English 421.090  
Topics in American Literature  
Department of English  
Fall 2017  
Tuesday and Thursday: 11-1215  
Ferguson 181

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Office Hours:  
Monday: 830-930; 3-4  
Tuesday: 1-3  
Wednesday: 830-930; 3-4  
Thursday: 1-3  
Friday: By Appointment

Catalog Description: “Advanced study and research in American literature, which may focus on particular periods, genres, and/or authors. Prerequisite: English 381 and nine additional hours of English.”

Course Description: I have titled the class for this semester “Southern Gothic to Grit,” yet the original and lengthier titled was “Southern Literature: From the Gothic and Grotesque to the Grit.” During the course of the semester, our goal will be to come to define and understand (in the literary sense) nearly every term in that title; south(ern)? gothic? grotesque? grit? Furthermore, how each definition may change—even in the slightest way—when descriptors are paired together. Of course, like any study, this study could begin in the far past and work towards the present, but we only have fifteen weeks. Therefore, our study will center (mainly) on the twentieth century. I have broken the class into three units. In unit one, we will study the “beginnings” of Southern gothic and grotesque through the writings of William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers. In this unit, we will be setting a foundation for the whole course by introducing ourselves to the concepts of the south, gothic, and grotesque. In particular, we will look at why the gothic and grotesque found such a strong home in southern writing. Then, we will move forward to the 1970s and 1980s and study late-century, somewhat postmodern responses to these ideas. During this unit, we will study such writers as Harry Crews, Barry Hannah, Padgett Powell, Dorothy Allison, Bobbie Ann Mason (amongst others). Our effort her will be to study these texts as responding to the ideas put forth by scholars and writers of Unit One. Finally, we will move into studying writing of the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and 2000s in connection with the evolving idea of “grit lit.” Unlike in the second unit, these writers of grit lit engage ideas of the south, the grotesque, and the gothic with less irony and instead display how these notions evolve as the south changes (and as American changes). In this last unit we will read such individuals as Ron Rash, Breece Pancake, Jill McCorkle, Barb Johnson, Daniel Woodrell and Donald Ray Pollock. Throughout all three units, we will discuss the ideas I have put forth above alongside cultural questions and debates of gender, race, economics, etc.
PLOs: As this course can count for the English major and minor, the following Program Learning Outcomes will be assessed.
1. The student will demonstrate the ability to read complex texts, closely and accurately.
2. The student will demonstrate the ability to comprehend both traditional and contemporary schools/methods of critical theory and apply them to literary texts to generate relevant interpretations.
3. The student will demonstrate knowledge of literary history in regard to particular periods of World, British and American literature.
4. The student will demonstrate ability to effectively conduct literary research.
5. The student will demonstrate the ability to write clear, grammatically correct prose for a variety of purposes in regards to literary analysis.

Required Texts:
--William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying
--Flannery O’Connor, A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories
--Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Café
--Donald Ray Pollock, The Devil All the Time
--Barb Johnson, More of this World or Maybe Another
--Daniel Woodrell, Winter’s Bone

--Handouts will be provided in both print and electronic form. When provided electronically, you are expected to have them available during our class meetings (this means either print them out or have them on an appropriate electronic device—a kindle of some sort, not cell phone). These handouts will include both primary and secondary sources. I would encourage you to purchase a three-ring-binder and thus build your own additional text for this class. This will allow you to keep everything together.

Course Requirements:
If it becomes clear that students are not completing the required reading, the course requirements will change to include daily reading quizzes.

--2 “Short” Essays, 100 points each
--Critical Companion (Group Project) 100 Points
--Critical Companion Presentation (100 Points) 100 Points
--Comprehensive Final Exam, 100 Points

Grades:
At any point in the semester, you can figure out your grade in the course by taking the number of points you have earned and dividing by the number of points possible. For example, at the end of the semester, if you have earned 389 points then your final grade would be 389/500= 77.8%

Course Assignments:
“Short” Essays: 4 pages in length, NOT including the works cited page. At the start of the semester, I will break the class into two groups (Group One and Group Two). As you can see from the calendar, there are set dates when the members of each group will turn in individual short papers. These short papers are to be academic in nature and make an argument. It is
important for each student to recognize that these are not response papers where you simply summarize the primary or secondary source(s) that we will be covering in class or share personal reactions to the texts. Each short essay is to be argumentative in nature and you are expected to include the necessary analysis to support your thesis.

Also, as you will see, the dates when these essays are due will always be on the first day that we deal with a specific text. The reason for this is that while I know that every student will come to each class having completed the reading and with thoughts and points for discussion, having an essay due assures me that I can count on half of the class being ready to participate.

Finally, these essays are due at the start of class which means when class begins. Any student turning in his/her paper more than ten minutes after class has begun will have that document be counted as one day late.

**Critical Companion:** The development of a Critical Companion will serve as your larger research project in this class. We will take time to discuss this project in class. At this time, though, I can share with you that it will be a group project. On Thursday, September 14th, I will go over the requirements for Critical Companion (written project) and the Critical Companion Group Presentation. Prior to this date, I would like you to have chosen your groups. As there are 20 seats in this class (at the time that I am writing this syllabus, only 19 of those seats have been taken), we will have five groups (each group will be limited to four people). I understand that group projects are not everyone’s favorite option, so I will allow you to make your own group. As for requirements, the written project will be a small anthology; it will require the collection of primary sources, the writing of histories, critical commentaries, and critical syntheses, and the development of discussion questions.

**Critical Companion Presentation:** Again, a larger explanation of the requirements for this presentation will be covered on September 14th. However, as for general information, the last week of class will be dedicated to giving these presentations. Each group will give a twenty-minute presentation. This will be a professional, practiced and formally delivered critical presentation. Through the use of power point or prezi or hand-outs or a combination of multiple delivery methods, your group will present a shortened version of your critical companion. In a manner of speaking, you will synthesize all the work that you have done on your subject into a presentation. It is expected that every member will have a speaking role, and it is very important to keep in mind that these are to be professional.

**Final Exam:** At the end of the semester, you will have a comprehensive final exam that will consist of a series of “short answer” and “long answer” essay questions. The questions will ask you to explain and/or apply concepts that we encounter in our class (through readings, lectures, and discussions) to specific texts or characters.

**Course Policies:**
*Attendance and Late Work:* The attendance policy for this course is that no student will be penalized for missing 4 or fewer courses. Any student missing 5 class meetings may receive a grade no higher than a C, and any student missing 6 or more class meetings may receive and F
for the course. If you do miss a class, you are still responsible for turning in any work that is due for that meeting and any work assigned for the next class meeting.

As for late work, all assignments are due at the start of class (no later than ten minutes into class) on the assigned date. All assignments turned in late will lose 5 points for every day (not class period) that it is late. Assignments turned in more than ten minutes after the start of class will be considered one day late.

The only absences that will count as excused absences will be DOCUMENTED family emergencies, university sanctioned events (this only includes sport/team events and will only count if I have documentation from the “coach”), and extreme medical issues. An excused absence does not include absences due to doctor appointments, absences due to cold/flu, absences for work, etc. In the case of any excused absence, you must remember that any work that is due that day is still due that day. The only exception for late work will be if the student has contacted me in advance and we have agreed to other arrangements.

**Academic Integrity (A-9.1):**

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Stephen F. Austin State University defines academic dishonesty as:

**Definition of Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at: http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

In terms of this class, any student caught blatantly and purposely plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive 0 points for the assignment. Furthermore, the incident may be reported.

**Free Speech and Class Conduct:**

In order to help improve our critical thinking and writing skills, we will regularly engage in class discussions. The purpose of these discussions will be to recognize that while many of the students in the class may be on the same level in terms of age or year, there are different abilities in the classroom and different ways to look at an issue or piece of writing. In other words, one can always learn from his/her peers. In order for this to happen, we must respect one another. Therefore, while I will encourage students to share different opinions and will not stop individuals from disagreeing with one another, I will not allow any student to engage in the use
of sexist, racist, or homophobic speech. Also, I will not allow any student to simply try to roll over or silence his/her peers.

**Acceptable Student Behavior**

Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy 10.4). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom.

In the case of this course, disruptive behavior will include the following: consistent use of cell phones/texting during class, consistent participation in side discussions that are not part of classroom dialogue, referring to your teacher or peers in an inappropriate way or verbally assaulting your teacher or peers, physically threatening your teacher or peers, and completing homework assignments for another class. Students participating in such activities can be asked to leave the class and will be counted as absent.

**Withheld Grades:**

“Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.”

For the complete policy, [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/semester_grds.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/semester_grds.asp)

**Students with Disabilities:**

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building Room 325, 468-3004/468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices).

**Homework and Written Assignments:**

During the semester, you will be expected to complete essays outside of the classroom environment. Each of these essays is to be typed, use 12 point font, and ONLY the essay should be double-spaced (DO NOT DOUBLE SPACE THE HEADER). The header of your essay must include your name, the date, the class number, and my name.

In the case of each essay, you may make use of outside resources. When writing your essay, you are to display correct citation of any and all sources that are used. This means, you are to recognize outside sources when either using direct quotes or summarizing the ideas of another.
Furthermore, since you will show in-text citation, your essays must also include a Works Cited page.

Finally, each of your essays should be viewed as academic writing. As such, it should be written in the academic voice (avoid the use of the first person unless instructed otherwise, avoid contractions, colloquialisms, text speak, etc.), be clean of stigmatized errors, display a clear thesis/supporting paragraphs/conclusion, and recognize all sources. Essays that do not comply with such standards will be graded accordingly.