Summary – Common Inquiries – Reading Imaginative Literature

**Reading Imaginative Literature** (e.g., English, Modern Language) Courses satisfying this requirement develop students’ skills in analyzing and understanding the ways of knowing provided by imaginative literature. Such an approach invites students to see how literature reveals things we cannot know except by inference or by metaphor. Students in these courses should recognize how imaginative literature honors the complexity of human experience. Further, by encouraging the practice of compassion by imagining the other, the course involves students in ways of knowing that are inherently ethical.

**Interpretive Statement**

Courses accepted as fulfilling the General Education category of Reading Imaginative Literature will meet the following criteria in approach, content, and methodology.

**Approach:** The course will offer an exploration of how literature can inform our lives and deepen our faith. Moving across space (to other places and other cultures) and time (to historical periods other than our own) we will seek to discern what is essentially human from what is particular to the place and time we inhabit. This mode of inquiry requires students to explore different literary genres, with the goals of:
- understanding more about how the context in which a text was written helps to determine how it should be read
- increasing respect for the benefits of paying close attention
- learning to notice the interplay of form, style and content
- appreciating presentational as opposed to propositional approaches to truth
- encountering the other with empathy, compassion and love
- articulating and wrestling with the ethical questions implicit in a text
- examining the assumptions we bring to our reading
- discerning issues of social and economic justice and the abuses of power
- deepening our understanding of what it means to read as people of faith and with increased regard for the significance of story for people of the book

**Content:** The focus will be on such imaginative genres as lyric and narrative poetry, prose fiction, creative non-fiction and drama. The poems, stories, and plays we read will raise some of the enduring questions about what it is like to experience love, to endure loss, to encounter the other, to cope with discrimination, to cling to faith and to entertain doubt—ultimately what it means to be human and have a sense of stewardship for one’s life. While we recognize that thoughtful writers can illuminate any human experience, courses fulfilling this requirement will focus on works of significance for their literary artistry rather than their commercial appeal. Specifically excluded are courses that focus on contemporary commercial genres such as baseball fiction, spy thrillers, science fiction, romance novels, pornography, murder mysteries, children’s literature and Westerns. Specifically included are courses focusing on works that require attention to diction (including sensory and connotative language, simile, and metaphor), image patterns, characterization, character foils, structure, setting, narrative point of view, literary allusion and literary context. Work that falls within such a capacious category includes drama from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Stoppard, prose fiction from Jane Austen to Toni Morrison to Chinua Achebe, poetry from Dante to Gerard Manley Hopkins to Eavan Boland.

**Methodology:** Courses that satisfy the category of Reading Imaginative Literature will direct attention to the interplay of language and style, will consider the relationship of form and content, and will locate works within a literary tradition. Specifically excluded are approaches that see literature as a utilitarian means to some non-literary end, that would use literature as a quarry for the extraction of nuggets of sociological constructs, psychological symptoms, cultural contexts, philosophical precepts, doctrinal truths, or other paraphrasable propositions. Throughout, the course will raise literary questions as to how a poem means as well as what a poem means, how prose fiction complicates our response to a narrative voice as well as what
the story reveals of human relationships, how drama offers multiple possibilities for interpretation of dialogue as well as giving timeless expression to the experience of tragedy, of reconciliation, of enduring justice and of enduring injustice.

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**Fall 2004**

1. **ENG006**
   a. This syllabus helped me understand that Studies in Literature counts as a writing intensive course. Other than that, I was not instructed in the goals of this specific GE. I suppose it could be to sharpen my own writing skills.

   b. Through practice, revision, and discussion I could see improvement in my writing, comparisons, and analysis of the novels, plays and poetry studied in the course.

3. **ENG006H**
   A. This course encourages the study of nuance in poetry and prose alike, as well as experimentation in one’s own writing. Discernment and an ability to articulate one’s thoughts are important skills in any career.

6. **ENG 006**
   I did not feel that this class was helpful for me as I had a wonderful English teacher last year. She was almost able to overcome my hatred for the subject. This class felt rather like a setback and I felt like the teacher was patronizing us rather than treating us as intellectual equals. I have had many bad English teachers and she was by no means the worst, but there was something about her that irritated me and made it hard to concentrate. I admit that a lot of the problems may have been my fault since I have a natural dislike for English and its teachers, but I didn't feel as though I learned much in the class.

10. **ENG 006**
    Studies in Literature was a great class for me in that I was able to really enjoy the novels and poems we were reading and further relate the literature to my own life and the world around me, which seems to be to be the ultimate purpose of the GE courses--to have a greater view and understanding of our world and the people in it. The syllabus helped to explain the category of “Common Inquiries” and made it clear that by studying literature, one is inquiring into the truth about our lives through the use of words and stories and different perspectives. The syllabus not only expressed these goals but the course itself was consistent in its deep analysis of varying works and authors and
continually relating it to real life and the world in which we live. Mostly I think the course helped me to look at myself differently and understand my own life in a new way.

12. ENG006D I learned how to write in a different way, looking into the text at details and appreciating different forms of writing.

13. ENG006I My experience in the Honors English course also benefited my understanding of the GE program because it equipped me to turn what I was learning of literature into a present, interactive influence on my life. Through digesting and debating books and venturing to view the plays I read acted out in theaters, I began to see further into every plot and character I encountered. I quickly began to relate everything I studied to the human nature and experience, and through doing was given windows into the world around me. Learning to view content in such a way will continue to assist me in using what I gain from my education to view and begin to comprehend the world around me.

15. ENG 006 This class was largely discussion based. We read a number of books and as a class discussed each of them at length. We read some short stories that were written by Christian authors.

The syllabus laid out clearly which of the GE requirements it was fulfilling and throughout the course it became clear how we were fulfilling those goals.

17. ENG006A a. The syllabus made clear the goals of the GE.

For this class, the goal of the GE was to explore literature, and I would say that both the syllabus and the instruction met that goal, as we read several books and even delved into the author’s backgrounds, broadening our horizons as readers.

18. ENG006 Studies of Literature really showed different pieces of literature and really explored the reasoning behind the writing. We looked into depth of the writing and of the entire culture and audience that the author was writing for. I think it helped give me a wider perspective and understanding of other cultures other than ourselves. We read a wide range of pieces that shaped the text and we looked deeper into what the author may really have wanted to say, more than just the words that he or she wrote. We also explored the various perspectives and opinions of God that different cultures and civilizations took part in. Liberal Studies should be liberal and open-minded and tolerant of the other backgrounds and way of living. I think this class did a superb job of
contributing to the goals of the Liberal Studies program. It showed a wide range of societies and how we as Christians reacted or should respond in such situations.

**Fall 2005**

6. ENG 006

Through the syllabus, Studies in Literature was fairly clear on the goal of the GE. There weren't that many questions since it was an English class and reading literature was obviously going to happen.

Studies in Literature fulfilled the Reading Imaginative Literature section because we read Shakespeare plays throughout the entire semester, we were also required to attend "Richard II" which was put on by the Westmont theater. The goal of the GE was completed through this course.