

English 200: Foundations of Literary Study
or, How to Read Like an English Major and Why
Spring 2011 // T, Th 11:30-12:45

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305 Colson Hall
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Office Hours: T 2-4 or by appointment

Description:

At the heart of the English major is the study of language, particularly (but not exclusively) in literary form. As you begin this process of in-depth study of language and literature, you will find that the tools you need to unfold a text are not the ones you've used in the past, and so this course is designed as your basic toolbox, one to equip you with the reading skills and many of the writing skills that you'll call upon often in your course of study.

We'll discuss the basic genres of poetry, narrative prose (usually fiction), and drama, and we'll develop a basic vocabulary to use for each of these as a way of reading closely, thoughtfully, carefully, and flexibly. At the same time, we'll discuss ways to incorporate those skills into your writing, so that once you've reached that next level of understanding about a text, you can communicate your understanding to other readers who might just be illuminated by your conclusions.

This course is new in the 2010-2011 school year, and is a cornerstone (literally: "Foundations of Literary Study") to the newly re-designed major as the English department has conceived of it. While our objectives primarily regard those tools for reading and writing about literary and cultural texts that you'll use in the courses that will follow, we'll also take time to talk about the major itself, and the education that you are planning for yourself. Consider this a welcome not only to the study of the major, but also to the community of the English department as well.

Objectives:

I have many objectives for the course, outcomes I hope that you will achieve by the end. Some are set by the department, some are additions that I particularly emphasize:

- Identify and analyze conventions of literary discourse, structure, and style as they occur in different literary genres, utilizing relevant vocabulary and skills.
- Utilize tools of close reading and thick description in order to summarize, paraphrase, analyze, and cite literary and cultural texts.
- Analyze how texts function in light of author, audience, and historical contexts.
- Using processes specific to the discipline, perform research to generate relevant evidence.
- Plan, organize, and write thesis-driven arguments that interpret literary and cultural texts.
- Ask probing questions about texts, and move beyond simply reading the surfaces.
- Take risks with their arguments, understanding that the safest interpretations of a text are often the most obvious and therefore the least interesting ones.
- Remember that literary study is driven by curiosity, intellectual interest, and the simple power of ideas—above all, this should be interesting, engaging, and even (gasp!) fun.

Required Texts

(WEL) Acheson, Katherine O. *Writing Essays about Literature*. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2010.

(LE) Beiderwell, Bruce, and Jeffrey M. Wheeler. *The Literary Experience: Essential Edition*. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009.

Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Venus*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1998.

Additional short texts will be available on eCampus by pdf, and are marked in the syllabus as ***.

Please print it out to have available on the days it is assigned. In fact, please bring all assigned reading to class. Arriving in class without the reading material is like coming without your brain.

Assignments

150 pts. for Participation: Much of this class will revolve around the free and ample exchange of thoughts, ideas, and feedback of each member of the classroom community. Therefore, be prepared for class, having done the reading brought the materials, and ready to talk and listen respectfully, thoughtfully, and seriously. OK, not always seriously, but mostly. Participation will be graded in three 50-point increments on 2/8, 3/15, and 4/22

300 pts. for The Commonplace Book: The commonplace book is a compendium of assigned exercises, self-guided creative exercises, excerpts of literary texts that you find and love, and other miscellaneous flotsam and jetsam from across the semester. Save everything. Keep it here.

200 pts. for Close Reading Paper: This 4-6 page paper will concentrate on closely analyzing the specific words, images, figurative language, rhythm, rhyme, and structure of a single poem to unearth a central theme of that text.

50 pts for Process Assignments for Final Paper: includes a proposal, 7-10 work bibliography, and 2 source annotations leading up to your final paper for the class. Details will come with the Final Paper Assignment.

300 pts. for the Final Paper: This 7-10 page paper will advance an original argument about a text I will hand-pick and assign to you. It will incorporate close reading, research on historical context, and engagement with other literary criticism to make an interpretive analytical argument about that text.

Total possible points= 1000

Grading Scale:

A+ = 965-1000 points

B+ = 865-899 points

C+ = 765-799 points

D = 600-699 points

A = 935-964 points

B = 835-864 points

C = 735-764 points

F = 0-599 points

A- = 900-934 points

B- = 800-834 points

C- = 700-734 points

Format for Papers:

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria: typed or word-processed, Times New Roman 12-point font (or equivalent), double-spaced, 1-inch to 1.25-inch margins, spell-checked, page-numbered, and finally, stapled or paper-clipped. Please head your papers with your name, the date, the course, my name, and the word count, followed by a (creative) title that is centered above your essay. Submissions that do not meet these requirements may be returned to the student to be resubmitted. Please note: I am seriously troubled by students who fiddle with the physical appearance of the paper so as to achieve the illusion of length. This belief assumes no difference between quantity and quality, an assumption that is incorrect. A paper that is presented in an honest way will earn far more respect.

- Grades on all assignments will drop 10% of their point value for every weekday they are late.
- Work handed in more than one week past the due date will automatically be graded F (50% of their point value).
- Work handed in more than 2 weeks past the due date will earn zero points.
- A paper is not considered turned until I have a hard copy in my hand: Electronic versions via email or disk are unacceptable unless I give explicit permission beforehand.
- Not coming prepared or participating fully in a draft workshop will result in a 10% penalty for the assignment.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance for this class is required. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to gather notes or make up any material. If you accumulate **4** absences for any reason, you **will forfeit your entire class participation grade (15%)**. If you accumulate **5** absences for any reason, you **will fail the course**. If a circumstance arises that drastically impacts your attendance, perhaps in all of your classes (serious illness, family tragedy, etc.), I'd strongly encourage you to contact Dr. Thomas Sloane, Sr. Associate Dean of Students, at 293-5611 or Tom.Sloane@mail.wvu.edu.

Tardiness:

Excessive tardiness is also a problem and will negatively impact your class participation grade. When you are late, you miss important class announcements, handouts, and the framework for the day's in-class work. Late entrance into class is disruptive to the workings of the class, assignments are collected at the beginning of class, and with so much material to cover, every moment is precious. Assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered late.

Office Hours:

My office hours are times that I am committed to being available to consult with students. Please note that I am always willing to review drafts with students in office hours, as well as to discuss any other concerns you may have about the class, its content, and its procedures. I am also around campus outside my stated office hours if you would like to make an appointment. Research suggests that students who are in the habit of seeking out additional contact with their teachers tend to do better, even if you're coming by to discuss the latest Arcade Fire release or a good recipe for hamburgers. Point is: come by, have a cup of coffee, chat. It'll be good.

Social Justice:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran's status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

More specifically to this course: It is my hope that this class will be a real welcome to the major, which means that even as I welcome you to my own field of study, I hope you will be welcoming to others. This classroom should be a space where we can have risky, far-flung, or completely out-there ideas, ask preposterous questions, or make silly or big interpretive mistakes. The best learning and the most important ideas come from environments where failure and success are valued as equally productive.

Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. I take this problem very seriously, and will aggressively pursue full punishment (an unforgiveable F for the course) if I find significant evidence of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty cheats you out of your education. Moreover, there is an underlying assumption of absolute disrespect for your classmates, your instructor and your institution. If you are panicking and feel like you might be forced to rely on academic dishonesty, please please please try to see me about other options. It is your responsibility to be informed about your responsibilities. For more information on the University's Code of Academic Integrity, visit <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html#Anchor-1.-44522>

Schedule of Classes

Schedule is subject to minor changes after either in-class announcement or email announcement.
Please check with me directly if you have any questions.

Date	Topic + Readings	Assignment Due
T Jan 11	Introductions	
Th Jan 13	What is an English major? <i>Why</i> the English Major? What is a text? Read: Assigned essay from PMLA forum	Exercise 1: “Why Major in Literature?”
T Jan 18	Genre I: Introduction to Poetry: What is poetry? Read: LE Ch 1	Exercise 2: What is Poetry?
Th Jan 20	Theme / Imagery / Concrete Language Read: LE Ch 3, LE Ch 7, Poetry packet (handout)	Exercise 3: Analyze an Image
T Jan 25	Word Choice and Close Reading Read: LE Ch 10, LE Ch 11, WEL Ch 3: 35-45	Exercise 4: A Single Word
Th Jan 27	Rhythm, Rhyme, and Structure Read: LE Ch 6, LE Ch 8, Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess” (LE pg 76+)	Exercise 5: Identifying Rhythm and Rhyme
T Feb 1	Symbolism and Figurative Language Read: LE Ch 13	Exercise 6: Layered Meanings
Th Feb 3	Allusion Read: LE Ch 15	Exercise 7: Allusive Writing
T Feb 8	Writing about Literature: Evidence Read: WEL Ch 1, WEL Ch 2	Commonplace Book
Th Feb 10	Writing about Literature: Argument Read: WEL Ch 6, WEL Ch 7	Exercise 8: Outline
T Feb 15	Peer Review	Complete, typed draft of Close Reading Paper
Th Feb 17	Genre II: Prose Narrative // Plot and Summary Read: Short fiction packet ***	Exercise 9: TBA
T Feb 22	Setting, Space, and Place Read: LE Ch 5	Close Reading Paper
Th Feb 24	Character Read: LE Ch 2	Exercise 10: TBA
T Mar 1	Point of View I Read: LE Ch 4	Exercise 11: TBA
Th Mar 3	Point of View II // The Author Read: Zadie Smith “Rereading Barthes and Nabokov”	
T Mar 8	Genres II: What else is in print? Drama, Film, Graphic Narrative, Digital Narrative, etc. Read: LE Ch 16	Exercise 12: TBA
Th Mar 10	Contexts and Theories Read: LE Ch 14, LE Ch 17, WEL Ch 4	Exercise 13: TBA

T Mar 15	<i>Venus</i> by Suzan-Lori Parks Read: <i>Venus</i> ALL	Commonplace Book
Th Mar 17	Research Read: LE 18, Jean Young, "The Re-Objectification and ..." ^{***}	Exercise 15: Finding Sources
	Spring Break	
T Mar 30	Reading Sources, Documenting Sources Read: WEL Ch 5, WEL Ch 10	Proposal
Th Apr 1	Responding to the Criticism, Annotated Bibliography Read: Elam And Rayner ^{***}	7-10 work bibliography
T Apr 6	Cultural Studies and Literary Studies Read: TBA	Exercise 15: Thick Description
Th Apr 8	Make-up Day: Cultural Studies, Continued	Annotations of 2 sources
T Apr 13	Writing strong paragraphs Read: WEL Ch 8	Draft of one body paragraph
Th Apr 15	Structuring Sophisticated Arguments / Process Read: Anne Lamott, from <i>Bird by Bird</i> ^{***}	Exercise 16: Your Writing Process
T Apr 20	Peer Editing	Complete, Typed Draft of Interpretive Analysis
Th Apr 22	Conferences	Bring Draft and final Commonplace Book
T Apr 27	Peer Editing II	Complete, Typed 2nd Draft of Interpretive Analysis
Th Apr 29	Last Class: Why major in English?	Final Draft of Interpretive Analysis