

BUTTE COLLEGE

COURSE OUTLINE

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION

ENGL 31 - Existential Literature: A Literary Approach to Self Integration **3 Unit(s)**

Prerequisite(s): NONE

Recommended Prep: Reading Level IV

Transfer Status: CSU/UC

51 hours Lecture

Through a variety of short stories, novels and poems dealing with existential themes, this course will help the student explore the literary, psychological, philosophical and theological implications of defining and taking responsibility for oneself in the quest for self-actualization. Graded only.

II. OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- A. Analyze themes within course texts and compare them to the ways these themes are treated in other course texts.
- B. Synthesize analyses of specific details in particular works of literature in support of a clear, overall point or thesis.
- C. Identify, employ and evaluate different frameworks for analyzing and interpreting literature. These frameworks may include political, socioeconomic, geographical, ethnic, cultural, ecological, psychoanalytical, historical, gender, sexuality, and genre development.
- D. Analyze and evaluate the choices of characters represented in specific examples of world existential literature. Assess the degree to which these characters suggest that a consciously integrated, physiological, social, and psychological being may achieve greater success or not and what this might tell us about the choices we make in life and the potential consequences of these choices that we must face and learn from.
- E. Question and assess the applicability to our own lives of major existential principles; facing potential meaninglessness or nothingness, acting from a position of more or less blindness, and accepting the full responsibility for the consequences of choices and attempting to learn from them.
- F. Question and assess the potential use of existential concepts to find healthier attitudes or responses to questions and problems surrounding substance abuse, sexuality, mental health, stress management, sustainable living, aging, death and dying.

III. COURSE CONTENT

A. Unit Titles/Suggested Time Schedule

Lecture	
<u>Topics</u>	<u>Hours</u>
1. Introduction to Course	1.50
2. Existence Before Essence	4.50
a. The subjective and the personal vs. objective and the impersonal	
b. The sensory system as a conduit to the world and perception as a process for the discovery of reality	

3. The Impotence of Reason	4.50
a. Holistic approaches to mental, physical and spiritual health	
4. Alienation and Anxiety	4.50
a. Alienation from God, nature, others, and our true selves	
b. Managing stress to improve our well being and our connections to others and ourselves	
5. The Encounter with Nothingness	4.50
a. The inevitability of death and decay	
b. Substance abuse and unhealthy coping mechanisms	
c. Genetic programming and telomeres and the aging process	
d. Existential acceptance as a means of mitigating physiological regression	
6. Freedom and Existential Responsibility	4.50
a. Metacognition as a means of becoming "self-surpassing"	
b. Healthy, self-affirming choices	
c. Existential freedom, the environment and society, and responsibility	
7. Authenticity vs. Inauthenticity	4.50
a. Fulfillment of potential vs. denial of potential	
b. Fuller integration of the body/mind/spirit	
c. Escaping the pitfalls of learned helplessness	
8. Good Faith vs. Bad Faith	4.50
a. Candor, honesty and sincerity vs. self deception and the denial of the true self	
b. Healthy intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships	
c. Physical and emotional relationship between bad faith and bad health	
9. I-Thou and I-it Relationships	4.50
a. Objectifying the other as existential inauthenticity	
10. The Absurd	4.50
a. Life and ultimate meaning	
b. The lack of meaning and the negating or debasing of life	
c. Creating meaning vs. looking for meaning from outside ourselves	
11. Contingency (Chance vs. Fate)	4.50
a. The idea of predestination vs. positive choices and actions	

- a. Developmental stages of life
- b. Need for courage to face the truth of existence and make right choices
- c. Lifelong commitment to personal and social wellness as integrated physiological and psychological entities

Total Hours

51.00

IV. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

- A. Lecture
- B. Group Discussions
- C. Guest Speakers
- D. Collaborative Group Work
- E. Homework: Students are required to complete two hours of outside-of-class homework for each hour of lecture
- F. Reading Assignments
- G. Journal and essay writing to deepen student inquiry into readings.

V. METHODS OF EVALUATION

- A. Oral Presentation
- B. Journal
- C. Short papers
- D. Essays and research papers
- E. Book reports
- F. Class Discussion
- G. A minimum of 4,000 words required writing
- H. Maintenance of a personal reflection journal

VI. EXAMPLES OF ASSIGNMENTS

- A. Reading Assignments
 - 1. Read Lu Xun's "Iron House Parable" and use Sartre's "Existentialism as Humanism" to critically evaluate the ethical dilemmas presented by Lu Xun. Then use Lu Xun to critically evaluate and question the ethical arguments made by Sartre.
 - 2. Read Kierkegaard's "Is There Such a Thing as the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" As you annotate the text, critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his arguments and the evidence on which they are based. Then identify the potential problems his arguments might create when we apply them to real-life ethical choices.
- B. Writing Assignments
 - 1. Write a formal character analysis (at least 750 words) of one character or an analytical comparison/contrast of two characters in Sartre's *No Exit*. Explain how these characters represent the conflict between bad faith and good faith and authenticity and inauthenticity.
 - 2. Read the excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and analyze and critically evaluate (in at least 750 words) the arguments she makes about a specifically feminine relationship to existentialist concepts like authenticity, good faith, and courage before the void. In what ways does she support and further develop Sartre's arguments, and in what ways does she undermine them?
- C. Out-of-Class Assignments
 - 1. Attend at least one local theater production and write an analysis of the way the play and the particular interpretation of it by the director, scene designers and actors represent key Existentialist concepts that we've addressed up to that point in the semester.

2. Choose a novel from the assigned reading list, and prepare a presentation for the class explaining how the major existentialist concepts we have covered so far are exemplified in that novel and what you think the overall message of that novel is and why.

VII. **RECOMMENDED MATERIALS OF INSTRUCTION**

Textbooks:

- A. Solomon, Robert C. Ed.. Existentialism. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Materials Other Than Textbooks:

- A. Specific texts and individual authors to be determined by the instructor.

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Date: 04/29/2013