

## SUMMER 2014 Seminars

### **Laura Renzi: Exploring One's Own Cultural Identity through the Understanding of Cultural Pluralism in Young Adult Literature**

Exploring One's Own Cultural Identity through the Understanding of Cultural Pluralism in Young Adult Literature What is the definition of a culturally pluralistic society? How does your cultural identity enhance, inhibit, detract from how you see and interact with a culturally pluralistic society? What types of young adult literature get published in this society, and what do these texts teach us (and school age children/adolescents) about the cultures that can be found in our society? This seminar is designed to discuss the cultural identity of the reader, as well as the characters that can be found in culturally pluralistic young adult literature. How does the cultural identity of the reader (race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) affect the knowledge that is made when reading these young adult texts? We will work to define what it "culturally pluralistic" means as a class through discussion and readings about cultural identity. We will also discuss how our views of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and religion (as well as other things) affect how we read and what we expect from these young adult texts. Through facilitated discussions, we will work our way through various cultural identities and look at how these cultural identities have been historically represented through stereotypes, media, and historical events. As a class, we will also touch upon how these historical representations have also been used to dictate educational policies within our society.

### **Jane Jeffrey: Reading the King James Bible**

The King James Bible, published in 1611, is the most widely printed book in the English language. Built on a century of English translations by writers from Tyndale to Cranmer, the KJB is the result of historic, linguistic, and intellectual collaboration and has had an immeasurable influence on the language, literature and culture of the western world. This seminar will read substantial parts of the Old and New Testaments in the King James version and explore the 1611 text, along with its precedents and afterlife, as a basis for research in literary and cultural studies. A unique interdisciplinary object--not so much a book as a library of books--the King James Bible provides an opportunity to explore and synthesize resources and method in linguistics, rhetoric, the arts, popular culture, religion, politics, and education. Students will practice both close and contextual reading, and they will learn how to frame research topics by means of analyzing past approaches and identifying open-ended questions.

FALL 2014 Seminars:

**Jeff Sommers: Classroom and Institutional Sites of Writing Assessment**

This seminar will focus on writing assessment and will be organized in a problem-based learning (PBL) environment. Problem-based learning (PBL) is a methodology that features group work focused on solving real problems related to the subject at hand, in this case, assessing student writing. Our course will divide into 3 segments: Problem 1 will focus on devising a sound method for responding to student writing in individual course; Problem 2 will focus on devising a sound method for a large-scale assessment of student writing, in this case, writing placement into ENGQ20, Basic Writing, or WRT120, Writing Effectively. The third segment of the course will require students to investigate an assessment problem or issue of personal concern to them. The course will also feature guest scholars in the area of writing assessment via teleconference. The primary objective of the course will be for students to increase their understanding of the intellectual grounding of both in-class and large-scale writing assessment through studying the relevant issues and participating in problem-solving activities that address real-world writing assessment problems

**Graham MacPhee: Arendt and Benjamin: Culture, Genocide, and Human Rights**

The German Jewish intellectuals Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin were both deeply affected by the rise of the genocidal Nazi regime. In different ways, their work focused on the connection between the Nazi's genocidal program and the deep structures of modern culture. Their philosophical writings ask how the dislocations of modernity blunted popular objections to the Nazi's policies and enabled a "logic" of accommodation with what should have been unthinkable. This seminar will look at primary texts by Benjamin and Arendt alongside a number of literary works that seek to represent and illuminate genocidal violence. These literary/testimonial texts will be drawn from different locations and historical moments to raise issues of diversity and explore the applicability of theoretical ideas. The seminar will encourage students to examine the relationship between culture and political violence, and to consider the ways in which literary and other texts engage with such violence in ways that restore our sense of responsibility.

**Erin Hurt: Southern Literature and The Problem of History**

This course will take Faulkner's famous phrase—"The past isn't dead. It isn't even past"—as a starting point for our critical inquiries as we explore the ways in which three authors represent history, memory, and storytelling in their fiction, set in the South and the Southwest. William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Cormac McCarthy use their novels to interrogate what history means. These authors' novels differ from each other by telling the stories that the others don't. At the same time, all of these authors deeply engage with the idea that history is contingent and not what we thought we knew; history is about (un)making, (re)writing, and erasing. Among the issues we will address are: history and fiction, collective memory, the idea of American identity, nation, empire, gender and society, race and ethnicity, postmodernity, narrative, slavery, freedom, closure, and community. Throughout, we will be paying close attention to each writer's stylistic choices—how the writer's narrative strategies affect the way we interpret the novel. Our goal, as we make our way through these novels, will be to articulate the ways in which these novels speak to each other about history and memory. During the semester, students will practice a number of different skills such as close reading, content and audience reception analysis, finding relevant scholarly work, and synthesizing critical arguments.

### **Andrew Sargent: Literature of the Civil Rights Era**

The Civil Rights/Black Power era of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s was a watershed period in US history. While key figures and events from this era have long been fixtures in the American popular imagination, our aim in ENG 400: Literature of the Civil Rights Era will be to examine the many forms of literature—novels, plays, short stories, poems, memoirs, speeches, photographs, films, and the like—that sought to shape the struggle for racial justice as it unfolded and/or to assess the movement’s aims, achievements, and shortcomings after the fact. In exploring texts by Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Harper Lee, William Melvin Kelley, Anne Moody, Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, Richard Hall, Mari Evans, Audre Lorde, and Katori Hall, among others, we will read works produced by the struggle’s iconic race leaders and bit players, movement activists and participant observers, men and women, blacks and whites, and creative writers, historians, and photojournalists. Our critical approach will blend cultural studies, critical race theory, whiteness studies, and other contemporary theories of race and gender, along with sustained close readings of the politics of racial representation—that is, the complex tension between the racial justice that our texts seek and the sometimes contradictory rhetorical and narrative strategies that they use to tell their stories. We will also pay particular attention to the ways in which the movement’s legacy is remembered and contested today. Students interested in learning more about Dr. Sargent’s research interests in this area are encouraged to view his faculty profile on the English Department website.

### **Michael Burns: African American Rhetorics**

In this seminar will address the history and development of African American English (AAVE), its roles within and beyond black culture, and its relationships to black experiences in mainstream U.S. society. As a motivating theme, we will view the rhetorical practices of black Americans as expressions of culture and means of resistance to racial oppression in the U.S. The course will draw rhetorical frameworks from Western European and African Diasporic traditions (e.g., Aristotle, Asante, Jackson and Richardson), sociolinguistic theory (e.g., Smitherman, Wolfram), and sociocultural theory (e.g., Omi and Winant). Students will write three papers: two short 5-page papers and a 2500-3000 word research paper. The main goals of the course are to have students engage in rhetorical analysis and develop a more critical understanding of the role language has played in the black American Experience.

### **Cortie Ervin: Genre and Multimodal/Multimedia Writing**

Less than 10 years ago, the term “multimodal composition” first came into wide use among those who teach and study how to teach writing. In the same decade, “multimedia writing” was proliferating online, and conventions for multimedia genres were evolving. This course brings the concepts of “multimodal composition” (the process of creating texts that incorporate some combination of audio, video, images, and text) and “multimedia writing” (those texts themselves) into play with theories of “genre.” The central question of this course: *How can genre theory help us understand the evolution of multimodal writing on the Web over the past five years?* Those who are entering the teaching profession can use this course to understand how and why to teach multimodal writing and multimedia reading to secondary school students. Those who are interested in continuing their study will do research in this class that will assist in graduate school applications. This seminar will also interest any English major who wants to further explore today’s popular Web and mobile app genres (viral videos, YouTube, Vine, Snapchat, vlogs) in order to understand how and why these are, in fact, forms of “writing.”

### **Cherise Pollard: African American Autobiography**

Autobiography is a genre that is central to the study of African American Literature. This course will trace the development of the genre from nineteenth century slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass' seminal 1845 Narrative to late twentieth century memoirs such as Barack Obama's Dreams From My Father. We will study African American life writing in its historical and cultural contexts, our analysis will focus on the ways that the genre emerged as a testament against the institutionalized forces of oppression from slavery to Jim Crow, to various manifestations of implicit and explicit abuses of white power that affected African Americans, to the complex issues of race in early twenty-first century post-racial America. We will also examine the ways in which issues of class, gender, and sexuality pressured black authors' definitions of their identities in relation to their families and their communities. A semester long study of African American Autobiography gives us the opportunity to further investigate the various ways in which African American authors articulate their humanity as they construct their identity.

### **Ashley Patriarca: Developing Grant Proposals**

This course explores the grant proposal, a genre written by academics as well as nonprofit and for-profit organizations, as a complex rhetorical endeavor. Grant proposals require intensive research into issues, audiences, and project management, but their impact on communities and organizations can be immense. Throughout the semester, we will examine how grant proposals can support organizational and individual goals of community and civic engagement. Using a genre ecologies framework (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000) we'll trace the functions of grant proposals within organizations and analyze how these documents fit within the larger scope of business and organizational writing. Students will have the opportunity to research how organizations create their grant proposals, as well as research and develop their own grant proposals.

### **Karen Fitts: A Life of Inquiry: Questions, Meaning, Mystery**

Inquiry and intellectual curiosity are primary values in academic life. However, too often we approach research as a rather lock-step (and quite frankly, dreaded) requirement instead of the absorbing, rewarding activity it can be. In recent years, alternatives to the traditional "research paper" have offered new ways of thinking about the questions we ask, the ways we make meaning, and the mystery residing at the very heart of inquiry. Alternative forms of research and writing draw students toward a greater awareness of and appreciation for multiple genres, media, disciplines, and cultures in the exploration of an interest, experience, teaching or belief, practice, or ability. More broadly, an alternative focus on the seeking and wondering in intellectual processes supports students' development of important lifetime habits of mind. Drawing on recent theories of composition and literacy work, "A Life of Inquiry: Questions, Meaning, Mystery" will engage students in a "crossroads pedagogy" (Davis and Shadle), in which disciplines and cultures meet and interact in various genres and through the use of diverse media forms, enabling writers to compose, or come to terms with, connections between what they know and want to know, their personal and public selves, and other significant questions of identity.

### **Rachel Banner: Racial Colorblindness in U.S. Law & Literature**

Hypothetically, the racially colorblind society is one where race is not a factor in obtaining justice. In this course, we will unpack today's familiar claim that, "I don't see color." In particular, we will investigate whether racial colorblindness is a feasible strategy for producing a less racist and more just American society, given our nation's racial history. Some guiding questions for the course are: In what ways has U.S. law been historically *blind* to the realities of racism? Can the ideal of racial colorblindness produce just outcomes for various groups of people? How are justice and race related in the United States? To think through these questions, we will study many different texts interested in race and U.S. law, including works of literature, some legal decisions, and a few writings from the legal school of thought known as Critical Race Theory. All of these texts wrestle with the problem of how to best guarantee "liberty and justice for all" in the racially diverse United States. Students who are interested in learning more about Dr. Banner's research interests can access her profile on the WCU English website.

### **Joseph Navitsky: Shakespeare's America / America's Shakespeare**

This research seminar examines the inheritance of William Shakespeare in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. Much like his impact on English language and literature, Shakespeare—poet, celebrity, and literary icon—remains a crucial force in the cultural imagination of America. But what accounts for the abiding relevance of the plays of an *Englishman* and how do they continue to shape *American* cultural experience 400 years after their creation? More specifically, how are attitudes toward Shakespeare deeply ingrained in American democratic ideals of freedom of expression, racial and religious equality, and access to public education? Special emphasis will be given to the collaborative nature of theatrical and film production and to critical issues (literary adaptation, the "cult of genius," theories of authorship, the formation of the canon, and secondary and university curricula) relevant to the work of all English majors, especially those with an interest in teaching. Familiarity with Shakespeare is not a requirement but enthusiasm for his work is. A change from previous offerings of this seminar is that this time students will read and research just three Shakespeare plays— *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*—along with a wider range of American appropriations and burlesques of those plays.

### **Randal Cream: Collecting, Collating, and Collaborating: Digital Environments for Writing**

This course asks its participants to think critically, practically, and theoretically about the ways in which writing occurs in digital environments. For decades now, virtually all writing has been mediated through some form of a digital environment (software, hardware, cloud and network services). This course invites students to analyze these environments, to critically consider some of the affordances and implications of digital environments for writing and to formulate their own writing practices against the backdrop of these theories and affordances. We'll adopt two broad practical tactics in order to organize the course: the embrace of digital environments for teaching & learning, and the use of digital environments for composing, creatively or critically. We'll read a lot, we'll write a lot, we'll think a lot, and we'll discuss all of these—in class, online, and in conferences. Welcome!

### **Kuhio Walters: Photography and the Rhetoric of Commemoration**

Is there a photographic rhetoric? Can photography argue or persuade? What kind of claims can it make on a viewer, as opposed to those made by written language? We will explore such questions, first, by rhetorically analyzing the major trends in the history of photography. Using semiotics and psychoanalysis, as well as theoretical frames that students probably encountered in ENG 194, 295, and 296, we will attempt to understand these artistic and documentary trends within the historical and political contexts that gave rise to them. (For example, how does photographic Pictorialism relate to late-19<sup>th</sup> century notions of subjective experience?) Second, with this history of photography's evolution in front of us, we will examine the practice of contemporary photojournalism and its role as a form of political advocacy. In sum, we will grapple with the strengths and limitations of the medium as a form of cultural and personal commemoration, aesthetic statement or critique, fetishized commercial object, and political mobilization. Interested students can learn more about my research interests from the English department's website: [http://www.wcupa.edu/ACADEMICS/SCH\\_CAS.ENG/Faculty/KuhioWalters.asp](http://www.wcupa.edu/ACADEMICS/SCH_CAS.ENG/Faculty/KuhioWalters.asp)