English 1102

Issues in Contemporary American Culture, Spring 2004

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Course Description
The goal of English 1102 at Georgia Tech is to improve your written and oral communication abilities by studying the humanities in the context of contemporary culture and by developing your research skills. Working both independently and collaboratively, you learn how to critically read various cultural texts and how to produce your own texts in response. In this effort, you will explore a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts—with “texts” referring to any objects that we study. The texts we will examine include film, short stories, novels, essays, poems, and plays; collectively, they will give us insight into the issues that define and divide the US socially and politically today. The specific issues we will focus on are the sites of cultural contention: family and the construction of the self, violence, national identity, tradition and history, and globalization. While most of our class texts were produced sometime around the 1990s, we will also look at older texts to see how these issues were dealt with historically.

Texts in addition to basic grammar and research texts
All are available at Engineer’s Bookstore, 748 Marietta Street NW. If it becomes necessary, a course packet will be made available through Engineer’s later in the semester. Otherwise, readings not found in the texts will be available on reserve.

• The Corrections by Jonathan Franzen.
• Hocus Pocus by Kurt Vonnegut.
• Jasmine by Bharati Mukherjee.
• Maus II by Art Spiegelman

Assignment Descriptions

Co-Web: To help you think about the differences between traditional literacy (writing papers) and e-literacy (creating web documents), you and other students will work together to design a collaborative web site. You will be graded on how you employ the principles of effective web and visual design in addition to the standard considerations for content and writing style.

Day-to-Day Work—Quizzes and Class Participation: You should attend every class with all your homework completed because you can’t really learn from this course if you come to class unprepared. Furthermore, daily work such as quizzes and class participation determine a large part of your grade. Collegial, respectful class participation is required. Expect a quiz about the assigned reading material everyday at the beginning of class. The quizzes aim to reward you for doing the daily reading. If you do the reading carefully, you should get an A on each quiz. You may drop three quiz grades.

Group Discussions/Presentations: All students will form groups that, on assigned days, will lead the class discussion; the goal is to create a presentation that teaches the day’s topic by
offering some additional information and mostly by engaging students in discussion. These performances are an important part of a well-rounded education because they give you experience speaking in front of a group while challenging you to make your audiences engage your topic (two tasks you will likely have to perfect in your professional life). Beyond these lessons, the presentations promote the class’s learning by presenting the material from students’ point of view. These group discussions/presentations should last ten minutes (but they can go overtime if they are actively engaging the class) and can take any form the group thinks will be the most interesting and educational for the class. Your group must email me at least two days before your presentation a detailed plan of your presentation and strategies for eliciting discussion. If you do not email me well in advance of your presentation date, you will be able to earn no higher than a C on your presentation.

Projects: Completing your paper and web-design projects will involve a process of discovery where you begin to see how you feel about an issue because you force yourself to think about it, test out various possibilities, and eventually settle on one or two conclusions (at least temporarily). You and I may not agree about your conclusions, but that is to be expected because there is never only one right way to address an issue. However, there are wrong ways and superficial responses; these are conclusions that do not provide strong evidence to support your points. Do sufficient research to strengthen your arguments, but most importantly spend the time to think creatively and logically about your projects. In the end, the key to completing these assignments successfully can be summarized under the following rule of thumb: question your presumptions; take nothing for granted.

At a minimum, all of your papers and web projects should introduce a clear thesis, support the argument with relevant evidence, respond to counter arguments, revise to guarantee logic and cohesion, and edit for flawless presentation. Note: any assignment with more than two spelling errors will receive a failing grade; a paper that is riddled with spelling errors demonstrates a lack of respect for your own work. Keep a copy of your papers in case either of us loses the first.

WebX Postings: In addition to in-class discussion, you will participate on our online bulletin board in Web Crossing (WebX). In your posts, you will reflect on issues raised in assigned readings and offer your own supplementary examples to assist your peers in their critical understanding of course material. These posts should total about 200 words (or so) and should be written as mini essays—that is with a topic sentence/thesis and following the guidelines of standard written English.

Grades

• Quizzes, WebX, Additional Writing Assignments 25%
• Class Participation and Group Discussions/Presentations 20%
• Co-Web Project 10%
• Mid-term and Final Exams 10%
• Project One 10%
• Major Research Project including Research Proposal 25%

Grading follows Georgia Tech’s four-point scale. A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0.

You can earn an A if you show originality and thought in your work, come to class prepared, and participate respectfully and actively in class discussion. You will absolutely help your grade by asking questions, offering useful comments, and taking an interest in the material and your
assignments. Your daily work (quizzes, participation, group discussions, and WebX) determines your grade much more than any other set of assignments, so you should take your day-to-day assignments as seriously as any work.

Policies

Attendance: You are allowed three unexcused absences; beginning with the fourth absence your final grade will be dropped half a letter for each day missed. Excuses must be from a medical doctor or a recognized University organization. If you are not present at the beginning of class, it is your responsibility to make sure your attendance is recorded. You are only allowed three tardies; each subsequent tardy will be recorded as an absence. Quizzes cannot be made up. Homework will only be accepted on the day it is due unless you bring in an excuse for an absence.

Students With Disabilities: Any student who needs an accommodation for any sort of disability, please make an appointment to see the instructor during office hours. Students with disabilities should also contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) to discuss reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor call (404) 894-2564 (voice) / (404) 894-1664 (voice/TDD) or visit Suite 210 in the Smithgall Student Services Building. For more information visit the following website: http://www.adapts.gatech.edu/.

Academic Honesty: All work you turn in for this class must be your own work, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. All written assignments for this course will be turned in through the anti-plagiarism program “Turn It In” (http://www.turnitin.com).

The "Student Conduct Code of the Rules and Regulations" (Georgia Institute of Technology General Catalog, Section XIX) states, “Academic misconduct is an act that does or could improperly distort student grades or other student academic records” and offers the following descriptive list:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;
- Substitution for, or unauthorized collaboration with, a student in the commission of academic requirements;
- Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, without adequate credit notations indicating authorship (plagiarism);
- False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
- Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
- Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of the student.

The Code continues, “While these acts constitute assured instances of academic misconduct, other acts of academic misconduct may be defined by the professor.” Consult the Honor Code online at “http://www.honor.gatech.edu/” or in the General Catalog to remember your primary
commitment to academic honesty. Students who engage in academic dishonesty may receive a 0.0 on the assignment or fail the course. In addition, the instance will be reported to the Dean of Students who may take further action.

Software/Computing Resources And Requirements:
We will meet regularly this quarter in a multimedia computer lab, and we will make use frequent use of Internet applications in the lab and from remote locations (i.e. your home or dorm room). I assume all students enrolled this quarter will meet the technology requirements for incoming freshmen at GT. You must have access to your own computer with Internet capabilities to complete the work in this class. We will use e-mail applications, Web browsers, and Web Crossing (WebX) as a means of communicating both in- and out-of-class. These tools will enable you to communicate with your peers and engage in electronic “bulletin board” discussions (email, WebX), and to participate in website critique. You will receive detailed instructions within the first weeks in class about how to access and use WebX. Previous knowledge of Internet research, e-mail, and conferencing software is not a prerequisite for this course.

Course Schedule

All assignments should be completed by the day listed on this syllabus. Readings not in the textbooks are on reserve or in the class packet if it becomes necessary to make one. This schedule and the syllabus in general are subject to changes and revisions.

Introductions and Reviews

Monday, January 5: Introduction to the course and each other.

Wednesday, January 7: Go to the “Errors” web site below; look through it and select the five errors you make most commonly. Reword the entries and write them out. Then use each term correctly in a sentence and write those out. (You will share these with the class, and we will have an in-class grammar and mechanics review to help identify writing weaknesses.)

   • http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html#errors

Friday, January 9: Read the tutorials and follow all links on the pages from the Bedford Researcher web site below. These tutorials will introduce you to important considerations in research writing. In class, we will also discuss the oral presentations/discussions and assign you to your groups.
   • http://bedfordresearcher.com/tutorials/thesis
   • http://bedfordresearcher.com/tutorials/quotations
   • http://bedfordresearcher.com/tutorials/workscited

The US: Conflicts from Inside

Finding yourself: Work and Family

Monday, January 12: In-class essay assessment. (You may want to start reading The Corrections.)


Friday, January 16: Office Space (film on reserve). Group Two.

Monday, January 19: School holiday. No class. You should be reading The Corrections.
Wednesday, January 21: In-class film. Continue reading The Corrections.

Friday, January 23: Finish The Corrections. Group Three. You should discuss one of the following questions on WebX by class time (See explanation of WebX on page 2 of the syllabus):

- Are elements of the Lambert family characteristic of what you think of when you think of “the American family” generically? Elaborate.

- How do the world in general—and family life in particular—change during the half century that the novel spans? In what ways is life better now than when the Lambert children were young? In what ways is it worse?


- Respond to one classmate’s WebX post. (You may respond to another post for extra credit.)


Friday, January 30: Research orientation class.

Monday, February 2: No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a thesis statement, a detailed thematic outline of your paper, and a copy of whatever research material you’re using in your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Wednesday, February 4: No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a thesis statement, a detailed thematic outline of your paper, and a copy of whatever research material you’re using in your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Friday, February 6: Papers due. In-class discussion of group web assignment and web design.

Violence and Crime

Stylized Crime


Wednesday, February 11: Historical Representation: In-class film noir. Continue reading Chandler essay excerpt and short story.

Friday, February 13: Discussion of film and Chandler work. Group Six.


Identity and Guns

Wednesday, February 18: Historical Representation: “The Man who was Almost a Man” by R. Wright. Group Two.

Friday, February 20: Bowling for Columbine (film on reserve). Group Three. Discuss the following on WebX:

- Offer your perspective on an idea you found to be noteworthy or controversial in Bowling for Columbine.
Crime as Social Commentary


Friday, February 27: Hocus Pocus (last third). Group Five.


Wednesday, March 3: Exam review and web design lab.

Friday, March 5: Mid-term exam. Group web site due by the end of the day.

Spring Break March 8-12.

The US: Conflicts (From) Outside

Monday, March 15: Introduction to major research paper. Print out the proposal document from the website


Finding America, Defining America

Monday, March 22: Historical Representations: “The Lost ‘Beautifulness’” by A. Yzeirska. Selection from Ragged Dick by H. Alger. “Let America be America Again” by L. Hughes. Group Three. Discuss the following questions on WebX:

• What is the source of the rhetorical power of these historic representations? Do they accurately represent the US as it is or do they represent the US in the image of what the authors want the country to become? Do they serve some other ideological purposes?

Wednesday, March 24: Jasmine reading day.

Friday, March 26: Complete Jasmine. Group Four. Discuss one of the following questions on WebX:

• How do the characters carry around the border with them, and how do the characters cross the borders?

• How does the text represent migration, social mobility, and exile?

Monday, March 29: Jasmine. Group Five.

• Respond to a classmate’s WebX post.


Friday, April 2: M. Butterfly by D.H. Hwang, Group One.
War and Terror and Their Effects

Monday, April 5: Research proposal and proposal form are due.

Wednesday, April 7: Historical Representations: “Soldier’s Home” by E. Hemingway. Group Two.

Friday, April 9: Maus II (first half). Group Three.

Monday, April 12: Maus II (second half). Group Four.

Wednesday, April 14: Three Kings (film on reserve). Read background information on the war at http://www.tandl.vt.edu/Foundations/mediaproject/home.htm Group Five.

Friday, April 16: Selections from Iraq War Reader. Group Six.

Monday, April 19: Selection from September 11 in History.

Wednesday, April 21: Post 9/11 art in-class discussion. Discussion of ground zero.

Friday, April 23: Exam review and in-class peer editing of research projects.

Note: This syllabus is subject to changes and revisions.