



ENGL 2600 Intro to Critical Theory

"Theory itself is often assumed to be abstract: something is more theoretical the more abstract it is, the more it is abstracted from everyday life. To abstract is to drag away, detach, pull away or divert. We might then have to drag theory back, to bring theory back to life."

-- Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

Fall 2018
Dr. McCown

TuTh 8:30-9:45 am

Course information:

ENGL 2600.01

TuTh 8:30-9:45 am (ughh, I know, early classes)

Multipurpose Center (MC) 110

Instructor: Dr. Julie McCown

What you can call me:

Dr. McCown (rhymes with *gown*)

Professor McCown

Dr. M

Professor M

Email: juliemccown@suu.edu

Office: Braithwaite Center (BC) 303B

Office hours: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 1:00 - 2:00 pm;

Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00 - 2:30 pm;

Or by appointment

Course Description:

From the catalog: "An introductory course in the reading and application of literary theory, which provides a survey of major critical and methodological approaches."

From Dr McCown:

Contrary to popular belief, English Studies is not a field in which anything goes. Far from it—being a literary scholar requires mastering a particular skill set and drawing on a common body of knowledge. This shared knowledge has less to do with *what* you read than with *how* you read and express your thoughts about that reading. Just as physicists have their lingo and economists have theirs, literary scholars have their own language, theories, methods, and conventions.

This course is designed to introduce English majors and potential majors to critical theory and how it can be applied to the study of literature. In this course we will study several influential schools of critical theory, learning how they developed in response to each other. We will also study a selection of the most recently published work in critical theory and theory-oriented literary criticism to give you a sense of how scholars and theorists are using critical theory today. You will practice applying the various critical theories to primary texts, both in class discussion and by writing papers through the lens of a specific theory. You will also learn to identify and employ the discursive conventions of literary scholarship as you practice reading challenging critical texts and doing research for your final paper, which requires entering into an ongoing conversation in the field. After completing this course, students will find their reading experience enriched by having learned the strategies for reading, thinking, and writing that make English Studies not a book club, but a profession.

Required Texts:

Peter M. Barry. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 4th ed.

ISBN: 978-1526121790

Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid's Tale*

ISBN: 978-0385490818

All other readings will be provided on Canvas

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to apply specific theories or theoretical approaches to literary texts in class discussions and academic writing.
SUU ELO: Communication: Students develop and express ideas and will be able to do so in a variety of ways, namely in writing, by speaking, visually, kinesthetically, through design or aurally.
2. Students will be able to identify and articulate key concepts and theories that fall under the broad term: critical theory.
SUU ELO: Critical Thinking: Students demonstrate disciplined processes of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.
3. Students will apply a range of critical theories and perspectives to literary and other texts through close reading and analysis.
SUU ELO: Inquiry & Analysis: Inquiry: Students systematically explore issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis: Students break complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.
4. Students will evaluate how perspective and background inform reading and interpretive experience.
SUU ELO: Intercultural Knowledge and Competence: Students demonstrate that they possess a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts.

Course Assignments:

Group Theory Project: (detailed instructions posted on Canvas)

The project involves working with your group members to create a one-page handout that provides an overview of one class day's assigned theories. There will be 7 groups total (5 groups of 4 students, 2 groups of 5 students).

***Note*: You will put yourselves in groups and sign-up for a chapter by Thursday, 9/6. I will not place you in groups; if you do not attend class, the burden is on you to reach out to classmates to find a group. This assignment cannot be completed individually.**

Create a 1 page handout for the 2 theories covered on your assigned day. You will turn in your handout **by noon the day prior to your assigned class day**. This will allow me to make copies for the whole class to distribute at the start of class.

Midterm Exam:

The Midterm Exam will be an in-class short-answer exam. You will be asked to define key terms from the school's of theory we covered during the first part of the semester. You will use your handouts to review and study for the exam.

Response Papers:

After the midterm, our focus will shift to reading 10 recent works of critical theory and literary criticism. You will be required to write at least eight 1-2 page response papers for these readings (there are 10 readings total, so you can skip two). Each response paper will address the following questions in 1-2 double-spaced pages: How does the writer employ critical theory? What theories are used? What applications can you see to the study of literature?

Discussion Questions:

You will sign up for a day to generate discussion questions (2-3 students per day). On your assigned day, you will come up with at least 2 discussion questions that will begin our day's discussion. When coming up with discussion questions, here are some ideas to consider: what you didn't understand about the reading, what you found interesting or intriguing about the reading, broad questions about how the reading fits in (or doesn't fit in) with a school of theory, or how the reading connects to other readings we've discussed.

Final Essay:

The Final Essay is an argumentative, academic essay around 8-12 pages in length. You will choose one of the 10 articles/chapters we read, and apply that writer's theory or theoretical approach to an essay of your own on a text of your choosing. You will also include other academic sources as well. Your essay should have a clear, detailed thesis statement that involves an analysis of your chosen text, as well as a significant engagement or application of theory.

Grades:

| | |
|-----|---------------------------|
| 20% | Group Theory Project |
| 21% | Midterm Exam |
| 24% | Response Papers (8 total) |
| 5% | Discussion Questions |
| 30% | Final Essay |

Late Work:

You will turn in all of your major assignments online. It is your responsibility to make sure that your submission goes through, which means going back after you have uploaded your assignment to double check that it is there. Computer problems are not a valid excuse for late or missing work. If you are having trouble uploading an assignment from your home computer, go

to the library and upload it from there. Plan ahead.

Major assignments that are turned in late will be deducted 10% for each 24-hour-period after the stated deadline. In-class work cannot be made-up.

Extensions are negotiable. If you anticipate needing more time for an assignment, you must get in touch with me at least two days before the assignment is due. Together we will arrive at a later due date. I will hold you to that new due date and deduct points if you miss it. Do not email me the day before something is due to ask for an extension; I will refuse. Plan ahead. I reserve the right to refuse extensions.

Attendance:

It is vital to your success in this course that you to attend class regularly. I will take attendance, but **you will not be penalized for absences**. Instead I will reward you for (near) perfect attendance. **If you miss 2 classes or fewer throughout the semester, you will receive an extra 5 points on your final grade.** This is a significant boost to your grade and should be regarded as a privilege that you must earn (not a right to which you are entitled); thus, I will be very strict in attendance and will not offer excused absences. If you miss class more than two times (for whatever reason), you will not be eligible to receive the extra points.

I will not supply what you miss when you are absent. You will need to first look over the syllabus calendar and then consult with classmates to find out what you missed and/or get notes.

Theory makes your brain hurt -- that's a good thing!

Studying critical theory can be quite challenging and confusing. It involves wrestling with not just new ideas, but new ways of thinking and organizing your ideas. Even scholars and professors working with theory for decades still wrestle with theory.

Critical theory also introduces viewpoints that may be quite new and different to you and conflict with your own personal beliefs. I am not asking you to adopt these different viewpoints, but rather to be open to discussing these ideas in meaningful and respectful ways, recognizing the multiplicity of worldviews and ways of being that exist in the broader cultural world. If any of this concerns you, please don't hesitate to let me know at any point in the semester.

Allies on Campus:

Allies On Campus is a committee comprised of students, staff, and faculty dedicated to creating safe spaces for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual individuals and Allies (LGBTQIA+) on the campus of Southern Utah University (SUU). As an ally, I am willing to listen and help you get help you need inside and outside of the classroom.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is presenting another person's ideas or words as one's own. Plagiarism occurs when a writer quotes, paraphrases, or summarizes another person's work without crediting his/her

sources. Plagiarism occurs whether the text quoted is a book, article, website, Wikipedia, a reader's guide like Cliffs Notes or Spark Notes, another student's paper, or any other source. An entire essay is considered fraudulent even if only a single sentence is plagiarized. Also, please note that plagiarism has nothing to do with intent. If you do not properly credit your sources, you have plagiarized, whether or not you meant to.

How can I avoid plagiarism?

1. Develop your own opinions and ideas whenever you write papers or exams. Resist the temptation to look to online reading guides, analyses, or summaries for inspiration; it's way too easy for the language you read and ideas you're exposed to to seep into your own writing.
2. As you work on your research paper, take good notes, being sure to keep your ideas about the primary text and the ideas of your interlocutors (i.e., your sources) separate.
3. Whenever you refer to another person's ideas or words, use proper citation to give them credit. This can mean either paraphrasing an author's ideas and indicating that you are doing so in your prose (e.g., writing, "As Brook Thomas has argued," and following that opener with a statement of his argument in your own words) or citing a source directly via quotation (e.g., "As Brook Thomas writes, 'xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx'"). Because most English classes will require you to use MLA citation guidelines, the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers is a recommended text for this course.

What are the consequences of plagiarism?

If I suspect you of plagiarism, I will contact you so that we can discuss my concerns. You will then have the opportunity to either accept or deny responsibility for plagiarism. Students who commit plagiarism will most likely receive a reduced grade, possibly a zero, for the fraudulent assignment. (I assess the academic penalty on a case-by-case basis.)

Syllabus as Contract:

This syllabus is more than a list of what you need to do; it's also a contract, a list of obligations and responsibilities that each of us takes on at the beginning of the semester. By reading this syllabus and deciding to stick with the course, you are consenting to the policies outlined above and promising to uphold your end of the bargain. I am promising a few things, too. As your instructor, I will:

1. Always start class on time, as I know your time is valuable.
2. Always end class on time, as I know you have places to be.
3. Grade your work within two weeks of it being turned in.
4. Hold office hours every week and advise you well ahead of time of any changes to them.
5. Be respectful of your opinions and open to your questions.

University Policies:

Academic Integrity: Scholastic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. You are expected to have read and understood Policy 6.33 Academic Integrity and the current issue of the student handbook (published by Student Services) regarding student responsibilities and rights.

ADA Statement: Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations or auxiliary aids will need to contact the Southern Utah University Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), in Room 206F of the Sharwan Smith Center or phone (435) 865-8022. SSD determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of services.

Emergency Management Statement: In case of emergency, the University's Emergency Notification System (ENS) will be activated. Students are encouraged to maintain updated contact information using the link on the homepage of the mySUU portal. In addition, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Emergency Response Protocols posted in each classroom. Detailed information about the University's emergency management plan can be found at: <https://www.suu.edu/ad/em/>.

HEOA Compliance statement: The sharing of copyrighted material through peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, except as provided under U.S. copyright law, is prohibited by law. Detailed information can be found at: <https://www.suu.edu/heoa/index.html>.

Disclaimer: Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grading, late assignments, makeup work, and attendance policies, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor. In the event that there are changes to the syllabus, I will notify you both in-person and electronically.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Tu 8/28

Introductions, class contract

TH 8/30

Read: Bruns, *Why Literature?* "Chapter 1 Why Read Literature?" (PDF on Canvas)

Week 2

Tu 9/4

Read: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 3 - 106 (Ch 1 - 18)

Th 9/6

Read: *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 109 - 206 (Ch 19 - 31)

Week 3

Tu 9/11

Read: *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 207 - 311 (Ch 32 - Historical Notes)

Th 9/13

New criticism/Structuralism

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/new-criticism/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/structuralism/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 11-60

Week 4

Tu 9/18

Post-structuralism/Deconstruction

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/poststructuralism/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/deconstruction/>

Skim,

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 61-82

Th 9/20

Psychoanalytic criticism/Marxism

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/psychoanalysis/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/marxism/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 97-122, 159-174

Week 5

Tu 9/25

Feminist criticism/LGBTQ criticism

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/feminist-theory/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/queer-theory/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 123-158

Th 9/27

New historicism/Cultural studies

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/new-historicism/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/cultural-studies/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 175-193

Week 6

Tu 10/2

Postcolonialism/Critical Race studies

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/postcolonial-theory/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/ethnic-studies/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 194-204

Th 10/4

Ecocriticism/Animal Studies

Read:

<https://www.shmoop.com/ecocriticism/>

<https://www.shmoop.com/animal-studies/>

Skim:

Barry, *Beginning Theory*, pp. 248-278, 335-341

Week 7

Tu 10/9

Midterm exam in class

Th 10/11

Read: Sara Ahmed, "Bringing Feminist Theory Home," from *Living a Feminist Life*

Due: Response Paper 1 (remember you only have to complete 8 Response Papers)

Week 8

Tu 10/16

Read: Todd May, "Our Lives and Our Vulnerability," from *A Fragile Life*

Due: Response Paper 2

Th 10/18

Read: Heather Houser, "Ecosickness," from *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*

Due: Response Paper 3

Week 9

Tu 10/23

No class: Fall Break

Th 10/25

Introduce and discuss Final Essay assignment

Week 10

Tu 10/30

Read: Matthew J.C. Cella, "The Ecosomatic Paradigm in Literature: Merging Disability Studies and Ecocriticism"

Due: Response Paper 4

Th 11/1

Read: Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation"

Due: Response Paper 5

Week 11

Tu 11/6

Read: Abeer A. Al-Sarrani, "Theresa Cha's *Dictée* as a Montage: A Visual Postcolonial-Feminist Transnational Reading"

Due: Response Paper 6

Th 11/8

No Class: Dr. McCown at SSAWW Conference (Society for the Study of American Women Writers) in Denver

Week 12

Tu 11/13

Writing Workshop

Th 11/15

Read: Christina Sharpe, "The Wake," from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Due: Response Paper 7

Week 13

Tu 11/20

Drafts/peer review

Th 11/22

No class: Thanksgiving

Week 14

Tu 11/27

Read: Bethany Schneider, "A Modest Proposal: Laura Ingalls Wilder Ate Zitkala-Sa"

Due: Response Paper 8

Th 11/29

Read: Julian Yates, "Impression," from *Of Sheep, Oranges, and Yeast: A Multispecies Impression*

Due: Response Paper 9

Week 15

Tu 12/4

Read: Rachel C. Lee, "Parts/Parturition," from *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies*

Due: Response Paper 10

Th 12/6

Wrap-up, present essays

Due: Final Essays by 11:59 pm