Department of English Language and Literature  
Fall 2012  
English 247: American Literature and Popular Culture

Instructor: Meredith Quinn Powell, mqpowell@uwaterloo.ca  
Office: PAS 1064, 519-888-4567 x 32625  
Class Time: 12:30-1:20, MWF  
Class Location: DWE 3517  
Office Hours: MW 1:30-2:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the intersections between American Literature and Popular Culture through a survey of comic, novel, and film to determine the nature of Post-Modernism in literary form.

The textual environment we will explore is swathed in an aura of contradictions. On the surface, it is a textual tossed salad of mass culture, consumerism, and the endless proliferation of the image and drive towards the American dream--family, fortune, and independence. Novels such as Don Delillo’s *White Noise*, Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, and the film, *Memento*, present characters dominated by the image. The form is the function of the text. The second half of this course is both theoretical and practical in its pursuits. Our goal is to become aware of the shaping force of popular culture, to exercise critical thinking, and to learn and apply rhetorical theories and methods to popular cultural texts and objects in a variety of forms. Using the cold war as a distant mirror, John Edgar Wideman’s novel, *Philadelphia Fire*, Tim O’Brien’s novel, *The Things They Carried*, and the supernatural elements in Charlaine Harris’ novel, *Dead Until Dark* will be critically examined, analyzed and assessed in order to explore the relationship between American war propaganda, politics, and mass culture. During the course we will also broaden our analysis to include advertisements, art, fashion, film, literature, music, politics, radio, and television in group discussion. By learning and applying theory and methods we will be able to increase our awareness of how popular culture impacts and shapes our daily experience.

Each week we will hold workshops dedicated to the writing process. In these workshops, we will apply theoretical concepts to the assigned texts, as well as explore the following essay-writing skills which will aid you in both your proposal and annotated bibliography, midterm essays, as well as the final research paper. Guided by Katherine Acheson’s book, *Writing Essays About Literature*, we will explore topics such as the thesis statement, grammar, form, reading, research, documentation, and MLA style. Chapter readings and exercises will be assigned in advance and participation counts towards your professionalism and participation grade. Participation in these classes will improve your writing skills.
REQUIRED MATERIALS


Evaluation:

First In-class Midterm (Friday October 12): 20%
Second In-class Midterm (November 23): 25%
Research Paper Proposal with Annotated Bibliography (Friday November 9): 10%
Final Research Paper (due December 10): 30%
Professionalism and Participation: 15%

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

*Please bring your texts to class*

**Week 1: Sept 10/12/14**
Mon: Syllabus Overview
Wed: Introduction to Course Concepts
Fri: Short Story

**Week 2: Sept 17/19/21**
Mon: Memento Screening TBA
Wed: Memento
Fri: Memento

**Week 3: Sept 24/26/28**
Mon: Writing Essays About Literature
Wed: Cultural Object Lecture: Video games
Fri: Cultural Object Lecture: Video games

**Week 4: Oct 1/3/5**
Mon: White Noise
Wed: White Noise
Fri: Writing Essays About Literature

**Week 5: Oct 8/10/12**
Mon: Thanksgiving: No Class
Wed: Mid-term Review
Fri: Midterm

**Week 6: Oct 15/17/19**
Mon: The Crying of Lot 49
Wed: The Crying of Lot 49
Fri: Writing Essays About Literature: The Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

**Week 7: Oct 22/24/26**
Mon: Philadelphia Fire
Wed: Philadelphia Fire
Fri: Writing Essays About Literature

**Week 8: Oct 29/31/Nov 2**
Mon: The Things They Carried
Wed: The Things They Carried
Fri: Peer Review Proposal Workshop: Bring draft of proposal to class for peer review

**Week 9: Nov 5/7/9**
Mon: Dead Until Dark
Wed: Dead Until Dark
Fri: Writing Essays about Literature/Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due

**Week 10: Nov 12/14/16**
Mon: Writing Essays About Literature
Wed: Midterm Review
Fri: Midterm Review

**Week 11: Nov 19/21/23**
Mon: Second Midterm
Wed: Workshop: Bring popular cultural object to class along with a typed paragraph on pop culture text/object that influences you and apply methodology
Fri: Writing Essays About Literature

**Week 12: Nov 26/28/30**
Mandatory Meeting with Instructor to discuss proposal and final paper. To be scheduled in advance.

**Week 13: Dec 3**
Monday: Course Wrap up

**Final Paper due December 6th.**
**Late policy:** Late assignments will not be accepted. If personal problems arise of a serious nature that will prevent you from submitting assignments on time and you know this in advance, contact me and we will make other arrangements; if unforeseen circumstances cause you to be unable to submit an assignment on time contact me when you are able to and we will work something out. Personal problems and resulting rescheduling where appropriate will be given due consideration and is at the instructor’s discretion. Late marks may be applicable at a rate of 2% per day if extension is granted.

**Please Note:**

**Professionalism and Participation Grade:** Arrive on time, prepared for class and ready to contribute to discussions. Follow the course updates and discussions through LEARN. Contributing to discussions in meaningful ways is important. Ask worthwhile questions, make comments that advance learning in the class, and highlight connections between ideas, methods and theories as they arise. Bring your textbook to each class. From time to time you will be required to bring in a short typed typed description (approximately 100-200 words) of a popular culture text/object, apply the course concepts we are learning each week and indicate why this particular text/object impacts you. This short assignment will be used for group work and for generating ideas for your final paper during our workshops. It will also be a means to partially assess your engagement in the material and in class. Do these things and you’ll achieve a good grade for this component of the class. Achieving a poor grade is also straightforward: Contribute in irrelevant ways, be disrespectful to the instructor or your fellow students when they are contributing to class, read your email, use your cell phone, arrive late to class, be ill prepared, or do anything else that distracts others and disengages you from class. Additionally, missing classes without valid excuses (a valid excuse would be a doctor’s note indicating you are not well enough to attend class) will contribute to a poor grade. Your attendance is required.

**Midterm:** You will be responsible for information covered during class and in course readings. Since the course is both literary, theoretical, and practical in nature you will be asked to do an analysis of a provided text in short-answer and essay format. The midterm will be written during class time on Friday October 12th and we will review the format and material for the test in the preceding class on October 10th. The second midterm will be written during class time on Monday November 19th and we will review the format and material for the test in the preceding class on Friday November 16th --please come prepared with your notes and any questions you may have. The midterms will replace a final exam.

**Proposal and Annotated Bibliography:** This one page essay plan will identify your thesis and your preliminary research (on both your text and the rhetorical theory you will be applying). In addition to the proposed research topic and methodology, 6-8 academic sources will accompany your thesis. In addition to bibliographic data, this assignment requires you to briefly summarize your sources and assess its relevance to your own argument. The writing class scheduled for Friday October 18th will be dedi-
cated to learning the format of the proposal and annotated bibliography. Please have a rough draft for the writing class on November 2nd for the peer-review workshop. Your final proposal and bibliography is due November 9th.

Research Paper: Start thinking about your essay right away. It will be 2000-2500 words in length. You will need to demonstrate clear thought, well developed analysis, and appropriate research (which will by necessity go beyond your course readings and our class discussions). The cogency of your argument and the clarity of your approach and the selection and application of your resources are essential to creating an excellent essay. Feel free to bring drafts to my office hours and I will be happy to help you develop your work. Your critical analysis will build on what we’ve learned throughout the term applying theories we’ve studied and going beyond this by researching these theories and ideas further in peer reviewed journals and academic books, which we will cover during our writing workshops. You’re required to draw on a minimum of eight sources (beyond your primary text). Your resources must be documented in your bibliography using MLA format.

Peer Feedback: You will be responsible for giving feedback to at least one other individual in the class throughout the term on their essay proposal in addition to writing exercises. Feedback will be approximately 150 words in length. Detailed expectations for peer feedback will be outlined in the first two weeks of class. Active and thoughtful feedback will contribute towards your professionalism and participation grade.

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g. plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm

Academic Integrity Website (Arts): http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html
Academic Integrity Office (UW): http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/

Note for students with Disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.