
Judith H. Anderson and Christine R. Farris, eds. *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction: First-Year English, Humanities Core Courses, Seminars*. New York: MLA, 2007. 336p.

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Judith H. Anderson writes in the introduction to this text, edited with Christine R. Farris, of her intent to provide “an account of courses taught in various institutional contexts” that utilize literature in first-year college classes for reading, writing, and critical thinking. She also wishes to integrate the concerns of the typical English department about the teaching of literature and the teaching of composition. For various reasons, compositionists, she explains, might perceive that the inclusion of literature within composition classes takes away time from the production of student texts or causes composition scholars to “lose political ground” in the struggle for the “intellectual place” of composition within an English, rhetoric, or cultural studies department (1-2).

The essays in this volume present the successful experiences of instructors teaching literature in first-year writing classes. The authors in Anderson and Farris’ collection describe their purposes for using certain texts and describe the methods of teaching and learning that they use to meet their course objectives. This approach is more useful to an instructor or to a coordinator of a first-year English program than a consideration of defects in various approaches and/or a discussion of which texts to exclude. The disappearance of literature texts from many first-year writing courses creates a place for a book such as *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction* to provide well documented examples of how the objectives of first-year writing programs may be accomplished using literature and other texts.

The introduction to the book contains information about the contributors and an explanation of what the reader may expect to find in their articles. The courses are divided into three groups: group one, humanities core courses with literature as an important component; group two, courses with a central focus on literature; and group three, courses with a focus upon the relationship between literature and culture. The book ends with the description of a first-year class in the analysis of language developed and taught by Anderson and a group of graduate students at Indiana University.

The first group begins with the description of a well planned one-year reading and writing course in the humanities at the University of California, Irvine that combines “argument, textual analysis, and research” (Clark and Losh 36). Some resources that are worthy of being examined for the Fall/Winter/Spring cycle of the 2007-2008 course titled Thinking/Making/Doing may be viewed online at

<http://eee.uci.edu/programs/humcore/>. With a “common syllabus” and writing topics (35), a program such as this one would clearly need to address the potential problem of student plagiarism. Although the article “Intellectual Community and Integrated Curricula in the First-Year Experience: The Humanities Core Course at the University of California, Irvine” by Michael P. Clark and Elizabeth Losh does not specifically describe the approach employed, looking online at the current course cycle on the web reveals that students enrolled must agree to submit their class papers to a review for similarities with other texts and that their submitted papers may become source documents on Turnitin.com.

Along with developing a strategy to prevent plagiarism, any university wishing to implement a first-year writing course with an online component might also consider its ability to give students equal access to technology. The Clark and Losh article mentions this concern but does not discuss it in detail (55). At some universities, freshmen might need to compete with a large number of their fellow students for the limited resources offered in the university library or computer labs, while students with up-to-date computer equipment and software may have twenty-four hour access to the course materials, not to mention better access to sites for research on the Internet that require specific software to view or download materials.

The challenging reading and writing assignments in humanities core courses make it important to inquire about the consequences for the students who do not perform well. Clark and Losh state that some of the underperformers from the first quarter at the University of California, Irvine register for a second quarter intensive intervention section with the option of weekly professional writing counseling (55). In group three, the article, “Connecting with the Humanities at Centre College” addresses the problem by making some of its sections writing intensive with a “sixty minute lab devoted to writing” every week for the less-proficient writers. The success of these sections has convinced the faculty and the administration at Centre that nurturing these students leads to an increased retention rate at the college (Emmitt et al. 104-105, 113).

In group two, one of the most interesting classes with a focus on literature is a writing intensive seminar at Franklin and Marshall College that juxtaposes history and historical fiction. In Tamara A. Goeglein’s historical fiction seminar, the students read historical period documents, nonfiction, and fiction about the Civil War battle at Gettysburg. Goeglein, in her article “‘You May Find It a Different Story from the One You Learned in School’: Teaching Writing in a First-Year Seminar on Historical Fiction,” makes a case for using literature in the classroom because of the power of the literary work to stir the imagination with its figurative language and also to stimulate ideas for writing. Fictional writing may also reveal ethical values that would

be difficult to find in a historical text (172), and these ethical values may provide an intriguing topic for an essay. This class would be useful for students because it offers them ideas about how to find some philosophical truth in the fiction and enables them to discover that historical narratives are shaped by what historians decide to include. Truly, there is never only one story to present.

Clyde Moneyhun, author of “Literary Texts as Primers in Meaning Marking,” an article from group three, addresses the issue of how to combine a focus on the literary text with the teaching of writing at Stanford University. After acknowledging the relevance of literature throughout the disciplines, he discusses the effective use of literature in a composition course (216-217). Moneyhun and other writers in this volume discuss the interpretation of texts within a cultural context. This context might come from the author’s biography, historical events, similar texts, or literary theory. When teaching *Frankenstein*, he provides a list of so many research paths for the students to follow (227) that it would be difficult not to find something interesting and meaningful to write about.

Another article from group three, “Writing on Boundaries: A Cultural Studies Approach to Literature and Writing Instruction,” introduces students to Stephen Greenblatt’s essay “Culture” because the creators of the course, Lori Robison and Eric A. Wolfe, wish to emphasize the significance of reading, writing, and interpretation of a text “in the larger world” (196). They correspondingly ask their students in Literature and Composition at the University of South Carolina, Lancaster to write essays about how a text challenges the social boundaries set by its culture. Using excerpts from Greenblatt’s essay in their writing assignments, they lead the students to connect details within the work as well as to establish a connection between the text and the values, institutions, and practices in the larger society. These activities educate young citizens who may someday need to challenge accepted beliefs or socially acceptable behaviors.

Many of the articles in Anderson and Farris’ collection offer examples of how instructors model critical thinking or provide detailed assignments that guide students through an analysis of various works of literature so that the students learn how to think about the components of each text, the relevant information outside of the text, and the process of writing about the text. If some instructors question literature’s place in first-year writing programs, then this volume is available to respond to those concerns and to show how the use of literature may stimulate the analysis that eventually appears in students’ essays. ✱