

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number 0518F
Date of Senate Approval 11/01/18

Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

APC Document 1 (HUM): **Retitle HUM 414 and revise the course description**

Effective Date: Fall 2019

1. Delete: On page 179, the entry for **HUM 414, The Individual in the Contemporary World:**

414 The Individual in the Contemporary World (4)

Global issues and recent history, both Western and non-Western, building on information gathered and questions raised in the preceding Humanities courses toward a fuller understanding of the responsibilities of and opportunities for humanity today. No credit given if credit received for LA 478. Prerequisites: 75 credit hours and HUM 124, 214, 324; LANG 120. Fall and Spring.

Add: On page 179, in place of deleted entry:

414 Critical Perspectives on Contemporaneity (4)

As a senior capstone course for the Liberal Arts Core, HUM 414 engages the idea of “contemporaneity” as a historical construction tied to certain privileged, longstanding Euro-Western master narratives about the world and different ways of being human. Though it reaches back at various moments to periods explored in HUM 124, 214, and 324, the primary coverage of this course spans the post-World War II period to the present. The course thematically examines an array of present-day historical, socio-cultural, ideological, and political forces impacting diverse human conditions and institutions while also addressing a range of critical responses thereto. Studied reflection about the future is incorporated as well. No credit given if credit received for LA 478. Prerequisites: 75 credit hours; HUM 124, 214, 324; LANG 120. Fall and Spring.

Impact Statement: Neither the proposed renaming of the course to “Critical Perspectives on Contemporaneity” nor the proposed course description revision will have an adverse effect on resources or staffing.

Rationale: The new title proposed for HUM 414 works in conjunction with a broader diversifying effort to rethink the course curriculum in ways that challenge Western master narratives about the world and about what it means to be human. These narratives were elaborated through the matrix of European colonialism and endowed with the authority to misrepresent, silence, or erase other culturally embedded narratives of non-European origin found in Africa, Asia, Polynesia, South America, Central America, North American First Nation societies, and elsewhere. According to Walter Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and others, the lifespan of such master narratives has been extended indefinitely by the multidimensional problem of *coloniality*. The term *coloniality* references perduring asymmetric power relations encoded within modalities of global oppression forged in legacies of colonization that exert an ongoing impact upon every domain of modern life, including education. Importantly, the state of affairs maintained by *coloniality* accords a preeminent normative status to Euro-Western experience.

It can thus be argued that the term “Individual” in the current course title presupposes a subjective Eurocentric experience that directs attention away from other approaches to being in the world that place greater value on, for example, relational community. Furthermore, the term “Contemporary” in the phrase “the Contemporary World” often presupposes a linear progression-based model of thinking about human experience and time that is informed by problematic Enlightenment assumptions about the so-called modern civilized West and its inverse: the premodern, lesser evolved non-West. This makes it harder to effectively introduce non-Western cultural traditions that conceive of human experience and time in a manner fundamentally incompatible with established Western models. The term “contemporaneity” interrupts these assumptions, thereby opening up additional space to explore history itself as a narrative construction and engage a wider variety of disciplinary frameworks, cultural contexts, and critical points of view.

To be clear, the idea here is not to dismiss or wage intellectual war against present-day Western society. Rather, the point is to create more discursive room for marginalized expressions of humanity, which in turn makes possible inclusive critical study and conversation. With this in mind, the proposed course description revision should be understood not as a radical departure from the current description but as a more precise, fleshed out version of it that also builds on some of the language used in the descriptions for HUM 124, 214, and 324. In its modified form, HUM 414 is still very much concerned with “global issues and recent history, both Western and non-Western,” with “information gathered and questions raised in the preceding Humanities courses,” and with pressing “responsibilities and opportunities.”