

LLT 4513: Seminar in Literature: Cultural Representations of Violence - Dr. Jaussen

As an upper-division humanities elective, this course seeks to promote advanced critical reading and cultural literacy among junior/senior undergraduate students by providing a targeted study of a narrow topic in literary criticism. Within the framework of the CURE intervention, the course offers a unique opportunity for students to expand their understanding of research methods across fields; in this case, students used the method of applying theoretical concepts from a variety of humanities disciplines to interpret contemporary cultural representations of violence.

The course was divided into two concurrently running sequences. In the first, the class as a whole read, analyzed, and discussed a variety of key philosophical and theoretical works on the topic of violence, paying particularly close attention to the way in which violence has been represented in art. Topics included the experience of warfare, the role of violence in the state, violence in race relations, and environmental violence. In the second sequence, teams of students used these concepts to analyze the role that violence plays in a contemporary cultural text; case studies ranged from architecture and poetry to graphic novels and podcasts. Students were asked to answer two fundamental questions about their assigned works: First, how does the works under consideration represent and reflect contemporary formations of violence? Second, how might each work offer an example of the problems faced when representing and imagining a particular mode or arena of violence?

Students were required to present their findings in several, cumulative iterations throughout the semester, which made the research projects manageable. First, they presented their initial research to the class during one of the seminar sessions. These presentations required a summary of the historical context of the work, an overview of the work as a whole, an interpretation of the work based on one or more of the theoretical tools we had developed as a class, and the facilitation of classroom discussion of the work. Second, students presented their projects as a poster at LTU's Research Day. Finally, each student composed a final, individual research paper focused on a narrower topic of their own interest.