemporary issue or popular cultural phenomenon, or choose an illustrative moment from one of your texts (or another well-known text) that functions as a hook. Try to show why students might care about this topic.
- Avoid mentioning a long list of authors and texts that would be unfamiliar to a student fresh out of high school -- save that for the first class session when you can explain who these figures are. You also don't need to go into great detail about the specific arc of the class over the course of the semester or all of the individual units; it's sufficient to sketch broadly the main themes and questions.

Please limit your course descriptions to no more than **300** words.

Sample course descriptions

Sample 1

Beyond Salem: Imaginings of the Witch in Literature & Film

Why do we write about witches? What is it about the occult that both thrills and terrifies us? Many are familiar with the 1692 witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts, but fears about witchcraft have existed for centuries earlier. Witches often served as figures of social anxiety, villains to unite a culture in crisis. In this class, we'll read texts and watch films that focus on a variety of cultural constructions of the witch from Classical Antiquity to the 21st century. We'll ask how and why a fear of witches has had such lasting power in literature and film, and later in the semester we'll explore more recent imaginings of the witch as a source of empowerment. This course satisfies half of the University's Reading & Composition sequence and is recommended for students who have completed R1A or have placed out of the R1A requirement. This course is designed to help students improve their skills in critical thinking, reading, and analytical writing. Students learn how to write with clarity, precision, and nuance through

reflective engagement with all stages of the writing process, from brainstorming to proofreading. In addition to regular attendance, reading, and participation, assignments include an introductory paper and a series of essays—drafts and deep revisions—as well as bCourses posts and a creative project. Students will

also develop skills for incorporating secondary sources into analytical writing, and the course will culminate in a research paper of 8-10 pages. This is a reading- and writing-intensive course.

Sample 2

On Being Ill

We tend to think about illness in biological and epidemiological terms. Much of our knowledge about health is communicated through the language of medicine and science; we look to doctors, pharmacists, nutritionists, and a range of other experts when seeking advice on how to lead a healthy life. But can science fully convey what it means to be ill? In this course, which borrows its title from Virginia Woolf's essay of the same name, we will pay close attention to the ways in which illness gets figured in literature and art. Indeed, one of our initial premises will be that creative works—novels, poems, films, visual art, memoirs, etc.—are able to register certain dimensions of being ill that exceed a strictly scientific framework. In this regard, they enrich our understanding of sickness and provide a valuable complement to medical knowledge. From Woolf to Audre Lorde, and from Shakespeare to the poet-physician Rafael Campo, the writers whom we will read help us address the following questions, among others: How does illness affect one's sense of self? How have conceptions of illness—and health—changed over time? What are the political dimensions of health? What relationships can we identify between illness and literary form? What role does figurative language play in accounts of illness? And how does health status intersect with other modalities of difference, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and class?

As part of the University's R&C requirement, this course is designed, above all, to help students refine their critical reading and writing skills. To this end, we will work on formulating nuanced theses, finding and evaluating textual evidence, and conducting and incorporating secondary research.

Sample 3

Elements of Island Literatures

The island is a territory of the imagination that cuts across linguistic and cultural boundaries: at once a fantasy land of conquest, domination, and punishment, and the site of new beginnings outside all that we know. In this course we will think together about what makes the island such a rich territory and a site of multiple (and often times contradictory!) imaginations. Through a selection (by no means exhaustive, by no means complete) of fiction, poetry, and film from the Hispanic, Anglophone, and Francophone Caribbean, making necessary detours in early modern European texts, we will hone our analytical writing and research skills by focusing on how and why islands are productive spaces from which to think about our relationship to nature, class, race, gender, knowledge, and power. As an R and C course, this is a *writing-intensive class that*

fulfills a University requirement. Expect to spend a considerable amount and time writing, rewriting, and writing some more! With consistent work and dedication, you will be surprised at how your writing evolves.