

SPRING 2006

FINAL VERSION
AMERICAN STUDIES 200:
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

The general goal of this course is to introduce you to the interdisciplinary exploration that is American Studies; this particular incarnation will focus on some of the most famous and important literature and philosophy generated by those wet behind the ears newcomers, the [North] “Americans.” A more subtle goal for you is to develop a sophisticated understanding of the nature and relations of literature and philosophy, especially as they fashion a distinctively American way of thinking and being/intellectual life. Although indebted to its European heritage, the thinkers we will study articulate voices that reflect the promise and also the contingencies of life on a new continent.

We have structured the course so that we will alternate our study of philosophers and writers. Specifically, the course will address the numerous ways American novelists from the 19th and 20th Century have addressed, borrowed, and critiqued ideas and concepts associated with American Pragmatism.

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. William James’ Pragmatism (*The Writings of William James*, McDermott, University Of Chicago Press)
- II. Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (Norton Critical Edition)
- III. John Dewey’s Instrumentalism (*The Quest for Certainty* Southern Illinois University Press, *A Common Faith* Yale University Press)
- IV. John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (Penguin)
- V. Josiah Royce’s *Philosophy of Loyalty* (Vanderbilt University Press)
- VI. R.W. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (Vintage, 2nd Edition)
- VII. Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism (*Contingency, irony, and solidarity* Cambridge University Press)
- VIII. Richard Powers *The Prisoner’s Dilemma* (Harper Perennial)

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 40% 2 Papers (@ 20%)
- 40% 2 Exams (@ 20%, take-home Midterm and cumulative Final)
- 20% Preparation/Participation (Discussion Participation, 2 Close Readings)

A. Papers: There will be two 5-page papers, scheduled for **February 14** and **April 20**. Topics will be provided, but you may also select your own topic (with our approval). More detailed information will be provided at the appropriate time.

B. Exams: There will be 2 exams (a take-home exam [scheduled to be due by 5PM on Thursday, **March 2**] and a final [scheduled for Tuesday, **May 2** at 1PM]) consisting of objective, short-answer and essay questions. The final will include a comprehensive essay question.

C. Preparation/Participation: The goal of these components is to foster *critical* reading and thinking skills which will help you develop *sophisticated insight*. Each functions to promote quality class preparation and participation. Your Prep/Participation grade consists of the following:

[1] Discussion Participation (10%): This class has 25 students and 2 professors, but our goal is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the class with some regularity. Qualitative participation needs to be built on careful **preparation** for class. You are expected to come to each class prepared; this requires that you do the assigned reading *and* reflect on it (both by noting key ideas and arguments and by formulating questions). It also requires that you bring the relevant texts to class; failure to prepare or bring the appropriate texts constitutes an absence.

Careful preparation will enable you to listen with understanding and to actively contribute to class discussion. Actively participate in class **discussion** by (1) *contributing* your own views, questions, and reactions to the reading and class discussion and (2) carefully *listening* to, questioning, and responding to the views of others.

When determining your discussion participation grade, we will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. The quality of your work is gauged by its **clarity, insight, and sophistication**. In assessing the pattern of your work, we will look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement and progress** (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials. If you are concerned about your participation performance, please don't hesitate to talk with us about it.

[2] Close Readings (2 at 5% each): You will each write *two* 1-2-page papers on selected in-class readings (one *before* spring break and one *after*). These papers will be assigned in advance according to a rotating "group" system." A Close Readings paper is not an impressionistic reaction to the reading. Rather, it is a clear, organized, and thoughtful interpretive answer to a question you might have had while reading through the particular assignment. The goal of a Close Reading is to give each of you an opportunity to formally prepare reflections on an assignment in a manner that will benefit class discussion. Our expectation is that you will be especially active in class discussion on that day; we will likely ask you to share and expand on the insights of your paper in class.

Close Readings need to be completed and dropped into the AS 200 Faculty Folder (on the Academic Volume) no later than **4:00 p.m.** the day *before* we discuss your assigned reading. Each Close Reading is worth 5% of your grade. Chief criteria for evaluating such work include (i) **clarity and organization** of your paper, (ii) **accuracy** of your points, and (iii) **insight and sophistication** in developing your interpretation. If you have questions about this assignment, please don't hesitate to consult us.

Attendance: You have up to 3 absences without accruing any penalty. For each absence over 3, your prep/participation grade will be lowered one letter grade. Note that failure to come to class prepared (see above) counts as an absence.

V. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Grading Criteria:** See "Grading Criteria for Written Work" handout for specifics.

A	94 and up	B+	87-89	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	B	84-86	C	74-76
		B-	80-83	C-	70-73 etc.

• **Interdisciplinary Grading:** Students may be concerned about the fairness of having two professors grade their work. To ensure fairness, we will do the following:

1. Provide you with clear expectations and grading criteria. Your prep/participation grade will be based on the criteria provided above. Written work will be judged in light of a handout, "Grading Criteria for Written Work," to be distributed separately.
2. Though each professor will bear primary responsibility for grading one of your papers and one of your Close Readings, *both* professors will review your work before recording the final grade.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that we send out via e-mail. In addition, we may leave documents (study questions, biographical sketches, etc.) in our class folder on the Academic Volume (at \\Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\Interdisp_Stu\American_Studies\Public). We will announce new documents that need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for this material. If you are unfamiliar with computer use, please check with one of the computer staff; they'll be happy to help you.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that all the work you submit is to be your own. You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., it must be formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment.

******This syllabus is subject to revision (but don't worry; we'll discuss any changes with the class before we make them).******

CALENDAR SPRING 2006

	W 1/11 Introduction	F 1/13 James "On a Certain Blindness" & "What Makes a Life Significant" 629-660
M 1/16 MLK No Class	W 1/18 James "The Moral Philosopher & The Moral Life" 610-629	F 1/20 James "The Moral Equivalent of War" 660-671
M 1/23 James "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy;" 362-376 "What Pragmatism Means" 376-390	W 1/25 James "Pragmatism & Common Sense;" 418-428 "The Pragmatic Conception of Truth" 429-443	F 1/27 James "Pragmatism & Religion" 461-472
M 1/30 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 1-18	W 2/1 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 19-42	F 2/3 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 43-59
M 2/6 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 60-86	W 2/8 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 87-111	F 2/10 Melville <i>Moby-Dick</i> , Chpts. 112-Epilogue
M 2/13 Dewey <i>Quest for Certainty</i> Chpt. 1 PAPER 1 DUE 2/14 by 5PM	W 2/15 Dewey <i>Quest for Certainty</i> Chpt. 2	F 2/17 Dewey <i>Quest for Certainty</i> Chpt. 10
M 2/20 Dewey <i>Common Faith</i> Chpt. 1	W 2/22 Dewey <i>Common Faith</i> Chpt. 2	F 2/24 Dewey <i>Common Faith</i> Chpt. 3
M 2/27 Steinbeck <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> , Chpts. 1-8	W 3/1 Steinbeck <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> , Chpts. 9-16 EXAM DUE 3/2 by 5PM	F 3/3 Steinbeck <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> , Chpts. 17-21
M 3/6 Steinbeck <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> , Chpts. 22-25	W 3/8 Steinbeck <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> , Chpt. 26-30	F 3/10 Royce Chpts. 1-2
M 3/13 SPRING BREAK	W 3/15 SPRING BREAK	F 3/17 SPRING BREAK
M 3/20 Royce Chpts 3-4	W 3/22 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 1-2	F 3/24 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 3-9
M 3/27 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 10 - 13	W 3/29 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 14-17	F 3/31 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 18-23
M 4/3 Ellison <i>Invisible Man</i> , Chpts. 24-end	W 4/5 Rorty, <i>Contingency, irony & solidarity</i> , Chpt. 1	F 4/7 Rorty CIS, Chpt. 2
M 4/10 Rorty CIS, Chpt. 3	W 4/12 Rorty CIS, Chpt. 9	F 4/14 EASTER BREAK
M 4/17 Powers, <i>Prisoner's Dilemma</i> , pp. 13-116	W 4/19 Powers <i>Prisoner's Dilemma</i> , pp. 117-185 PAPER 2 DUE 4/20 by 5PM	F 4/21 Powers <i>Prisoner's Dilemma</i> , pp. 187-237
M 4/24 Powers <i>Prisoner's Dilemma</i> , pp. 239-348	W 4/26 Wrap-up	F 4/28 URCAS (no class)