

VOICES OF THE STRANGER is an upper-division interdisciplinary course that belongs more to the College of Letters and Science than to any particular department or program within the college. Students are encouraged to draw upon the expertise they have cultivated in their own major fields to approach and engage a topic of shared intellectual interest.

The title of the course (inspired by Thomas Merton) was selected to focus attention on individuals whose way of life, personal circumstances, social characteristics, and other identifying factors qualifies them as being "strangers" -- that is, "strangers" to someone. But the word "stranger" is treated as a relational term that tends to identify someone who is as yet not-known in relation to that which is better known, commonly understood, or more immediately comfortable. In this situation lie the ingredients for stereotyping, not-seeing, not-recognizing, and, of course, for de-humanizing, non-humanizing, and all of the attitudinal and dispositional stances that become inherent in discrimination, prejudice, intolerance, and racism. We will not be content, however, simply to scold or be accusatory. Rather our intention is to foster understanding, that is, to create situations that allow voices to speak that are not always heard, to see persons who are not always seen first as human, and to stimulate attitudes of openness, interest, and attentiveness to diversity, distinction, and uniqueness. So, while we will be paying attention to terms like "stranger," "outsider," "fugitive," and the like, we will also be searching for models and images that encourage understanding of difference and recognition of diversity. Our intention is to find ways of talking about these matters constructively.

Thus, VOICES OF THE STRANGER is designed to approach themes and topics that are sometimes volatile in ways that belong to the classroom learning process. While guarding against any attempt to transfer the subject from volatile to benign, or from the emotions to mere critique and analysis, the class has been established to help create the atmosphere in which difficult, complicated but essential social, cultural and political issues can be approached in such a constructive manner that everyone, regardless of initial point of view, learns something important, and, perhaps, something unexpected. Perhaps.

The formal assignment of the class is threefold: Students are expected (1) to attend class (for the subject is present in the classroom), (2) to do the assigned reading, and (3) to complete the formal writing requirements. The writing includes a Logbook (approximately one page of reflective response to each classroom presentation), an Essay on "Meeting a Stranger", and two briefer essay questions on the final examination. The Logbook will be graded on a P/NP basis, with the instructors having the discretion to recognize superlative work with additional rewards, and is due at class time on Tuesday, May 28. The Logbook must cover 14 of the class presentations. The Essay on "Meeting a Stranger" should be conceived as a 1500 word (5-6 pages) effort, and is due with the Logbook on May 28. The instructors and readers will make every effort to return the Logbook and Essay at the time of the final examination.

Voluntary discussion groups will be announced during the second week of class. Such discussions will be conducted by the Teaching Assistants, and will concern themselves primarily with the content of the assigned readings.

Teaching Assistants for the course are: Craig Hazen, Elaine Yastishock, and Lisle Dalton. Class Assistants are Phil Womble and Carla Martinez.

Walter Capps' office is SH 4724, and office hours are 2-3 o'clock on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Reading assignments will be made in class weekly.