Critical Speaking Seminar: Echoes of Prophets, Poets, and Princesses in the Arabic Intellectual Tradition
NELC/COML 008-401-Spring 2013

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Class Time-MW 3:30-5:00
Class Location- Williams 438
Office Hours-Tues. 1:30-3:30 William’s Café and by appointment

I. Course Description

Through the power of their voices, Arab poets made and unmade rulers, mobilized armies, and immortalized the deeds of countless individuals. The voice of ’Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, rang out loudly in the political and military affairs of the nascent Islamic Empire. Early debates about the nature of God’s speech led to a violent confrontation between religious and political authorities which shaped their interaction for centuries. In this CWiC critical speaking seminar, we will examine the role of the spoken word in the Arabic intellectual tradition. In particular, we will study its influence on the development of Arabic literature, theories of linguistic signification, the educational system, and identities of different groups. We will study in translation works of Arabic poetry, religious texts, speeches, debates, collections of stories, and works of dialectics. Although we will focus on texts that date from 500 C.E. to 1500 C.E., we will also examine contemporary examples of speech in order to better understand the performative context and continuity between pre-modern and modern traditions of speech in Arabic. All readings are in English and the course presumes no prior knowledge of the topic.

In this CWiC speaking seminar, we will use the course material to improve our speaking and listening skills through class discussions, debates, storytelling, and other types of presentations. The focus on developing our speaking will also bring to life the role of the spoken word in the course material, shed light on dimensions of the tradition that are not generally studied, and demonstrate the continuing relevance of this material as an object of study and appreciation.

II. Course Objectives

Effective public speaking requires a variety of technical skills (voice, physical comportment, effective visual aids), a mastery of the topic and ability to present it, the ability to respond to questions, and confidence. In order to improve your speaking, we will focus on developing the following skills:

1. Analyzing an author’s or speaker’s arguments;
2. Studying different frameworks of historical and literary analysis;
3. Giving coherent, lucid, and polished oral presentations;
4. Developing, defending, and debating positions;
5. Developing critical listening skills and asking succinct questions;
6. Developing an appreciation of the Arabic intellectual tradition.

III. Course Assignments and Grading

Class Attendance and Participation-10%

Reading Comprehension Questions-10%

Weekly Speaking Assignments-20%

CWiC Advisor Meetings-10%

Oral Projects-50%

This is a Communication Within the Curriculum (CWiC) speaking seminar. Most assignments will be oral and conducted in class. Thus, you must attend all classes and participate (you must also attend all formal presentations since part of your grade for these presentations is the questions that you ask and other related activities). Absences for illness, emergencies, and religious holidays must be documented according to University’s policy and you should contact me to inform me about the situation. For every two undocumented absences, the final grade will be reduced by a third of a letter grade. In addition, speaking exercises missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up. For further details on the University’s attendance policy, see:

(http://www.college.upenn.edu/class-attendance)

Participation is about both speaking and listening in class so you can ask pertinent questions and make thoughtful comments to further our exploration of topics. You will receive feedback at the end of every month about your class participation so you can improve throughout the semester.

To foster class conversations and the development of your speaking and reasoning skills you will have the following homework and in-class speaking assignments which account for 30% of your final grade:

a. Reading comprehension questions for each homework assignment which will be collected after each class and graded;

b. Each Monday you will have a speaking assignment which you must prepare at home before class. The assignment will be based on a prompt that will be provided to you on the previous Wednesday;

c. Each Wednesday you will have an impromptu speaking exercise in which you are given a prompt in class and give some time to prepare it.

Submission of comprehension questions a day after class will receive half credit and the after that no credit.
The following two formal oral presentations account for half of the final grade of the course:

- a. Individual presentation of at least 15 minutes on a topic selected in consultation with the instructor;
- b. A group presentation with each member presenting for about five minutes.

To improve your speaking skills, the formal projects will be recorded. You will review these recordings and their grading with me. Although these recordings may be reviewed and shared among classmates, they are private property and should not be distributed or used outside of the class.

An undergraduate speaking advisor will be assigned to this course to help you craft these formal presentations. The advisor has training in public speaking, but is not responsible for the course material (if you are having trouble with the material, please contact me so we can work through any problems together). During the semester, you will meet with your assigned advisor outside of the class for two mandatory one-hour sessions to prepare the projects that I have assigned. You must meet with the course’s assigned advisor at least 48 hours prior to presentation. You may not work with other CWiC advisors for these projects (although you are free to use them for work from other courses during walk in hours). To schedule a session with your advisor use CWiC’s online scheduler:

https://fission.sas.upenn.edu/scheduler/cwic/

The advisor will not help you create from scratch, but he or she will help you refine and craft a better presentation. Therefore, you must prepare before you meet with the advisor. These meetings are mandatory and part of your final grade. Although the advisor does not assign the grade, he or she will communicate with me about each session. Finally, if you do not meet with the advisor and/or prepare, it is unlikely that your presentation will be the high quality production and experience that you want for this class. The CWiC advisors are highly trained experts and fellow undergraduates who are here to help you, so make the most of them.

IV. Academic Integrity
Students must abide by the University’s Code of Academic Integrity, which can be found online at:
(http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html).

The class will address the proper ways to cite material orally, but for online assistance, see:
(http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html).
Any violation of these policies will result in an F for the course and the student will be reported to the University for discipline. If you are having problems with the course or are uncertain about how to handle material in an appropriate manner, please contact me so we can address these issues together.

V. Food and Beverages Policy
Beverages are permissible in class, but food is not since we will be speaking.

VI. Technology Policy
Students may bring laptops and tablets to class to take notes, have their readings, and do in-class activities. However, these devices must be turned off during presentations. Phones must be shut off during class.

VII. Class Schedule and Assignments
The course is divided into four sections: poetry, the Qur’an, prose, and criticism and theory. Each section examines the role and development of the spoken word within each type of discourse.

Required Texts
The required readings are available on Blackboard or Franklin.

Useful Web Resources
CWiC Speaking Website- Has many useful resources on speaking
www.sas.upenn.edu/cwic

Fawaaris- Dickinson Online Arabic Literature Project
http://blogs.dickinson.edu/arabiclitproject/

Tahrir Square Documents-Translation of documents of Egypt's Revolution
http://www.tahrirdocuments.org/

Online @ Franklin
Cambridge History of Arabic Literature- Post Classical Period
Dictionary of Literary Biography: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925
Encyclopedia of Islam
JSTOR
New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics

Jan. 9-Introduction to the Study of the Arabic Intellectual Tradition
Homework

Reading Comprehension Questions @Blackboard
Jan 14- Pre-Islamic Qasida and the Tribe
Homework


Jan. 16- Brigand Poets
Homework


Jan. 21- MLK DAY NO CLASS

Jan. 23 Gender and Sexuality
Homework


Jan 28- Beyond Authenticity to Orality in Pre-Islamic Poetry
Homework


Jan. 30- Urbanization and Changing Aesthetics
Homework


FEB. 4 The Poetics of Legitimacy
Homework


Feb. 6- Commitment and Poetry in the Modern Era
Homework
Suras- 1, 4, 82, 96.

II- The Qur‘ān: Between Poetry and Prose

Feb. 11- Qur‘ānic Discourse
Homework


Q. 7:11-18; 15: 26-34;

Feb. 13- The Qur‘ān, Storytellers, and the Devil
Homework


Feb. 18- The Prophet and Poetry
Homework
Selections for al-Nawawi’s Forty

III. Prose
Feb. 20- The Khabar- The Oral Origins of Written Prose
Homework


Feb. 25 - Misers and Narrative
Homework
Practice Presentation

Feb. 27 - Group Presentation
Homework

Kilito, Abdelfattah. The Author and His Doubles (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001.), 1-33.


Spring Break- Mar. 4 and 6 No Class
Mar 11.- Authorship
Homework


Mar. 13-Identity and Conflict
Homework

Copperson, Michael. *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of Al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107-153.- Online @ Franklin

Mar. 18-Truth and Fiction in Narrative
Homework


Mar. 20- Animal Rights and Courts
Homework


Mar 25. Elite Prose and the Underworld
Homework


Mar 27- Popular Prose Stories


Apr 1- Gender and Sexuality in the Arabian Nights
Homework

Criticism and Theory
Apr. 3 - The Rise of Classical Arabic
Homework


Apr. 8 - Early Legal Theory, Hermeneutics, and Signification
Homework


Apr. 10 - Dialectics as Literature and Criticism
Homework

Prepare in-class debate

Apr. 15 - In class debate
Homework


Apr. 17 - Diglossia and Modernity
Homework

Prepare Final Presentation

Apr 22.-Final Presentation