

Chaminade University
EN 432, American Literature, 1940 - Present
Winter Evening Semester, 2009

Syllabus

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Course website: <http://www.edwebs.com/cham/432/09WinEve/index.lasso>

Chaminade Catalog Description

Areas of special interest may include Beat writers (Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder); the Vietnam War (Tim O'Brien); black American writing (Alice Walker). Examples of other writers covered include Sylvia Plath, W. S. Merwin, Daniel Berrigan, Flannery O'Connor, Lois Ann Yamanaka. Offered alternative years. Prerequisite: Any 200-level English offering.

Detailed Description

This course is a survey of American literature from 1940 to the present. It emphasizes both poetry and fiction. For this semester, the novelists figuring most prominently are Alice Walker, Jack Kerouac, Tim O'Brien and Lois Ann Yamanaka. Among the poets to be read are W.S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, Gary Snyder, and Cathy Song.

This period of American literature is marked by World War II, the nuclear arms race, the emergence of mass media, the Viet Nam War and the emergence of terrorism as a fact of life. Several important social movements also mark the period: the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the environmental movement. From the inside, each of these movements looked not just to cultural change, but to revolution, meaning a fundamental change in values. And now American culture is in the midst of what is being called the "information revolution."

Quite naturally, the literature of this tumultuous period of history has also transformed. In this course we will review the literature of the period with an eye to the following areas: cultural identity, technology, war, and religion.

Through reading, listening to music, watching films, and through writing, discussion and other modes of creative expression, we will seek to explore and examine the way in which literature has played a major role in both fermenting and documenting the changes of the period.

Diversity

Chaminade's "Core Beliefs Statement" says, "Students, both traditional and non-traditional, bring a variety of talents, traditions, cultures and abilities. This diversity brings a special opportunity to the Chaminade community, which can then nurture and guide each student to the fullest realization of potential." Consequently, this course encompasses readings that both reflect and examine the diversity of our literary heritage. Additionally, the course puts special attention on the problems faced by authors seeking to write from unique personal or cultural perspectives to readers who may not share the same perspectives or cultural background.

Objectives

At the end of the term, students who have been actively and consistently engaged in the course readings, quizzes, discussions and other assignments, who have consistently developed and refined their insights via regular journal writing, and who have completed the two research projects, should be able to:

- * Understand and articulate the global contexts in which American literature from 1940 to present is studied.
- * Evaluate and explain ethical and religious ideas that emerge in the study and discussion of American literature from 1940 to present..
- * Identify and categorize various critical strategies used in the analysis of American literature from 1940 to present.
- * Apply insights about American literature from 1940 to present to the preparation and delivery of interpretative statements to diverse readers (different ages, cultural backgrounds, etc.).
- * Formulate questions grounded in concepts related to the study of American literature from 1940 to present and direct them to instructor, classmates and diverse others.
- * Summarize, critique and extend class discussions and related ideas about the concepts "America," "American" and "literature."
- * Make qualitative distinctions among the wide variety of American literature research sources available via the internet and libraries.
- * Propose, execute and prepare research projects in American literature from 1940 to present.
- * Appropriately self-assess one's own insights and skills related to the study of American literature from 1940 to present.

This course fulfills the following English Program learning objectives:

- * A proficiency in writing through an analytical literary research paper.
- * The ability to define various literary critical approaches and apply them to given texts.
- * The ability to define, identify, and articulate major movements/periods in British and American literature.
- * The ability to critically analyze significant authors, texts, and issues in British and American Literature.

Texts (toc)

- * Booth, *The Craft of Research*, 2nd Edition [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * Charters. *Portable Beat Reader* [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * Hoover, *Postmodern American Poetry - A Norton Anthology* [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * Walker, *The Color Purple* [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * Yamanaka, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* [Link to Amazon.com](#)

Optional DVDs (available at video rental outlets, [netflix.com](#), [amazon.com](#), or other online sources)

- * *The Color Purple*
 - o Steven Spielberg's film starring Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey, and Danny
- * *Sylvia*
 - o Starring Gweneth Paltrow, and excellent dramatization Plath's life as a poet. [Link to Amazon.com](#)
- * *What Happened to Kerouac?*
 - o Documentary showing Kerouac's journey as a public figure; contains superb archival footage of Kerouac reading from his work, as well as interviews with his friends and lovers as well as his daughter; also contains excellent commentary on his theories about creativity and his alcoholism.

Online References

- * Academy of American Poets website
- * The Beat Page

Requirements (toc)

Participation and attendance (approximately 20%)
Reading journal (approximately 20%)
Two essays (approximately 20%)
Quizzes and miscellaneous assignments (approximately 20%)
Final exam (approximately 20%)

Participation and attendance (toc)

This course requires regular attendance and participation in discussions. Also, each student will be required to make one presentation about the readings; collaboration with another student is encouraged.

This course requires the use of the World Wide Web and email. In order to facilitate required online participation, all students are required to have active internet accounts with the Chaminade Academic Computing center.

Reading Journal (toc)

The journal is an informal record of participation in the course and a private workspace for the free exploration of ideas related to the course readings. Journals should contain quotations copied from texts, paraphrases, research notes from library and internet sources, class notes, as well as drafts of essays and online postings. Journals are normally kept in a conventional pen and ink notebook.

The requirement for the journal is a minimum of 30 - 50 pages (approx. 5000 words).

For more information about keeping your course journal, follow this link.

Essays (toc)

Two essays of approximately 1800 words each will be due during the term. Essays for this course will review and expand on reading, reflection and discussion directly associated to the course. Background research using EBSCO, the library and other sources is also required. An important element in essays for this course is quotation from and commentary on required readings and discussions. In general, essays will be evaluated with regard to clarity and creativity.

Question and Answer Exercises (Q & A) and miscellaneous assignments (toc)

Online Question and Answer Exercises will be posted to the course web site throughout the term. These exercises are intended to pace the student through the course's required readings, including material listed in the "Course Outline and Study Guide" section of the homepage.

Submission of responses to Question and Answer Exercises is required; they will be self-graded, and should be seen as preparation for the objective section of the final exam, as described below.

Miscellaneous assignments may from time to time be added to the course study guide.

In addition to Question and Answer Exercises, students may be required to complete additional informal assignments, for example, reading brief excerpts from other works aloud to a friend or over the telephone.

Final Exam (toc)

The final exam consists to two sections. The first section is made up of 25 short answer or multiple-choice questions similar to those on the Q&A exercises. The second section consists of one or more essay questions which are distributed during the week prior to the exam.

Section 1 of the exam will be taken via the course management system. This section of the exam may be taken via the student's normal web access and is therefore "open book"; however, the exam time is limited to 30 minutes.

Section 2 must be taken either at the Chaminade main campus or elsewhere under the supervision of a proctor approved by Chaminade's AUP office. Section 2 of the exam is "closed book." Students planning on taking this section of the exam at a location other than the Chaminade main campus must make prior arrangements with their Chaminade advisors or with the AUP office.

In general, final exam essay questions are aligned with the discussion topics presented throughout the course. Active participation in online discussions is therefore a prerequisite to success on the final exam.

In general, students must complete all other course requirements before taking the final exam.

Self-assessment and Final Grade

The final grade for the course will be determined in part by the student's self-assessment and grade estimate (see the button in the Unit 10 section of the Study Guide), which will be submitted after taking the final exam.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

All material submitted in fulfillment of course requirements must be original work written by the registered student. Work that has been submitted in other classes may not be submitted for credit in this one, nor may work being done for this course be submitted for credit in another course.

Students are required to consult sources outside the required reading of the course; they are also responsible for clearly stating the nature of their sources. Statements of "common knowledge" are generally exempt from this scholarly requirement.

Plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else's ideas as your own. Plagiarism in this course will result in a grade of "0" for the assignment and possible failure for the course.

If the instructor suspects plagiarism, the burden of proof of the originality of the writing lies with the student. Evidence of originality would include copies of early drafts of the writing, research and interview notes, as well as the ability to discuss the themes of the writing with the instructor. Students should consider their instructor's vigilance in such matters a normal part of the academic process and should be prepared to present evidence of originality if requested.

Students are strongly advised to save files of early drafts of essays, along with outlines, research notes and other supporting documentation, as the instructor may at any time require that they be presented.

Course Overview

Week 1 -- Literary Backgrounds

Log in to course management system. Read "Help" files. Post a "literary" autobiographical paragraph to "Introductions" conference (i.e. emphasize the development of your interest in literature along with some pertinent facts about your life).

Review

- o Writing About Literature
- o Keeping a course journal
- o Guidelines for Essays

* Academy of American Poets Website -- Take a quick tour, then carefully read the following:

- o Walt Whitman, "A Backward Glance," "I Hear America Singing," "I Sing the Body Electric," "Song of Myself, I, II, VI & LII "
- o Ezra Pound, "from "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," "In a Station of the Metro," "The River-Merchant's Wife," "Canto I"
- o Langston Hughes, "Dream Variations," "Dreams," "I, Too, Hear Sing America," "Let America Be America Again," "Madam and the Phone Bill," "Theme for English B"
+ "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

* Notes on Literary Modernism

* For Discussion: After reviewing the items listed above, look over at least two readings from various units of the study guide below. Then answer the following questions: What is modern? What is "post-modern"? What in the literature you have read in this and other courses do you feel exemplify the two concepts? Also keep in mind that the best WebCT postings end with your own thought-provoking questions. Post to "Post/Modern" discussion topic.

Week 2 -- The Beats and Before

* Portable Beat Anthology:

- o Charters, "Variations on a Generation" (xv - xxxvi), "The Best Minds of a Generation" (1 - 7),
- o Kerouac (8 - 59)
- o Holmes (154- 166)
- o Gary Snyder (288 - 306, 569 - 579)
- o Philip Whalen (307 - 316)
- o Alan Watts (607 - 614)

* Gary Snyder on Poets.org

* Gary Snyder at the Modern American Poetry website

* For Discussion: Post your own definition of the term "beat" as it is used in the literary sense. Include one brief quotation that you feel stands as an example of the type of literature described in your definition. Post to the "Beat" discussion.

Week 3 -- Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath: Literature and Psychoanalysis

* Robert Lowell -- Read introduction and poems.

* Sylvia Plath -- Read introduction and poems.

- o Optional: View movie *Sylvia*

* Do background research on the two poets at the following sites before proceeding to the discussion question below. At the Literature Resource Center, you will find articles from the Dictionary of Literary Biography which are fairly comprehensive. On EBSCO, you will need to search either on author name or on some other keyword (try "confessionalism"). Take notes on any points you find of interest. Be sure to keep track of bibliographical information, as later in the course you may want to return to the source.

* For Discussion: After reading works at Poets.org by Lowell and Plath, viewing the film *Sylvia* and spending some time reading critical articles about the two writers, write a comment explaining the shortcomings of the term "confessional poetry" as it is applied to Lowell and Plath. You might also note the names of any other writers the term is commonly applied to. Post to the "Psychoanalysis" discussion topic.

Week 4 -- Literature of Cultural Identity

* Read: Yamanaka, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*

* For Discussion: Post your comments about *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* to the "Yamanaka" conference. Also, consider responding to the question of how you feel about the use of pidgin English in the novel or elsewhere. I would like the discussion to be as far ranging as possible, yet still connected to the novel, so feel free to make up your own question. Sunday, February 08, 2009

Week 5-- Magic Realism Fiction, Deep Image Poetry

* Submit Essay Assignment 1.

* Read: Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato*, Chapters 1 - 27

For Discussion: At several places in O'Brien's novel, various characters discuss what the purpose of war is. Using a text from the novel as a starting point (i.e. provide a brief quotation and citation), write your own brief definition of the phrase "just war." Post to the "Literature and the Viet Nam War" discussion topic.

Week 6 -- Literature of the Viet Nam War

- * Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato*, Chapters 28 - end
- * H. Bruce Franklin, "Plausibility of Denial: Tim O'Brien, My Lai, and America" [ÊÊ](#)
- * Yousef Komunyakaa
 - o Read "Believing in Iron," "Facing It," "Jasmine," "The Whistle," and (if your system permits listening to audio) listen to "My Father's Love Letters"

For Discussion: Continue postings in the "Literature and the Viet Nam War" discussion topic.

Week 7 -- Black American Literature

- * Read: *The Color Purple*, first half
- * For Discussion: One of the most discussed issues in Black American literature has to do with the portrayal of Black men by Black women. And one of the most common discussion points about *The Color Purple* has to do with the theme of "sisterhood." But these questions seem a bit too general for our purposes here. So for this discussion, please comment on the role of Shug and how as a character she functions to move the plot of the novel forward. Optional: If in the process of responding to this question, you see connection to the other topics (portrayal of Black men and sisterhood) mentioned, include it in your comment. Post to "Black American Literature."

Week 8-- Black American Literature

- * Read: *The Color Purple*, to end
- * Optional: View film *The Color Purple*
- * Links to sites about prominent Black American writers, 1940 - present
 - o Maya Angelou
 - o Toni Cade Bambara
 - o James Baldwin
 - o Amiri Baraka
 - o Gwendolyn Brooks
 - o Rita Dove
 - o Ralph Ellison
 - o Nikki Giovanni
 - o Robert Hayden
 - o Langston Hughes
 - o Yousef Komunyakaa
 - o Ishmael Reed
 - o Morrison, Toni
 - o Alice Walker
 - o Richard Wright

For Discussion: Continue postings in the "Black American Literature" discussion topic.

Week 9 -- Zen Buddhism and other Religious Influences

- * William Everson (Brother Antoninus)
- * Philip Whalen
- * Thomas Merton, "A Christian Looks at Zen"

* Shaul Magid, "Monastic Liberation As Counter-Cultural Critique in the Life And Thought Of Thomas Merton"

* For Discussion: Write a comment explaining how Jack Kerouac and Thomas Merton are related to one another as Catholics who hold strong views about Zen Buddhism. Also, after reviewing Snyder's "Note on Religious Tendencies," what in general do you feel are the religious characteristics of writers we have looked at so far? Post to "Religious Influences."

Week 10 -- Review

* Optional: View film *What Happened to Kerouac*

* Submit Essay Assignment 2.

Final Exam: The final exam is in two sections. See the Final Exam Study Guide link for details.