Sample Syllabus: Greek Poetry, Philosophy, and Politics in a Multicultural Context

St. Lawrence University
The Cultural Encounters Program

Rationale for Cultural Encounters Level II
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Source: http://www.diversityweb.org/diversity_innovations/curriculum_change/diversity_requirement_models/greek_poetry.cfm

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1. This course will examine ancient Greek poetry, philosophy, and politics and how these texts developed in a multicultural (African, Greek, and Semitic) context in the Mediterranean Basin. The class will also consider contemporary (19th and 20th century) discourse(s) about these works and cultures from four interconnected angles:

   a. The class will read contemporary scholarship on the Afroasiatic roots of Greek philosophy and culture.
   b. Looking at a variety of Greek texts, the class will search for clues about how the Greeks regarded their African and Semitic neighbors.
   c. The class will consider some African and Semitic texts which may have influenced the Greeks and which are also interesting in their own right.
   d. The class will attend to the multiplicity within each culture to illustrate that "cultures" are not monolithic and that there are perhaps cultural encounters (based in hierarchies of gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity, for example) at work within a larger cultural context.

Texts

- Aeschylus, Oresteia
- Aristotle, Politics
- Bernal, Martin, Black Athena, Vol. I
- Cantarella, Eva, Bisexuality in the Ancient World
- DuBois, Page, Centaurs and Amazons
- Frye, Ellen, The Other Sappho
- Haley, Shelley, Black Feminist Thought and the Classics
- Herodotus, Histories
- Homeric Hymn to Demeter
- Lamy, Lucy, New Light On Ancient Knowledge: Egyptian Mysteries
- Lichtheim, Miriam, Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies
- Plato, Dialogues
- Sappho, Fragments
- Sertima, Ivan van, Black Women in Antiquity
- Versluis, Arthur, The Egyptian Mysteries
2. The course will be writing intensive in that it incorporates a variety of writing styles, utilizes writing to spark class discussion and involves revision based on student and instructor comment. The writing for the course will reflect the questions the course raises—in both form and content. As the course studies an interdisciplinary and varied body of texts, students too will be given writing assignments in multiple styles. A brief writing assignment (2 pages) will be assigned every week and will be used to generate student discussion in class. Some of the assignments will be creative ones, asking students, through poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction, to put into practice alternative ways of knowing. One of the brief writing assignments will be revised into a more polished piece of writing (5-7 pages) to be turned in at the end of the semester. This revised writing will have been reviewed and critiqued by the student's peers in class discussion and by the instructor in writing. The exams for the course will also be in essay form.

3. The contemporary scholarship on the Afroasiatic roots of Greek philosophy represents a cultural encounter in that it throws into relief how a scholar's cultural assumptions shape how that scholar represents and understands cultures removed in both time and space from that scholar's own world. In addition, the class will explore how the Greeks regarded their neighbors and some of the influences those neighbors may have had on Greek thought.

4. It is hoped that students will reconsider, through contemporary representations of ancient Greece, their own perceptions of the position of Greece and its neighbors as the beginnings of European culture and thought.

5. One of the strongest ways the course will address issues of power, domination and resistance is through a repositioning of the Greek texts into a larger cultural/political context than is ordinary in courses on ancient Greek thought.