This course examines cultural contact narratives – both 'factual' and 'fictional' – between European 'explorers' of the Arctic and native peoples in the comparative context of European colonialism and emergent literatures, including British, Canadian, Inuit, and Amerindian texts. We will look at the early narratives of European "explorers," as well as at the oral traditions and testimony of native Arctic peoples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will look at the way the Arctic was represented – in panoramas, dioramas, and the illustrated press – with a specific focus on the international interest in the fate of Sir John Franklin's last expedition, which disappeared almost without a trace in the late 1840's. We'll continue through an examination of the way the North is framed by the show-makers of more recent years, with reference both to “documentary” film (Flaherty's Nanook of the North and NOVA’s Arctic Passage: Prisoners of the Ice) as well as feature films (Benoit Pilon’s The Necessities of Life and Zacharias Kunuk’s Atanarjuat). In the final third of the semester, our focus will be on contemporary Inuit life and culture, particularly in the new Canadian territory of Nunavut. We will read a variety of texts both by “Western” and Inuit writers, including Jonathan Krakauer, Kenn Harper, Alooktook Ipellie, Tanya Tagaq, and Lawrence Millman.

**COURSE STRUCTURE**

Due to this being an Early Spring course, with just three weeks to cover a wide range of texts and topics, a significant amount of our work must take place outside of the classroom, including substantial online readings and viewings, films you will need to watch on your own at home, and written responses to each class’s topic. In a sense, this is similar to a hybrid course, with roughly half of our work being done in class, while the rest of our readings, viewings, and discussions will take place online. However, unlike regular-semester hybrids, we will still need to meet on all four scheduled class days each week in order to have enough classroom time to cover the in-person portion of the course. We have a great deal of ground to cover, but my approach here has not been not to condense the work of a semester, but to take advantage of the closer juxtaposition of our subjects to increase the depth and intensity of our engagement. The
effect will, I hope, be to increase our appreciation and understanding of the interconnections between these materials, and between them and ourselves.

For each class meeting, week, beginning with our second class, a response is due on our class blog, located at http://eng261.blogspot.com. These will be written in conversation with the day’s readings and viewings; in many cases there will be specific prompts on the main blog post. Responses should be roughly 1-2 paragraphs in length, and speak as specifically as possible to that day’s assignments. Your response may be framed in the form of a question (to which I or others may respond) or you may choose to respond to or comment on the post of another member of the class. Responses are not graded, but they are counted as the central part of the online component of the course; missing or incomplete responses will have an adverse effect on your grade for the class.

You’ll need to start right at the beginning by having a close look at our blog and its associated links. In order for Blogger, which I use, to work properly, you’ll need to be sure to set your browser’s security to accept cookies from blogger.com. Most of the online readings and viewings are publicly available, but some are hosted by Adams Library and will require that you access them using your RIC credentials. You should finish reading and watching all the materials listed for each class day, and post your response prior to our class meeting. These readings response writings constitute the online component of our class, which is equal in scope and importance to our in-person class meetings. I’d emphasize that this is not a scaled-down version of the regular semester’s class, but one which covers all the same material, but in a more dense and closely-integrated fashion.

Given our short timeframe, we will have just one formal written paper of 5-7 pages in length; this assignment is structured so that you will receive early and regular feedback. I’ll begin by meeting with each of you individually during Week I to help you select and shape your topic. Written will be due at the end of Week II; these drafts will be returned with my comments the following Monday, and the final revised version due no later than Friday at 5 p.m. on Week III. In selecting topics, I will work with you to find a subject that connects, as far as possible, with your course of study at RIC; every field and cultural form (science, literature, film, music) and every professional challenge (education, nursing, social work) exists in the Arctic, and making connections between your own area of work and interest with those same issues up north is strongly encouraged.

REQUIRED PRINT TEXTS (Available at the RIC Campus Store)

Into the Wild, by Jonathan Krakauer
Minik, the New York Eskimo: An Arctic Explorer, a Museum, and the Betrayal of the Inuit People, by Kenn Harper
A Kayak Full of Ghosts, Lawrence Millman
Split Tooth, by Tanya Tagaq

FILMS

Nanook of the North (1922)
Search for the Northwest Passage (2005)
Avaja (2009)
Exile (2010)
COURSE SCHEDULE
(all underlined material is part of the online component of the course)

WEEK I

Monday: Introduction to the course. We’ll go over the structure of the course in detail, step by step. In addition, I’ll give a brief introduction to the geography, cultures, and literature of the Arctic, so that we’ll start with a solid overview of the subject; I’ll also talk about ways that students in every major and every professional school can find and develop connections with the region.

NB: The comment field is at the end of each blog posting. If you use a Google identity, you can automatically tag your posts; you may also simply post anonymously – but in that case be sure to include your name at the end of your post. I also recommend composing your response in a separate file, and then using “paste” to insert it – that way, if there are any technical issues with the posting (remember, your browser needs to be set to accept “cookies” from Blogger), you won’t lose your text. Remember also that you can reply to other students’ posts; when you use the “reply:” function your text will be automatically threaded.

Tuesday: Krakauer, Into the Wild, pp. 1-132. What does it mean to walk “into the wild?” We’ll discuss the strongly contrasting views of Chris McCandless’s story, particularly those of Alaskans. You’ll also be responsible for viewing the 2007 Sean Penn film adaptation at home (it’s available via most major streaming services). Online readings: Krakauer, “Death of an Innocent” (the original article on which Into the Wild was based); David A. James, “Into the Wild, Revisited” (2019).

Wednesday: Krakauer Into the Wild, pp. 133-207 (end). What do we mean when we value acts of exploration? Does exploration sometimes veer into exploitation? And what are the politics and economics of exploration, its individual and social costs? Online Readings and viewings: John F. Kennedy, “Why we choose to go to the Moon”; Gil Scott-Heron, “Whitey on the Moon”; “Cost of NASA’s Space Programs”; Ronald Reagan, Speech on the loss of the Space Shuttle Challenger; Potter, “Exploration and Sacrifice: The Cultural Logic of Arctic Exploration” (all linked via blog).

Thursday: Today we’ll examine the historical, political, and cultural significance of the lost Franklin Arctic expedition of 1845, and how its mysteries have been solved using Inuit oral testimony. In-class film, Search for the Northwest Passage. Online readings/viewings Potter, “The Man Who Ate His Boots”; Arctic Ghost Ship (documentary); Keenleyside et. al., “The Final Days of the Franklin Expedition: New Skeletal Evidence”; Conrad, “Geography and Some Explorers”

WEEK II

Monday. The case of Minik. Minik Wallace was an Inughuit boy who, with his father Qisuk and four others, was abruptly brought from northwest Greenland to New York City by Robert Peary in 1897. They were, studied, poked, and podded by a team of anthropologists that included Franz Boas and A.L. Kroeber, even as all the adults including Minik’s father succumbed to illness. Reading: Harper, Minik, the New York Eskimo. Today and tomorrow, I’ll also be scheduling meetings with all
students before class time to help you develop topics for your paper.

Tuesday: Inuit on Display: Ethnology, Display, Death. From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, dozens of Inuit people were brought to Europe and America in order to appear in World’s Fairs and other public exhibitions, including zoos. What are their stories, and how can we understand the politics of ethnological “entertainments” from this era? Online readings on Nancy Columbia, Rosie Midway Spoon, Abraham Ulrikab, “Prince” Pomiuk, and others; Kenn Harper and Russell Potter, “Early Arctic Films of Nancy Columbia and Esther Eneutseak.”

Wednesday Nanook and its Legacy. For nearly a century, Nanook of the North has stood as the iconic representation of Inuit people, and been acclaimed as both the first, and one of the best, modern documentary films. Yet so much of its story was falsified, or omitted – among these the fact that the Inuk woman playing “Nala, the Smiling One” was filmmaker Flaherty’s mistress. We’ll look at the vexed cultural history of this iconic film. You’ll be responsible for watching the film on your own (it’s in the public domain, and can be found online). Online readings: Flaherty, “How I Filmed Nanook of the North”; Gant, “Good and Bad Eskimos”; Louis Menard, “Nanook and Me.”

Thursday Traditional Inuit Culture. Today we’ll look at a variety of traditional Inuit stories and legends, as well as at the more fanciful take on such stories by the late Inuit artist and writer Alootook Ipellie. Reading: Millman, A Kayak Full of Ghosts. Online reading: Alootook Ipellie, “Self-portrait: Inverse Ten Commandments,” “When God Sings the Blues”; Kimberly McMahon-Coleman, "Dreaming an Identity Across Two Cultures: The Works of Alootook Ipellie." Drafts of final paper due today.

WEEK III


Tuesday: Contemporary Inuit Culture. Reading, Tagaq, Split Tooth. In-class listenings to audio version of Tagaq’s memoir, with throat-singing. Online viewing: Selected videos of indigenous musical artists Tanya Tagaq, Northern Haze, and Nive and the Deer Children.

Wednesday: The question of Arctic sovereignty. In the 1950’s a number of Inuit communities were moved, some say to assert Canadian sovereignty over the High Arctic. Even today, the question of who controls the Northwest Passage continues to vex Canada and its neighbors, even as Russia seeks to expand its zone of influence in the Arctic. Online readings and viewings: Cryopolitics Blog, Excerpt from The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic; Exile (Zacharias Kunuk, 2010); Territorial Evolution of Canada; Community Visit to Grise Fiord.

Thursday: Inuit today. When we say today, we’ll mean right now – in Nunavut, Nunavik, NWT and beyond – looking through online reporting on Canadian territories that have the highest per-capita use of computers and the Web. We’ll also review and sum up our learning experience for the course as a whole. Online reading: Special edition of the Nunatsiaq News: Nunavut Turns 20; current issue of Nunatsiaq News.

Final paper due Friday by 5 p.m.; e-mailed papers are acceptable, but please be sure you’ve received confirmation of its receipt from me.
COURSE EXPECTATIONS

• Each class meeting, week, beginning with our second class, a response is due on our class blog, located at http://eng261.blogspot.com. These will be written in response to our readings; in some cases there will be more specific prompts on the main blog post. Responses should be roughly 1-2 paragraphs in length, and speak as specifically as possible to that week’s readings and viewings. Your response may be framed in the form of a question (to which others may respond) or indeed you may choose to respond to or comment on the post of another member of the class.

• There will be a final, formal, paper of 5-7 pages in length. These papers are open to any topic relevant to our class’s topics, readings, and issues. In particular, I’d encourage you to make your paper relevant to you – nursing majors could write about issues facing nurses and/or public health in Nunavut; social work majors could write about social problems facing Inuit and northerners generally; criminal justice majors could write about crime and punishment in Nunavut. I will meet individually with all students at the beginning of Week II to help you focus your topic and connect you with resources; rough drafts will be due on Thursday of that week, and will be returned at the start of Week III with comments and suggestions for revision.

• MLA style should be used for citations, and a Works Cited list included; there is a link to MLA guidelines on our blog.

• Plagiarism: Please acquaint yourself, if you have not already, with the statement in the College Handbook on this subject. Clear instances of plagiarism will result in an automatic grade of “F,” and all such instances are reported to the Chair of the Department.

• Final grade: The final grade is determined from: Attendance and Participation for in-person class meetings, 30%; participation in the blog and online readings and activities, 30%; final paper 40%. 