

English 9003
Contemporary Theory
in Literary and Cultural Studies
Fall 2021

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-3, Thursday 10-12 (or by appointment)

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The course meets Tuesdays, 3:30-6:30 in UC 4415

Course Description

This course will provide a survey of contemporary theory and some of its precursors in twentieth-century thought. It will focus on a number of distinct though often related critical schools or movements, for example, Structuralism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, New Historicism, Queer Studies, Cultural Studies, and Post-Colonial Theory. The readings for the course have been chosen to introduce some of the terms and concepts that have become critical touchstones for many scholars in literary and cultural studies, while the assignments will provide students with the opportunity to study theory as an object of analysis in its own right.¹

The course assumes no specialized knowledge of the field. For some students, it will serve as an introduction to the significant influence that theory has had on the ways in which we read and interpret literature and culture; for others it will be a chance to renew and deepen their knowledge of particular critics and approaches. Throughout, our goal will be not only to provide students with some of the basic methodological tools that they will need in graduate studies, but to foster a spirit of self-reflexive inquiry into what we read and how we read it.

Assignments

Final Paper (50% of final grade; due December xx??)

5,000 words. The final essay for the course should engage critically with one or more schools or theorists on the syllabus or with a theorist or field of theory not covered in class. Consult me before deciding on the topic, in any case, but all the more so if you plan to select a topic not covered in class. The essay might invoke some literary precedents or implications of the theory you discuss, but it should not be a reading of a literary text. Rather, it should attempt to read the theory under discussion, to explore its stakes, implications, limits. I encourage you to explore a field you have *not* taken up in your seminar; should you decide to write further on a topic covered in your seminar, however, the final paper must not only expand upon, but diverge substantially from, it. The essay should be thoroughly researched and refer to the relevant literature on the topic you cover.

Seminar (25%)

25-30 minutes. The seminar will take up a text assigned for the week's reading. The point of the seminar is, first and foremost, to lead the class through the text, to help us understand it and

its implications. But it should also engage with the text or texts critically, to explore their context, for example (in the author's work, in its relation to broader trends in theory). How, for example, does Lacan take up and respond to Freud? The seminar might explore also blind spots in the text under discussion, as well as probe its possibilities and limitations.

One week after the seminar, you are to submit a written version of the seminar. This should not merely be a transcript of the seminar, but rather its rewriting into a short essay, complete with proper documentation.

Response Essay (15%; due in class October 26)

5 pages. In this essay, you should engage critically with one text on the course, taking a position in relation to it.

All written assignments must be documented according to MLA style.

Participation (10%)

The participation grade will assess the quality of your engagement in and contribution to the seminar. As such, it is not a measure of loquacity but rather of preparation, thoughtful and helpful interventions in class, attention to and engagement with the seminars and to class discussion more generally. Should you miss **more than 2 classes** without documented illness or compassionate grounds, you may forfeit this portion of the course grade.

Scholastic 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
Academic Handbook, Exam, Course Outlines Page 4
Issued: 2011 02

You may be asked to submit an electronic version of any word for submission to Turnitin.com.

Required Texts

All texts for the course will be available as photocopies and on a flash drive. There are a number of reliable guides to the theoretical movements and figures covered in the course. I strongly encourage you to consult them alongside the weekly readings.