

Department of English & Writing Studies

Reading America Now
English 3480G (001)
Winter 2018

Instructor: Prof. Kate Stanley
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AHB 3G12

Office hours: Wed 3:30-5:30 and by appt

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Class Time: Tues 12:30-1:30; Thurs 12:30-2:30

Location: FNB 2220

In this class we will study contemporary American art, music, literature, and criticism. I've selected work that is contemporary in the sense that it was published or released in the twenty-first century (most of it in the past ten years), but also in the sense that it is particularly relevant and responsive to our times. In many cases, the art that is most engaged with its present moment is equally engaged with the past. For that reason, we will periodically pair contemporary readings with historical documents and with canonical texts from American literary history. The course traverses a variety of genres and forms (novels, short stories, poetry, tv series, commencement addresses, essays, photography, visual art, graphic novels, music videos, manifestos, letters)—and includes art that refuses to conform to generic and formal categorization. We will focus in particular on work that has spurred generative cultural conversations around questions of national identity, sexual and racial difference, social and economic injustice, and the significance of media technology.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English

1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or 1042E or 1042E or both of English
1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department.

Objectives:

To develop four skills essential to cultural criticism:

- *Close Reading*: relating form to content; noticing how a given writer evokes a particular feeling, tone, and achieves other literary effects; examining how a work is structured and how the narrative voice positions itself in relation to its subject and its audience.
- *Engaged Discussion*: remaining attentive and responsive to the work we are studying and the conversation it sparks; expressing ideas and questions to classmates (even when our thoughts or questions might still be in process).
- *Clear and Persuasive Writing*: composing ideas into lucid prose that makes a cogent argument supported by textual evidence.
- *Scholarly Research*: engaging with critical scholarship and exploring strategies for entering into ongoing critical discussions and debates around American art and literature.

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Analyze the various means by which contemporary US cultural forms respond to and convey social, political, and aesthetic experiences and aspirations;
2. Express ideas clearly in oral and written contexts using appropriate textual evidence, literary terms, scholarly criticism, theoretical concepts, as well as social, political, and

historical contexts;

3. Summarize and cite secondary sources responsibly, and discuss them productively to generate new interpretations of texts;
4. Frame a generative research question and employ library research methods to investigate possible answers to that question;
5. Situate ideas within the context of an existing critical discussion, develop an original, incisive, and unified argument in an analytical essay, respond constructively to feedback and peer review.

Required Texts

Course Reader – available end of January

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Mariner)

Deadwood (episodes 1 – 5) – available on iTunes for \$3.49 an episode

Ben Lerner, *10:04* (Emblem Ed)

George Saunders, *The Tenth of December: Stories* (Random) – available mid-January

Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (Doubleday)

Methods of Evaluation

Participation	- 15%
Close Reading	- 5% (4 pages)
In-Class Essay	- 15%
Final Paper	- 30% (8 pages)
Final	- 35%

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

Course Requirements & Policies

Participation & Preparation:

Attentive reading and reflective discussion are at the heart of this class. Your attendance, preparation, and participation are essential. Being prepared means you have completed the reading (or viewing), reflected on it, and have come to class with your assigned reading in hand, ready to discuss your thoughts, questions, and any passages that struck you as important.

Absences:

Unexplained absences will adversely affect your participation grade. Students with more than with 3 unexcused absences will receive written warning from the undergraduate chair. **A student with 4 or more unexcused absences risks being barred from writing the final exam, which means failing the course.** An absence will be excused if you supply legitimate documentation to the Academic Counseling office.

Technology:

Laptops are not permitted in class. For special dispensation, please come and talk to me. Please keep your phones away during class.

Late Assignment Protocol:

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Submit your assignment on OWL and bring a hard copy to class. Late essays and assignments will be deducted by 2% per day. Submit late papers on OWL and drop a hard copy in the box outside of AHB 2G02. I go with the date stamp given by the office.

Western Policies and Support Services

Policies related to course work, grades, plagiarism, appeals, etc. are available on the English Department website: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>

Course Selection:

Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded and that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed. If the student does not have the prerequisites for a course, the University reserves the right to remove the student from the course and to delete it from the student's record. This decision may not be appealed and there will be no adjustment to fees paid.

Accommodation:

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All

papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

I am happy to make academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities who have registered with Student Development Services: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>

The Student Development Centre offers resources for students, including one-on-one tutoring sessions to help with writing: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>

Reading Schedule

You are expected to have done the assigned reading prior to the first class in which a work is being discussed. You are required to bring hard copies of assigned readings to class.

(R) = Course Reader

9 Jan – Introduction

I. American Empathy

11 Jan – Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*

16 Jan – *Underground Railroad* cont.

18 Jan – *Underground Railroad* cont.

– Criticism: To be distributed

23 Jan – finish *Underground Railroad*

25 Jan – Watch: *Deadwood - Episode 1 & 2*

– 1 Corinthians 12-13 (Hand-out)

– Criticism: “The Misfit,” from *The New Yorker* (Hand-out)

30 Jan – Watch: *Deadwood - Episode 3*

– John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”

1 Feb – *Deadwood - Episode 4 & 5*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson, from “Nature” (Hand-out)

- 6 Feb – George Saunders, “Commencement Speech” (2013); “Victory Lap,” from *Tenth of December*
- 8 Feb – Saunders, “Tenth of December”; “Escape from Spiderhead”, from *The Tenth of December*
Listen: Saunders on Bookworm
- 13 Feb – Saunders, “The Semplica-Girl Diaries,” from *The Tenth of December*
– Criticism: TBA
- 15 Feb – Saunders, “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” (R); “Trump L’Oeil” (R)
IN-CLASS ESSAY
- 20 Feb – Reading Week
- 22 Feb – Reading Week

II. *American Witness*

- 27 Feb – Ben Lerner, *10:04*
- 1 Mar – *10:04* cont.
– Criticism: Marta Figlerowicz, “10:04/10:05”
- 6 Mar – finish *10:04*
- 8 Mar – Juliana Spahr – “Poem Written after September 11, 2001,”
“November 30, 2002,” “December 1, 2002,” “December 2, 2002,” “January 13,
2003,” “January 20, 2003,” “January 28, 2003,” from *This Connection of
Everyone with Lungs* (R)
– Criticism: Heather Milne, “Dearly Beloveds: The Politics of Intimacy in Juliana
Spahr’s *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*”
- 13 Mar – Spahr, “Gentle Now, Don’t Add to Heartache” (R)
– Criticism: Margaret Ronda, “Mourning and Melancholia in the Anthropocene”
(R)
- 15 Mar – Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*
- 20 Mar – *Fun Home* cont.
- 22 Mar – finish *Fun Home*
– Criticism: TBA
- 27 Mar – PAPER WORKSHOP
- 29 Mar – Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to my Son” (R), “The First White President” (R)
– James Baldwin, “Letter to my Nephew” (R), “The Creative Process” (R)
- 3 Apr – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Dear Ijeawele, Or a Feminist Manifesto in
Fifteen Suggestions” (R); from *We Should All Be Feminists*
– Watch: Beyonce’s “Lemonade,” Superbowl Half-Time Performance, “Flawless”
– Criticism: TBA
- 5 Apr – Beyonce cont.; REVIEW