English 251A: Criticism 1

Section 6
M 7-9:50; HH336
Fall 2012

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Office Hours: M 5:00-6:00, or by appointment

Course Description
In ordinary usage, the word criticism implies an action that most of us would prefer not doing, often with good reason. The pejorative sense of the word is also implied in the derivatives criticize, critical, and critic. We are more likely to find bitter, harsh, fierce, or scathing before the word criticism than good, astute, fair, or incisive. The phrase constructive criticism is no less pejorative, at best implying an emperor in new clothes; for to “offer” such criticism is still to judge another person, to condemn them—perhaps politely—to change.

English teaches us that criticism can be damning. The main goal of this course is to explore how it might prove a blessing as well: to seek the most productive—or better, creative—practices of criticism. To achieve this goal we will learn and apply a variety of terms and techniques for literary and rhetorical analysis. The bulk of our attention will be given to poems and other short texts that we can discuss easily in class.

251A is the only second year seminar course offered in the English department. Seminars provide an ideal kind of learning environment since they require students to take part in a way that lectures don’t allow. The experience should prove to be not only valuable but enjoyable. After some concentrated training and practice, you will emerge from this course with enhanced skills for literary and rhetorical study and greater resources (including a technical vocabulary) for making persuasive arguments within these disciplines.

Texts
The following texts are available at the UW Bookstore:

Other readings will be available through UW-LEARN (learn.uwaterloo.ca).

Assessment
1) Attendance, Participation, Preparation. Weight: 20%.
Students are expected to be present for every class, to make regular contributions to the discussion, and to cooperate in all class exercises. Attendance and punctuality count. Students should arrive at least a few minutes before class so as to have adequate time to set up. Lateness will be tolerated, grudgingly. I expect you to attend conscientiously and participate in an informed and productive manner. This means you will need to arrive to class with perceptions and opinions about the assigned work. I expect you to show courtesy and respect listening and
responding to what others say. The work you do in class, in groups and individually, will count towards this grade, as will discussion posts and other questions I assign to be answered on UW-LEARN or to be brought into class. Each student is responsible for checking UW-LEARN a few times a week and completing each assignment.

2) Three Close Reading Assignments. **Total weight: 25%**
   Assignment 1: Analyzing Poetry. Approximately 700 words. **Weight: 7% (due Oct. 1)**
   Assignment 3: Exploring a Story. 500-900 words. **Weight: 9% (due Dec. 3)**

3) An essay, 1200-1500 words in length (typed, double-spaced). **Weight: 25% (due Nov. 12)**

4) Final Exam. **Weight: 30%**

**General Note on Close Reading Assignments and Essay**
There is an art of careful concision, and the word limit for these assignments should be observed as closely as possible. All assignments should be written in grammatically correct prose. Read your work aloud to anyone who will listen—to yourself first of all. If a sentence “sounds wrong” it probably is. Think about what you intend to say and then write it anew. Always write in a clear and direct style. Avoid jargon and florid language. Assignments should be formatted according to MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines, and any assignment that consistently ignores this style will be penalized. Cornell University Library provides information on these conventions, visit [http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla](http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla). These conventions apply to all quotations in the text, the works cited page, and all general formatting.

**Deadlines**
In his *Book of Ephraim*, the poet James Merrill personifies the “Deadline” as an “ancient foe.” It is hoped that you will not only conquer this “foe” by submitting your work on time but that you will discover some creative pressures in your contest with it. All essays are to be submitted to me in person before the beginning of the class on the assigned day; those submitted afterwards will be considered late. No electronic submissions will be accepted except in the case of a medical emergency. Five percent of the assignment grade will be deducted per day for lateness.

**Tentative Schedule**

**Other readings will be announced on UW-LEARN**

**Week 1: Monday, Sept. 10**
Introductions, Jumping Right Into It

**Week 2: Monday, Sept. 17**
RP: Chapters 1-2

**Week 3: Monday, Sept. 24**
RP: Chapter 3
AE: “Repetition” (19)
Week 4: Monday, Oct. 1  
*Close Reading Assignment 1 due*
RP: Chapter 4
AF: “Defamiliarization” (11)

Monday, Oct. 8 — THANKSGIVING *(University Holiday)*

Week 5: Monday, Oct. 15
RP: Chapter 5
AF: “Symbolism” (30), “Allegory” (31)

Week 6: Monday, Oct. 22  
*Close Reading Assignment 2 due*
RP: Chapter 6

Week 7: Monday, Oct. 29
RP: Chapter 7
AF: “Telling in Different Voices” (27)

Week 8: Monday, Nov. 5
RP: Chapter 8
AF: “Irony” (39)

Week 9: Monday, Nov. 12  
*Essay due*
RP: Chapter 9
Selections from William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*

Week 10: Monday, Nov. 19  
*Optional Assignment on the Art of Fiction, part 1*
William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, from the beginning to the middle (pp.3-136)
AF: selections TBA

Week 11: Monday, Nov. 26  
*Optional Assignment on the Art of Fiction, part 2*
William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, from the middle to the ending (pp.137-261)
AF: selections TBA

Week 12: Monday, Dec. 3  
*Close Reading Assignment 3 due*
Tying up Faulkner
Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Closing comments, preparation for exam

Final Exam — TBA
“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.”

“Academic Integrity: in order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.”

“Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of her or his university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70—Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.”

“Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his or her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (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 offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.”

“Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm.”

All sources of information that you use in your written work in this class must be cited fully and scrupulously. If I suspect that you have committed an academic offence, including plagiarism, I will report it to the Associate Dean; if the offence is confirmed, the normal result is a failing grade on the assignment and academic probation.