Please note: For your convenience, here is a list of the English Department faculty, their office locations, phone extensions, and office hours for fall ‘15.

**Make sure you speak with your advisor well in advance of spring ‘16 Registration (which begins Nov. 3rd)**  
If office hours are not convenient, you can always make an appointment.

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Main Office: M-F 8:30-12:00 & 1:00-4:30
EN 100
ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS
S. Welter
TTH 6:30-7:50
3 hours

An individually paced course primarily for English Language Learners. Students placed in this course receive individual guidance in writing thesis-driven papers, analyzing reading assignments, and using correct Standard Written English. Instruction will also include opportunities for students to practice their use and comprehension of idiomatic written and conversational English. Fall sections of EN 100 may involve collaboration with Scribner Seminars. Upon completion of the course, students normally proceed to English 103: Writing Seminar I.

EN 103
WRITING SEMINAR I

Section 01
MWF 10:10-11:05
4 hours

Section 02
TTh 8:10-9:30
4 hours

Section 03
TTh 9:40-11:00
4 hours

Section 04
TTh 6:30-7:50
4 hours

T. Niles
S. Welter
S. Welter
D. Samburskiy

This course is an introduction to expository writing with weekly writing assignments emphasizing skills in developing ideas, organizing material, and creating thesis statements. Assignments provide practice in description, definition, comparison and contrast, and argumentation with additional focus on grammar, syntax, and usage. Students and instructors meet in seminar three hours a week; students are also required to meet regularly with a Writing Center tutor. This course does not fulfill the all-college Foundation Requirement in expository writing.
In this seminar, students will gain experience in writing analytical essays informed by critical reading and careful reasoning. Special attention is given to developing ideas, writing from sources, organizing material, and revising drafts. The class also will focus on grammar, style, and formal conventions of writing. Peer critique sessions and workshops give students a chance to respond to their classmates’ work. Weekly informal writing complements assignments of longer finished papers. This course fulfills the all-college Foundation Requirement in expository writing.

Each section of 105 is focused on a particular topic or theme.

EN 105 01 WRITING SEMINAR II:  F. Bonneville
MW 4:00-5:20 LOVE: MOTIVES AND MOTIFS
4 hours

EN 105 02 WRITING SEMINAR II:  F. Bonneville
MW 6:30-7:50 LOVE: MOTIVES AND MOTIFS
4 hours

EN 105 03 WRITING SEMINAR II:  F. Bonneville
TTH 6:30-7:50 LOVE: MOTIVES AND MOTIFS
4 hours

An interdisciplinary exploration of love as explained and represented by thinkers and artists over the centuries. From Plato to Kundera, Erich Fromm to Colette, perspectives of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and myth studies will be featured along with drama, fiction, and film.

EN 105 04 WRITING SEMINAR II:  O. Dunn
WF 8:40-10:00 GOTHAM
4 hours

EN 105 05 WRITING SEMINAR II:  O. Dunn
TTH 8:10-9:30 GOTHAM
4 hours

A city thrives like an organism and decays like a corpse. It sleeps; or else it never sleeps. It has a heartbeat. Our metaphors give us away; we see the city as a living thing. This class will follow the work of architects, artists, and filmmakers as they grapple with the chaos of life in a living metropolis. With them, we'll walk the streets of Paris, New York, and London, and we'll study the techniques they used to comprehend the patchwork of city blocks they inhabit. At the same time, we'll learn to create our own patchworks of language, as we describe the shifting landscape around us. We will look at art by painters like Piet Mondrian, Edward Hopper, and Giacomo Balla, and examine work by architects including Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. Films we'll watch will include Metropolis and—you guessed it—Batman.

Like a city, our writing will remain in process throughout the semester. We'll complete multiple writing exercises each week, sometimes generating cohesive essays, sometimes examining our writing at the paragraph or even the sentence level. By the end of the course, through drafting and revision, we will build a final portfolio of polished writing.
Over the course of the semester, you’ll write in a variety of ways about several different arts. Most of our projects will involve the arts on campus and in the community. Whether considering music, a museum exhibit, film, theater, or literature, we will attend to the features that make writing engaging, lively, and lucid: a vivid voice, sound sentences, coherent paragraphs, strong theses, and sharp diction. Writing assignments will take the form of exercises, preliminary responses, reviews, and full essays. Reading, too, will play a large part in the seminar. As well as reading the work of your peers, you will read, as examples or prompts, the work of accomplished arts writers to gain a stronger sense of the elements that distinguish the best writing and how you might lend those qualities to your own work.

“I write with a knife”—so Zakaria Tamer, exiled Syrian satirist, describes his practice. So sharpen your knives—I mean pens—and prepare both to write satire and to write about satire. We will consult the New York Times for events, persons, and topics that demand satirizing; encounter some great satirists from the past; meditate on the motives, purposes, and effectiveness of satire; explore the various media satire exploits (verse, prose, painting, film, TV, etc.), and write, both essays and satiric imitations.

Frequent short writing assignments, four longer papers.

From the Declaration of Independence to the #100daysofhappiness project, one could argue that Americans are obsessed with the pursuit of happiness. But what are we really seeking? What lengths are we willing to go to find happiness? How do factors like income, education, relationship status, and technology inform our perceptions? Can we bottle happiness? Buy happiness? Be coached into happiness? What does it mean to be truly happy? And what happens when you are not? In this writing seminar we will examine these questions and our own cultural and personal biases through reading, writing, and discussion. We will examine texts from philosophers, poets, psychologists, film-makers, and essayists as we consider the question of what it means to be happy. Students will prepare weekly responses, formal essays, and a research project. In addition, students will participate in peer workshops and teacher conferences.
The twenty-first-century world is a digital culture. The social transformations set in motion by our connection to the web raise far-reaching questions for our identity. How is the rise of digital culture redefining how we understand ourselves as individuals and as social beings? Who do we become when we’re constantly connected to family, friends, and strangers across global space and time? What roles do images, data, and devices play in the construction of our identities? What does it mean to live, work, play, love, and die online?

In this course, we will explore these and other questions of digital identity as a way of developing critical writing and reading skills. We’ll read a range of texts that explore how digital technology and connectivity play a role in reshaping crucial issues of personality, privacy, gender, race, sexuality, and anonymity. We’ll consider how authors, filmmakers, and other artists represent and respond to the new possibilities and questions that digital technology poses for identity in a global context. And we’ll write critically and reflectively about our own constantly shifting positions and identities within the increasingly complex network of the web. To explore these issues, we’ll study, discuss, and write about a diverse collection of texts, including novels, films, images, theoretical writings, blog posts, works of digital art, and the everyday objects of the digital world.

In addition to drafting, workshopping, and revising traditional essays, we’ll also experiment with a range of different technologies—from blogs and Twitter to digital tools for research and writing—in order to keep a critical engagement with our own digital identities at the forefront of our thinking and writing. Our ultimate goal will be to become stronger critical readers and writers as well as sharper, more engaged participants in the digital culture around us.
What happens when a memoir or a novel becomes a movie? When a fairy tale or a bible story inspires a ballet? When poems interpret paintings and paintings illuminate poems? When an ancient myth provides matter for a stage play, or a hit play gets turned into an opera? We will explore the problems and pleasures created by adaptations and transformations of material from one art form to another. We will consider not only questions such as what gets omitted, what gets added, and what becomes changed entirely, but, more important, how these “art transplants” reveal more fully the unique qualities of each of the art forms, as well as some qualities that all the arts seem to share. Required reading, viewing, and listening will include several works of art, both adaptations and their sources, and at least one live performance at Skidmore, as well as a selection of illuminating secondary readings. Our investigations of artistic adaptations and transformations will provide the basis for the course’s main task, creating and revising analytical essays. Regular brief writing assignments will prepare students to craft four essays and revise them.

“Biographies,” Mark Twain wrote, “are but the clothes and buttons of a man.” So why do we read them? Is it because we seek the meaning of other people’s experience or because we simply want to rummage through the laundry—especially the dirty laundry—of strangers’ lives? Reading nonfiction by writers such as Hermione Lee, E. B. White, and Leonard Michaels, we will study (and practice) the art of biography, as well as the art of the essay. Along the way, you will develop a set of tactics for writing clear and elegant essays of your own, focusing on matters of style, invention, analysis, and revision. Requirements include informal writing exercises, three formal essays, and an in-class presentation.

What is an essay? Where did the form begin? And why should you be asked to write one, or four? In this course, we will follow the meaningful meanderings of essayists such as Michel de Montaigne, Virginia Woolf, and E.B. White. We will also read a couple narrative adventures, by authors such as Richard Hughes and Karen Russell. Over the course of the semester—through informal exercises, discussions, and in-class workshops—we’ll develop our sense of clear and graceful prose as well as our sense of audience, argumentation, and the value of revision. Assignments include several informal writing exercises and four formal essays.
What do our imaginations make of the world that we call “real”? Why do humans conjure invisible thresholds into unseen worlds? What are we really seeking inside the fantastic realms that we create?

In this writing course, you will study fantasy fictions, films, and artworks that depict fairytale lands; haunted houses and haunting minds; utopian cities of the future and on distant stars; miniature and apocalyptic landscapes. The course is divided into four units of study: childhood’s realms; gothic realms; realms of discovery and adventure; realms of vision and hallucination. We will study the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and of the lesser known master fantasist George MacDonald. We will examine the psychological dualisms and implications of works by Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant. We will read of pioneers lost in unfamiliar surroundings, in the stories of H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, and Daniel Keyes. We will try to translate and learn the visionary language of great visual creative artists such as Joseph Cornell, Michael Kuch, and Fred Tomaselli. In each unit of the class, we will also consider contemporary texts and view a contemporary movie to contrast structures and purpose with those of the earlier texts. Films screened for this course in previous years include Pan's Labyrinth; The Others; The Haunting; The Truman Show; Henry Darger and Realms of the Unreal; and The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys. Attendance at one art exhibit at the Pohndorff Special Collections is also mandatory.

In each unit, students are required to draft and revise one long essay on an assigned fantasy topic; write two short exercises of analysis; write one creative short story; participate fully in discussions; and present written work to other members of the class for review throughout the term. Our goal is to accomplish the art of composing creative analytic essays at the college level.

How do contemporary fantasy filmmakers like Tim Burton, Hayao Miyazaki, Peter Weir, Nietzchka Keene, Guillermo del Toro, or Steven Spielberg re-envision familiar tales of children’s quests for empowerment, adulthood, moral autonomy, love, and for a secure home? What fairytales recur, adjusted and re-imagined, in fantasy films? What are various intersections of folklore, or magic, with their historical partner, realism? How do early utopian ideals affect new films about space and time travel? Why do classic fantasy films portray children as innocent yet alien? And why do films about age, disease, loneliness, and mental illness employ fantasy tropes?

In this course, students will study eight to ten classic and contemporary films from several countries; consider influential tales and shorter films from disparate eras and cultures; and work to compose college-level essays about fantasy films, identifying patterns, biases, and innovations. The course will be divided into four thematic units. Readings from fantasy literature and theory accompany each course unit. Requirements: three major essays, drafted and revised; one final “exam” essay project; weekly mandatory screenings (or approved independent viewings); short expository and creative writing exercises; workshop presentation; discussion.
The honors sections of EN 105 offer highly motivated students with strong verbal skills the opportunity to refine their ability to analyze sophisticated ideas, to hone their rhetorical strategies, and to develop cogent arguments. Toward these goals, students write and revise essays drawing upon a variety of challenging readings and critique each other’s work for depth and complexity of thought, logic of supporting evidence, and subtleties of style.

Students must have an EW placement of EN105H to enroll in the class.

EN 105H 01  WRITING SEMINAR II: M. Wiseman
MWF 12:20-1:15  THE LAND OF ABSURDITY
4 hours

This course will take us into the land of absurdity, as mapped by fiction writers, filmmakers, poets, and playwrights. We will venture into regions of dark humor, charged outrage, searing satire, and profound silliness, with the aid of such guides as Fyodor Dostoyevsky (whose Underground Man is sometimes considered a proto-existential absurdist), Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Italo Calvino, Lewis Carroll, Donald Barthelme, Haruki Murakami, and Flann O’Brien, among others. We will see the absurd as brought to us onscreen by such directors as Luis Buñuel, Spike Jonze, Terry Gilliam, and Stanley Kubrick, and Monty Python will add pointed silliness to our proceedings.

Sinister, ludicrous, surreal, irreverent, or all of the above, these portrayals and explorations will help us to think about, and especially to write about, the absurdity we might find in our own lives. We will ask, how do these visions illuminate our own dilemmas? How, in other words, can an absurd perspective help us to live? How does an appreciation of paradox deepen and free our thinking? How can chaos and incoherence be shaped—how is incoherence made coherent? Thus, the relationship between certainty and chaos, the disjunction between seeing and knowing, the blurred distinctions among sense, senselessness, and nonsense, the uses of satire, and the mingling of the sublime and the ridiculous will serve as catalysts for our writing as well as for our discussions.

Our writing practice will emphasize understanding and developing our own writing processes. Students will write frequent short papers of several types—personal, analytical, persuasive, reflective—and three substantial essays, submitted first as drafts and then in careful revision.

EN 110  INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY STUDIES

Section 01  MW 2:30-3:50  A. Bozio
4 hours

Section 02  TTH 11:10-12:30  N. Junkerman
4 hours

Section 03  TTH 9:40-11:00  W. Lee
4 hours

Section 04  MWF 9:05-10:00  T. Wientzen
4 hours

Section 05  MWF 10:10-11:05  M. Greaves
4 hours
This course introduces students to the practice of literary studies, with a particular emphasis on the skills involved in close reading. The course aims to foster a way of thinking critically and with sophistication about language, texts, and literary production. We will ask such questions as how and why we read, what it means to read as students of literature, what writing can teach us about reading, and what reading can teach us about writing. The goal overall is to make the words on the page thrillingly rich and complicated, while also recognizing the ways in which those words have been informed by their social, political, aesthetic, psychological, and religious contexts. This course is writing intensive and will include some attention to critical perspective and appropriate research skills. (Fulfills the all-college Foundation Requirement in expository writing; prospective English majors are encouraged to take EN 110 prior to enrolling in 200-level courses.)

EN 211 01       FICTION    O. Dunn
TTH 2:10-3:30
3 hours

In *The Decay of Lying* Oscar Wilde wrote that “the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition.” Taking Wilde's contrarian position as a starting point, this class asks how writers of fiction create works that are simultaneously more and less than real. As we read major works of British and American fiction from the eighteenth century to the present, we will develop a critical vocabulary for talking about fiction, with particular attention to authors' formal strategies, attending to details such as setting, point of view, character, plot, and tone. Readings will include works by authors including Daniel Defoe, Laurence Sterne, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, George Eliot, Herman Melville, James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, and Angela Carter. Course requirements will include two medium-length papers, a midterm, and a final.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED COURSES IN FICTION;
REQUIRED FOR INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING
COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE

EN 211 02       FICTION    T. Wientzen
MWF 11:15-12:10
3 hours

One dominant theory holds that the novel emerged as a literary form in order to represent “human life” in all its cultural, geographical, and historical variability. Yet the non-human has also long haunted fiction. This course offers students an introduction to some of the dominant movements in prose fiction since the nineteenth century. Focusing on the formal techniques of narrative fiction (such as irony, tone, setting, genre, and characterization), we will develop skills for reading fiction while attending to the historical conditions that underwrote its evolution. Reading short fiction by Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Bruno Schulz, Franz Kafka, Raymond Carver, and George Saunders, among others, we will explore fiction's distinctive ways of mediating both human and non-human life. Novels will include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), among others. Class requirements: active class participation, short close reading papers, and a final exam.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED COURSES IN FICTION;
REQUIRED FOR INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING
COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE
One way to get a grip on the tradition of English language poetry is by realizing who read what, and when. William Blake, for instance, makes a lot more sense once we see his debts to everything that went before—specifically, to nursery rhymes, the King James Bible, and John Milton. We will begin with Blake and work our way backwards through the “highlights” of English poetry. Then, around mid-term, we will jump back to about 1800 and move forward into the present day. Emphasis throughout will be on reading relatively few poems but understanding these key poems in depth. Students will write brief critical papers, memorize poems, maintain a timeline, and also write some imitations.

**RECOMMENDED PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED COURSES IN POETRY; REQUIRED FOR INTRODUCTION TO POETRY WRITING**

**COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE**

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<td>EN 213 01</td>
<td>POETRY</td>
<td>A. Bernard</td>
<td>MW 2:30-3:50</td>
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An introduction to the changing forms of plays and theatres from the Greeks to the present. Authors read are likely to include Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Marlowe, Webster, Chekhov, Pirandello, Beckett, Brecht, Parks, Churchill. Brief response writings, two exams, two longer papers (5-7 pp.).

**COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE**

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<td>DRAMA</td>
<td>R. Janes</td>
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<td>EN 217 01</td>
<td>FILM</td>
<td>C. Aldarondo</td>
<td>WF 12:20-1:40</td>
<td>T 6:30-9:30 screenings</td>
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Is cinema dying? With movie theater attendance at record lows, serial TV shows surging in popularity, and online short-form media commanding ever-larger amounts of our attention, the fact is that movies are not what they used to be. It is a paradoxical situation, for, on the one hand, it seems that the value of film is fading; on the other, film’s supposedly endangered status makes it more precious to us than ever. But what is (or was) film in the face of this supposed death certificate? What is it that we are supposedly losing?

This course, *Introduction to Film Study*, will take this debate over the vitality or mortality of cinema as a starting point, in order to construct a foundational sense of cinema throughout its history. We will cover a wide range of cinematic styles and movements across genres and cultures, from the most immaculately preserved Hollywood epic to the home movie decaying in an ordinary garage, from the mystique of Marlon Brando to the gritty ambivalence of the Spaghetti Western, and from the rapid-fire editing of Soviet cinema to the bold experiments of Cuban revolutionary film. Through weekly screenings of documentaries, experimental films, and narrative features alike, we will develop a historical context for the hundred-plus years of cinema’s existence, practice some of the major analytic approaches to film, and examine the institutions that make films possible, in order to arrive at a sophisticated understanding of cinema as it faces its greatest crisis yet. Requirements include weekly film responses, in-class exams, and group exercises.

**COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE**

**COUNTS TOWARD MEDIA AND FILM STUDIES MINOR**
What do we mean when we talk about a genre that is defined by what it isn’t? How are we to distinguish an essay, a memoir, an extended piece of intellectual synthesis, reflection, or reportage from fiction and poetry?

In addressing such questions, this course will explore some of the possibilities that flexible form the essay offers us as readers and writers; we will also delve into at least one book-length work. Our study will be guided thematically. We’ll consider works that focus on defining the essay and nonfiction, on the pleasures of books and the processes of reading and writing, on the ways memory summons and shapes writing, on the conjunction of scientific and philosophical viewpoints about the human brain and consciousness, and on the interplay of the observer and the social phenomena observed. Writers whose works we will read include Michel de Montaigne, William Hazlitt, Virginia Woolf, Patricia Hampl, Joseph Brodsky, Cheryl Strayed, Oliver Sacks, John Berger, Michael Ondaatje, James Baldwin, Joan Didion, and David Foster Wallace. We will also consider nonfiction in other media—photography, documentary film, and radio.

Our writing will cover both personal and analytic essays: three essays are required.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION FOR ADVANCED COURSES IN NONFICTION; REQUIRED FOR INTRODUCTION TO NONFICTION WRITING

COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE

“The purpose of playing,” Hamlet tells us, “is to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature.” In this moment, as so often happens in early modern drama, Hamlet becomes metatheatrical. That is, the play begins to think explicitly about the nature of performance, asking what it means to act, when acting requires that you represent yourself as something you are not, and what effect this misrepresentation has upon the social order. In this class, we will take up these questions by learning, first, how plays were staged in the early modern period. What difference does it make, for example, that Ophelia was played by a boy or that the actor playing Othello would have worn blackface? Our answers to these questions will inform the way that we think about Shakespearean drama as a space of cultural negotiation, in which ideologies of gender, power, history, and desire are reimagined at the moment that they are performed. Our readings will include A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 1 and 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Twelfth Night, Hamlet, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale, as well as secondary sources that will help us to place these plays within the cultural landscape of early modern England. To gain greater insight into the way that plays make meaning, we will watch some performances in class and, occasionally, stage moments of the plays ourselves. Students will also be expected to write two short essays and one longer research paper.

COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE

COUNTS TOWARD THE EARLY PERIOD REQUIREMENT
How much can your writing improve in one semester? In this course you will undertake the work, and be held to the standards, of a professional ghostwriter or freelancer. And what might you be assigned to write? An introduction to the documentary “extras” on a Mad Men DVD (e.g., “The 1964 Presidential Campaign”). The “Our Story” blurb for the website of a local restaurant. A capsule biography for a mayoral candidate. A C.E.O.’s response to a request from Forbes: “Tell us about the biggest mistake you ever made as a leader.” The instructor will furnish you with material; with her guidance, you will shape it into publishable or, as the case may be, presentable prose. Your final exam—a series of short-order writing projects—will have three readers: the instructor and two professional editors. Note: this course is not designed to be useful to either highly advanced writers or those who are currently working on their mastery of the English language. Feel free to contact the instructor if you'd like to discuss whether Prose Boot Camp is the right class for you.

COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE

This course seeks to trace the boundaries of an invisible world. In our reading, discussion, and writing we will think carefully about how American literary texts have represented the supernatural. We will interpret this central category broadly, to include all manner of things that American authors have identified as transgressing the limits of nature. We will read our share of fantastic tales of the spirits and monsters that have always haunted the American imagination. Amongst and alongside these stories, however, we will also read narratives of religious experience—of striking conversions, visions, miracles, and divine wonders. Our mapping of this world will help us to think about the cultural and historical dimensions of the supernatural. How has the literary supernatural been used to divide high and low, sacred and profane, serious and foolish? What have American writers communicated about their interests and allegiances by talking about the existence of a supernatural realm? How has the status of the supernatural changed over time?

Authors covered in this course may include Cotton Mather, Stephen King, Shirley Jackson, Charles Chesnutt, Jonathan Edwards, H.P. Lovecraft, Toni Morrison, and Harriet Prescott Spofford. We will also read a selection of contemporary criticism on American literary supernaturalism.

COUNTS AS A “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT” COURSE
“Let us inquire,” directs Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1836 essay *Nature*, “to what end is nature?” From the creation myths of Genesis to contemporary environmental journalism, writers have grappled with Emerson’s question. “Literature and the Environment” examines how we know nature and the environment through literary works and how texts reveal environmental and personal values about the natural world in which we live. We will consider shifting images of nature, from the spiritual and sacred, to projections of the human psyche, and to a powerful force worthy of our wonder, worry, and awe. Readings for the course concentrate on nonfiction and fiction but also include selections from myth and poetry. We will read primarily nineteenth- and twentieth-century American authors such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Edward Abbey, Terry Tempest Williams, and Barbara Kingsolver. Course requirements include active discussion, three papers, a class blog, a final examination, and independent readings.

COUNTS AS A “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT” COURSE

COUNTS TOWARD ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES CREDIT

EN 229C 01    INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE    W. Lee
TTH 11:10-12:30         AMERICAN LITERATURE
3 hours

Asian American literature and culture encompasses an array of stories told in a variety of styles about people belonging to a number of different ethnic groups:

- American-born daughters struggling with their Chinese immigrant parents’ expectations
- Young Japanese Americans dealing with the immediate aftermath of World War II internment
- A Vietnamese-born writer in the U.S. who encounters dismissals of ethnic literature as “a license to bore”
- The divergent paths of two Indian brothers who come of age in 1960s Calcutta—one becomes a member of the radical left Naxalbari movement, the other moves to the U.S. and becomes an oceanographer
- A Korean American comedian’s reflections on her disastrous experiences as the star of U.S. network television’s first Asian American sitcom
- A Taiwanese American time machine repairman navigating his life in a science fictional universe
- Two twenty-something Asian American stoners on a quest for White Castle hamburgers.

This course will introduce students to major authors, works, and topics in Asian American literature and culture. The course also aims to provide a sense of the historical conditions out of which various forms of Asian American writing and culture have emerged and changed over time. As a literature course, the class will focus on textual analysis and close reading—on how specific texts give representational shape to the social and historical experiences that they depict. In doing so, the course will explore how the formal, generic, and stylistic features of Asian American texts influence their promotion, reception, and interpretation. Readings consist chiefly of works that have canonical status within the field of Asian American literary studies but also include works that suggest new directions in the field. Readings will include short stories, novels, memoir, autobiography, science fiction, poetry, and film. Prose writers may include Jade Snow Wong, John Okada, Frank Chin, Margaret Cho, Chang-rae Lee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nam Le, and Charles Yu. Poets: John Yau and Timothy Yu. Films: *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle, Better Luck Tomorrow.*

COUNTS AS A “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT” COURSE

FULFILLS THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT
It’s no secret that novels often deal with political events. In fact, some of the most famous novels have been described as “political novels,” though writers themselves frequently object to that language, arguing that it is not the business of serious fiction to adopt political positions or to promote an ideology. One of the best writers of political fiction in the country is Russell Banks, who recently argued that books with a “program,” books designed to sell a political idea or to make things seem more black or white than they are, cannot be good books. An example? Though he approves of the point of view at the heart of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous anti-slavery novel, Banks said, “I would not like to have written *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” a notoriously simple-minded and “mawkish” work.

This course in “Politics and the Novel” is designed to help us explore what differentiates a fully successful political fiction from a more one-dimensional novel. We will focus on masterworks with a clear interest in political issues. In studying a variety of such novels we will consider such questions as the relation between fact and fiction, the status of ideas in works of fiction, and the ways in which writers manage to achieve the variousness and complexity we hope to discover when we read a novel—especially when the novel is invested in political issues. We will also ask what readers are required to know about the places and situations in which political fictions are set.

The works to be studied—which include works from all over the world—are as follows:

--Franz Kafka, *IN THE PENAL COLONY*
--Milan Kundera, *THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER & FORGETTING*
--Pat Barker, *REGENERATION*
--Chinua Achebe, *THINGS FALL APART*
--Michael Ondaatje, *ANIL’S GHOST*
--Nadine Gordimer, *BURGER’S DAUGHTER*
--V.S. Naipaul, *A BEND IN THE RIVER*
--J.M. Coetzee, *DISGRACE*

Students in the course will write two papers and take both a mid-term and a scheduled final examination.

**COUNTS AS A “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT” COURSE**

**FULFILLS THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT**
EN 281 01  INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING  S. Chung  
TTH 2:10-3:30  
4 hours  
An introduction to the writing of short fiction for beginning writers. During the first weeks of the semester, we will study a diverse range of master short stories exemplifying particular approaches to form and elements of craft, e.g. narration, plot, setting, dialogue, character. The rest of the semester will follow workshop format, focused on student creative work—both short imitative writing assignments and a short story of eight-twelve pages. In addition to creative work, attendance, active participation, and thoughtful written critiques are required.  
PREREQUISITE: EN 211  
COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE  

EN 281 02  INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING  G. Hrbek  
TTH 12:40-2:00  
4 hours  
An introduction to the writing of short stories. Writing and reading assignments are geared to the beginning writer of fiction. Workshop format with the majority of class time devoted to discussions of student writing. Two stories of at least twelve pages. Attendance required. Grades based primarily on written work, also exercises and class participation.  
PREREQUISITE: EN 211  
COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE  

EN 282 01  INTRODUCTION TO POETRY WRITING  J. Rogoff  
WF 10:10-11:30  
4 hours  
Whether you’ve written poetry before or not, you can learn the basics of what used to be called “versification,” the making of verses. We will start with the simplest form in English, the ballad, and proceed through riding rime, blank verse, sonnets, villanelles, sestinas, and many other conventional poetic forms. We will end with the 20th century’s looser “forms”—free verse and prose poems, among others. Along the way, students will share and critique one another’s efforts in an atmosphere of good humor and good will. The work will culminate in each student’s revised portfolio of exercises from the term, and a class reading.  
PREREQUISITE: EN 213  
COUNTS AS A “FORMS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE” COURSE  


If you have had an appointment in Skidmore’s Writing Center (Scribner Library 4th Floor) or have looked in at the activity there and thought you might like to become a Writing Center tutor, your first step is to take this course, required of all our tutors.

A good tutor must not only be a strong writer and thinker but also evidence patience, adaptability, and a willingness to listen and to engage all manner of student writers. Our aim in EN 303H is to help you to continue to develop these skills and to give you a firm foundation for tutoring, a job that requires a careful and rewarding balancing act. We will explore and practice ways to be a supportive guide without becoming a surrogate professor. How can a tutor coax a student writer to consider rethinking and revising without doing that work for the writer? How does a tutor negotiate a tutoring-session agenda without taking over a session? How can a tutor point out and explain needed corrections but avoid actually editing a writer’s paper? How do tutors offer strategic guidance while recognizing their limitations and yet maintaining confidence?

In order to approach these questions and many others, we will interweave discussions of the founding work of classical rhetoricians (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian), the analytical and theoretical perspectives on discourse of modern scholars (Burke, Habermas, Foucault, Foster Wallace), and studies of collaborative learning (Bruffee, Murray, Lunsford, Harris). In other words, both practical and theoretical perspectives will feed each other, enriching your own approach to tutoring basics and complexities.

From exploring the politics of Standard Edited English to reviewing grammar fundamentals, from applying Aristotelian artistic proofs in persuasive essays to considering the effects of contemporary discourse theory, from examining the influence of pop culture and social media on reading and writing to confronting potential conflicts between traditional college composition and increasingly diverse student populations, the coursework in EN303H seeks to give you tools so that both you and those you tutor can become more audience-responsive, productively critical, self-aware thinkers and writers.

Coursework includes three 2- to 3-pp. papers, weekly meetings in the Writing Center with English 103 students, check-ins with EN 103 instructors, grammar exercises, one oral report, an audio recording of a tutoring session, and a substantial research paper (15-20 pp) due at the end of the semester.

Open to majors in all departments and programs and to sophomores, juniors, and first-semester seniors. To be considered for enrollment, students must be recommended by a faculty member and submit a brief writing sample. Final course enrollment is by permission of the instructors.
The course will introduce students to a wide range of novels and short stories published over the course of the last quarter century or so. The goal is to acquaint ourselves with the best writing available and to address several questions that are especially relevant to readers of serious contemporary fiction:

1—What differentiates recent fiction from the fiction of the past?
2—What proportion of the best recent fiction resists the sort of mainstream realism still favored by most readers of fiction?
3—Is it true, as some critics have argued, that “experimentalism” and “formalism” are now largely played out and that the primary energies in recent fiction are “topical,” so that the most compelling works are likely to reflect debates bearing upon gender, post-colonialism, sexual politics and new media, among other issues?

The works to be studied include the following:

--Jose Saramago, THE YEAR OF THE DEATH OF RICARDO REIS
--Zadie Smith, ON BEAUTY
--Claire Messud, THE WOMAN UPSTAIRS
--Ian McEwan, ON CHESIL BEACH
--J. M. Coetzee, ELIZABETH COSTELLO
--Nadine Gordimer, THE PICKUP
--W.G. Sebald, AUSTERLITZ

plus short stories by Steven Millhauser, Rick Moody, and Joyce Carol Oates

Students in the course will write one 5000-word paper and take both a mid-term and a scheduled final exam.

Ezra Pound’s rallying cry for modernism—“Make it new!”—was not actually new at all: Pound lifted the phrase from an inscription on the bathtub of an ancient Chinese emperor. In this course, we will consider how modernist poetry recycled material from the past to respond to anxieties about the present, brought on by upheavals such as World War I, Irish independence, racial tensions, and the rise of fascism. Discussion topics will range from poetic meter to relativity to ancient mythology, often within a single stanza. In addition to studying poems by key figures like W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens, we will read short critical works by these poets to consider their theories alongside their practices of poetic craft. We will also attend to how discoveries in other disciplines, from anthropology to astronomy, inflected the challenging, beautiful, and often bizarre poetry of the period. Assignments will include two shorter papers, one longer paper, a project drawing from poetry manuscripts or rare books, and a presentation.
Of all the literary genres that flourished during the later Middle Ages, romance may be the most characteristic of the era, uniquely suited to the articulation and celebration of chivalric values and ideals. But it also incorporates folk and fairy tale motifs, Christian themes, epic journeys, explorations of the supernatural in this and the other world, and poignant longing for another, better time.

Because English romance took much of its mythic background from Celtic legends and its narrative form from Breton and French culture, we will begin the course with a brief look at some of the major influences on the romance genre, in translation: selections from the Four Branches of the Welsh *Mabinogion*, Marie de France's *Lais*, and Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*. Then we will move to the English romances themselves, all in the language of England as it was spoken and written between 1250 and 1480—Middle English. Our readings will include *Sir Launfal* (a re-telling of Marie's lai of *Lanval*); *Emare*? (a story of incest and abandonment, with a debt to Arabic sources); *Sir Orfeo* (a Celtic retelling of the Orpheus myth); the great *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; and selections from Malory's prose *Morte d’Arthur*, with its haunting depiction of the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom, Camelot.

Assignments will include weekly journal entries, two 7 to 10-page essays, and a group oral presentation.

**COUNTS TOWARD THE EARLY PERIOD REQUIREMENT**

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English poet John Milton was born on December 8, 1608. In what ways does—or should—such a figure continue to “matter”? To address that question, we will plunge into Milton’s major works: the early masque called *Comus*, the sonnets, the political tracts on divorce and censorship, the epics *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. We will be concerned to explore the relationship between these texts and seventeenth-century England, but also to test their relevance to, and track their influence on, much more contemporary media and events. What does Milton matter to films as disparate as *National Lampoon’s Animal House*, *Sabrina*, and *Devil’s Advocate*? How does *Paradise Lost* shape the fantasy novels of C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman? Can reading Milton help us navigate issues of free speech and ideological violence in a post-9/11 world? In what ways does Milton appear on the web? We will also engage Milton with contemporary theory, considering how the insights of disability studies, psychoanalysis, body theory, feminism, and culture studies help to keep Milton’s work “alive.”

Class time will be largely devoted to discussion of the primary material, helping you to identify key Miltonic themes and passages that have in some way informed popular culture. The choice of contemporary text or issue exemplary of Milton’s concerns—or in some dialogue with his preoccupations—will be entirely up to you, and so you will need to begin your detective work early on. As the semester proceeds, each new Milton text we read together will serve to deepen your analysis of the poet’s relevance to modern art and culture, and thus to refine your articulation of a paper topic. Course requirements will include frequent writing toward development of a final research paper as well as a presentation.

**COUNTS TOWARD THE EARLY PERIOD REQUIREMENT**
Since its inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what scholars call “theory” has transformed the way that we interpret literature and culture. In this course, we will study that transformation by undertaking a broad survey of the foundations of contemporary theory before turning to some of the most prominent theoretical movements of the past thirty years. Specifically, after reading the work of Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, and Deleuze and Guattari, we will focus upon the development of postmodernism, queer theory, posthumanism, biopolitics, critical race theory, transnational studies, disability theory, cognitive approaches to literature, and the digital humanities.

In this way, the course will organize itself around a set of questions. How does culture affect the way that we make sense of our bodies and the world around us? And how should our answers to that question inform the work that we undertake in literary studies? The course presumes no prior knowledge of theory; nevertheless, students who have taken EN 228, “Introduction to Literary Theory,” will find that this course expands their understanding of theory in useful and exciting ways. In addition to writing two short essays, students will pursue their own theoretical interests in a final research paper, a portion of which they will present to the class.

Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne produced some of the most dazzling, deceptive, and compelling writing of the American nineteenth century. The central purpose of this course is to take a long, careful look at the work of these two authors. Readings will include dozens of short stories by Poe and Hawthorne, along with a selection of their letters, newspaper articles, journals, works of criticism, etc. We will also read several of Hawthorne’s novels, as well as Poe’s longer work, “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.”

We will read these two writers in a kind of semester-long dialogue, in an effort to understand their engagements with a wide range of topics. These will include (but are certainly not limited to) aesthetics, literary form, crime, justice, devotion, science and the soul. We will also seek to place their works in the cultural context of antebellum American literature and society, reading documents from the period along with essays by contemporary historians and literary critics.
EN 363 02  ZOMBIES/MONSTERS/SUPERHEROES  W. Lee
TTH 2:10-3:30  THE FANTASTIC IN 20c AMERICA  3 hours

The fantastic has been used to describe that which is imaginative, fanciful, and remote from reality. And yet, from Hawthorne’s supernatural stories about the Puritan past to George H.W. Bush’s dismissal of Ronald Reagan’s economic policies as “voodoo economics” to the CDC’s 2011 “Zombie Preparedness” guide as a means of encouraging Americans to prepare for real disasters, the fantastic has played key roles in how Americans understand and negotiate their relationships to past, present, and potential future realities. Considering a range of texts about three key fantastic figures—monsters, comic book super heroes, and zombies—this course examines the fantastic as a mode that variously reinforces, negotiates, unsettles, and re-imagines the terms of American belonging and exclusion. Spanning the twentieth-century through the present, the course will pay particular attention to how constructions of race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect with distinctions between the “fantastic” and the “realistic.” We will use the fantastic to explore contested and changing understandings of what it means to be a “normal” and “real” American over the course of the century. Our course will also examine the aesthetic and theoretical dimensions of the fantastic. By exploring the fantastic in these ways, we will also consider its relationship to distinctions 1) between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” literature and culture and 2) between notions of “literary” and “genre” fiction.

Texts will include popular films, government documents, television shows, graphic narratives (i.e., comics), short stories, novels, and journalism. Readings may include texts by Henry James, Stephen Crane, Zora Neale Hurston, Ray Bradbury, Michael Chabon, and Colson Whitehead. Film and television may include The Addams Family (1964), Night of the Living Dead (1968), and Gremlins (1985). We will read some works of cultural history, as well as literary criticism and theory by Sigmund Freud, Judith (Jack) Halberstam, Scott McCloud, Sianne Ngai, and Tzvetan Todorov.

EN 363 03  AMERICAN REALISM  P. Benzon
MW 2:30-3:50  3 hours

In “The Art of Fiction,” Henry James writes, “Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue.” Our course will consider the history of realism in the context of U.S. fiction, with a particular emphasis on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. We will explore how writers variously imagine the real—from James’ diaphanous web to Stephen Crane’s documentary experiments and James Weldon Johnson’s fictive autobiography. We will pay particular attention to matters of form and genre, considering realism’s relationship both to naturalism and regionalism and to other forms of knowledge including journalism, law, history, anthropology, psychology, biology, and photography. Readings will include works by Henry James, Stephen Crane, James Weldon Johnson, Kate Chopin, Charles Chesnutt, and Edith Wharton. Weekly blog posts, a short paper, a final research paper, and an in-class conference are required.

REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS PLANNING TO TAKE “ADVANCED PROJECTS IN WRITING: POETRY” IN THE SPRING OF THEIR SENIOR YEAR
In this course we will explore a variety of contemporary global literature from around the world. As writers, we will read on the level of both form and content, and ask questions about the relationships between the two and with the cultural context in which the work was created. We will consider intended audience and the ways in which we as readers approach settings that are especially unfamiliar to us. The question of the particular versus the universal will inevitably thread through our study and discussion: which works, for example, find their way into the English language, and why? In what ways are these authors “representative” and in what ways are they atypical? We will look at the phenomenon of literary transnationalism as well as the implications and complications of translation. For writing assignments, students will write three short fiction scenes, at least one of which they will expand into a full-length story, and all of which will be workshopped in class: in these scenes and stories, students will explore both settings and characters (and the situations they give rise to) which are culturally “other” in relation to themselves. Research will necessarily be part of our discussion and process.

PREREQUISITES: EN 211, EN 281
REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS PLANNING TO TAKE “ADVANCED PROJECTS IN WRITING: FICTION” IN THE SPRING OF THEIR SENIOR YEAR

Classes alternate between literary discussion and workshop format. Each of the poets whose work we will read—including Wyatt, Shakespeare, Brooks, Basho, Ashbery, Rilke, Hopkins, Moore—offers a different kind of challenge in terms of sensibility, accessibility, and contextual scholarship. Both a short essay, and an “imitation” or “response” poem, will be due every week. Writing imitations is a time-honored method of enlarging one's poetry skills; and, like generous reading, it is also important for developing a sense of poetry as a thing outside of oneself.

PREREQUISITES: EN 213, EN 282
If personal essayists are determined “to redeem experience, to reawaken the past, and to find its pattern,” as essayist Sven Birkerts believes, what essay form might our memories need for their vivid afterlives in prose? Should an essayist tell the story of the past as a dramatic event, crafting a tale of rising tensions, conflicted characters, and escalating stakes, in the form of a narrative essay? Or should the essayist, instead, embody in prose the very process of remembering, arranging fragments, associations, and patterns of meaning, in the form of a lyric essay? Is the essayist depicting a cause and effect chain of events, or musing on the elusive sensations that disrupt expected chronologies? We are both story-tellers and ruminators, crafting tales or making mosaics of our memories. The memories guide us through our prose to the best home for our past’s reawakening.

In this advanced-level workshop (intended for writers already experienced with essay craft), we will practice narrative essay writing and lyric essay writing. The first half of the term will be devoted primarily to narrative forms, the second half primarily to lyric forms; however, we may also contrast our experiences in immediate juxtapositions of the two approaches. Requirements: four essays, three revised; short writing exercises; in-depth workshop discussions; at least two drafts in workshop discussion; weekly readings of literary essays; mandatory attendance; one short critical response essay.

PREREQUISITES: EN 110; ONE COURSE FROM “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT”; AND EN 280
REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS PLANNING TO TAKE “ADVANCED PROJECTS IN WRITING: NONFICTION” IN THE SPRING OF THEIR SENIOR YEAR

A workshop for committed and experienced fiction writers. We will study and discuss a diverse range of master short fiction, but primarily we will focus on the workshop, i.e. students' creative work. Class discussions will cover key elements of fiction craft and form, including sentence-level mastery, as well as larger questions of a story’s impact on the reader.

As advanced writers and readers, students are expected to write rigorous and thoughtful critiques of peer work.

Students will each submit a short scene, two short stories of 8-15 pages, and at least one revision.

PREREQUISITES: EN 110; ONE COURSE FROM "LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT”; AND EN 281
An intensive workshop for committed writers. Though there will be informal discussion of published writing, our primary task will be the critiquing of student work. Attendance, class participation, and thoughtful written response to student writing are of paramount importance. Main creative requirement: two short stories of 10-12 pages each, both of which will be revised after being workshopped.

PREREQUISITES: EN 110; ONE COURSE FROM “LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN CONTEXT”; AND EN 281
NOTE: The Capstone Experience is satisfied in most cases by a Senior Seminar (EN 375) or Advanced Projects in Writing (EN 381). (Students with appropriate preparation and faculty permission may instead choose the senior thesis or project options: EN 376, 389, 390). So that your choice of fall courses is a fully informed one, we also include below the Senior Seminars in Literary Studies to be offered in the Spring of 2016. Sections of “Advanced Projects: Poetry,” “Advanced Projects: Fiction,” and “Advanced Projects: Nonfiction” will also be offered in the Spring of 2016.

EN 375 SENIOR SEMINAR:
TTH 11:10-12:30 JANE AUSTEN C. Golden
4 hours

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Jane Austen (1775-1817) is a keenly satiric, witty writer whose work is deeply rooted in her time yet resonates in our own. Beginning with biography, we will return to Regency England to learn about the life of an author who understood the precarious nature of being a middle-class woman of modest financial means in an era undergoing great social, economic, and political change. Austen, who published her novels anonymously under the title “A Lady,” wrote when technology was rising and England was actively warring with Napoleon. Hers was a socially stratified era noted, on the one hand, for social refinement and elegance in art and architecture versus, on the other hand, for frivolous pursuits leading to dissolution and degeneracy (e.g. womanizing, gambling). We will read Austen’s six published novels—Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), Emma (1815), Northanger Abbey (1818), and Persuasion (1818)—that lead us into Regency ballrooms, country estates, and domestic parlors to discern Austen’s voice and examine pressing issues of her day that she actively critiqued—e.g. the economics of marriage for women, social class stratification, primogeniture and entailment, and slavery. As preparation for writing their major research paper, students will compose several short papers and an annotated bibliography and give oral reports to illuminate Austen’s literary sensibility, her Regency times, and the current fascination Austen holds today. Most importantly, students will select topics for, write, and revise a substantial and well-written research paper of 25 to 30 pages. Throughout the term, students will read intensively, lead discussions, and work collaboratively as they write multiple drafts of their research papers and experience the rigors and excitement of literary scholarship. Be prepared for summer reading before our course begins in the fall!

EN 376 01 SENIOR PROJECTS The Department
3 hours

This offering allows a senior the opportunity to develop a particular facet of English study that he or she is interested in and has already explored to some extent. It could include projects such as teaching, creative writing, journalism, and film production, as well as specialized reading and writing on literary topics. Outstanding work may qualify the senior for departmental honors. All requirements for a regular Independent Study apply. To register, fill out a “Senior Thesis or Senior Project Registration” form, available in the English department and on the English department’s website. Students who wish to be considered for Honors for a senior project must complete at least two preparatory courses in the appropriate genre.

EN 389 01 PREP FOR THESIS The Department
3 hours

Required of all first semester senior English majors who intend to write a thesis (EN 390). Under the direction of a thesis advisor, the student reads extensively in primary and secondary sources related to the proposed thesis topic, develops his or her research skills, and brings the thesis topic to focus by writing an outline and series of brief papers which will contribute to the thesis. Offered only with approval in advance by the department. To register, fill out a “Senior Thesis or Senior Project Registration” form, available in the English department and on the English department’s website.
Senior Seminars to be Offered in the Spring 2016

EN 375    AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE 1990s    W. Lee
4 hours

I Love the ’90s. The Dream of the ’90s is Alive in Portland. How ’90s Are You?

It might seem strange to begin scholarly inquiry about American literature and the 1990s with titles borrowed respectively from a VH-1 mini-series, IFC’s “Portlandia,” and a recent Buzzfeed quiz. The afterlife of the 1990s, however, will be the jumping off point for this interdisciplinary senior seminar’s investigation of the relationship between American literature and the politics and culture of the decade. We will begin by considering how recent popular culture and media stories about the 1990s often evoke feelings of nostalgia. Having noted the marginal status of literature in these accounts, we will then turn to a range of American literary texts from the 1990s and explore what the decade looks and feels like from the perspective of its novels, short stories, and plays. Throughout our course, we will explore how 1990s literary texts reinforce, complicate, and/or unsettle the terms in which the political and cultural debates of the decade linked questions about national identity at the brink of the new millennium with shifting ideas of racial, class, gender, and sexual identities.

Our readings will be organized by 1990s topics and events such as the Culture Wars, concerns about the “death of literature,” multiculturalism, Generation X, Girl Power, Queer Nation, the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, and the dot-com bubble. We will also explore the questions of how and why so many 1990s literary texts are themselves pre-occupied with or haunted by earlier texts and historical periods. Literary texts may include works by Paul Beatty, Douglas Coupland, Jonathan Franzen, Chang-rae Lee, Gish Jen, R. Zamora Linmark, Rick Moody, Toni Morrison, and Anna Deavere Smith. Films may include Paris is Burning and Reality Bites. Supplementary texts may include readings in queer theory, ethnic studies scholarship, and literary criticism, as well as historical primary sources such as political speeches and news articles.

EN 375    TONI MORRISON    M. Stokes
4 hours

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, the American Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and the Nobel Prize for Literature, Toni Morrison is considered by many to be our greatest living American novelist. Her work, located in the lived experience of African-American culture, explores contradictions that lie at the heart of American identity: the love of freedom in a country founded on slavery; the fact of racial bigotry in a country allegedly dedicated to equality; the role of community in a country that worships the individual; and the insistence of desire in a world imagined by Puritans. Ranging across geographies and demographics, Morrison maps an American experience lived in pool halls and churches, cotton fields and urban neighborhoods, and most of all in families—families, like America, torn apart and put back together again.

In this seminar we’ll focus on Morrison’s first five novels (The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, and Beloved); Morrison’s critical essay Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination; and a variety of scholarly treatments of her life and work. Students will write a research paper of 20-25 pages, drafts of which they will share with their peers in a workshop format.
The field of collaborative life-writing has had significant consequences for people who might not, without some form of assistance, have access to the technologies of written autobiography. In this unique class, students will have the opportunity to work collaboratively on life-writing projects with residents of Saratoga Bridges, a local non-profit agency for people with developmental disabilities. Working in pairs, Skidmore students will assist Bridges residents in composing short memoirs, in addition to completing their own short life-narratives and reflective accounts of their experiences as autobiography “partners.” The course will begin with some training in working with people with developmental disabilities as well as discussion of the ethical responsibilities entailed in writing on behalf of another person. Limited to 8 students to facilitate partnering with Bridges.