

Department of English, Western University
English 9108
Indigenous Critical Theory: Key Concepts and Debates
Fall 2014 and Winter 2015

Contact Information:

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Class Meetings: Tuesdays from 3:30 – 6:20 p.m. in University College 377
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 12:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Course Description:

In her groundbreaking work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith considers the historical forces and power asymmetries that have created a hegemonic intellectual “text world in which the centre of [...] knowledge is either in Britain, the United States, or Western Europe” (Smith 35) and, moreover, where theory is naturalized as the invention and provenance of the West. Ironically, at the core of much Western thought, Indigeneity constitutes the sometimes repressed and sometimes overt catalyst for theorization—the figure of radical alterity, the bearer of “the gift,” the carrier of knowledge to be colonized for the West’s own self-reinvention. This graduate seminar is premised upon the urgent need to do more than re-trace the spectres of Indigeneity in Western thought or even examine the West’s unacknowledged debt to Indigenous intellectual culture. Instead, the course will challenge the limits of academic theory’s traditional “text world” by engaging with the transdisciplinary field of contemporary Indigenous thought, a field in which Indigenous peoples are the agents, instead of the objects, of theory. In so doing, the course will lay a critical foundation for understanding key concepts and debates in the field of Indigenous studies.

In this context, the course will grapple with the following questions: How might we engage with Indigenous theory beyond paradigms of “writing back” or “theorizing back” against Empire? What is the relation between theory and practice? How might theory be mobilized to better address Indigenous rights and social justice? How do a range of Indigenous cultural practices constitute forms of theorizing and how might we read them for their theoretical innovations? In exploring these and other questions, the course will consider how both thinking Indigeneity and Indigenous thinking enable important critical reappraisals of questions of identity, subjectivity, temporality, sovereignty, citizenship, and power. While the emphasis will be on Indigenous thought and cultural production in Canada and the United States, the course will also consider broader global concerns and contexts.

Course Materials:

- Electronic copies of all readings are available on a USB key in Leanne Trask's office

Assignments:**Fall Semester:**

- One 30-40-minute seminar presentation and subsequent leading of class discussion. **[15% of final grade]**
- One conference paper proposal (maximum of 500 words). **[5% of final grade] Due November 6th, 2014**
- One 9-page (double-spaced) conference paper. **[20%] Due December 19th, 2014**

- Participation in class discussion (please see guidelines described below). **[10% of final grade]**
Note: For students who may be nervous about participation in class discussion and/or who wish to receive feedback on their writing and critical thinking skills earlier in the first semester, students may opt to split their fall participation grade into 5% for general participation and 5% for one 2-3 page response paper to a week's assigned readings. Students may choose the particular week of readings that they wish to write their response paper for, but the week must not coincide with the date of their seminar presentation. For further information, please see guidelines for participation and response papers below.

Winter Semester:

- Participation in class discussion. **[10% of final grade]**
- One 30-40 minute seminar presentation and subsequent leading of class discussion. **[15% of final grade]**
- One original research paper **[25% of final grade]**

Note: For this final assignment, students may opt to write a new research paper of approximately 20 pages in length OR to revise their conference paper into a journal article of 24-25 pages in length. If students opt for the latter, their assignment must include a 250-word abstract that accompanies the article as well as a one-paragraph rationale discussing the "fit" between their work and the peer-reviewed scholarly journal to which they would hypothetically submit their essay.

Guidelines for Class Participation:

- The participation grade for each semester will take into account attendance and attentiveness in class meetings, evidence of preparedness for class (i.e. demonstrated detailed engagement with the readings, questions about readings brought to class), as well as the quality of verbal contributions to class discussion.
- Students should have carefully read and thoughtfully engaged with the assigned readings prior to class.
- At the graduate level, students are encouraged to assume the stance of professional learners—ones who have the critical maturity to be open to broadening their intellectual horizons and to engaging with a diverse range of scholarship.
- Effective participation in a graduate course involves being open to asking questions about things one doesn't understand, thoughtfully engaging with the course readings, remaining attentive and carefully listening to the comments of other class participants, and debating ideas with respect and sensitivity to both the subject matter and all participants in the discussion.

- The quality of a student's contributions is more important than sheer quantity, though speaking regularly in class is a goal to work towards. At the same time, effective participation in a seminar course also, in certain cases, means learning when one has contributed enough to a particular discussion and providing opportunities for others to share their thoughts.

Guidelines for Response Papers:

- Should students decide to split their fall participation grade into two components, a 2-3 page written response paper to assigned readings should be submitted via email (as Microsoft Word or RTF attachments) to pwakeham@uwo.ca no later than **24 hours** prior to the weekly class. Response papers for the assigned readings for the week will not be accepted after this deadline. Students are able to choose which weeks they would like to submit their responses. Please note, however, that students are not eligible to submit a written response paper during the week they are responsible for presenting a seminar.
- The goal for these papers is not to offer a comprehensive summary of all the points expounded in the readings. Instead, the responses should succinctly outline the main argument of each assigned reading for the week (where applicable) and then proceed to critically analyze the texts and draw connections or reflect on points of divergence between them. In this sense, the goal is to put the assigned readings for the week together in critical conversation. Students might also wish to raise a question or two for further thought or discussion.

Guidelines for Seminar Presentations:

- Seminar presentations should succinctly and briefly outline the arguments developed in the critical essays and analyze key themes and strategies of the readings assigned for the day. **A strong presentation, however, must go much further than merely rehearsing the articles' arguments or the basic plot and structures of a cultural text.** Seminar presentations must engage thoughtfully and critically with the readings, analyzing the connections and points of divergence between the texts as well as reflecting upon the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments. In other words, a seminar presentation **should have an argument**—a nuanced and thoughtful analytic position on the readings/cultural texts assigned for the week. Linking the readings to previous texts studied in the course and/or previous class discussions is also a useful strategy.
- Presentations should also consider how the arguments expounded in the readings could be developed further and, most importantly, how the texts relate to the broader questions under investigation throughout this course. Lastly, presentations should conclude with at least two thoughtful and engaging questions for class discussion.
- Please also note that your presentations will be timed, so you cannot exceed the 40 minute maximum. This is to ensure fairness for all students and to create a comparable basis upon which seminars can be evaluated. In keeping with this point, the seminarist should present his/her work and then questions and discussion will ensue after the presentation.
- After the presentation, the seminar presenter will also be responsible for leading the ensuing class discussion for about 15 minutes.
- Students will be asked to submit a hard copy version of their seminar presentation notes (whether they be just point form notes or a scripted paper) to the Professor on the same day that their presentation is given orally.

- Students are allowed to consider a creative dimension for their seminar presentation. If students wish to use this option, however, they must meet with the Professor and obtain approval for their specific ideas at least two weeks in advance of their presentation.

Conference Proposals and Papers

- Because this is a full-year course, we have the wonderful opportunity to consider a greater variety of assignments than what may be included in typical graduate seminar fare. Additionally, we have time to consider how to combine our intellectual ideas with the honing of professional academic skills, including the writing of conference paper proposals and presentations. The guidelines below offer some important considerations for these modes of sharing intellectual work. Further discussion of these genres will also be provided in class.

- **Conference paper proposals** should not exceed 500 words. The task of introducing a topic and then specifying your argument in such a concise amount of words is a fine art. This assignment will help provide students with skills and experience in negotiating this academic genre.

- The proposal should include the following:

a.) A title that is specific enough to provide readers with key terms, texts, and/or contexts discussed in the paper.

b.) A succinct introduction to the topic that tells readers about what time period and geopolitical and cultural locations your paper addresses and the research questions or key concepts that your analysis takes up.

c.) A brief mention of your methodological approach and why/how it is important and useful.

d.) A clear and compelling articulation of what your hypothesis is (i.e. what you hope to argue or demonstrate in your paper).

- **Conference Papers** should be no longer than 9 double-spaced pages (which typically amounts to 20 minutes of reading time).

- The paper should include the following:

a.) An engaging introduction that provides the listener with the key coordinates necessary for understanding and appreciating your argument: the time period, geopolitical and cultural contexts, and research questions or key concepts for your paper.

b.) A recognition of existing scholarship on the topic and a delineation of how your paper intervenes in and/or extends current debates.

c.) A clear and compelling argument that is outlined toward the beginning of the paper and then further developed and supported throughout.

d.) Effective “sign-posting” or techniques for providing the listener with a map of where your paper is going and how you are getting there.

e.) Methods of engaging a listening audience. Conference papers are typically written with a view to effective oral communication. As a result, very long sentences that might be effective in written essays should be broken down into multiple sentences. Oral cues can also be included to provide readers with “signposts” or a sense of where the paper is at and where it is going throughout.

Important Information Regarding Assignments:

- Any assignments submitted after the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments (with the exception of the weekly reading responses) must be submitted in hard copy. Email and faxes will not be accepted.

- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged with the Professor in advance.
- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5 x 11” paper, with 1” margins, double spaced, and in a 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman). The title page should include the following information: the title of the essay, your name, the course number, and the date.
- Please retain one hard copy and one electronic version of each essay you submit in this class. As well, please retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation and essays should be accompanied with a Works Cited page.

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 the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf
- It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If a writer uses a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations (or verbal explanation in the case of seminar presentations).

Schedule of Readings

Please Note: The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the schedule throughout the course of the academic term. Any changes will be announced in class and students will be responsible for making note of such amendments.

Fall Semester

September 4: Introduction

Unit 1: Critical Foundations

This first unit lays out conceptual and contextual groundwork for the course, introducing key terms and debates for Indigenous studies. In this vein, we will consider the following questions: What does it mean to speak of “Indigeneity”? What does it mean to “do” “Indigenous Studies”? Moreover, this unit proceeds with the belief that Indigenous studies must be crucially informed by and responsive to the historical and contemporary contexts of Indigenous peoples in the settler states in which we live and work. This unit thus maps the connections between theoretical concepts and crucial events in Canada over the past two and a half decades. How do such contexts inform questions of Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous rights in contemporary Canada?

September 11: What Is Indigeneity? What is Theory?

Sean Kicummah Teuton, “Introduction: Imagining an American Indian Center” (the complete chapter is included, but students are only required to read pages 11-33)

Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, “Introduction” to *Theorizing Native Studies* (the complete chapter is included, but students are only required to read from pages 1-12)

Sherman Alexie, “How to Write the Great American Indian Novel”

Marvin Francis, “BNA Actor”

Supplementary: For students who are not familiar with the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada as well as the history of colonialism in this region, a PDF file of Jo-Ann Episkenew’s chapter “Policies of Devastation” from *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* is available on the USB key. I am also happy to recommend additional sources upon request.

September 18: Settler Colonialism

Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”

Lorenzo Veracini, “Introduction: The Settler Colonial Situation”

Eden Robinson, “Terminal Avenue”

September 25: Settler Colonialism’s Social Contexts in Canada Since 1990, Part I

Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (available for viewing in UC’s film library as well as through the Weldon library catalogue’s link to NFB access)

Ellen Gabriel, “Epilogue: Fraudulent Theft of Mohawk Land by the Municipality of Oka”

Peter H. Russell, “Oka to Ipperwash: The Necessity of Flashpoint Events”

October 2: Sovereignty

Laurelyn Whitt, “Transforming Sovereignties”

Jessica R. Catellino, “Sovereign Interdependencies”

Thomas King, “Borders”

Supplementary: For a clear and helpful summation of key debates regarding Indigenous sovereignty, please read the preface and dialogue on “Understanding Aboriginal Sovereignty” from *Philosophy and Aboriginal Rights* scanned as a single PDF file)

October 9: Indigenous Identity and Recognition in Contemporary Settler States

Glen Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts”

Andrea Smith, “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity”

October 16: Settler Colonialism’s Social Contexts in Canada Since 1990, Part II

Alanis Obomsawin, *The People of the Kattawapiskak River* (available for viewing in UC’s film library as well as through the Weldon library catalogue’s link to NFB access)

Jennifer Henderson, “Transparency, Spectatorship, Accountability: Indigenous Families in Settler-State ‘Postdemocracies’”

Leanne Simpson, “A Love Song for Attawapiskat” (Please listen to the audio version of this poem online at <http://www.arpbooks.com/islands>)

October 23: Economies of Abandonment in Late Liberalism

Ursula LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

Elizabeth Povinelli, “Introduction: The Child in the Broom Closet” (the complete chapter is provided, but students are only required to read from pages 1-29) and “Events of Abandonment”

October 30: Class Cancelled due to Western’s Fall Study Break

Unit 2: Indigeneity, Identity, Embodiment: The Micropolitics of Settler Colonialism and the Decolonization of the Everyday

Having considered some of the macro-political contexts of settler colonialism and Indigenous studies in unit 1, this new unit now zooms in on the “micropolitical”—the more intimate experiences, affects, sensibilities, and conditions of everyday life that both shape and are shaped by Indigeneity. What does it mean to think about indigeneity as embodied experience without succumbing to the binds of biological determinism? How are questions of gender and sexuality articulated to experiences and constructions of Indigeneity? How has Indigenous critical thought as well as Indigenous literary and cultural production grappled with the colonial regulation of Indigenous gender and sexual identities? How, also, might Indigenous studies and Indigenous cultural production play a role in revivifying alternative gender and sexual identities for Indigenous peoples? How do Indigenous intellectuals and artists imagine the body, erotics, intimacy, the family, and kinship? Which of these terms are commensurable with Indigenous ways of knowing and which may be colonial impositions?

November 6: Theorizing Resurgence as a Practice of Everyday Life

Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism”

Leanne Simpson, “Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought”

November 13: Indigenous Feminisms

Joyce Green, “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism”

Cheryl Suzack, “Emotion Before the Law”

From *The Indian Act*

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, “(a found poem)”

November 20: Heteropatriarchy and Gendered Violence

Marie Clements, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

Marie Clements, “In the end you are made accountable”

November 27: Indigeneity, the Family, and Kinship

Julia Emberley, “The Family in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Aboriginality in the Photographic Archive”

Mark Rifkin, Introduction to *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*

Beth Brant, “Swimming Upstream”

December 4: Queer Indigeneities

Scott Morgenson, “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities”

Qwo-Li Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies”

Kent Monkman’s art: view the images on the powerpoint slide and visit kentmonkman.com

Winter Semester 2015 (Schedule still subject to change)

Unit 3: Theory and/as Critical Practice

Building on the critical foundations established in the fall semester, our course now turns toward examining strategies for mobilizing and further refining theory through critical practice. In so doing, this unit will consider the following questions: What challenges and ethical questions are crucial to consider when researching and writing about topics related to Indigenous peoples? How might research be re-imagined and practiced differently to counter, rather than perpetuate, colonial power structures? How does intellectual work relate to questions of sovereignty, decolonization, and justice?

January 8: Class Cancelled. Professor Presenting at the MLA Annual Conference

January 15: Decolonizing Methodologies

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Introduction” and “Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects”

Leanne Simpson, “Please Be Careful When You’re Getting Smart”

Gregory Scofield “The Dissertation”

January 22: Decolonizing Methodologies and Research Ethics

Margaret Kovach, “Creating Indigenous Research Frameworks” and “Applying a Decolonizing Lens within Indigenous Research Frameworks”

Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 9)

January 29: Envisioning Alliance through Critical Practice

Harsha Walia, “Decolonizing Together: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization”

Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, “#IdleNoMore: Settler Responsibility for Relationship”

Adam Barker, “From Adversaries to Allies: Forging Respectful Alliances between Indigenous and Settler Peoples”

January 29: Class Conference!

- Students will present their 20-minute conference papers followed by 10 minutes of questions and discussion per paper

Unit 4: Theory and/as Critical Practice, Part II: Critical Approaches to Literary and Cultural Studies

After surveying the questions raised in unit 3 in broad terms, this unit turns to consider more deeply a range of decolonizing approaches to humanities-based research in literary and cultural studies. In so doing, we will consider how the work of reading and literary-critical interpretation is shaped by cultural perspectives—often those of Western academia. To

formulate more attentive and nuanced strategies for reading Indigenous literary and cultural production, therefore, this unit will put the categories of “literature” and “poetics” under critical pressure and work to formulate more multi-faceted understandings of Indigenous practices of storytelling, poetics, and culture, broadly construed. Through engagement with a range of genres, methodologies, and critical debates, we will consider the following questions: In what ways might Indigenous literary and cultural studies attend to the specificities of distinct Indigenous cultures? How might Indigenous literary and cultural studies address global influences and exchanges? How might Indigenous practices of storytelling complicate Western generic boundaries and raise important questions about the relation between written text, speech, and other forms of cultural and artistic expression?

February 5: Cultures of Storytelling

Brian Maracle, “The First Words”

Thomas King, first chapter of *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*

Note: You can also listen to an audio recording of King on the CBC website

(<http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/massey-archives/2003/11/07/massey-lectures-2003-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative/>)

February 12: Native Literary Nationalism

Craig Womack, “Introduction: American Indian Literary Self-Determination”

Kristina Fagan et. al., “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?: Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts--A Collaborative Interlogue”

Lee Maracle, “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style”

February 19: Reading Week, No Classes

February 26: Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies

Chadwick Allen, “Introduction” to *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*

March 5: Class Cancelled. Professor in Ottawa for Service on a SSHRC Committee

March 12: Literary-Critical Approaches in Practice

Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*

G. Thomas Couser, “Tracing the Trickster: Nanapush, Ojibwe Oral Tradition, and *Tracks*”

John McWilliams, “Doubling the Last Survivor: *Tracks* and American Narratives of Lost Wilderness”

March 19: Indigenous Poetics

Neal McLeod, “Introduction” to *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*

Gregory Scofield, “Poems as Healing Bundles”

Lee Maracle, “Indigenous Poetry and the Oral”

Lindsay “Eekwol” Knight, “Revitalizing Indigenous Swagger: Poetics from a Plains Cree Perspective”

Eekwol, “Apprento”

Warren Cariou, “Edgework: Indigenous Poetics as Re-placement”

March 26: Troubling Tricksters

Kristina Fagan, “What’s the Trouble with the Trickster? An Introduction”

Margery Fee, “The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada”

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, “Trickster Beyond 1992: Our Relationship”

April 2: Storytelling, Orality, and Cinema

Zacharias Kunuk, dir. *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* (this film should be viewed prior to class at:

<http://www.isuma.tv/atanarjuat>)

Sophie McCall, “‘I Can Only Sing this Song to Someone Who Understands It’: Community Filmmaking and the Politics of Partial Translation”