



English 772-01: Contemporary American Literature

Fall 2013

TR 1100-1215, Grubbs 312

Instructor Information

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Course Description

America since its invention has been a complicated place, a setting for competition and conflict between differing values and cultures and peoples. In this class we will read contemporary American writers, focusing often on women writers and the roles assigned to women in literature. We will listen to diverse American voices, we will study literary genres and the blurring of genres, and we will discuss the ways literature does—or does not—reflect the complex ways in which we define America in the 21st Century.

Learning Outcomes

In this class, you will:

- Read, analyze, interpret and identify literary texts by various contemporary authors.
- Discuss the role of women writers and the roles assigned to women in literature
- Understand the diverse historical and cultural contexts of American literature.
- Respond critically to works of literature, including situating works within a specific context.
- Engage with themes and ideas found in American literature through writing and class discussions
- Participate in an in-class scholarly dialogue
- Participate in a scholarly community.

Discussion. Taught face-to-face, this class will be centered around the discussion of contemporary literary works. Students should be prepared to discuss the readings and should come to each session with comments and questions on the texts.

Reading. Reading well—reading carefully, reading wisely—is crucial to your success in this class. If at some point you encounter works containing language or situations that make you uncomfortable, please continue reading the material in a mature and scholarly manner. Always feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Teaching Philosophy

This class will be taught face-to-face in several ways—through lecture, discussion, small-group work, and through reading texts aloud. I see reading and writing as skills that can be taught and learned. All my teaching is based on this perspective, a perspective that places the responsibility for success or failure on the individual student. But it is also an extraordinarily liberating perspective, I think, for in a talent-free classroom students can shake off their inhibitions and face what I see as an important truth: that with desire and hard work, anyone can understand a piece of writing, or write a competent essay or short story or poem. The skills of reading and writing are there for anybody to use and to learn. Once they are learned—owned, as it were—they become the personal possessions of the learner. I have many times in my life experienced the transformative power of literature. Though this power is not directly transferable from me to the students, I think it is my responsibility as a teacher to help my students achieve transformation, if they want it, to give them the opportunity to learn these skills, to use these tools, to open their lives to literature and to change. Words have power. Words change lives. And I am in the word business.

Required Texts and Materials

The required texts for this class are:

- Dumanis, Michael, ed. *Legitimate Dangers: American Poets of the New Century*. Sarabande Books, 2006.
- Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Anchor, 2011.
- Granados, Christine. *Brides and Sinners in El Chuco*. University of Arizona Press, 2006.
- Karr, Mary. *The Liars' Club*. Penguin, Revised Edition 2005.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Vintage, 2007.
- McConnell, Patricia. *Sing Soft, Sing Loud*. Logoria Press, 1995.
- Smith, Patti. *Just Kids*. Ecco Press, 2010.
- Trethewey, Natasha. *Native Guard*. Mariner Books, 2007.

Additional readings may be posted to Canvas.

You will also need the following supplies:

- a few standard-sized file folders with pockets
- one or two notebooks
- two bluebooks
- Internet access and an email account
- a stapler
- lots of paper

Grading Policies

Grading

This course will use the standard letter grading scale:

A = 100...90, B = 89...80, C = 79...70, D = 69...60, F = 59...0

Grade Determination

Attendance & Participation	5
Homework & Extra Credit	10
Discussion Leader	10
Paper One	17
Paper Two	20
Midterm Exam	17
Final Exam	21

Due Dates

Discussion Leader	Individual Dates
Paper One	Individual Dates
Midterm	Tuesday, October 8
Paper Two	Tuesday, November 26
Final exam	Tuesday, December 10

Course Topics, Calendar of Activities, Major Assignment Dates**Attendance & Participation**

This is a discussion-based course, and your learning will reflect your level of participation—your knowledge will grow from your questions, your comments, and your ideas. You are expected to attend all classes and participate in discussion, workshops, and other activities.

In-Class Work.

On some class days we will write in class and we will read our writing out loud. You are expected to participate in these activities and in other class discussions and collaborative activities. **ALWAYS BRING PENS (OR PENCILS) AND PAPER TO CLASS.**

Homework & Extra Credit

For each reading assignment, you will write a short (@ 250-word) response and post your response to Canvas. These will be awarded a completion grade, and are designed to help you sort out your thinking about the texts. Extra credit will at times be offered, which can help boost your grade.

Discussion Leader

Each student will lead a class discussion of a reading assignment. It will be important for you to know your assignment very well, and to come up with innovative ways of inspiring discussion among your fellow students.

Paper One

Paper One will be a scholarly study of a particular author. Students will write a paper of @ 2000-2500 words and then make a presentation of @ 20 minutes on that author to the class. Your paper will include a bibliography (specific number of sources to be agreed upon with me) on the writer that makes distinctions between scholarly and popular sources. One week before your presentation, you must have a conference with me. I will expect to see your bibliography, some sources, and your written presentation ideas.

Paper Two

Paper Two will be a research paper of @ 3000-4000 words. You will define and discuss an important aspect of contemporary literature, using the work of more than one author to illustrate your definition. Examples (of somewhat broad) topics include: a specific school of poetry, creative nonfiction, environmental literature, the literature of incarceration, political lit, feminist lit, genre-blurring, minimalism, multi-culturalism, post-modernism, etc. You are encouraged to hand in a rough draft and have a conference about this paper.

Midterm Exam

The Midterm Exam will cover texts discussed in class up to the exam date—that is, poetry and short fiction. You can expect questions dealing with both genres and multiple authors.

Final Exam

The Final Exam may cover any of the texts discussed in class this semester. You can expect questions dealing with all genres and with multiple authors.

Distinguished Visiting Writers

Several writers will be visiting campus this fall to present their work. You are encouraged to attend these events, which will count as valuable extra-credit assignments.

- September 5th: Dr. Stephen Meats, Poet
- October 25th: Simon Ortiz, Poet
- November 21st: Whitney Terrell, Fiction Writer

Conferences

At some point in the second half of the semester I will ask you to make an appointment to come to my office for an in-depth discussion of your reading. But you are, of course, always welcome to come in at any time to talk about your work. In fact, I would strongly recommend that you do!

Tentative Course Schedule

	T	R
1	A20 Organizing/Syllabus Workshop	A22 <i>Sing Soft, Sing Loud</i>
2	A27 <i>Sing Soft, Sing Loud</i>	A29 <i>Sing Soft, Sing Loud</i>
3	S3 <i>Sing Soft, Sing Loud</i>	S5 <i>Brides and Sinners in El Chuco</i>
4	S10 <i>Brides and Sinners in El Chuco</i> Special Guest!	S12 <i>Brides and Sinners in El Chuco</i>
5	S17 <i>Native Guard</i>	S19 <i>Native Guard.</i>
6	S24 <i>Legitimate Dangers</i>	S26 <i>Legitimate Dangers</i>
7	O1 <i>Legitimate Dangers</i>	O3 Poetry from <i>Callaloo</i>
8	O8 Midterm	O10 Fall Break
9	O15 <i>Just Kids.</i>	O17 <i>Just Kids.</i>
10	O22 <i>Just Kids.</i>	O24 FSU—No class
11	O28 <i>The Liars' Club.</i>	O31 <i>The Liars' Club</i>
12	N5 <i>The Road</i>	N7 <i>The Road</i>
13	N12 <i>The Road</i>	N14 <i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i>
14	N19 <i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i>	N21 <i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i>
15	N26 TBA Paper 2 Due	N28 Turkey!!!!
16	D3 TBA	D5 TBA
post	D10 FINAL EXAM	

Additional reading assignments may be posted to Canvas....

Other Pertinent Course Information

Classroom Policies

Syllabus Supplement. Important university policies can be found on the Syllabus Supplement:

<http://www.pittstate.edu/dotAsset/eef4b5e9-4261-43dc-913b-2be85609cbeb.pdf>

Or go to the Registrar's Office page, click on "Forms," and look for the Syllabus Supplement.

Attendance. You are expected to attend class according to the times published in the fall schedule of classes. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late will have their attendance mark reduced by one-half.

Authorized Absences. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. You are responsible for providing evidence to substantiate "authorized absences." If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you are responsible for informing me. Excessive unexcused absences (more than **three**) will result in the final course grade being lowered at least one letter grade. Students who have not attended at all or who have been excessively absent from may be dropped from the course.

Classroom Behavior. I define disruptive classroom behavior as anything that interferes with my ability to conduct the class or as anything that distracts students from the instructional program. This can include sleeping, talking, **TEXTING**, reading the newspaper, or playing with your phone (always remember to turn off your phone when you enter the classroom and **keep it OFF your desk**). Please pay attention. **PLEASE RESPECT YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.** Disruptive or inappropriate behavior can be cause for dismissal from this course; except in the most egregious cases, you will receive a warning.

Food: Please do not inflict your eating habits on the rest of the class!

Incomplete. An incomplete grade may be assigned in rare instances when a student is unable to complete a course due to circumstances beyond his/her control. You must have completed a majority of the coursework to be eligible for this consideration..

Grades. Grades are not negotiable. Your final course grade will be based on your work in the course. If you are concerned about a grade, please see me during office hours or make an appointment.

E-mail and Fax. Because of security issues, I will not discuss grades via email or fax. I will, however, be happy to answer email questions about the readings or assignments.

Academic Integrity

According to the PSU Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities, "Education at the university level requires intellectual integrity and trust between faculty and students. Professors are obliged to master their subject and present as fair an account of it as possible. For their part, students are obliged to make an honest effort to fulfill both the letter and the spirit of course requirements. Academic dishonesty violates both integrity and trust. It jeopardizes the effectiveness of the educational process and the reliability of publicly reported records of achievement."

The Code defines academic dishonesty as "unethical activity associated with course work or grades." This can include:

- Giving or receiving unauthorized aid on examinations.
- Giving or receiving unauthorized aid in the preparation of notebooks, themes, reports, papers or any other assignments.
- *Submitting the same work for more than one course without the instructor's permission.*
- Plagiarism.

For more information on Academic Integrity, please see the Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities:

<http://www.pittstate.edu/audiences/current-students/policies/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-misconduct.dot>

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Office at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/office/eoaa/>

Final Note

When the person who is grading your papers writes a syllabus, or hands you anything that says, “These are my values—this what I’m looking for,” you should always believe them.