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English 120: Introduction to the English Major: Literature, History, Culture

*Read this long and intimidating document and thoroughly familiarize yourself with its contents.
As they used to intone on the old TV cop drama "Dragnet": Ignorance of the law is no excuse.*

Course Goals

This course is an introduction, not to literature, strictly speaking, but to the discipline of English. We'll spend some time discussing what exactly that means, and what skills and concepts you'll need in order to make your way through this 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 the four-course cluster (with English 220, 225, and 320) that constitutes the "core" of our department's major curriculum. Each of these courses addresses major theoretical and methodological concerns in the study of language and texts.

Specifically, this semester, we'll take up questions such as these, among others:

- What is literature? Why is there an academic discipline devoted largely (but not exclusively) to its study, and how did that discipline evolve?
- What research resources appropriate to our discipline are available in and/or via the library, and how do I use them?
- What exactly are we doing when we do literary analysis (or "criticism")? What are the aims of literary analysis and how have those aims changed over time? And why should aspiring writers or teachers be concerned with those sorts of things?
- What role does *genre* play in a text's meaning?
- What is the relationship between a literary text and its larger historical and cultural contexts?

Required Materials/Resources

- First and foremost, regular access to the course website (accessible through the "Courses" page of my faculty website, whose URL is listed above). A good deal of the course material will be available on the website only (*not* on Moodle or ONCORES), either as pdfs or as links to other sites. The online Course Reader is password-protected; the username and password are on the hard copy of the syllabus that you received in class. You'll need Adobe Reader or its equivalent to read the pdf files there. If you don't have convenient access to the web at home, make plans to spend some time each week in a campus computer lab, reading and/or printing out copies of the readings for the coming week.

If you lose this print syllabus and can't remember the password, consult a classmate or e-mail me. The password does *not* appear—for obvious reasons—anywhere in the online version of the syllabus.

- J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (\$8.99 new). I've ordered the latest reissue from Little, Brown (available at the HSU bookstore), but you're free to use any edition of the text, including one you may already own or one you purchased at an online or second-hand book store.
- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (\$22.00 new). The bible on matters of style and format for all self-respecting English majors, regardless of their chosen pathway. Read it, study it, refer to it—constantly. (And while much of the work you do for this class will

indeed involve research, you should feel free to mentally remove “*of Research Papers*” from the book’s title.) Ambitious and/or well-to-do members of the class may also wish to purchase a reputable research handbook such as Wayne C. Booth, et al.’s *The Craft of Research* or Nancy L. Baker and Nancy Huling’s *A Research Guide for Undergraduate Students*, 6th ed.

Course Requirements/Major Assignments

Regular monitoring of the course updates page: Required reading and/or any informal writing assignment for the next class session will be posted on the “Updates” page of the class web site, normally by 8:00 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. If you have to miss a class, you’re expected to be prepared for the next one, just the same. I’ll make announcements and minor schedule changes on the Updates page, as well, though I will also announce any changes to the course calendar in class and I’ll certainly consult with you before making any *radical* changes. Just the same, you should check the Updates page regularly in case you missed an announcement or forgot to note it in your own calendar.

Informal writing assignments on Moodle: Seven or eight times over the course of the semester I’ll give informal writing assignments that will ask you to kick around some ideas about issues/problems/puzzles currently under discussion in class (and *usually* related to the reading for the next class session). I’ll grade them on a C/NC basis. These are *not* formal essays in any sense, but rather a place where you’ll think on paper (er, in pixels) and record the results of your thinking. Here are some general guidelines, for those who appreciate 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.
- Please try to stick to the prompts. It’s not that I want to stifle or discourage independent thinking, but if you have other observations to make about the text, you have a standing invitation to share them during class discussion.
- Because life is short and the semester even shorter, try to say what you have to say in no more than 800 words. In other words, pointless rambling won’t impress me; if you tend to run on and on, then 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, and that’s okay. *Depth* of thought can occasionally substitute for *breadth*. Even so: try to be thorough and to at least *touch on* each question. Above all, demonstrate some genuine engagement with the assigned readings.
- Some of these assignments will be more ambitious or demanding than others, but most will require *at least* 400 words to say anything meaningful (as opposed to glib and superficial). Perfunctory efforts that stop at 401 words without having said much of anything—or without having addressed more than a portion of the prompts—probably won’t receive credit.

These assignments *must* be composed in some sort of word-processing software and uploaded to Moodle. Please save your file (“save as”) with a **.doc, .docx, .rft or .pdf extension**. Google Docs also works. But those are the only file types I can reliably open. **If you’re working in OpenOffice or Pages or whatever, please, please remember to save your file in a format that I can access.**

Under no circumstances will I accept these late. If you miss the Moodle cut-off time and e-mail them to me later in the day, leave them in my department mailbox, or slip them under my office door, they will remain unread. (As you all know by now, life is unfair.) 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 students who are disciplined, organized, and prudent. So: make sure you understand how to use Moodle, and don’t wait until the last minute to submit your assignment. If you e-mail me frantically ten minutes before class to say you weren’t able to upload your file, I won’t have much sympathy; if, however, you e-mail me at 8:00 the evening before to tell me Moodle isn’t working, we can figure out a solution together.

Your cumulative grade for these assignments will be based strictly on the number you submit and earn credit for: miss or fail one (or none) and you'll earn an "A"; miss two for a "B"; three, a "C"; and so on. (An aside: if you know you have trouble piping up in class discussions, these informal assignments may be another good way to keep me apprised of your intellectual progress in the class.)

Three (3) Short(er) Projects (see the calendar below for tentative due dates, and look for details on the "major assignments" section of the class website as each project is introduced): Although you may wish to approach these projects in the same exploratory spirit as the informal writing assignments, they will be more elaborate, and two of them will involve additional outside research. You will usually have at least a week to complete each assignment. I'll collect them in hard copy and give them a letter grade.

- The "Lycidas" Project (research/collaborative)
- The Ballad Project (creative)
- Annotated *Rye*: Scrutinizing Sources as a New Historicist (research/analytical)

Final Paper: Historicizing *Catcher*: Texts and Contexts. In lieu of a final exam, you'll complete a second, more ambitious analytical paper on *The Catcher in the Rye* during the last weeks of the semester. Building on your "Annotated *Rye*" project and informed by your study of various critical issues that we will have discussed throughout the semester, you will do additional independent research and put Salinger's novel into historical dialogue with some aspect of postwar American culture. Details to follow later in the semester.

Attendance, etc.: It's not that every last class will be scintillating or mind-blowing; I'm not *that* vain. But it's important in a discussion- and workshop-oriented course that everyone attend regularly. So even though you may resent such apparent condescension, I will send around a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class session, and you should make sure you've confirmed your presence in order to get full credit for this portion of your course grade. You get **four** (4) free passes to cover all the contingencies of life—including illnesses and emergencies, flood, fire, and famine—no explanations, no apologies, no penalties. (A courtesy e-mail is always welcome, of course, and again, you must check the Updates page to see what's expected of you for the next meeting. Oh: and routine absences should *not* include sessions when major assignments are due.) But there are no additional "excused" absences; a note from the Health Center attesting to your positive strep-throat culture will not buy you a fifth. So use these wisely. Miss more than four classes, and your final grade will start to suffer. The more you miss, the more it will hurt—up to and including failing the class. If I notice you've been gone more than six times (that's 20% of the course!), I will strenuously advise you to withdraw, assuming it's still possible.

Please get to class on time, don't wander in and out, and don't leave early. Save texting, Facebook, e-mail, and web-surfing for your own time, not class time. And bear in mind that it's especially bad form to arrive late on a day when work is due. (More information on this topic in "Course Policies" online.)

Grading

Here's where the oppressive substructure of my seemingly benign classroom shows through. I try to grade by the book, which was written long before the days of rampant grade inflation: "A" is reserved for truly stunning, outstanding work; "B" work goes beyond minimal expectations for basic competency; and "C" is "standard" and "normal"—i.e., it's solid but unexceptional, and it meets the basic course requirements in every way. "D" work is technically worthy of credit, but barely. I don't expect to give any Incompletes. Here's how your final course grade will break down:

- Final Paper: 20%
- Other Projects: 45% (15% each)
- Informal Written Assignments: 25%
- Attendance, punctuality, participation, and all-around good citizenship: 10%

Miscellany

Disabilities: Please let me know of any documented disabilities and recommended accommodations that would promote your success in this class.

Plagiarism: I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously (and deal with plagiarists harshly). Passing off part or all of someone else's words or ideas as your own will result—at the very least—in a failing grade for the course. The university definition of and policies regarding academic dishonesty can be found online and in the HSU catalog. Please be aware that plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty can result in expulsion from the University.

Communicating: I'll read and respond to everything you hand in and put grades on your formal written work, and I'll gladly meet with you at any time to talk about your progress and prospects. If 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 don't be embarrassed, and don't just disappear: let me know, and as soon as humanly possible. At the very least, I can direct you to campus resources that may help, and together we may be able to devise a plan to get you through the semester in one piece. I don't guarantee that I can accommodate every unexpected turn of events; you should also be prepared to withdraw from one or more courses, or from the university entirely, if the situation is dire enough. But there are sometimes contingency plans that can be put into effect if students alert their faculty promptly of personal crises that threaten to interfere with their academic performance.

As for more routine problems: if you're falling behind in the class, feeling as though you're not "getting" something, or just having an intangible problem either mild or severe, then please, please, please: ***don't sit there fretting and cowering—come and talk to me without delay.***

If your schedule really and truly cannot be changed to make my regular office hours, then I will try to accommodate requests for appointments at other mutually agreeable times. Just stop me after class or e-mail me so that we can talk one-on-one.

FOR ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER GENERAL INFORMATION (INCLUDING MORE ON CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, MINIMUM OUTSIDE PREPARATION REQUIRED FOR THIS COURSE, PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, DETAILED DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT & DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR, SAFETY INFORMATION, ETC.), ALL LAID OUT IN EVEN MORE EXCRUCIATING DETAIL, SEE THE "COURSE POLICIES AND SYLLABUS ADDENDA" PAGE ONLINE AT THE COURSE WEBSITE ([HTTP://USERS.HUMBOLDT.EDU/MSELDRIDGE/ENGL120/120POLICIES.HTML](http://users.humboldt.edu/mseldrige/ENGL120/120POLICIES.HTML)). IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STUDENTS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS INFORMATION.

Calendar

(Danger! All quantities approximate! Subject to explosive change!)

Judging by past experience, I'd say that after about the eighth or ninth week of the semester, this calendar may have only a tenuous relationship to what we're actually doing in class. Still, let it serve as a rough guide to the order in which we'll tackle various topics. Please refer to the online Updates page and the online Course Reader for specific readings and assignments on a day-by-day basis. You should always come to class having completed the readings/assignments designated for a given day (e.g., come to the second class session having read Eagleton's "What Is Literature?" and having uploaded the first informal writing assignment to Moodle).

Week 1 W 1/20	Introductions and paperwork; our literary histories.
Week 2 M 1/25 W 1/27	What Is Literature?; Close reading and interpretation Terry Eagleton: "What Is Literature?" (online Course Reader). <i>Informal Writing Assignment #1 due.</i> How to read a poem? Figurative language (Course Reader).
Week 3 M 2/1 W 2/3	The lyric; "Lycidas" and literary history The speaker of the lyric poem (Course Reader). The limits of close reading: "Lycidas" (Course Reader).
Week 4 M 2/8 W 2/10	Strategizing research Discussion of "Lycidas" continued. The Lycidas Project introduced. Library visit (meet in Library 118): assessing research needs; finding resources.
Week 5 M 2/15 W 2/17	Ballads; Genre and meaning The Ballad: "The Bonny Hind," etc. (Course Reader); The Ballad Project introduced. Readings on genre (Course Reader). In-class meeting of Lycidas Project groups.
Week 6 M 2/22 W 2/24	Literature and History I Generic (r)evolution and transformation. Lycidas Project due. Milton as Generic Man vs. Milton as Great Man (Course Reader).
Week 7 M 2/29 W 3/2	Literature and History II Milton as Imperial Apologist (Course Reader). Ballad Project due. Lee Patterson, "Literary History" (Course Reader). <i>Everyone</i> must attempt today's Informal Writing Assignment.
Week 8 M 3/7 & W 3/9	Patterson continued + Literature, Politics and Ideology (Course Reader).
SPRING BREAK	
Week 9 M 3/21 W 3/23	Catcher In/And Its Time I <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> : in-class quiz and discussion. <i>Catcher</i> , cont'd. Reading fiction (Course Reader).
Week 10 M 3/28 & W 3/30	Catcher In/And Its Time II Historicizing <i>Catcher</i> , co-opting rebellion: teen angst, youth culture, and postwar containment. (Course Reader.) Annotated <i>Rye</i> Project and Historicizing <i>Catcher</i> Paper introduced; possible additional online readings.
Week 11 M 4/4 W 4/6	Readin', Writin', and Researchin'...Historically. Possible assigned reading on "Discourse" (Course Reader). How to be historical-minded about even the most unlikely of texts. Identifying research topics; finding source material.

Week 12

M 4/11 &
W 4/13

Interlude: The Rise of English / English at HSU. Online reading and possible panel discussion.

Week 13

M 4/18
W 4/20

Final paper Q & A; Annotated *Rye* Project due.
First draft of Historicizing *Catcher* Paper due.

Week 14

M 4/25
W 4/27

Peer conferences: discussion of Historicizing *Catcher* Paper drafts.
Progress reports; coaching & consultation; revision strategies.

Week 15

M 5/2 &
W 5/4

Wrapping up: advice, assessments and adieus. There's every chance that we will have run over in earlier weeks and will need this time to play catch-up; if not, we'll devote our class sessions to reviewing selected nuts-and-bolts/practical/mechanical issues of special importance to English majors: MLA style (those maddeningly arbitrary conventions of manuscript format), quotation/paraphrase/summary, acknowledging sources (a plagiarist—*moi?*), parenthetical citation and Works Cited, etc.

Final draft of Historicizing *Catcher* Paper due during final exam period, 12:40-2:30, Wednesday, May 11th.