Course Highlights

“Journeys to Hell and the Dark Sublime”

Little pink paper hearts cover the door of Honors College Professor Brian Marks’ office. Part of a Valentine’s Day class project, these “Love Letters from the Pit of Hell” surely put other valentines to shame.

In “Journeys to Hell and the Dark Sublime,” students examine questions about Hell and explore why humans are drawn to the dark sublime.

Professor Marks’ class expands beyond Western notions of Hell and monsters who deal with death.

“I want to examine many cultural representations of the figure of death. In Western civilization we often think of death as a bony dude with a cloak on,” he says with a chuckle, referring to the Grim Reaper.

“In the present there are shards of the past. I like to use the present to look back at the past and the past to see into how we view what is evil, what is horrifying, terrifying, sinful, in different ways.”

In the course, students read chronologically to understand where modern beliefs stem from.

“Dante’s Inferno is an incredibly rich text,” Professor Marks says. “It can seem intimidating, but I hope that it can build a person’s confidence as a reader.”

Kayla Solomon (English Education) appreciates the challenge of the course readings: “the Inferno, was once something indigestible to me, but now I can see the many definitions of evil and amorality in Dante’s time versus in the 21st Century.”

Professor Marks believes that the class is less about the immediate subject matter of Hell and the dark sublime and more about pondering life’s biggest questions collaboratively.

“I’m just as in the dark as anyone else,” he shares, “but I like to talk about things with other people to see their thoughts and perspectives.”

“Indigiqueer Theory and Practice”

In August ’22, Dr. Sharity Bassett began at UWM as Visiting Assistant Professor in Women & Gender Studies and as the American Indian Student Center Manager.

Her “Indigiqueer Theory and Practice” course introduces students to indigenous artists and writers, including Kent Monkman, Lisa Tatonetti, and Audra Simpson, among others.

“When you intersect queer theory with indigenous thought as indigenous queer theorists and artists have,” Professor Bassett says, “there’s more potential to undermine and disrupt settler nation states to the point where we can interrogate some of the heteronormativity that’s part of the soil at this point.”

As part of the course, Professor Bassett has students extend their learning outside the classroom. They are required to attend two co-curricular events on campus related to indigenous topics.

“What I want to do in those two assignments is disrupt the idea that there’s not enough indigenous content on campus because there is,” Professor Bassett shares. “You just have to look for it.”

David Jensen (History) was excited to take the course precisely because he did not know what to expect from the content. He has found the coursework beneficial to learning more about being a member of the Milwaukee community.

“Dr. Bassett asks us to take off the glasses of whatever worldview we bring into the classroom, to understand what those glasses change when we look at the world, and then to try on other glasses,” David says.

Professor Bassett is happy to be teaching “Indigiqueer Theory and Practice” in the Honors College and obviously so are the students. The course filled all open seats within minutes of registration opening.