

# First-Year Seminar Proposal

Office of First-Year Experience  
145 Strong Hall

Please provide the following information using this proposal form. Please submit completed proposals to [firstyear@ku.edu](mailto:firstyear@ku.edu) by September 30, 2013.

**1. Your name, position, department, and seminar title.**

Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Full Professor of English, English Department

“Literature of Social Justice”

**2. Course description.** Please insert a 100-200 word description of your seminar. The description should describe big questions and issues addressed in the seminar, describe why the topic is important, and make it clear how first-year students will relate to and engage with the topic.

Although we tend to think of literary texts as "fictional," that is, made up, entertaining but somehow divorced from the most pressing social and political concerns of our day, literature has in fact had a great deal to say about issues of injustice and oppression. In fact, arguably, one of the best ways to generate awareness and empathy for a situation of injustice is to ask readers imaginatively to step into the shoes of someone who has been oppressed. In this class will examine literature which has addressed situations of political, social, and/or economic oppression or repression with the potential function of enlisting readers' sympathies in a project of social justice. This class will read some prominent examples of 19th, 20th, and 21st-century literary texts dealing with social injustice and the curtailment of human and civil rights. We will address vexed debates surrounding cultural authority and authenticity, identity politics, attempts to represent the voice of the "oppressed," and ethical and rhetorical appeals to an assumed readership. Our larger question will be: what role can literature have in promoting justice in society?

**3. FYS learning outcomes.** How will your seminar address FYS learning outcomes listed on the previous page? Please provide brief description (approximately 100 words) of what these skills will look like in your course and how your course will help students achieve these outcomes.

- **Critical Thinking.** FYS meet Goal 1, Learning Outcome 1 of the KU Core: *Students will be able to analyze and evaluate assumptions, claims, evidence, arguments, and forms of expression; select and apply appropriate interpretive tools:* Students will be asked to analyze literary forms of expression for types of rhetorical and ethical appeals and to evaluate the claims that are made, the form in which they are made, and their possible effectiveness. Students will also be asked to evaluate arguments made in literary scholarship. Assignments will include microtheme papers (for the literary texts) and critical responses (for the scholarly texts), on the way to a final project.
- **Information Literacy.** *Students will develop information literacy skills, including identifying an information need, distinguishing between different kinds of information sources, composing search strategies, and retrieving useful and relevant information.* Class time will be devoted to helping to

develop students' information literacy, including: 1) how to do database searches for appropriate scholarship; 2) how to identify appropriate scholarly sources; how to summarize arguments by distilling the most important information from a scholarly source. A part of the scaffolded assignment structure will include an annotated bibliography.

- **Communication.** *Students will be able to more effectively develop and articulate critical analysis and application through writing, media, and/or oral communication.* Students will develop written critical analyses primarily through their writing (smaller microtheme papers and the larger final project), but will also participate in the development of oral and written arguments through class discussions, oral presentations, and a class discussion blog.
- **Experiential Learning.** *Students will become aware of experiential learning opportunities and ways to extend their learning outside the classroom.* A final project will involve a service learning activity designed by the student (with guidance from me and from the Center for Service Learning) that will be linked to interviews of activists involved in a particular social justice effort or movement.

4. **Integrative assignment.** Each FYS should have an integrative assignment that captures student achievement on the first three FYS learning outcomes. Typically these assignments are completed in stages with support and feedback provided to the students at each stage. Briefly describe an assignment you might use, and how you will know whether students have achieved the outcomes (will you use a rubric or other tools?)

My current idea about the final project is that it would be a critical analysis of the kinds of oral and written rhetoric used by activists today who are engaged in a social justice effort, and it would also be informed by the student's own participation in this effort through some form of service learning. Stages would involve: 1) service learning activity 2) reflection on this activity and its applicability to the class theme, through a class blog 3) annotated bibliography 4) interviews and write up 5) group discussion on interviews 6) drafting of project 7) peer editing of project 8) final project. I would evaluate the goals of critical thinking and communication through rubrics applied to the final project. (Information literacy and experiential learning would be evaluated separately at the earlier stages, also through rubrics.)

*Note. Performance on these assignments will be used by the FYS program to document students' achievement of KU Core goal 1, learning outcome 1, as required by the University Core Curriculum Committee.*

5. **Additional course features** (optional): I will collaborate with the Center for Service Learning to arrange appropriate service learning opportunities that can be effectively integrated with the students' final projects.
6. **Chair endorsement.** Please attach a letter from your department chair indicating approval for you to teach the seminar if selected for fall 2014.