

**English 120: Introduction to the English Major
Literature, History, Culture
CRN: 41466
Fall 2012: MW 8:00 – 9:50
FH 236**

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Founders Hall 226
Office hours:
T: 11:00 – 12:00
W: 12:30 - 2:00
and by appointment

Course goals

Catalog description: "Aims and methods of literary scholarship and criticism, to prepare for upper division work. Recommended first course in the major. One of four units is individualized instruction on assigned topics."

This course is an introduction, not to literature, strictly speaking, but to the *discipline* of English literary studies. We'll spend some time discussing what exactly that means, and what skills and concepts you'll need to make your way through the undergraduate major. While no one can anticipate all of the texts and assignments you'll encounter in future English courses, this course should prepare you for many of them. Introduction to the English Major is the first course in a four-course core sequence that includes English 220, 225, and 320. Each of these courses addresses major theoretical and methodological concerns in the study of language and texts. Specifically, this semester, we'll consider the following questions, among others:

- What is literature? Why is there an academic discipline devoted to its study?
- What role does genre play in our understanding of a text's meaning?
- What exactly are we doing when we do "literary criticism"? What are the aims of literary criticism? How have those aims changed over time?
- What is the relationship between a literary text and its larger historical and cultural contexts?
- What research resources are available in and through the library, and how do I use them?

The class will be conducted through discussion and very, very occasional lectures.

Required Materials/Resources: First and foremost, regular access to the course web site. A good deal of the course material will be available on the web only, either as web pages, as pdfs, or as links to other sites. The course reader is password protected; when prompted, you'll need to use **the user name and password included on the print syllabus distributed in class**. If you lost the print syllabus you'll need to contact me or a classmate for this information. In addition, homework assignments will be posted for each class session to the website's "updates" page; you'll also find links to handouts for major assignments and an overview of course policies on the web site.

Otherwise, you'll need to purchase only one text: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. It's available at the HSU Bookstore. Feel free to use any edition of the text, including one you may already own or one purchased at a second-hand book store.

Major Graded Assignments: "In general, it is expected that the successful student will spend two hours of preparation per week for each unit earned" (*Humboldt State University Catalog 2010-2011* p. 56). For a 4-unit course, this means you should expect to devote about 8 hours per week outside of class to this course. This is the recommended *minimum*. Spending 8 hours per week does not guarantee a passing grade, however, nor does it guarantee *any* particular letter grade.

- **Informal writing assignments on Moodle:** Seven times in the semester I'll assign an informal writing assignment that will ask you to consider some questions regarding the readings for the next class session. In general, I assign these for readings that I feel are especially important, and the questions will form the basis

of our discussion for that next class session. They'll be graded on a C/NC basis. These are *not* formal essays in any sense, but rather a place where you'll think on paper and record the results of your thinking. Here are some general guidelines for those who like such things:

- As an English major, you should be able to express yourself in clear and complete grammatical sentences, and even, God help us, in *paragraphs*. If I can't understand the point you're making, I'll likely deny you credit.
- You should address the questions posed, please. If you have other observations to make about the text, I'll invite you to share them during class discussion.
- Because life is short, and the semester even shorter, you should say what you have to say in no more than 800 words. In other words, pointless rambling will not impress me; if you tend to run on and on, you should edit your response and cut out the flab. In some cases, you may exhaust your 800 words without managing to address every single question posed; that's fine. *Depth* of thought can substitute for *breadth*. But your response must address some of the questions posed and must demonstrate familiarity with the assigned readings.
- Most of these assignments will require *at least* 400 words if you're going to say anything meaningful; if you stop at 400 words without having at least attempted every question, you shouldn't expect to receive credit. If you sincerely don't understand a question, you should at least say as much.

The overall grade for these assignments (that is, the grade that will be calculated into your final grade) will be based strictly **on the number you submit and that earn credit**: 6 or more assignments will earn an "A"; 5 will earn a "B"; 4 will earn a "C." **You'll receive no credit if you submit fewer than four.**

These assignments will be uploaded to the university's Learning Management System, Moodle. You'll complete them using some word-processing software, save the file, and then upload it. **Please be sure to save your file as a .doc or .rtf file, please. If you're working in Open Office please be advised that I cannot open files with a .odt extension! You must save your file with a .doc extension!**

Informal assignments cannot be turned in late. I'll say that again: no informal assignments will be accepted after the deadline, no matter what the reason. Don't attempt to leave hard copies in my mailbox or to slip them under my office door. These assignments are dependent, in part, on your ability to manage your time and to foresee (and avoid) potential problems; they're meant to reward those students who are disciplined, organized, and prudent. Make sure you understand how to use Moodle, if you're new to HSU; don't wait until the last minute to submit your assignment. If you email me frantically at 8:03 in the morning to say you weren't able to upload your file, I will have little sympathy; if, however, you email me at 8 p.m. the previous night to say Moodle isn't working, we can figure out a solution together.

- **Four Projects (see schedule below for proposed due dates and "major assignments" page for details as the projects are introduced):** During the semester three informal projects will be due. These are in the spirit of the informal writing assignments, but are somewhat more elaborate; one will involve additional outside research. You'll have several days to complete each assignment; they will be collected in hard copy and given a letter grade.
 - The "Lycidas" Project
 - How To Read: Engaging with Texts
 - Source Critique: Scrutinizing Your Resources
 - Cumulative Assessment: A narrative overview of your semester in English 120
- **Final Paper: *The Grapes of Wrath*: Texts and Contexts:** A final research/analytical paper will be due in week 14 of the semester in lieu of a final exam. This assignment will be a historicist reading of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Details will follow later in the semester.

Other Course Requirements:

- **Regular monitoring of the course updates page:** After every class, the homework assignment for the next class session will be posted at the "updates" page of the web site. If you have to miss a class, I expect you to log on and be prepared for the next class just the same. Information about any changes to the schedule will also be posted on the updates page. I'll announce any changes to the course calendar in class as well and will certainly consult with the class before making any radical changes.
- **Attendance and punctuality:** Everyone is entitled to miss **three** classes—no explanations, no apologies necessary. Miss more than three, and your *final* grade will suffer; the more you miss, the more it'll hurt, and the pain will increase exponentially with each additional absence. You *can* fail this class because of excessive absences. If you miss *six* classes, I'll advise you to withdraw; if you miss seven or more, I'll *insist* that you do (at six absences, you'll have missed 20% of our class time). On the other hand, perfect or near-perfect attendance (that is, no more than one absence) can *boost* your final grade in the class.

These absences are to meet the unexpected and unavoidable contingencies of life: illness, emergencies, flood, fire, famine. There are no additional "excused" absences. Don't bring me a note from the Health Center attesting to your positive strep-throat culture and expect me to erase an absence. These sanctioned absences are like sick days from work—they cover those times when you really *must* miss class.

Please note that missing a class doesn't excuse you from completing the assigned work for the next session; remember, the assignment will be available at the updates page, whether you made it to class or not. If you know in advance that you must miss when a major assignment is due, let me know; otherwise, routine absences should *not* include sessions when major assignments are due.

Please don't expect me to make individual adjustments to my attendance policy based on your personal circumstances; I don't think it's fair to ask me to judge the validity of your priorities or to exempt some students from rules that others are expected to observe. It's not up to the institution to accommodate your individual situation; it's up to you to meet the expectations and obligations of the institution, or to wait and pursue your education at some later time. Use your sanctioned absences *wisely*.

Please make every effort to get to class on time. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class; if you arrive late, it's up to you to inform me that you were present so you're not marked absent for the day. If I see a pattern of consistent lateness developing I'll keep track of the time you've missed and add those minutes up into absences.

It's an early class, folks. If you know already that an 8 a.m. start is going to be rough for you, I suggest you wait and take the class in a different semester. If routine tardiness becomes an issue, I'll begin locking the classroom door at 8:15 a.m.

Grading: I subscribe to nasty, traditional grading criteria: an "A" represents truly outstanding work; a "B" is awarded to above-average work; a "C" indicates a solid, if unexceptional, effort; and "D" is reserved for work that just barely merits credit, and certainly nothing more. I assume "F" needs no explanation. I'll grant incompletes in the course only under *extraordinary* circumstances.

Final Paper: 25%

"Projects": 10% each (for a total of 40% of final grade)

Informal writing assignments: 25%

Participation, punctuality, citizenship; attendance: 10%

A cumulative average of 2.0 (C) in courses in the major is required for graduation. Students may *not* retake a course for a better grade if they originally received a grade of C or higher.

Please let me know of any documented disabilities and the recommended accommodations that would promote your success in this class. The online version of this syllabus has links to additional resources for students with disabilities.

Classroom Deportment: I will eject students who are disruptive, abusive, or generally disrespectful. If you're persuaded that what we're doing in this class is pointless, then you should withdraw from the class and invest your time in something you find worthwhile, rather than lurk and make snarky comments. Please see the online version of this syllabus for more information on HSU's policies on classroom behavior.

Academic Integrity: All members of an academic community are responsible for supporting intellectual freedom and openness through rigorous personal standards of honesty and fairness. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the very purpose of the university and diminish the value of an education. All cases of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating, will be handled in accordance with University policy. Students are responsible for knowing HSU policy regarding academic honesty. These guidelines, along with sanctions for violations, can be reviewed at http://www.humboldt.edu/studentrights/academic_honesty.php

Plagiarism is fast becoming one of the major headaches for universities across the country. Countless articles have appeared in the popular press about the casualness with which students steal material, especially from the Internet, that they attempt to pass off as their own. Be warned: I will deal with plagiarists very, very harshly.

Communicating: I assume that most of you won't be able to make my regular office hours. That doesn't mean we can't meet, just the same. I'm happy to set up appointments at other times—just stop me after class, or send me an email if you'd like to meet one-on-one. The most efficient way to reach me is via email; I often forget to check my voicemail for messages.

If a personal disaster befalls you in the course of the semester--your home burns down, your computer crashes, a marauding horde carries off your livestock--please let me know! I might be able to direct you to campus resources that may help; at the very least, we should figure out a plan to help you make it through the semester successfully.

Add/Drop policy: Students are responsible for knowing University policy, procedures, and schedule for dropping or adding classes. For more information, refer to the registrar's website: <http://sorrel.humboldt.edu/registrar/students/regulations/schedadjust.html>

Safety information and emergency evacuation: Please review the evacuation plan for the classroom (posted on the orange signs) and review Campus Emergency Preparedness procedures by following the link below: http://www.humboldt.edu/emergencymgmtprogram/campus_emergency_preparedness.php

****Course calendar: under construction****
Explosive! Subject to volatile changes!

Judging by past experience, this calendar will likely have an ambiguous relationship to what we're doing in class after about the eighth or ninth week. Still, it will serve as a guide to the order in which we'll tackle various topics. Please refer to the online updates page and the readings page of the website for specific assignments and readings on a day-by-day basis.

Week 1 What Is Literature?

Introductions and paperwork; our "literary histories."

Terry Eagleton: "What Is Literature?" (Available online at the course website.) First informal writing assignment will be due!

- Week 2 Close reading and "interpretation."**
How to read a poem; figurative language. Online readings.
The speaker of the lyric poem. Online readings
- Week 3 Close reading continued; "Lycidas" and literary history**
The limits of close reading: "Lycidas" (online).
The "Lycidas" Project introduced and discussed.
- Week 4 Strategizing research; genre & literary history**
Assessing research needs; finding resources.
Genre discussed (online readings).
- Week 5 Genre & literary history (continued)**
Literary history: Tillyard. Online reading. In-class meeting of Lycidas Project groups.
Literary history continued: Northrop Frye
- Week 6 New Historicisms**
"Literary History": Patterson (available online). **The "Lycidas" Project due; How to Read: Engaging with Texts introduced.**
Patterson continued; Bertens: "Political Readings"
- Week 7 New Historicisms continued.**
Lawrence Lipking: "The Genius of the Shore."
Lipking continued; Whisnant: "Foucault & Discourse"
- Week 8 Fiction**
The formal properties of fiction. Online readings (Jeremy Hawthorn). **How to Read: Engaging with Texts due.**
The Grapes of Wrath. Focus on Chapters 1 – 11, characterization, narrative voice.
- Week 9 Fiction continued**
The Grapes of Wrath, chapters 12 – end. Discussion.
- Week 10 Historicizing *The Grapes of Wrath***
Online reading: Dyen. Final paper introduced; Analyzing Sources project introduced.
Dyen continued.
- Week 11 The Rise of English**
Research II; Critical Approaches to Research Sources
- Week 12 John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*** (we'll screen the film during class time)
Analyzing Sources Project due, along with tentative thesis for final paper.
- Week 13** Catch-up; Final paper Q & A; more on critical research

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14 Writing critical papers

Final paper due! Cumulative Assessment Project introduced.

Wrapping up!

Week 15 Wrapping up.

Wrapping up.

Cumulative Assessment Projects are due in my mailbox in FH 201 by Wednesday, December 12th, at noon.