

English 273: Contemporary Literature (Honors)
Americans Abroad: 1960-present

Dr. Ryan Claycomb
ryan.claycomb@mail.wvu.edu
Class meets Tu/Thr 2:30-3:45pm

126D Honors Hall
304-293-2100 (office)
Office Hours: Tu 4pm-5:00 pm
or by appointment

Course Description

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps with goals of both economic and technological development as well as mutual cultural understanding. More recently, as part of WVU's 2020 strategic plan, the University adopted a goal to "expose all students to a global experience, with opportunities for study abroad, global service learning, on-campus activities, and a curriculum that incorporates international vision." So while we often associate the literature of the contemporary period with postmodern experimentalism and literary play, we might also call this a period of international mobility and cultural interplay, with negative and positive connotations. Indeed, a global transnationalism has so infused the contemporary arts that some have taken to using a new term to describe the *post*-postmodern period following 9/11: altermodernism.

"Americans Abroad: 1960-present" therefore takes the idea of global travel, study abroad, and global cultural interchange as a key feature of much contemporary literature and culture. In the course, we will consider our own rhetoric of internationalization and globalization alongside narratives both from American writers and writers around the globe.

Part of my rationale for assigning narratives of Americans abroad specifically is based on a belief that we read literature as a kind of research for the lives we lead, and so by considering stories of other Americans striking out into the world, we develop an archive of vicarious experiences to help us better prepare for our own global realities.

During the semester we will consider how institutions like tourism, economic development, charity, education, and research all help fuel the narratives that we as individuals and as a nation tell about our relationship with the world, particularly with the different ways we conceive of them through categories like race, gender, socioeconomic class, and designations of the "western" and "non-western" world. We will also consider our reading alongside the prospect of actual study abroad programs available to WVU students.

The specific learning objectives for this course are as follows. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Identify a range of cultural and literary tropes that populate literary and everyday narratives of Westerners moving beyond their own borders.
- Analyze literary texts for their use of and/or critique of those tropes.
- Employ a critical language surrounding several central concepts--"Altermodern," "Neoliberalism," "Orientalism," "Ecotourism," "The Rhetoric of Empire," "The Tourist Gaze,"—and synthesize them with your own habits of literary analysis and your own approach to global study/travel.
- Apply concepts discovered and tested in literary study to discussions of study abroad, international tourism, and the global job market.
- Generate and produce both academic analyses and practical documents that employ the lessons learned from the critical study of the literature of Americans abroad.

The goals of this course grow out of and connect to the broader goals of the English major:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
 - a. Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
 - b. Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity
 - c. Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
 - d. Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Texts:

These texts are available at both the University Book Store and the Book Exchange. Please obtain them immediately, and try when possible to locate the assigned edition. Other texts may be added to our eCampus site as PDFs or via weblinks. These will be announced in in the syllabus with *** or in class as necessary.

- Sedaris, David. *Me Talk Pretty One Day*
- Oderman, Kevin. *Going*
- Smith, Ethel Morgan. *Reflections of the Other: Being Black in Germany*
- Lee, Andrea. *Interesting Women*
- Eggers, Dave. *You Shall Know Our Velocity!*
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*
- Brazaitis, Mark. *An American Affair*
- Patchett, Ann. *State of Wonder*

Course Requirements:

You are expected to meet the following requirements to achieve a passing grade.

1. Complete all reading by the date it is listed in the syllabus. There is plenty of reading in this course, so be sure to budget your time accordingly. Some reading will be tested by unannounced quizzes.
2. Complete all work by the date listed in the syllabus
 - Grades on all assignments will drop one letter grade for every weekday they are late.
 - Work handed in more than one week past the due date will automatically be graded F (50%).
 - Work handed in more than two weeks past the due date will earn a zero.
 - A paper is not considered turned until I have a hard copy in my hand, unless I give explicit permission *beforehand*.
 - No work will be accepted after final grades have been submitted, except in cases of extreme duress, and then only when discussed with me in advance.
3. Participate in class activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates.

Assignments:

20 pts. x 5 *Participation:* At three-week intervals (five total) students will earn participation grades based on attendance, preparation, meaningful contribution to classroom discussion and in-class activities, and absence of disruptive behavior. NOTE: a *lively* discussion is more important to me than one without missteps or mistakes. Please consider that taking intellectual risks in discussion is an implicit goal of an education in critical thinking.

- 50 pts. Discussion Leaders: At varying times during the semester, students will lead (in small groups) at least 15 minutes of the discussion on a critical reading that is to be paired with one of our primary texts. Guidelines to be announced.
- 20 pts. x 5 Letters: For five different texts throughout the semester, students will write a short response (500+ words) to the reading in the form of a letter written to a character, an author, a classmate, or the instructor, and post their letters to the appropriate discussion forums on eCampus by **noon** on the due date. The letter can pick up on an issue in the primary or critical readings, or a discussion topic from an earlier classroom discussion that applies to the reading of the day. These letters should be well-written and organized logically, but can nonetheless be composed in more casual language, and may even take the form of a more creative response. Part of the goal of this assignment is to acknowledge the stakes of the issues raised in these texts, and transform them into writing that might apply to the lives we are actually living. Students can supplement grades for in-class participation through active, cogent, and courteous responses to other students' letters on the discussion forums, though in-class discussion will maintain primacy.
- 100 pts. Practical Project: Students will construct a written document that responds to the demands of an application for a study abroad program such as the Fulbright, the Boren, or the Critical Language Scholarship. Students will design a hypothetical but realistic future project and complete the application for that project, with special attention to the essays and personal statements.
- 150 pts. Midterm: Students will analyze passages of literature that have been discussed in class based on specific prompts, and will answer questions on the critical texts under discussion.
- 250 pts. Critical Paper: Students will write a 1500+ word paper (5+ pages) that applies a critical concept discussed during the semester to one of the texts being discussed (or, upon approval, a text that fits within the bounds of the semester). The goals of the paper will be to show skill in constructing a critically thoughtful argument that interprets your text within the historically specific cultural conditions of our contemporary global moment.
- 250 pts. Final Exam: The final exam will be cumulative of all material over the semester, and will be administered as a take-home exam with essay and short-answer questions.

Format for Papers:

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria: Typed, Times 12-point (or equivalent) font, double-spaced (unless guided otherwise), 1-inch to 1.25 inch margins, page numbered and stapled or paper clipped. Since paper assignments are based on word counts, a good rule of thumb is that each page is approximately 330 words. 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. **Please note: messing with the physical appearance of the paper to achieve the illusion of length assumes that I cannot tell the difference between quantity and quality. A paper that is shorter than the assigned length but presented in an honest way will earn far more respect.**

Grading Written Work

Grades on written work will follow the guidelines laid out below, guidelines used by the University's writing program:

A (90-100% of available points): This is an outstanding essay that reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well organized with excellent development of its ideas. It reflects the writer's command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.

B (80-89.99% of available points): This is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing that do not interfere with reading the essay.

C (70-79.99% of available points): This is a standard, satisfactory essay that fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. This is the basic grade from which all others are derived. Higher grades than this *exceed* the expectations for the assignment, and grades lower than this fail to meet some major component of the assignment. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength that would distinguish an above-average essay.

D (60-69.99% of available points): This is a below-average essay that fulfills many components of the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (less than 60% of available points): This is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems.

0: This is an essay that is either completely unrelated to the assignment, or that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not one's own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

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 more than 4 absences (two full weeks of class) for any reason, you **will forfeit your entire class participation grade**. 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 Kim Mosby, Sr. Associate Dean of Student Life, at 293-5611 or Kim.Mosby@mail.wvu.edu.

Tardiness:

Excessive tardiness (or habitual early departure) is a problem and will negatively impact your class participation grade. When you are not in the class, you miss important class announcements, handouts, and the framework for the day's in-class work, or preparation for the next class.

Assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered late, and it is your responsibility to request and gather missed material. **Arriving in class more than 15 minutes late (or leaving more than 15 minutes early) will count as an absence.**

Office Hours:

Studies show that students who take advantage of opportunities to meet with faculty members outside of class are, in general, more successful in their courses. My office hours are times when I am committed to being available to consult with students, though I am frequently there at other times as well, and therefore am quite willing to make appointments at other times. Please note that I am often willing to review drafts or brainstorm with students in office hours before due dates, as well as to discuss any other concerns you may have about the class, its content, and its procedures. Or to—you know—hang out, talk about the new Arcade Fire album, recipes for hamburgers, whatever.

Social Justice:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with 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 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).

Academic Dishonesty:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code:

http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Class Schedule/ Syllabus

Dates and assignment parameters subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via email

Wk	Day	Date	Class Schedule, Readings, Assignments
1	TH	1/9	Class introductions: Americans Abroad—four grand narratives
2	T	1/14	David Sedaris, <i>Me Talk Pretty One Day</i> , pgs. 153-210 Feel free to read earlier essays, but part deux covers Sedaris' time in France. ***Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel"***
	TH	1/16	David Sedaris, <i>Me Talk Pretty One Day</i> , pgs 211-end
3	T	1/21	Kevin Oderman, <i>Going</i> (ch 1-12)
	TH	1/23	Kevin Oderman, <i>Going</i> (ch 13-17) ***Edward Said on Orientalism*** (Discussion Group 1)
4	T	1/28	Kevin Oderman, <i>Going</i> (Ch 18 - the end) Special visit from Kevin Oderman
	TH	1/30	Ethel Morgan Smith, <i>Reflections of the Other</i> , Ch 1, 4 Special visit from Ethel Morgan Smith
5	T	2/4	Ethel Morgan Smith, <i>Reflections of the Other</i> , Ch 6, 8, 9 Special visit from ASPIRE office
	TH	2/6	Andrea Lee, "Full Moon over Milan," "Interesting Women," "Sicily" ***John Urry, "The Tourist Gaze" *** (Discussion Group 2)
6	T	2/11	Andrea Lee, "Brothers and Sisters Around the World," "Dancing with Josefina," "Anthropology"
	TH	2/13	MIDTERM EXAM
7	T	2/18	Dave Eggers, <i>You Shall Know Our Velocity!</i> (pgs. 1-155) *** "Altermodernism explained: Manifesto" *** (Discussion Group 3)
	TH	2/20	Dave Eggers, <i>You Shall Know Our Velocity!</i> (pgs. 155-224)
8	T	2/25	Dave Eggers, <i>You Shall Know Our Velocity!</i> (pgs. 224-298)
	TH	2/27	Dave Eggers, <i>You Shall Know Our Velocity!</i> (pgs. 298-end) ***Ivan Illich, "To Hell with Good Intentions"*** Special visit from Amizade Global Service Learning
9	T	3/4	Danny Boyle, dir. <i>The Beach</i> View film on your own, or screening party TBA ***John Vidal, "DiCaprio film-makers face storm over paradise lost"***
	TH	3/6	<i>The Beach</i> and Ecotourism ***James Annesley, "Pure Shores" *** DUE IN CLASS: PRACTICAL PROJECT

!!!		3/10-15	SPRING BREAK: we finish with two long novels, plus short stories. Get a head start on the reading!
10	T	3/18	Barbara Kingsolver, <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> pgs. 1-312
	TH	3/20	Barbara Kingsolver, <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> pgs. 313-376 ***David Spurr on <i>The Rhetoric of Empire</i> *** (Discussion Group 4)
11	T	3/25	Barbara Kingsolver, <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> pgs. 377-506
	TH	3/27	Barbara Kingsolver, <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> pgs. 507-end
12	T	4/1	Draft Workshop: Critical Paper DUE IN CLASS: Complete Draft of Critical Paper
	TH	4/3	Mark Brazaitis, <i>An American Affair</i> “The Foreign Correspondent,” “The Poet and the General,” “Iris, Thirty Years Later” “Coming Home” “Before the Wedding” Special visit from Mark Brazaitis
13	T	4/8	Mark Brazaitis, <i>An American Affair</i> DUE IN CLASS: CRITICAL PAPER
	TH	4/10	Ann Patchett, <i>State of Wonder</i> , pgs. 1-120
14	T	4/15	Ann Patchett, <i>State of Wonder</i> , pgs. 121-181 ***David Harvey, <i>A Brief History of Neoliberalism</i> *** (Discussion Group 5)
	TH	4/17	Ann Patchett, <i>State of Wonder</i> , pgs. 183-324
15	T	4/22	Ann Patchett, <i>State of Wonder</i> , pgs. 325-end
	TH	4/24	Discussion: Literature and Living Globally Take-Home Exam distributed
16	T	4/29	DUE: Take-Home Exam , in my Honors Hall office, by 11 a.m.