ENGL 4321.001: Topics in American Literature: American Responses
Department of English and Creative Writing
Thursdays: 6-830
Ferguson Room 182
Fall 2021

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Office Hours:
Monday 830-930 and 2-330
Tuesday: 9-11
Wednesday 830-930 and 2-330
Thursday: 330-500
Friday: By appointment

“Because survival is insufficient.”
Station Eleven
Emily St. John Mandel

Catalog Description: Advanced study and research in American literature, which may focus on particular periods, genres and/or authors.

Course Justification: ENGL 4321 “Topics in American Literature” (3 credits) typically meets three times each week in 50-minute segments or twice each week in 75-minute segments for 15 weeks, and also meets for a 2-hour final examination. Students are expected to complete a significant amount of weekly reading of primary and secondary source material. The weekly reading will be accompanied by such assignments as in-class and out-of-class writings, class presentations, and research assignments. The amount of writing will average between 22-32 pages over the semester and will require substantial research. The required outside of class workload will average 6 hours per week.

Delivery Format: This class has been designated as a standard face-to-face course. However, during this semester, we will also be required to meet asynchronously (this is required out of class meetings) for a total of 150 minutes in order to comply with state and federal regulations on minimum contact hours in for-credit courses. This asynchronous class time will not include the standard out-of-class homework assignments, but will, instead, be in addition to that work. I have done all that I can to make this as seamless and valuable as possible.
Course Description: The topic for this semester has been broadly defined as “American Responses.” In the coming 16 weeks, we will look at two “events”—one specific and one broad in nature. Specifically, we will begin our semester studying the literary and artistic response to the tragedy of 9/11. While we will start by exploring the known facts of the event as narrativized in the *The 9/11 Report*, we will then move our study to how different novelists, YA writers, musicians, artists, and filmmakers attempted to “explain” and interpret this day. As Don DeLillo writes of those attempting to narrativize this tragedy, “The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space.” After we complete this first half of the class, we will then move on to studying the idea of the “event” on the grander scale and look at narratives of catastrophe and survival. Specifically, we will trace this narrative, exploring why authors chose this topic at particular moments, how they chose to narrativize the event and man’s response, the themes to emerge, and whether or not “hope springs eternal.” In each case, we will be studying topics that can be quite emotional, distressing, and anxiety inducing. The purpose here is not to disrespect those who have perished (the victims of the events of 9/11 or the victims of American pandemics and catastrophes), but to explore how artists (more specifically, in our case, writers) have attempted to provide some insight (not always positive) into the experiences of our nation.

Required Texts:
1) *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon
2) *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo
3) *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer
4) I AM STILL CHOOSING A YA NOVEL
5) *The Submission* by Amy Waldman
6) *The Scarlet Plague* by Jack London—this text is available online for free, if you would rather get it that way
7) *Earth Abides* by George R. Stewart
8) *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland
9) *Zone One* by Colson Whitehead OR *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (we will discuss this as a class and talk about which we will choose)
10) *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel

Course Requirements:
--Weekly Reading Journals: 10%
--Midterm/Essay One: 15%
--Seminar Project: 40%
--Seminar Project Presentation (Group Grade): 20%
--Final Exam: 15%
**Weekly Reading Journals:** Each week, you will be responsible to complete a reading journal that you will load into a D2L discussion board. These reading journals/discussion board posts must be around 500 words. In each journal/discussion, you are to write about the novel that you have read for that week; focus on recognizing major plot points, symbols, narrative techniques or moves, repeated ideas, themes, etc. When I read these, I will read them differently than an academic paper. I will not read them as though they are full arguments or grand interpretations. Instead, I will read them as though they are a collection of ideas and thoughts that you had about each work as you read. This is what may be seen a low stakes writing/grading in the class. However, this does not mean that you can simply throw words on a page. As the semester continues, the journal entries may begin to note similarities between works or symbols that are repeated (potentially in different ways). The journal entries will be averaged together and count as 10% of your final grade.

**Midterm/Essay One:** The midterm exam will be a take home exam and will take the format of a formal essay. This will count for 15% of your final grade.

**Final Exam:** We will have an essay driven final exam during our final exam period. Depending on how the semester goes, this exam will either be cumulative and ask questions about specific novels that we have covered during the entire semester OR the exam will be single question focusing on the broader theme(s) covered in the semester and will require you to look at specific works. The reason that I have the two options is that I will be watching the class each week. If it becomes apparent that the same students are always speaking and that the class, as a majority, is not completing the readings for each week, then there will be a cumulative exam. However, if many of the students are participating and engaging in specific discussion (able to work with ideas and specific passages), then we will look to the broader, single question exam. This will count for 15% of your final grade.

**Seminar Project:** See separate handout. This will count for 40% of your final grade.

**Seminar Project Presentation (Group Driven):** See separate handout. This will count for 20% of your final grade.

**General Grading Standard:**

**A:** 90-100: Students earning the grade of an A on any assignment will have completed work that obviously demonstrates a more than average understanding of the course material and fulfills all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of an A is reserved for that work which expertly displays one’s ability to engage the ideas at hand, recognize and dialogue about the complications of such ideas, and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors.

**B:** 80-89: Students earning the grade of a B on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates a more than average understanding of the course material and fulfills all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a B is reserved for that work which adeptly displays one’s ability to engage the ideas at hand, recognize and dialogue about the
Complications of such ideas, and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors. However, the level of thought, while still above average, may fluctuate in terms of analytic abilities and expression.

C: 70-79: Students earning the grade of a C on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates an average understanding of the course material and fulfills all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a C is reserved for that work which displays one’s ability to engage the ideas at hand (more so through summary and response rather than analysis), recognize and dialogue about the complications of such ideas (however, the complications recognized will focus more on surface level issues rather than the greater whole), and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors. As can be seen from this description, the level of thought will be acceptable and display that a student has read the assignment, but his/her analytic abilities and level of expression will not be nearly as complicated nor developed. Instead, C work will display a student’s hold to traditional methods of expression (simpler construction of sentence and paragraph development) and a struggle to display complex, critical thinking skills.

D: 60-69: Students earning the grade of a D on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates a below average understanding of course material and may not fulfill all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a D is reserved for that work which displays one’s struggle or refusal to engage the ideas at hand, simply summarizes the work under study with no actual recognition of or dialogue about the complications of such ideas, and the translation of ideas into writing is completed in such a convoluted manner that the audience will have difficulty following the conversation.

F: 0-59: Students earning the grade of a F on any assignment will either (a) not have completed the assignment, (b) will have completed the assignment but not followed the guidelines, or (c) will have completed the assignment and demonstrated a total misunderstanding of the course material. In this case, it will be obvious that the student has either not completed the required reading and/or given him/herself enough time to develop the work. The grade of a F is reserved for that work which does not engage the issues at hand, offers a base (not complete) summary of the work at hand with no critical engagement, and the translation of ideas into writing is either incomplete or the audience will be unable to follow the conversation. It is important to remember that a student can receive 0 out of 100 points. In the case that a student only partially completes an assignment (in terms of page length, but not purpose), s/he may receive 0 points.

Course Policies and Procedures:
Attendance and Late Work:
I have found, and studies have shown, that students who attend class and are regular participants in activities will show improvement in the areas of critical thinking and writing and thus are more likely to earn better grades. As such, I do hold to an attendance policy. This being said, you will be allowed one absence without penalty (other than not being allowed to make up missed work/quiz). I will take attendance at the start of every class period. If you do miss a class meeting, you will not be allowed to make up any work done during that day.

If you miss more than one class meeting, your final grade may be impacted in the following
manner: if you miss 2 class meetings, your final grade may be no higher than a C and if you miss 3 class periods, you may fail the course. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes missed from a peer or to meet with me during office hours. Remember, something “important” happens every day in class and it is your responsibility to stay on top of those happenings.

As for late work, I do my best to return all work in a prompt manner. In order to do so, I must have all assignments turned in on time. This being said, any assignment that is turned in late will be dropped 10 points for each day that it is late. Assignments will be turned in at the start of class. An assignment will be considered late if it is turned in more than 15 minutes after class has begun. As you will know of due dates in advance, I will not accept such excuses as my printer broke, the library printer did not work, something happened to my computer, etc. Plan ahead!

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, personal illness (a cold, the flu, etc.), work, etc., but may include absences due to COVID. In the case of any excused absence, you must remember that any work that is due that day is still due that day unless you have contacted me in advance and I 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 paper that displays plagiarism will automatically receive 0 points. Furthermore, the incident may be reported.

Class Debate and Discussion:
In order to help improve our critical thinking and writing skills, we will regularly engage in class
discussions and writings. The purpose of such work will be to recognize that while many of the students in the class may be similar in terms of age or academic standing, there are different academic 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. Furthermore, as the topic under investigation during the opening 8 weeks can be quite heavy, it is important that we give everyone a bit of extra space. 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 or any threatening action. 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, Article II: B-6). 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 penalties.

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, 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. Furthermore, class will begin on time each day and run the entire period. It is your responsibility to arrive on time (if you are late and we are taking a quiz, you will not be given extra time) and to remain engaged until class has been completed.

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

Writing Requirements and Resources:
All assignments must be typed, make use of 12-point Times New Roman font, be double-spaced, and have 1-inch margins on all sides. All outside resources must be recognized through in-text citation and you must include a works cited page. All in-text citations and the Works Cited page must be done in MLA format, ninth edition. On the first page ONLY there should be a header that includes your name, my name, the date, and the class (and this should be single-spaced).

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.

**Student Services**

*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)

**Mental Health and Wellness**  
SFA values students’ mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. SFA provides a variety of resources to support students' mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

*On-campus Resources:*  
*SFA Counseling Services*  
[www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices](http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices)  
Rusk Building, 3rd Floor 936.468.2401

*SFA Human Services*  
*Counseling Clinic*  
[www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp) Human Services, Room 202 936.468.1041

*Crisis Resources:*  
Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343  
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)  
Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741