



Cultural Modernisms and Postmodernisms

Spring 2026

HUMN 2043/4043

TR 12:30-1:50, PY 201

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This interdisciplinary course will introduce students to the cultures of Europe, the U.S., South America, and elsewhere from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The emphasis will be on Western cultures, especially the major movements in the arts and literature that are broadly designated as Modernist and Postmodernist. We will look at all aspects of culture, including history, art, literature, philosophy, and music. Students will thus acquire an understanding of various cultures and how they have developed during this time period; encounter different ways of viewing the world; learn to analyze, interpret, and think critically about diverse works of art, literature, and music; experiment with interdisciplinary approaches to the material; and learn to identify, describe, and discuss major themes, works, movements, and historical events. They will also develop critical thinking skills in short responses, evaluating individual works and synthesizing the knowledge they have gained. Participation in class discussion and activities will help them to express themselves and support their ideas at an advanced level. In exploring these different cultures, students will hopefully wish to continue to learn about them after the end of the semester, and even visit some of the countries we will discuss.

THECB Core Course Objectives and Assessments for Language, Philosophy, and Culture

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - All assignments will assess critical thinking skills. The Humanities Essay Rubric will be applied to the final essay exam for assessment purposes.
- Communication Skills
 - To assess written communication skills, the Humanities Essay Rubric will be applied to the final essay exam to evaluate readability, clarity,

and the ability to support an argument with specific and accurate examples and details as evidence.

- Personal and Social Responsibility
 - To assess personal and social responsibility in critical thinking, the Humanities Essay Rubric will be applied to the final essay exam to evaluate the ability to support an argument with specific and accurate examples and details as evidence and to evaluate different ways of viewing the world.

Course Goals

- Study primary texts in literature, philosophy, and other disciplines, as well as the historical and cultural contexts for the primary texts
- Think critically about primary works in context and in comparison with one another
- Learn interdisciplinary approaches to the study of cultures
- Learn how to discuss other cultural artefacts, including art, architecture, and music
- Gain a sense of historical chronology and the interconnectedness of various cultural movements, including the ways in which they respond to one another, as relevant
- Gain a detailed knowledge of the well-known works covered in class
- Practice expressing and supporting ideas both orally and in writing
- Engage in research on particular artworks to share with the class through blog posts

Textbook: Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities: Culture, Continuity & Change*, Vol. II, 4th ed. on Pearson's Revel Digital Learning Platform, available through D2L.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (2043, 10%; 4043, 5%). It is essential that you participate in class discussion and activities to help you understand and master all of the material we cover. Please note that participation is different from attendance. Participation means talking in class.

2. In-Class Writing (2043, 20%; 4043, 15%). At the beginning of most classes, I will give you a brief question on or a quotation from one of the primary texts assigned for the day to respond to. These are low-stakes assignments, and your grade for these reflections will be check plus, check, check minus, or X, which will be entered in D2L as 100, 85, 75, or 0. Your response should demonstrate critical thinking and an understanding of the text. Spelling and grammar will not count. If you miss an in-class writing, you may make it up in my office within one week of your return to class (or longer if you make special arrangements with me). You must take the initiative to schedule a time with me in person or by email to make up an assignment. The number of in-class writings as listed in the Gradebook may be subject to modification.

3. Pearson Assignments (2043, 25% total; 4043, 20% total). Please complete the reading, quizzes, and tests on the Revel platform by the dates in the course schedule. The deadline in the course schedule is the final deadline.

4. In-class quizzes (2043, 15% total; 4043, 10% total). You will have 5-6 quizzes on famous artworks. Quizzes will be announced at least one week in advance in class and by email. The number of quizzes as listed in the Gradebook may be subject to modification without increasing the weight of each one.

5. Guest Visit Responses (2043 and 4043, 10%). We will have four guest visits in this class. After each visit, you will write 1-2 pages summarizing the lecture and discussion, then describing what you personally learned from it and how you might apply what you learned in the present or the future. If you are absent from a visit, you will get a zero for this assignment unless you have a documented excused absence.

5. Final Essay Exam (2043, 20% and 4043, 15%). The final essay exam will be comprehensive, and will be graded using the Humanities Essay Rubric on D2L.

6. Research-Based Presentation (4043, 10%). Upper-level students must choose a topic for a 10-15 minute presentation. The topic should complement the textbook, not repeat what it says. You will be expected to consult at least three scholarly sources, and give me an outline of the presentation and a bibliography in MLA or APA style on the day of your presentation. See the presentation rubric on D2L for guidance. You should look through the textbook and submit a topic proposal to me by **Jan. 27**, and we will set an appropriate date for your presentation.

7. Research Paper (4043, Draft, 5%; Final Paper, 10%). Upper-level students will write a 5-6 page research paper on a topic of their choice, but not on the same topic as their presentation. The paper must be in MLA or APA format, including in-text citations. If you use a cover sheet, it will not count toward the minimum length. The Works Cited page also does not count. You should watch the video on D2L on writing a research paper. See the rubric on D2L for guidance. Please submit a brief paper proposal by **April 16** and a draft with a bibliography of at least three scholarly sources by **April 30**. You will get credit for submitting the draft with the bibliography, and I will give you feedback. The final version is due on **May 14**.

Note that the D2L Gradebook is set up for the 2000-level of this course. I will record presentation and paper grades separately, and you must contact me if you wish to know what your grade is and get my feedback. I will calculate 4000-level final grades individually at the end of the semester.

8. Attendance. You must attend class to help you master and contextualize the material. You are permitted two unexcused absences. Absences will be excused on the basis of a note from a doctor, dean, military official, or coach. However, if you believe you have a good reason for missing class but are unable to get a written excuse, please let me know, and if your excuse is valid, I will excuse you.

Your final grade will be lowered by one point for each unexcused absence in excess of the two permitted unexcused absences. In addition, three “lates” will add up to one unexcused absence unless you provide me with a valid reason for lateness.

Any student with more than four absences for any reason may be dropped from the course.

Course Policies

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism is the use of someone else's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing on the Works Cited page), whether you use that material in a quote, paraphrase, or summary.

Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be treated as academic dishonesty, the penalty for which is a zero on the assignment. However, you are permitted to use AI in an ethical manner, specifically:

1. You may use Grammarly and/or other spelling and grammar checkers, including those on Google Docs, but you may not use them to “rewrite” your paper or change the “tone” (that is, to “make it sound more academic,” etc.);
2. You may use AI to generate ideas. For example, you may put your topic into ChatGPT and ask for some ideas, and you may ask it follow-up questions.
3. You must always cite any AI usage in MLA style.

Be aware, however, of the following drawbacks of AI:

1. AI is often inaccurate. Check everything you find through AI with other sources;
2. AI tends to “hallucinate” sources—that is, it is known to come up with sources that do not actually exist;
3. AI tends to confirm what you already believe (“confirmation bias”);
4. Grammarly and similar programs may give you suggestions that actually change the meaning of what you wrote, so always check it carefully;
5. Similarly, do not simply accept everything Grammarly suggests. You will not learn anything that way. Go over each suggested change and make sure you understand it and agree with it before you accept it;
6. AI is NOT private. Do not put any personal information into AI chats.

Cellphones: You may not use your cellphone in class except to consult the texts we are discussing, or to google a question we cannot answer. If I see you using a cellphone or a computer in class for any other reason, I may give you an unexcused absence for the day without warning.

Food: In accordance with the building policy, you may bring only bottled water to class.

Computers: You may not use a computer in class except to consult the text, or for another justifiable reason. If this is the case, please inform me beforehand.

Attention: Please be alert and do not lay your head down on your desk during class, or I may mark you late or absent without warning.

Class Dismissal: Please do not start to pack up your things or leave until I have dismissed the class. If you believe I have gone over the allotted time, please raise your hand and let me know.

Email Communication: The only way I can communicate with you outside of class is through D2L email. You should set up D2L so that D2L emails are delivered to your email account. You are responsible for checking your email or D2L daily for any reminders, clarifications, or other communications from me.

Safe Zone Statement: This classroom is a “safe zone” in which all students will be treated and will treat one another equally, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Diversity of thought is encouraged.

Other Important Information

Office Hours: My office hours are given above, and I am always happy to help you with any questions you may have, whether they are about the texts we are reading, assignments, exams, absences, or anything else—or you may just come by to talk. If you can’t make my office hours, we can make an appointment.

Tutoring Support: Tutoring and Academic Support Programs (TASP) provides free drop-in tutoring for MSU students. Located on the first floor of Moffett Library, TASP's Learning center provides tutoring support in a number of core courses and subject areas. Please see their schedule for more information about times and offerings.

Academic Accommodations: If you require special accommodations, please contact Disability Support Service at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Arrangements cannot be applied retroactively.

Research and Creative Activity Opportunities at MSU: Enhancing Undergraduate Research Endeavors and Creative Activities (EURECA) is a program that provides opportunities for undergraduates to engage in high-quality research and creative activities with faculty. EURECA provides incentives and funding through a system that supports faculty and students in a cooperative research process. Information and resources are available from [The Office of Undergraduate Research](#).

Student Handbook: For additional information, see [Student Handbook](#) .