Guidelines for 1210/1310 Introduction to British/American Literature

Course Description (from Undergraduate Catalog):
A basic introduction to the concepts, terms, and practices commonly encountered in
literary study, presented by way of texts from the history of British/American literature
that appropriately demonstrate such concepts, terms, and practices. This course is
recommended for prospective English majors.

Position within the English Curriculum & Course Goals
With a target audience of undergraduates in their first or second years, these courses have
a double function: 1) they offer a reasonably consistent (across sections) and broadly
introductory literature course for General Education requirements, and 2) can be a
gateway to the literature curriculum for potential English majors.

The course goals are:
• To provide broad exposure to a national literary tradition across its history.
• To introduce the major forms of literary expression: drama, poetry, fiction, and
  non-fiction.
• To introduce tools for interpretation, including beginning critical and interpretive
  vocabulary.
• To develop skills in literary interpretation and argumentation.

1. Historical Breadth. A major goal for the course is to improve students’ ability to
discuss texts historically, situating texts within literary and/or cultural frameworks. To
that end, the course should stress active and careful reading across a range of literary
texts from each of the following periods:

1210 (British): pre-1600 1600-1800 1800-1900 1900-present
1310 (Amer.): pre-1800 1800-1865 1865-1920 1920-present

To provide significant reading opportunities in a given period, a minimum of two weeks
of assignments should generally be devoted to each category. It is expected that readings
will be assigned for each class period across the entire term.

As the purpose of the course is to introduce a broad range of issues in British or
American literature, the class should not be used as a topics course with a narrow theme.
If courses are organized around a central theme, that theme should be broad and
capacious (for example, the role of the author, defining America, etc.); or, alternatively,
multiple subthemes can be revisited throughout the semester. Given the goal
of the course, reading assignments should consist of representative voices selected with
careful attention to helpfulness for teaching historical and generic categories as well as
for addressing any topical and/or thematic concerns. In most cases, an anthology and
some additional texts should offer adequate range and breath for these courses (see #6).

2. Generic Breadth. The course should introduce the major forms of literary expression--
drama, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Again, it is expected that each genre will have multiple class periods devoted to it.

3. Introduction to Methods and Concepts. The course should offer tools for interpretation, including beginning critical and interpretative vocabulary (e.g. metaphor, meter, plot). (A recommended list of adoptable critical terms is available from the Literature Coordinator.)

4. Evaluation. A variety of instruments (papers, exams, etc.) should be used to assess student performance. In general, students should be evaluated on their acquired skills in interpretation and in making critical arguments as well as on their mastery of content knowledge. Students might demonstrate their skills in interpretation and argumentation through, for example, short papers or more informally through on-line or in-class discussions. Content knowledge might be assessed through, for example, identification quizzes or fact-based writing tasks. For sections taught in the usual format (i.e. with c. 30 students), the grading schema should follow these principles:
   a. Between 40% and 60% of the course grade should be based on instruments that assess students’ skills in interpretation and argumentation.
   b. Between 40% and 60% of the course grade should be based on instruments that assess students’ mastery of content knowledge.
   Of course, many instruments will assess both skills and knowledge. An exam, for example, might test content knowledge with short-answer or identification questions but also test interpretative skills through essay questions. A writing assignment that has students analyze a given text will likely also have them demonstrate their familiarity with terms and concepts introduced in class. Instructors should keep such cases in mind as they design their syllabi.

5. Limits on Weight of Individual Assignments.
   a. Assignments that demand formal writing are appropriate, but no single writing assignment (e.g. the traditional term paper) should count for more than 15% of the course grade.
   b. No single oral presentation should count for more than 15% of the course grade. If the presentation is based on a writing assignment, the presentation and the paper together should total no more than 15% of the course grade.
   c. It is expected that instructors will offer final exams, whether take-home or in-class assessments. Individual exams may count for up to 25% of the course grade.

6. Recommended Texts. The use of an anthology or a judicious selection of individual texts is appropriate for this course. Adopting a handbook of literary terms is also highly recommended. (A list of such handbooks is available from the Literature Coordinator.) Significant reliance on additional readings collected by the instructor in coursepacks or through library reserves is discouraged. It is recommended that instructors limit themselves to a maximum of six textbooks and that the combined cost of those texts not exceed $100.

7. Teaching Evaluations. Instructors are encouraged to seek feedback from students around the halfway point of the semester using the MoCAT program or some other.
instrument.