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Word for Word/Sept. 11 Seminars
Week in Review Desk; Section 4

Academe on War: Man (and Woman) The Psychobabble Detectors!

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AMERICA is at war, and following suit, the nation's professoriate is rapidly deploying courses. Notably, the University of California at Los Angeles has just launched 49 undergraduate seminars across a range of disciplines to address "the innumerable issues arising out of the events of Sept. 11." The courses include "Navigating Between Blithesome Optimism and Cultural Despair" and "Implications of World Crises for Student Stress and Academic Achievement: Coping Strategies."

Eyebrows are already being raised. Citing the U.C.L.A. courses and other such developments in the United States, Bryan Appleyard, in a commentary for The Sunday Times of London, wrote that "an unprecedented assault on mainland America is being turned into sentimental psychobabble, an occasion for nationwide counseling or politically correct pseudo-courses."

But judge for yourself. Here are excerpts from some of the course descriptions (a couple with grammatical errors), posted on U.C.L.A.'s Web site at www.college.ucla.edu/hnrs98 . TOM KUNTZ

Course: "Navigating Between Blithesome Optimism and Cultural Despair"

Instructor's description: I intend to share the sense of crisis about my teaching mission that I experienced on Sept. 11, and examine the context of Enlightenment values that have given meaning to my life's work. My faith in the unlimited creativity of human beings in solving the problems of their environment, in the capacity of the imagination to invent new solutions to economic, physical and psychological dilemmas, in the liberation of mental energy and fresh ideas from the fetters of dogma and fear, was sorely tested on that fateful Tuesday. I will attempt to dissect and comprehend the events through their representations, for only through understanding can we prevent future recurrences of such events.

Course: "Women's Participation in Political Violence"

Description: The course poses the question: What is women's relationship to political violence? Using a feminist lens, the course examines the participation of women in radical political movements in the late 20th-century United States. Women are often not the director actors in violent acts; more often they are victims, participants or accomplices. The course tries to understand the motivations, complex behaviors and world views of radical women.

Course: "Echoes of Terror in Brain, Mind and Literature"

Description: Traumatic historical events, such as those of Sept. 11, evoke both shared and highly individual responses. In this seminar, we will discuss ways in which people cope with public terror in their lives. We will examine the neurobiological and psychological effects of terror and the transformation of these responses into creative expression.

Course: "What the U.S. Should Do to Be Popular in the Third World"

Description: The reasons for the unpopularity of the U.S. government in the third world are examined. The persistently negative reaction of the Latin American left wing against U.S. trade policies; the 20th-century condemnations of the U.S. by essentially all communist countries; the Ugly American in Southeast Asia; the demonstrations against our W.T.O. meetings; and the growing Arab hatred of the U.S.: Are these hatreds coincidental? What do they have in common? Although our policy makers clearly desire to help these countries, have we subconsciously evolved policies that are highly economically inefficient and essentially exploitative of the third world?

Course: "Implications of World Crises for Student Stress and Academic Achievement: Coping Strategies"

Description: [sic] Exploration of the relationship among world crises, students stress as they relate to student achievement. Students will maintain a journal during

the quarter, including interviews of other students. Enrollment limited.

Course: Understanding the Unthinkable and Incomprehensible

Description: In this course we will try to understand two fundamental questions that are raised by events of Sept. 11. First, how can people unleash acts of terror on innocent citizens? Second, what are the consequences of mutual cultural ignorance? . . .

Course: "Terrorism and the Politics of Knowledge"

Description: While the world rightfully stands united in its condemnation of the bombings of Sept. 11, the American mainstream media has remained impervious to those critical voices which have also drawn attention to America's own record of imperialistic adventurism and the relation of the W.T.C. bombings to American excesses in Iraq, Sudan and the Middle East. This seminar asks fundamental questions about how we constitute terrorism and its agents. What are the categories of knowledge deployed to understand terror? Should the continuing sanctions against Iraq also be considered a form of terrorism? What is the relationship of the bin Ladens of this world to Western state terrorism? Who defines and names terrorism, with what authority, and with what consequences?

Course: "Culture and the Deferral of Violence"

Description: Exploration of the hypothesis that human language and culture [sic] is essentially a means of deferring violence, and its application to the current situation.

Course: "Terror & Society in Bergman's Films"

Description: Drawing on two films by Ingmar Bergman about terror, questions will be asked about the origins of terror in Society and, in particular, within male/female relationships. Possible reduction in the threat of terror will be explored.

Course: "War, Terror and Violence: Reflecting on Machiavelli"

Description: Is war a legitimate instrument of politics? Can war be a just act of the state? How do wars waged by states differ from acts of violence by individuals? Why is the word 'terror' used for some acts of violence? This seminar will explore these questions from the point of view expressed by Niccolo Machiavelli in parts of "The Prince," a book written almost five centuries ago but often cited today when such questions are discussed.

Course: "Literature as Mourning: China and Greece"

Description: Examines texts from world literature, especially the Chinese and Greek traditions, as responses to the loss of loved ones and as ways of managing, cultivating and redirecting the force of grief.

Course: "Beyond Tears: Evidence, Fact and Crisis"

Description: An exploration of the evidentiary concepts that may help students and citizens avoid being misled by those who manipulate crisis for their own ends.

Photo: Get serious: It's time to hit the books in terror studies. (Associated Press)

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