

CBM003 ADD/CHANGE FORM

Undergraduate Council  
 New Course  Course Change  
 Core Category: Humanities Effective Fall 2010

40

or

Graduate/Professional Studies Council  
 New Course  Course Change  
 Effective Fall \_\_

APPROVED APR 21 2010  
 RECEIVED APR 01 2010  
 Email: *[Signature]*

- Department: ENGL College: CLASS
- Faculty Contact Person: Barry Wood Telephone: 281-821-9691 (home)  
barrywood1940@yahoo.com
- Course Information on New/Revised course:
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title:  
ILAS / ~~3360~~ / Cosmic Narratives
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Short Course Title (30 characters max.):  
ILAS / ~~3360~~ / COSMIC NARRATIVES
  - SCH: 3.00 Level: JR CIP Code: 24.0101.00 01 Lect Hrs: 3 Lab Hrs: 0
- Justification for adding/changing course: To provide for new discipline areas
- Was the proposed/revised course previously offered as a special topics course?  Yes  No  
If Yes, please complete:
  - Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title:  
\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_
  - Course ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Effective Date (currently active row): \_\_\_\_\_
- Authorized Degree Program(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Does this course affect major/minor requirements in the College/Department?  Yes  No
  - Does this course affect major/minor requirements in other Colleges/Departments?  Yes  No
  - Can the course be repeated for credit?  Yes  No (if yes, include in course description)
- Grade Option: Letter (A, B, C ...) Instruction Type: lecture ONLY (Note: Lect/Lab info. must match item 3, above.)
- If this form involves a change to an existing course, please obtain the following information from the course inventory: Instructional Area / Course Number / Long Course Title  
\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_
  - Course ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Effective Date (currently active row): \_\_\_\_\_
- Proposed Catalog Description: (If there are no prerequisites, type in "none".)  
Cr: 3. (3-0). Prerequisites: ENGL 1304. Description (30 words max.): Narrative history of the Universe from its beginnings to the present emphasizing relevance of cosmic narratives to the human situation.
- Dean's Signature: *[Signature]* Date: 4/1/10

Print/Type Name: Sarah Fishman

U N I V E R S I T Y of H O U S T O N

CORE CURRICULUM COURSE REQUEST

Originating Department/College: English Department/CLASS

Person making request: Barry Wood Telephone: 281-821-9691/UH: 32963

E-mail: barrywood1940@yahoo.com, bwood@uh.edu

Dean's signature:  Date: 3/31/10

I. General Information:

2360

Course number and title: ILAS 2360: Cosmic Narratives

Catalog description must be included on completed CBM 003 form and attached to this document. Narrative history of the Universe from its beginnings to the present emphasizing relevance of cosmic narratives to the human situation.

Category of Core for which course is being proposed (mark only one):

- Communication
- Mathematics
- Mathematics/Reasoning (IDO)
- American History
- Government
- \* Humanities
- Visual/Performing Arts Critical
- Visual/Performing Arts Experiential
- Natural Sciences
- Social/Behavioral Sciences
- Writing in the Disciplines (IDO)

II. Objectives and Evaluation (respond on one or more separate sheets):

Call ext. 3-0919 for a copy of "Guidelines for Requesting and Evaluating Core Courses" or visit the website at [www.uh.edu/academics/corecurriculum](http://www.uh.edu/academics/corecurriculum)

- A. How does the proposed course meet the appropriate Exemplary Educational Objectives (see **Guidelines**). Attach a syllabus and supporting materials for the objectives the syllabus does not make clear.

**Objective 1: To demonstrate awareness of the scope and variety of works in the arts and humanities.** Among important works studied in the humanities are dozens of myths and legends from every early culture on every continent. These include myths of origins—including the Earth; the stars, Sun, and Moon; and the people themselves. These are early, literary versions of "cosmic narratives." A full collection of these (Sproul, ed. Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World) is required reading for this course and will be studied alongside cosmic narratives from the sciences

(narratives of the Big Bang, galactic formation, stellar evolution, Earth history, rise of life, emergence of man, and peopling of the planet). While a few courses in Departments of English, Anthropology, History and Philosophy may touch on one or two myths of origin, no existing course in CLASS treats myths of origin this fully.

**2. To understand those works as expressions of individual and human values within an historical and social context.** Cosmic narratives from earlier times (that is, myths of origins) reflect the culture-specific values, interests, and concerns of tribal and early civilized peoples. They are culture-specific and ethnocentric; they personalize and humanize forces and events in the world; but they do not provide verifiable accounts of how the Earth, Universe, or people truly began or how the natural world works. Today's cosmic narratives have emerged from the sciences; they emphasize accounts based on observation, mathematical calculation, and computer modeling. Cosmic narratives from the sciences entail a value system that transcends tribal, societal, national, and religious expectations; this emphasizes correspondence between the narrative and the experienced and measured physical reality.

**3. To respond critically to works in the arts and humanities.** This course aims to provide narrative insight into the sciences, an approach that should bring a central methodology of the humanities into clearer focus. By contrast, students will become aware of the various ways that narratives address the human condition. Mythical, legendary, and humanistic narratives address human needs in aesthetic terms apart from their accuracy in describing the real world. Cosmic narratives address actual observations and mathematical constructs with full attention to their accuracy in reflecting the actual situation in the real world, including the history and development of Earth and the Universe.

**4. To articulate an informed personal reaction to works in the arts and humanities.** An important aspect of the humanities is critical theory. One form of this is narrative theory: the study of how narrative works and is applied to works of literature, history, philosophy, etc. This course, Cosmic Narratives, extends narrative theory to completely new territory, utilizing it to make sense of subjects (the sciences) that have not been approached with this tool of humanistic study.

**5. To develop an appreciation for the aesthetic principles that guide or govern the humanities and arts.** Narrative is the most easily understood format for information; it aligns with basic cognitive endowments and sound pedagogical method. Children understand stories without instruction; adults adopt narrative to remember and communicate information. While this course presents science in narrative form, it does this within a methodology that is fundamental to all humanistic knowledge and consistent with what is known from cognitive science.

**6. To demonstrate knowledge of the influence of literature, philosophy, and/or the arts on intercultural experiences.** While "intercultural" in this context appears to refer to experiences of people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, there is another meaning that emerges from the interdisciplinary format of this course. In 1959, C. P. Snow pointed to a continuing problem: the huge divide between "two cultures," the humanistic and scientific. Cosmic Narratives is an attempt to bridge the two cultures by utilizing a methodology basic to the humanities and social sciences and applying it directly to the sciences. Narrative appears to be one of the few formats for presenting knowledge that can apply to disciplines on both sides of this chasm.

- B. Specify the processes and procedures for evaluating course effectiveness in regard to its goals.

**Preamble:** In keeping with the University of Houston Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which focuses on learning through discovery, an intercollegiate mentoring plan has been devised and endorsed by chairmen of five departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS)—Anthropology, English, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology—and four departments in the College of Natural Science and Mathematics (NSM)—Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Earth Sciences and Geology, and Physics). In preparing the 3,000-word paper (a requirement for humanities courses approved for the core curriculum), each student will be required to locate a mentor in a department and college outside her/his own major.

**Two sets of mentoring guidelines will be used.** The first (student's) set will specify that the student should have decided on a topic, had it approved by the instructor, completed some preliminary research, and worked out a general outline *prior to* seeking a mentor. This will stipulate that the mentor's name, status, and department must be included on the title page of the essay. The second (mentor's) set will specify that the mentor should encourage discussion of the topic, assist the student in clarifying certain points, and suggest other research material that might be pertinent. The mentor's guidelines will make clear that the mentor is *not* expected to read a student's first draft. These guidelines will be available on the course blackboard and at all tutoring sites in both colleges (CLASS and NSM); in addition, each student will be required to supply them to her/his mentor at the initial contact. These guidelines will necessarily include a standard statement of general goals for papers in this course. This is important because mentors may think of their discipline in terms of concepts and analysis rather than narratively.

**Evaluating Course Effectiveness:** Primary evidence of course effectiveness will come from the student research papers submitted. Humanities students will be expected to demonstrate basic science literacy relevant to their topic; science students will similarly be expected to demonstrate competence in understanding science through an alternate methodology (narrative analysis) central to the humanities. Consistent with the interdisciplinary format of the course, students will be expected to locate research in areas outside their major, use them responsibly, and communicate a level of understanding commensurate with the stated educational objectives of the course. A list of approximately 130 items (books and DVD documentaries) has been submitted to the M. D. Anderson Library for purchase to form the core of a growing reserve collection to support the interdisciplinary format of this course.

- C. Delineate how these evaluation results will be used to improve the course.
- (1) Attached to the research essays, students will be asked to submit a brief (5-10 lines) written comment on the effectiveness of the mentoring process.
  - (2) We will also meet with a cross section of those who served as mentors for their analyses of the mentoring process, its effectiveness, and ways to improve it.
  - (3) We intend to conduct a course evaluation (in addition to the standard college evaluation ) that will address the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary approach and the mentoring process, and which allows students to make suggestions for improvement. To obtain full participation, we plan to present this as an in-class

evaluation with a focus on questions that require written (rather than scantron) responses.

- (4) We plan to pay particular attention to student evaluations for their reactions, suggestions, and critiques with a view to improving all aspects of the course: lectures, visuals, readings, the course blackboard, etc. We expect that this will be a continuing process each time the course is offered.

**SVP. Effective 5/2/08. Replaces all previous forms, which may no longer be used.**

**ILAS 3360**  
Fall 2010  
TTh 10-11:30

**COSMIC NARRATIVES**  
Course Syllabus

**Barry Wood**  
bwood@uh.edu

**Catalog Description:** Narrative history of the Universe from its beginnings to the present emphasizing relevance of cosmic narratives to the human situation.

**Preface:** ILAS signifies “interdisciplinary liberal arts and social sciences.” Drawing on the humanities, the course uses narrative as an organizing format for the presentation of the sciences, specifically those that provide a continuous history of the past of the Universe, Earth, and human life. Drawing on the social sciences, the course adopts a narrative organization of knowledge as both cognitively and pedagogically effective for presenting scientific knowledge.

**Required Books (Additional readings—essays, chapters from books, etc.—may be assigned):**

Bill Bryson, A Short History of Nearly Everything (2003)  
Jane Goodall, In the Shadow of Man (1971)  
Donald Johanson, Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind (1981)  
Barbara C. Sproul, Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World (1979)

**Learning through Discovery:** An intercollegiate mentoring plan between CLASS and NSM (endorsed by deans and chairmen in both colleges) requires that students locate a mentor outside their major and college for the preparation of the required 3,000-word essay.

**Acquaintance with Discovery:** Each semester, an important guest who has made a major discovery will be invited to address the class and appear at a public event hosted by the university and supported by granting sources from both CLASS and NSM. Dr. Donald Johanson, Director of the Institute for Human Origins (IHO), will be on campus October 7-8, 2010. In 1974, Dr. Johanson made what stands as the most important discovery of the 20<sup>th</sup> century related to the history of man: the 3.2-million-year-old fossilized skeleton of “Lucy,” the earliest bipedal hominid ever discovered.

**Ten Cosmic Narratives from the Sciences:**

The Narrative of Origins: the Big Bang (physics); parallel myths of origins (literature)  
Galactic Formation (astronomy; physics)  
Stellar Evolution (astrophysics); parallel constellation myths (literature)  
Evolution of the Elements in the Stars (nucleosynthesis)  
Planetary Formation (physics; geology); parallel myths of Earth origins (literature)  
Earth History and Plate Tectonics (geosciences);  
Chemical Evolution (chemistry: physical and organic)  
Emergence and Development of Life (molecular and cell biology)  
Development of Primates and Hominids (anthropology); parallel myths of human origins (literature)  
Human migration: peopling the world (archeology; genetics); parallel migration myths (literature)

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

40 points: five postings to the course blackboard on specific topics based on readings from the assigned texts.  
40 points: tests (probably three) and occasional quizzes  
20 points: based on a visit to the Museum of Natural Science and written response to assigned observational topics: fossils, prehistoric skeletons, life forms, mineral origins, etc.  
100 points: based on a 3000-word mentored research essay

## **Learning Outcomes:**

- (1) Students will acquire a coherent history of the Universe from its beginnings to the present as currently understood within the major sciences.
- (2) Students will acquire basic science literacy: an understanding of the general structure of the Universe, the history of Earth, the rise of life, and the emergence of modern humans.
- (3) Students will understand the narrative organization of knowledge, its cognitive origins, its application in the humanities, and its extension to the presentation of scientific knowledge.
- (4) Students will demonstrate research ability and competence in communicating their discoveries through a logical, objective, coherent, and properly documented research essay.
- (5) Students will demonstrate responsible and ethical principles in their conduct and presentation of research.

## **Policies:**

- (1) Readings: Students are expected to complete the reading of all assigned texts.
- (2) Attendance: Prompt arrival at class and regular attendance is expected.
- (3) Deadlines: Deadlines are set to spread assignments evenly throughout the course, and thus to assure that work can be completed without undue stress toward the end of the course.
- (4) Cell Phones: Cell phones should be turned off. No texting will be permitted during class.
- (5) Laptops: These are permitted for taking notes. Reading/writing e-mail is not permitted.
- (6) Academic Honesty: Honesty in tests, course postings, and research essays is expected according to standards set out in (a) accepted styles (MLA, APA) for responsible presentation of research, and (b) the University of Houston Academic Honesty Policy.
- (7) Incompletes: Incompletes are subject to university policy: they are granted only for students who have completed all required work with passing grades through the first 10-12 weeks of the course but have encountered sudden, unavoidable personal or medical problems that make completion of the course in a timely manner impossible. Documentation supporting claims of crises is required. Incompletes will not be granted as an extension of time to complete assignments beyond the date when grades are due.
- (8) Withdrawals: Withdrawals should occur only after careful review of the overall situation of the student since they are subject to Texas Coordinating Board rules limiting withdrawals to six (6) during an academic career.