

English 265 - Special Topics: Becoming American: Citizenship and Identity in Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States

Spring 2010

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Office Hours: M & W 3:30 – 4:30pm
T & Th 11am - 12:30pm
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Required Texts:

Alvarez, Julia *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*
Cather, Willa *O Pioneers*
Brown, William Wells *Clotel or The President's Daughter*
Rae-Lee, Chang *Native Speaker*
Silko, Leslie Marmon *Ceremony*

Please Bookmark:

Oxford English Dictionary: www.oed.edu

MLA Formatting and Style Guides: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>
<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocMLA.html>

Course Description:

What does it mean to be “American”? This question of who belongs and when will be at the heart of our inquiry this semester. Part of America's legacy as a colony is an anxiety about belonging that has informed our country's literary tradition from its very inception. A narrative of American citizenship and belonging also shapes our country's legal record. If equal protection under the law is the basic measure of citizenship, its evolving definition and application can be discerned in the ever-changing relationship between “American” and “alien” in the legal and artistic discourses of this nation. During the semester, we will read legal and historical documents alongside fictional works from an array of authors like William Wells Brown, Chang Rae-Lee, Carlos Bulosan, Leslie Marmon Silko, Julia Alvarez, and Toni Morrison, in order to trace the development of themes of citizenship, identity, struggle, and belonging in twentieth century ethnic American literature.

As this is a writing intensive English course, we will also discuss the practice and process of discussing, analyzing, and writing papers about literature. We will attend to the elements of fiction, the skills of close reading and analysis as well as issues of mechanics, style, organization, and argument appropriate to literary studies. By the end of the course, I hope that you will have gained an appreciation for this body of work, developed a facility with the basic principles of literary studies, and received valuable practice in thinking and writing about literature.

Course goals and objectives

This course fulfills Humanities F4 and F2 requirements. What does that mean? Well, this course is considered part of the broader Foundations liberal arts curriculum that is designed to lend focus and cohesion to your undergraduate experience. The goal of any liberal arts curriculum is to create a well-rounded lifelong learner who has an array of interpretive, analytical, and critical thinking skills that will, hopefully, facilitate success.

This humanities course focuses on two aspects of that larger curriculum:

F2 “Develop excellence in written communication,” which the college catalog defines as “the ability to express concise and methodical arguments in clear and precise prose.”

F4 “Read and interpret literary texts.” As per the catalog description, the “critical and sensitive

reading of significant works refines analytical skills and develops an awareness of the power of language.”

Additionally, this course is also considered writing intensive; thus, we will focus on the process of planning, drafting, and revising essays about literature over the course of the semester.

Based on these requirements, we will focus on the following objectives over the course of the semester:

- Further develop our knowledge and understanding of the elements of literary studies: narrative, perspective, character, setting, imagery, style, and theme.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills to unpack meaning in texts and tackle problems of interpretation.
- Understand how works engage their “contexts”, the political, social, and historical discourses of their moment.
- Understand and think critically about how the quality of “Americanness” is constructed and represented in these texts.
- Develop skills of concise, “clean,” and insightful writing.
- Develop an individual “voice” in written assignments. We will use the principles of literary study to develop incisive interpretations that grow out of individual insights.

Why do all of this? The hoped for outcome is that you end up better able to analyze and critically evaluate others’ ideas and develop greater facility expressing these interpretations in writing, while developing a better understanding of and appreciation for the literature of this period. At the end of the semester, we will all pause to consider whether these objectives have been met and consider strategies to consolidate our strengths and develop our weaknesses.

Grade Components

Participation and attendance	15%
Response Journal	15%
Book Club Group Project and Presentation	20%
1 Short Essay –4 pages	15%
Final Essay –8 pages	25%
Final Exam	10%

Grade Scale

A+	100
A	99-95
A-	94-90
B+	89-87
B	86-83
B-	82-80
C+	79-77
C	76-73
C-	72-70
D+	69-67
D	66-63
D-	63-60
F	59 and below

Guidelines for Our Response Community

Attendance is very important in a discussion-centered classroom. A successful student will strive to attend every class and be ON TIME. Since situations do arise that may cause you to be absent, you will be allowed up to three absences, or “personal days,” for the semester. After those three instances, only absences for documented illness, documented death or serious illness of immediate family members, and school related travel that has been previously documented will be excused. If your absence is excused, you will be allowed one week to make up any in-class assignments you may have missed. Students who have missed class time should first, get notes from a classmate, then review the notes and consult with me to clear up any questions. **It is your responsibility to get class notes, and set up and keep appointments to make up missed work. Missing an appointment or deadline for make-up work will result in failure of the assignment.** More

than five **unexcused** absences will result in failure of the course.

Participation is determined by more than attendance. Students are expected to contribute regularly and significantly through in class discussion, written responses, and group work. We are striving to build a discourse community based on our shared understandings of the texts we encounter, and the community is incomplete without your thoughtful contributions. You will begin the semester with 100 participation and attendance points. These points may be reduced for a number of reasons, including but not limited to: each unexcused absence beyond three (-5), chronic lateness –more than three (-3), lack of participation(-3), and missed conferences(-10)

Conferences. At times during the semester, I will hold conferences to brainstorm for assignments, review feedback, and check your progress. Missing or being unprepared for a scheduled conference appointment will result in an unexcused absence and 10 point deduction from your participation grade.

Communication. Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment. Additionally, I will answer most emails within 24 hours of their receipt (except those sent during the weekend), but do not expect an *immediate* response to *any* email, especially those sent between 8pm and 8am. I am happy to respond orally or in writing to drafts received more than 48 hours before the due date within 24 hours of their receipt. Drafts submitted within 48 hours of the due date **may** receive oral feedback schedule permitting.

from **Faculty Guidelines for Accommodations of Students with Disabilities:** “Students wishing to change an existing accommodation or request additional accommodations for a particular course should be referred to SDS, located in the modular building behind McCoy Theatre, to complete the necessary paperwork. The request must be approved by the Disability Support Committee **before** it is implemented in the classroom.” For more information, contact Melissa McCowen at 843-3994.

Writing Assignments

Writing is an integral part of the learning process that helps you to engage ideas, increase retention, and practice articulating your views in relationship to new material. However, writing is itself a process. Thus, the assignments this semester are structured to help you focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that requires you to draw on the skills of close reading and interpretation practiced over the course of the semester. Extensions must be arranged at least 72 hours PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day. All major written assignments must be completed and turned in under penalty of failure of the course. Each assignment will have its own assignment sheet; these short descriptions are included for reference.

Reading Response Journal

Responses should be thoughtful, relevant to the task at hand, exhibit a knowledge of the reading and make frequent use of the text as evidence for your response, interpretation, and/or analysis. These responses are also a place for you to explore issues raised by the readings as you practice the skills of close reading, drafting, revision, and interpretation that are integral to literary studies. I will respond to your journals throughout the semester, but will not grade them until the end; thus, your portfolio will serve as a record of your work. Please keep your responses in a writing portfolio, which will be evaluated at the end of the semester.

Short Essay

The 4pp short essay will require you to focus on two skills vital to literary studies – close reading and interpretation.

Final Essay

The **final essay** will bring to bear the skills of close reading and interpretation in an analysis of a work or works. The assignment will also involve reworking revising and extending previous writing into an 8 page essay that includes a bibliography containing at least 4 outside sources.

Book Club

Unfortunately, there are always more books than weeks in the semester; thus, this assignment exposes you to a variety of texts that could not be fit into the syllabus. Several class periods will be set aside for “Book Club” meetings, and your group will also have to meet outside of class. This assignment allows you to practice discussing issues before an audience, gain experience leading course discussion, collaborate with others, and use the skills of research and analysis to explore and engage the literary and social issues raised by a text. **Please Note:** Visual aids, technology, and creativity are strongly encouraged.

Keep in Mind . . .

- All assigned reading should be completed before the scheduled class meeting. In order to be prepared for class discussion, you should: read each selection thoughtfully, jotting down any questions that may arise; read each selection actively, making notes where helpful; and reflect on the discussion questions where applicable.
- Frankly, there is a lot of reading in this course. Please know that if you choose not to keep up with the readings your performance (and grade) will suffer because you will not be able to fully grasp and exercise the principles of close reading and interpretation that are at the heart of our inquiry. If you do not think that you can handle the reading load, you should “investigate your options.”
- Additionally, this class will include a lot of discussion. At times, we may not see eye to eye on the political, historical, social, or textual issues under consideration. We do not have to agree, but we will hold ourselves to the *sine qua non* of academic discourse -- considered, reasoned appeal based on evidence. Thus, we will not use or condone homophobic, racist, sexist, or otherwise denigrating language in our discourse community.
- Please refrain from using cell phones, texting, emailing, myspacing, warcrafting, facebooking or whatever during class. These things vex me and detract from the classroom atmosphere, essentially robbing your classmates of the full learning experience and thus violating the Honor Code. Leaving the classroom for repeated cell phone breaks under the guise of bathroom visits also vexes me and will result in the severe curtailment of bathroom privileges for everyone.
- Situations can and do arise that may require adjustments to the schedule of readings, discussion, or assignments. **Therefore, this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.**

N.B. : Please keep a copy of all graded assignments.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction

W Jan 13	Introduction; review syllabus and policies
F Jan 15	Introduction to terms and concepts; Diagnostic Bulosan, “Be American”; “Organic Act of the Philippines”

Week 2: Pioneers and Settlers

M Jan 18 **M L King, Jr. Holiday**

W Jan 20 James Fenimore Cooper, from *The Pioneers*, VI, C1 and V2, C22

E-text can be found at:

VI: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/browse-eaf?id=eaf054v1.xml&data=/texts/eaf&tag=public>

VII: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/browse-eaf?id=eaf054v2.xml&data=/texts/eaf&tag=public>

F Jan 22 Whitman 285; "Leaves of Grass"

Week 3: Pioneers and Settlers

M Jan 25 *O Pioneers* "Introduction" and Pt. 1;

W Jan 27 *O Pioneers* Pt. 2; Crevecoeur, "What Is an American"

F Jan 29 *O Pioneers* Pt. 3-5

Week 4: Pioneers and Settlers

M Feb 1 Anzia Yezierska "The Lost 'Beautifulness'"; Roediger, "The Prehistory of the White Worker"

W Feb 3 Book Club

F Feb 5 Native American Talk Stories: "Stories of the Beginning of the World"; Allen, ed. "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky," "The Beginning and the End of the World"

Week 5: Making Native Americans

M Feb 8 *Ceremony* "Preface," "Introduction," to page 34

W Feb 10 *Ceremony* through 85; "excerpt from Privileges and Prerogatives Granted to Columbus"

F Feb 12 *Ceremony* 86-120; "Indian Removal Act"

Week 6: Making Native Americans

M Feb 15 *Ceremony* 121- 156 (up to page break); "Cherokee Nation v. Georgia"

W Feb 17 *Ceremony* 156-208 (up to first page break); Barbara Cameron, "Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From the Reservation"

F Feb 19 *Ceremony* 208 to end

Week 7: The Challenge of Slavery

M Feb 22 **Conferences; Essay 1 Due**

W Feb 24 *Clotel* 49-80; "Introduction," "Chronology"

F Feb 26 *Clotel* 81-115; Jefferson, "A Declaration" 238

Week 8: The Challenge of Slavery

M Mar 1 *Clotel* 116-164; "Fugitive Slave Act/Clause"

W Mar 3 *Clotel* 165-203; Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow"

F Mar 5 *Clotel* 204-end

Week 9: The Challenge of Slavery

M Mar 8 Book Club

W Mar 10 Childs, "The Quadroons" 274; Hughes, "Father and Son"

F Mar 12 Randall Kenan, "Things of This World; or, Angels Unawares"

Week 10: Spring Break - March 13 - 21

Week 11: Border Crossings

M Mar 22 *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* to 103; "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo"

W Mar 24 *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* 107-149

F Mar 26 *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* 150-191; Anzaldua, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"

Week 12: Border Crossings

- M Mar 29 *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* 195-255
W Mar 31 *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* 256 to end; Cisneros, "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me"
F Apr 2 **Good Friday Recess**

Week 13: Accented Identity

- M Apr 5 *Native Speaker* to 81; Takaki, "From a Different Shore"
W Apr 7 *Native Speaker* to 130; "Aliens and Nationality"
F Apr 9 *Native Speaker* to 188

Week 14: Accented Identity

- M Apr 12 *Native Speaker* to 258; "Immigration Restriction Laws of 1917 and 1924"
W Apr 14 *Native Speaker* to 312; "Immigration and Nationality Law of 1965"
F Apr 16 *Native Speaker* to end

Week 15: Synthesis and Reflection

- M Apr 19 Book Club
W Apr 21 Group Presentation
F Apr 23 Group Presentation

Week 16: Synthesis and Reflection

- M Apr 26 Group Presentation
W Apr 28 Group Presentation
Last Day of Classes

- Final Paper Due** Monday, April 19
Response Portfolio Due Wednesday, April 28
Final Exam Wednesday, May 5 @ 1pm