

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • MERCED • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO



SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

Office of the Chair
PHONE: (510) 987-9303
FAX: (510) 763-0309
E-MAIL: gayle.binion@ucop.edu

Assembly of the Academic Senate
Academic Council
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607-5200

8 January 2003

TO: President Richard C. Atkinson
FROM: Gayle Binion, Chair, UC Academic Council
RE: English R 1A

As per your request of last September, the Academic Senate has empanelled a task force to review several questions concerning responsibility for the description of courses offered at the University of California. The Committee, largely through the efforts of the Berkeley representative and Academic Senate staff analyst, has completed its report on the English R 1A course (“The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance”) which was taught during Fall semester on the Berkeley campus. The report and its six appendices are attached. Please distribute this report to the members of the Board of Regents.

The Task Force on Course Descriptions is continuing its work on the adequacy of the campus procedures for review of course descriptions and the nature of faculty responsibility for the content of these materials. We expect to complete this work by the end of Winter quarter.

CC: Members, Task Force on Course Descriptions

Carole Goldberg, UCLA, Chair
Randolph Bergstrom, UCSB
William Davis, UCD
David Goodblatt, UCSD
Mel Heyman, UCSF
Catherine Koshland, UCB
Robert Post, UCB
Michael Rose, UCI
Karen Rowe, UCLA
Kimberly Peterson, Staff Analyst

Report of the Academic Senate Course Descriptions Task Force on the UC Berkeley English R1A Course Section, “The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance”

I. Facts about UC Berkeley English R1A Courses

Reading and Composition is a required course at UC Berkeley. Each semester, students may meet this course requirement by choosing from approximately 30 sections of English R1A offered in the English Department or from equivalent courses (about 30 additional sections) offered by other departments. The current general description for the English R1A course was approved by the UC Berkeley Senate Committee on Courses of Instruction in 1999. This general description appears in the official campus course catalogue, whereas the individual section descriptions only appear on departmental websites. These sections tend to be offered only once and are not permanent course offerings.

Graduate student instructors teach these courses and must have previous teaching experience in addition to having taken a 300-level instructional pedagogy course. Prior to this incident, the English Department had been in the practice of vetting the qualifications of the graduate student instructors teaching the course; however, the Department had not been in the practice of reviewing the course section descriptions. In the other departments in which Reading and Composition is taught, the course section descriptions are vetted on a regular basis.

II. Timeline of Events and Actions Taken by the Department, University, and Academic Senate

On May 9, 2002 an op-ed piece by Roger Kimball was published in the Wall Street Journal entitled, “The Intifada Curriculum.” This article commented on the description that was posted on the Berkeley English Department’s website of the English R1A “Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance” course section (for original description, see appendix 1).

On that same day, Chancellor Robert Berdahl met with members of the UC Berkeley leadership, including the English Department Chair, to consider what steps and actions should be taken regarding the course and the course description. It was determined that the last sentence of the course description, “conservative thinkers are encouraged to seek other sections,” was in violation of the Faculty Code of Conduct and needed to be eliminated immediately. This change to the course section description was completed within 48 hours. The graduate student instructor was also asked to amend the description to clarify what would be taught and the methodology for achieving the instructional purposes of the course. The Department Chair immediately assumed a direct mentoring role with the graduate student instructor.

On May 10th Chancellor Berdahl issued a public statement (appendix 2) that reported the steps that were being taken to revise the description and ensure that the class was conducted in accordance to the Faculty Code of Conduct. The Department Chair took responsibility

for the lack of oversight of the course description and stated that the Department had failed to execute the responsibility that had been delegated to it by the Academic Senate.

On May 17, 2002 a letter from Chancellor Berdahl was published in the Wall Street Journal which detailed the actions being taken by the University to make changes to the section description and ensure that the course would allow for open and free discourse.

By May 20th the following steps and actions had occurred:

- The graduate student instructor had amended the description to clarify what would be taught and the methodology for achieving the instructional purposes of the course.
- The Department Chair was scheduled to attend the first meeting of the class in order to advise the students of the right to express themselves openly and to have their work evaluated free of discrimination or harassment. Students would be informed that if they felt their rights were being violated, they should contact the Chair immediately. Moreover, students would write confidential evaluations of the class twice during the semester as well as at the end of the semester. These evaluations would go to the chair and to the instructor.
- A senior member of the English Department faculty would be assigned to attend the class for the entire semester as an observer in order to ensure that an open environment for discussion, free of intimidation or indoctrination by the instructor or students, would be maintained.
- A joint faculty-administrative task force was formed to review the principles and practices of mentoring and overseeing graduate student instructors.

On May 21st Chancellor Berdahl issued a statement updating the public on the steps that had been and were being taken by the University regarding the course description and conduct of the course (appendix 3).

Over the course of the summer, the instructor of record met with each of the graduate student instructors scheduled to teach sections of English R1A to clarify procedures and review each of their course descriptions and syllabi.

On July 15th the Humanities Subcommittee of the UC Berkeley Senate Committee on Courses of Instruction met and reviewed the revised course section description and determined that it was consistent with the rubric of the course. The steps that the English Department had taken reassured the Subcommittee that the course would be conducted in a way that would not compromise the educational experience of the students.

On July 24th Academic Council reviewed the situation and determined that this was a campus issue and voted unanimously to support the Berkeley Academic Senate in whatever determination they would make concerning the matter.

On August 7th the Committee on Courses of Instruction met and reviewed the revised version of the section description. The committee unanimously agreed that the revised section description fit the rubric of the course and reaffirmed the decision of the Humanities Subcommittee.

On August 8th the UC Berkeley Divisional Council met and reaffirmed the authority of the Committee on Courses of Instruction to be the final arbiter on courses in accordance to senate bylaws.

Additional steps and actions that have been taken include:

- In her mentoring role to the graduate student instructor, the Department Chair has continually worked with the graduate student to revise and rework his course section description. The graduate student instructor has been willing and receptive to working with the Chair, and has made numerous revisions to the description (for final course description, see appendix 4).
- Students were asked to evaluate the course and instructor before the semester midpoint so that modifications could be made if necessary.
- The English Department has developed and implemented new oversight structures to ensure that all current and future course descriptions are in accordance with the Faculty Code of Conduct, and with the educational mission of the Reading and Composition courses, and specifically that courses and descriptions do not exclude or discourage qualified students from enrolling.
- The Committee on Courses of Instruction has assigned a subcommittee to review the divisional senate bylaws.

III. Outcomes

The course proceeded smoothly throughout the entire semester. Prof. Steve Goldsmith attended every class, and Chair Professor Adelman met with all students, and reviewed the periodic evaluations. The course began with the maximum R&C enrollment of 17, and dropped shortly to 15 (typical of these courses). At the end of the 8th week, one student dropped the class. Although that student had attended regularly, he had not completed any of the written work assigned to that date. All three sets of evaluations indicated a very high level of student engagement with the materials of the course and praise for Snehal Shingavi's handling of discussion and of all other aspects of the course. Comments from the students included the following:

- 1.) "I believe the readings and assignments were excellent and definitely helped my ability to concentrate on hard to read texts!...The instructor was well prepared to lead the discussions
- 2.) "He makes us want to learn and come to class. I loved it. I wish there was a second part to it. Honestly, it was my favorite class this semester!"
- 3.) "This class was nothing like how some critics tried to say about this course. We remained on topics about the literature, writing, reading poetry, analyzing deeper meaning, and formulating our ideas. Although the subject matter was a controversial topic, we focused on the literary aspects of the poetry."

Several additional comments from students are included in Chair Adelman's letter to UC Berkeley Division Senate Chair Koshland that is included as an appendix (appendix 5). In addition, the appendices include Prof. Steve Goldsmith's report on the class (appendix 6).

In addition to the positive outcome for the class, several other developments of occurred.

- Executive Vice-Chancellor and Provost Paul Gray appointed a task force on GSI mentoring; that task force met to consider changes in the GSI mentoring policy, in mentoring and training specifically for Reading and Composition courses, and in GSI preparation for teaching. The task force recommended several changes to policy, and its final report will be available at the beginning of the spring semester. The Graduate Council of the Academic Senate is working closely with the task force to approve the new policies and will work with the administration on their implementation.
- The English department instituted new policies for review and approval of the Reading and Composition courses.
- The Committee on Courses of Instruction of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate initiated in September a review of its procedures.

Appendix 1 – Original Course Description

The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance

Course Number: English R1A LEC 4 Units

Semester and Year: Fall 2002

Location and Time: 204 Wheeler TuTh 2:00-3:30

Instructor: Shingavi, Snehal

Course Control Number: 28448

Final Exam Number: TBA

Booklist: (tentative) Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories, Ghassan Kanafani; Born Black, Suheir Hammad; Drops of This Story, Suheir Hammad; Enemy of the Sun, Naseer Hasan Aruri; The Adam of Two Edens : Selected Poems, Mahmud Darwish; Memory for Forgetfulness : August, Beirut, 1982, Mahmud Darwish; Victims of a Map : A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry, Mahmud Darwish; Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict, Norman G. Finkelstein; The Question of Palestine, Edward W. Said; Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question, Edward W. Said; The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994, Edward W. Said; Intifada, Phil Marshall.

Course Description: Since the inception of the Intifada in September of 2000, Palestinians have been fighting for their right to exist. The brutal Israeli military occupation of Palestine, an occupation that has been ongoing since 1948, has systematically displaced, killed, and maimed millions of Palestinian people. And yet, from under the brutal weight of the occupation, Palestinians have produced their own culture and poetry of resistance. This class will examine the history of the Palestinian resistance and the way that it is narrated by Palestinians in order to produce an understanding of the Intifada and to develop a coherent political analysis of the situation. This class takes as its starting point the right of Palestinians to fight for their own self-determination. Conservative thinkers are encouraged to seek other sections.

Appendix 2 – Public Statement from Chancellor Berdahl, May 10, 2002

University Statement Regarding Scheduled Fall 2002 Class Titled "The Politics and Poetics of Palestine Resistance"

10 May 2002

Editor's note: Also see [May 21, 2002 update](#)

The following is a statement addressing questions raised about a course scheduled for the fall 2002 semester titled, "The Politics and Poetics of Palestine Resistance."

There was a failure of oversight on the part of the English Department in reviewing course proposal descriptions for the reading and composition sections. This failure is in the process of being addressed. Structures will be put in place to ensure all course descriptions will be developed in accord with the Faculty Code of Conduct, specifically that courses not exclude or discourage qualified students on grounds other than lack of preparation.

In this particular case, the English Department will immediately revise the course description to ensure open access. In addition, the department chair will provide oversight for this class to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with the Faculty Code of Conduct. Among the code's requirements is that there be no "discrimination, including harassment, against a student on political grounds, or for the reasons of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, national origin...."

Chancellor Robert M. Berdahl stated: "I am concerned that this failure of oversight has occurred and I am pleased that the English Department is acting immediately to remedy it. Universities should not avoid presenting controversial material, and we do not. It is imperative that our classrooms be free of indoctrination - indoctrination is not education. Classrooms must be places in which an open environment prevails and where students are free to express their views."

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2002/05/10_class.html

Appendix 3 – Public Statement from Chancellor Berdahl, May 21, 2002

Update on the fall 2002 course "The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance."

21 May 2002

In close consultation with the English Department, the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate, and the graduate student instructor of the course, University of California, Berkeley administrators announced the following:

- The English Department has acknowledged a lapse in oversight of its reading and composition courses. When the course description in question was called to the attention of the department chair, and particularly the final sentence that implied exclusion based on one's political persuasion, the chair and the graduate student instructor removed the sentence. In addition, the graduate student instructor amended the course description to clarify what will be taught and the methodology for achieving the instructional purposes of the course, consistent with the requirements of English 1A.
- Students in any course have the right to express themselves openly and to have their work evaluated free of discrimination or harassment. In this case, the English Department chair will explicitly advise students enrolled in the class of this right. If students believe that these rights are compromised, they are to contact the department chair immediately. The English Department is committed to guaranteeing students that their evaluations are based solely on their academic performance, not their political viewpoint.
- Faculty observation and mentoring of graduate student instructors in all departments and instructional programs are important to their training as teachers and to ensuring that the educational goals of the course are met. Because of the controversy aroused by this course and the potential in-class conflict that could ensue, the English Department - to assure fairness to all parties in the class - will assume responsibility for regular observation of the class and mentoring of the instructor.
- A joint Academic Senate/administrative committee will review the principles and practices of mentoring and overseeing all courses led by graduate student instructors.

BACKGROUND: The course in question is an English 1A class, the first semester of a year-long sequence in reading and composition required of undergraduates at UC Berkeley. A wide variety of such courses are available and spread across 20 academic departments. These courses are taught by lecturers or graduate student instructors. Graduate student instructors act as apprentice teachers and are mentored by Academic Senate faculty.

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2002/05/21_palest-class.html

Appendix 4 – Final Course Description

The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance

Course Number: English R1A LEC 4 Units

Semester and Year: fall 2002

Location and Time: 204 Wheeler TuTh 2:00-3:30

Instructor: Shingavi, Snehal

Course Control Number: 28448

Final Exam Number: TBA

Booklist: (tentative) Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories, Ghassan Kanafani; Born Black, Suheir Hammad; Drops of This Story, Suheir Hammad; Enemy of the Sun, Naseer Hasan Aruri; The Adam of Two Edens : Selected Poems, Mahmud Darwish; Memory for Forgetfulness : August, Beirut, 1982, Mahmud Darwish; Victims of a Map : A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry, Mahmud Darwish; Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict, Norman G. Finkelstein; The Question of Palestine, Edward W. Said; Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question, Edward W. Said; The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994, Edward W. Said; Intifada, Phil Marshall.

Course Description: This is a course on Palestinian resistance poetry. It takes as its point of departure the Palestinian literature that has developed since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, which has displaced, maimed, and killed many Palestinian people. The Israeli military occupation of historic Palestine has caused unspeakable suffering. Since the occupation, Palestinians have been fighting for their right to exist. And yet, from under the weight of this occupation, Palestinians have produced their own culture and poetry of resistance. This class will examine the history of the Palestinian resistance and the way that it is narrated by Palestinians. The instructor takes as his starting point the right of Palestinians to fight for their own self-determination.

Discussions about the literature will focus on several intersecting themes: how are Palestinian artists able to imagine art under the occupation; what consequences does resistance have on the character of the art that is produced (i.e. why are there so few Palestinian epics and plays and comedies); can one represent the Israeli occupation in art; what is the difference between political art and propaganda and how do the debates about those terms inflect the production of literature; how do poems represent the desire to escape and the longing for home simultaneously (alternatively, how do poems represent the nation without a state); what consequence do political debates have on formal innovations and their reproduction; and what are the obligations of artists in representing the occupation.

This 1A course offers students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse, leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English. The course aims at continuing to develop the students' practical fluency with sentence, paragraph and thesis-development skills but with increasingly complex applications. Students will be assigned a number of short essays (2-4 written pages) and several revisions.

Appendix 5 – Chair Adelman’s December 19, 2002 Report to Chair Koshland

December 19, 2002

Catherine P. Koshland
Chair, Berkeley Division of the UC Academic Senate
320 Stephens Hall

Dear Chair Koshland:

I am writing to report on the English 1A section on "The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance." I am happy to report that, despite its controversial beginning, the course went very smoothly.

The Department put several measures in place to insure that the course would maintain an open educational environment and that student work would be graded on academic grounds only. I attended the first meeting of the course and invited students to come directly to me if they felt that open discussion of the issues was not welcome in the classroom or that their papers had been graded on political rather than academic grounds. In addition, Professor Steven Goldsmith attended every class meeting as an impartial observer in order to insure that an open atmosphere conducive to discussion was maintained. Finally, in addition to the official departmental evaluation forms distributed at the end of the semester, I distributed and read confidential evaluation forms twice in the course of the semester.

As it turned out, none of these measures proved to be necessary, though their presence may have played a role in insuring that the course was taught professionally. No student from this course came to me to report problems either with grading or with the way in which discussion was conducted. Professor Goldsmith repeatedly reported to me that the course went very well and that the instructor did not in any way attempt to prohibit the expression of points of view that he did not share, though he did on occasion exercise his obligation to keep the discussion to the subject matter at hand. (I append his final report to me below.) All three sets of evaluations indicated a very high level of student engagement with the materials of the course and praise for Snehal Shingavi's handling of discussion and of all other aspects of the course. (These are in fact among the most impressive set of evaluations for a Graduate Student Instructor that I have ever seen.)

Let me say a little more about enrollment in the class and also about the evaluations. The class started with 17 enrolled students, which is the limit in our Reading and Composition courses. That number dropped to 15 almost immediately, which is also characteristic of these courses (though they are required, students often under-estimate the amount of work they will entail). That number held steady until the eighth week, when one additional student dropped the course. This student had refused to participate in the discussions of the poetry and had completed none of the many written assignments for the course at that time that he dropped it. Judging from the evaluations, the remaining 14 students were delighted with the course. 11 of the 14 enrolled

filled out the final evaluation forms. Every one of the 11 forms is strongly positive. I include a sample comment from each of the 11 students:

- 1.) "I believe the readings and assignments were excellent and definitely helped my ability to concentrate on hard to read texts!...The instructor was well prepared to lead the discussions, When people had questions he compassionately and clearly answered them...The effectiveness of class discussions, to propel learning in new vistas and encourage our confidence, were superb. Controversies were handled smoothly. The [paper] comments were appropriate, insightful, and kind. I have become a better writer."
- 2.) "He makes us want to learn and come to class. I loved it. I wish there was a second part to it. Honestly, it was my favorite class this semester!"
- 3.) "This class was nothing like how some critics tried to say about this course. We remained on topics about the literature, writing, reading poetry, analyzing deeper meaning, and formulating our ideas. Although the subject matter was a controversial topic, we focused on the literary aspects of the poetry."
- 4.) "The instructor does a good job of making it clear that it is not necessary to take a pro-Palestinian view.... gets all the students to think and analyze...great class."
- 5.) "This class has focused on poetry....I feel as though I have greatly improved. Snehal was excellent in the discussion arena, he gave the class lots of opportunity for success ('What might/could this mean?') and gave inspiring prompts."
- 6.) "Prof. Shingavi is a great leader of discussion & whenever there are times of silence, he knows what questions/suggestions to make to open the discussion back up."
- 7.) "It helped me improve my writing and critical reading skill."
- 8.) "Instructor was near flawless. This class is one of the few classes at Berkeley that has inspired me to think and work hard. I also feel that he improved my ability to analyze literature and write about it. The professor was always available and always helpful." [This comment is from a senior Economics major.]
- 9.) "Instructor was nothing less than awesome. He dealt with such a controversial topic very well and the class atmosphere was always very comforting and voicing my opinion and participating in discussion was very easy."
- 10.) "He lead all discussions effectively by asking questions to make us think....This class was great!"
- 11.) "This was one of my favorite classes. This is unusual as I tend not to like English classes.... I learned how to analyze different aspects of poems and to recognize what is important in a poem and a piece of literature."

I hope that these comments make it clear just how successful the course was in fulfilling the educational mission of the Reading and Composition courses.

Sincerely,

Janet Adelman
Chair

cc: Ronelle Alexander, Chair
Academic Senate Committee on Courses

Attachment: Report from Steven Goldsmith

Appendix 6 – Prof. Goldsmith’s December 18, 2002 Report to Chair Adelman

December 18, 2002

Dear Chair Adelman,

I am pleased to report that Snehal Shingavi's section of English 1A, on the Poetics and Politics of Palestinian Resistance, could not have proceeded more smoothly. As the faculty observer, I attended every class meeting, ready to intervene if the environment of free discussion and open inquiry were ever threatened. In fact, the occasion for such intervention never arose, and the students never heard my voice beyond my opening day introduction. Mr. Shingavi conducted class in a wholly professional manner, welcoming all students' views, regardless of their political positions. Whenever controversial historical or political issues arose ("Why did the Palestinians leave their homes in 1948?"), he was quick to recognize the disputes and to sketch for his students a range of possible interpretations. One student, who dropped the class in the eighth week and seems to have attended solely for the purpose of challenging the political positions represented in Mr. Shingavi's original course description, spoke often and freely. Occasionally, Mr. Shingavi exercised his right as instructor to steer the class away from general political controversy and back to the literary material at hand, but he always did so with respect and fairness. The strength of the class was the literature itself, which Mr. Shingavi always made the focus of discussion. By presenting Palestinian poetry as a living, continuously developing cultural phenomenon, and by presenting such a variety of Palestinian voices, he raised complex questions about literature's many relations to politics, questions that always resisted the reductive answer of propaganda. Students learned, and were surprised to learn, that Palestinian poetry critiques existing Palestinian politics with a passion that often rivals the poetry's desire to advance and imagine the terms of Palestinian nationalism. Sophisticated, open-minded, student-oriented, Mr. Shingavi created a challenging but comfortable environment for his students, and, given the quality of their eager participation, they seem to have thrived under his tutelage. Their warm regard for their instructor was also evident. Mr. Shingavi weathered the initial storm of controversy with admirable composure, and almost immediately, his class settled into the routine of another successful English 1A section. His students, glad to have enrolled, never understood all the fuss.

Steven Goldsmith
Associate Professor
Department of English