**EXISTENTIALISM**

**AND**

**LITERATURE**

**MODULE HANDBOOK**

**2014-15**

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**MODULE DESCRIPTOR**

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| **MODULE TITLE** | **EXISTENTIALISM AND LITERATURE** | | |
| **Module Code** | **14-6024-00s** | | |
| **Level** | **6** | | |
| **Credit Points** | **10** | | |
| **Indicative Assessment Components &**  **Percentage Weightings** | **3500 word essay. 100%.** | | |
| **Pre-Requisite Modules**  ***(if applicable)*** | **Any level 5 literature module** | | |
| **Delivered according to Standard Academic Calendar**  YES | **Long:**  **2 semesters**  NO | **Short:**  **1 semester**  YES | **Other delivery pattern:**  *Please specify* |

**1 MODULE AIMS**

This module introduces students to a number of literary texts which have a strong affinity with Existentialist philosophy. Students cover the main areas of interest of Existentialist thought and view these in relation to a diverse range of novels (from Fyodor Dostoevsky to Milan Kundera). The aim of the module is to develop a good understanding of Existentialism and the literature associated with it.

**2 MODULE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**BY THE END OF THE MODULE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO**

1. display knowledge of the key elements in existential philosophy and to illustrate how these have been used in various literary texts
2. relate existential literature to the broader social context
3. relate existential philosophy to the formal characteristics of appropriate literary texts

3 INDICATIVE LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

There is a weekly seminar of one and a half hours. Existential themes and concepts will be introduced in the seminars and discussed alongside the key texts. There is also a web-site devoted to the module. Where possible a guest speaker (or speakers) leads a discussion on some aspect of existentialism and literature.

**4 INDICATIVE MODULE CONTENTS / TOPICS**

The weekly seminars cover the following texts and topics:

* Introduction: ‘What is Existentialism?’
* Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1886)
* Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925)
* Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (1938)
* Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (1942)
* Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others* (1945)
* Saul Bellow, *The Victim* (1949)
* Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984)
* Visiting speakers: (e.g.) ‘Existentialism and Eastern Philosophy’; ‘Existentialism and Psychiatry’

**FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THIS MODULE**

* **FURTHER / ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THIS MODULE, INCLUDING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA DETAILING HOW YOUR PERFORMANCE IN THE MODULE WILL BE MEASURED, HOW YOU WILL RECEIVE FEEDBACK, DETAILS OF LEARNING RESOURCES AND KEY READINGS**
* **THIS INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND IN**

In addition to the above texts students are recommended to buy *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* by Steven Earnshaw (Continuum, 2006) as an introduction to the subject.

The web-site at <http://teaching.shu.ac.uk/ds/sle/e+l/Elprog.htm> includes week-by-week details of the possible areas to be covered in the seminars and links to related sites. It also has suggestions for further reading.

Assessment is by one 3500 word essay. A list of indicative essay titles can be viewed on the above web-site. Students are required to fill in the standard self-assessment forms when submitting their essays. A copy of these forms, with responses and comments added by the tutor is returned to students when they are given their mark for the assignment.

* **NOTE THAT THIS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE FROM YEAR TO YEAR**

**SEMINARS**

**Week 1** Oct 02 Introduction to Existentialism

**Week 2** Oct 09 Introduction to Existentialism

**Week 3** Oct 16 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

**Week 4** Oct 23 Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

**Week 5** Oct 30 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

**Week 6** Nov 06 Albert Camus, *The Outsider*

**Week 7 READING WEEK**

**Week 8** Nov 20 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*

**Week 9** Nov 27 Guest Speaker

Danny Broderick - 'The Eastern Influence' (1.30-3.00)

**Week 10** Dec 04 Saul Bellow, *The Victim*

**Week 11** Dec 11 Guest Speaker

Dr Simon Mullins, ‘Alienation’ (1.30-3.00)

**Week 12** Dec 18 Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

**Module Tutors:**

**Steven Earnshaw, e-mail: s.l.earnshaw@shu.ac.uk**

Neil Miles, email: n.miles@shu.ac.uk

**Assessment is by one 3500 word essay**

**Your role within the module**

The University regulations on attendance state: ‘We assume that you will take responsibility for your own learning and we expect you to attend all classes, as learning is a shared experience and you have a part to play in promoting collective understanding.’ You need to attend lectures and seminars in order to participate fully in the course, to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from your tutors and your peers, and to make your own contribution to their learning. It is also in seminars that assessment feedback will normally be distributed.

You are expected to participate in classes in a way that helps foster a constructive learning environment. This includes arriving on time, reading any set texts in advance of seminars, taking part in class discussions, and treating your colleagues with politeness and consideration.

If you are having problems attending lectures and seminars, you should talk to your module tutor, the module leader, or the course leader.

Make sure you keep up to date with news about the module through the Blackboard site, and that the information in your Student Record is current. Staff will usually try to get in touch with you through your shu.ac.uk email address, so it is important to check this regularly.

**Details of penalties**

* Word counts: questions for coursework assignments will usually specify maximum and minimum word counts. If your essay falls much below the minimum, it may be that you haven’t answered the question fully enough to meet the assessment criteria. If you submit an excessively long piece of work, you should be aware that the examiner is not obliged to carry on reading past the word limit.
* Missing coursework deadlines: the University assessment regulations state, ‘If you do not submit your coursework by the specified deadline this will be treated as non-submission and you will receive a mark of zero for the piece of work.  This may result in you failing the module.’ If you have exceptional circumstances that you think may prevent you from being able to submit a piece of work on time, you need to submit an Exceptional Extension Request Form or an Extenuating Circumstances Form; for details, click the Support & Information tab on shuspace and go to Rules and Regulations.

**Assessment regulations**

It is your responsibility to familiarise yourself with the University’s assessment regulations. To obtain these, click the Support & Information tab on shuspace and go to Rules and Regulations.

You should be particularly aware of the University regulations regarding cheating and plagiarism. These state that plagiarism is ‘where someone tries to pass off another’s work, thoughts or ideas as their own, whether deliberately or unintentionally, without appropriate acknowledgement’. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and will be punished as such.

**Questions**

Answer one of the following questions with reference to novels studied on the course. Your answer should demonstrate a critical grasp of existential thought in literature. You are ‘free’ to devise your own question, or suggest alternative texts, although this must be agreed with the tutor in advance.

1. To what extent is the self a constructed entity in Existentialism?  
  
2. ‘It is only through finitude that life gains meaning’. How accurate is this?  
  
3. Is awareness of ‘existence’ liberating or restrictive?  
  
4. Who or what is the ‘they’, and how does it impinge upon an individual’s ‘visibility’?  
  
5. Is Christian Existentialism an impossibility?

6. How important is phenomenology in Existentialism?  
  
7. Why do writers and thinkers working within the Existentialist tradition find the novel such a convenient means for conveying their ideas?   
  
8. Is Existentialism a predominantly intellectual pursuit?  
  
9. ‘Existentialism has no regard for the needs of society.’ Do you agree?  
  
10. ‘Female characters in existential novels are only included in order to “save” men.’ Discuss.

13. What might psychiatry and Existentialism learn from each other?  
  
14. ‘Eastern philosophy aims to remove the self, whereas Existentialism aims to more firmly establish it.’ Discuss.  
  
15. All notions of responsibility in Existentialism are founded upon being responsible solely to the self. Is this true?  
  
16. Existentialism maintains that we are ‘superfluous’ because we did not bring our selves into being. What are the consequences of this?

17. Under what circumstances are we ‘free’?

18. Does the idea that there is such a thing as ‘human nature’ have any place in Existentialism?

Assessment Criteria

The following is a general guide to the criteria used in assigning marks for **literature and language coursework essays**. For literature essays, you are also advised to consult the self-assessment tick sheet available at the Owen 11 helpdesk. For criteria specific to individual modules, see the relevant module guide.

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| **Mark** | **Content, Structure, Argument** | **Presentation and Writing Style** | **Sources and Citation** |
| 80-100  exemplary | Content is of publishable or near-publishable novelty and significance; structure is clear and coherent; argument is ambitious, sophisticated, and compelling. | Exemplary presentation; almost no errors of typography, layout, or grammar; appropriate, fluent, and felicitous writing style. | Most relevant sources discovered and cited; writer demonstrates coherent mastery of those sources; no errors in citation or bibliography. |
| 70-79  excellent | Content demonstrates substantial independent work; clear and coherent structure; convincing and sustained argument highly relevant to question. | Very well presented work, with few or no errors of typography or grammar; writing style appropriate for an academic essay, and fluent. | A good range of relevant sources discovered and cited; writer handles those sources appropriately; hardly any errors in citation or bibliography. |
| 60-69  proficient | Content demonstrates some independent work; clear, clearly signposted structure; coherent and sustained argument relevant to question. | Well presented work, with few errors of typography or grammar; writing style appropriate for an academic essay. | A good range of academically appropriate sources cited; sources and quotations referenced consistently and accurately. |
| 50-59  good | Content partially or wholly limited to material discussed in class; some effort to structure it; argument present, but possibly simplistic or inconsistent; argument largely relevant to question. | Acceptable standard of presentation; few serious errors of grammar; writing style adequate to convey the meaning. | A range of academically appropriate sources cited, reasonably consistently; quotations and factual claims referenced; adequate bibliography. |
| 40-49  adequate | Content relevant to the module; some evidence of structure; argument partially present. | Adequate standard of presentation; intelligible writing style. | Some academically appropriate sources cited; quotations and factual sources referenced; bibliography present. |
| 30-39  weak | Content relevant to the module. | Poor presentation, possibly including typos and grammatical errors, but intelligible writing style. | Some sources cited; some attempt at referencing quotations and factual claims. Bibliography inadequate or missing. |
| 20-29  well below passable standard | Content not necessarily connected to the module. | Very poor presentation; largely intelligible writing style. | Little or no attempt at citing sources; bibliography inadequate or missing. |
| 1-19  poor | Content largely or wholly irrelevant to the module. | Presentation ignores usual academic style; writing unintelligible. | Little or no attempt at citing sources. |
| 0 No work submitted | | | |