Ethnic Literatures of the U.S.: Word, Image, and Race

Dr. Everett Hamner
Western Illinois University, Spring 2015
ENG 348, Mondays 12:30-3, Quad Cities Complex 2206, westernonline.wiu.edu
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General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

(General Education/Multicultural Studies) Study of literary texts, authors, and genres from various ethnic groups in the U.S. Examinations of culturally specific and cross-cultural questions including issues of race, class, and gender.

Specific Description & Goals

This course concentrates on the literatures and cultures of the two largest ethnic minorities in the United States, African Americans and Latinos/Latinas. We will find that there are unique elements of each group as well as many parallels, but also that each category—as with other ethnicities, which we’ll also consider—is used to blanket a vast range of distinct histories and identities.

Our broadest goals are to recognize and question stereotypes of these groups and some of their most visible figures, thus opening space for new understandings, and to do so especially through dynamic encounters with literature, film, and graphic narrative. Beginning our journey just after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday, we will reconsider his legacy via a provocative, detailed, and well-researched comic biography, a field trip to see Best Picture-nominated Selma, and comparisons to the Malcolm X of Spike Lee’s 1992 film biography. Though these figures would not emerge onto the public stage until later, appreciating the nuances of their lives and diverse portrayals will then provide invaluable context for reading one of the great novels of American literature, Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, a work with which we will linger for several weeks to explore the evolution of the 1960s civil rights movement.

Then our course shifts ground, turning to another graphic narrative for a primer on Latino/a history and culture. Here we will find significant parallels between contemporary clashes over immigration reform and the history of African American resistance to slavery and Jim Crow. Indeed last year’s rhetorical and physical violence over citizenship rights and policing protocols demands continual attention to these issues, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s spectacular 1997 novel, Tropic of Orange, remains all too relevant. This daring hybrid of magical realism and technothriller will finally lead us to a recent hybrid of word and image, a kind of comics journalism that powerfully confronts racial and class-based injustices in five different US settings. Together, these works will invite us to rethink our approaches to ethnic and cultural diversity and our visions of American and global citizenship for the 21st century.

Coursework involves a mid-level reading load, preparation for class discussions, four announced reading comprehension quizzes, and three journalistic, creative, and critical writing projects.
Meeting, Reading/Viewing, & Assignment Schedule

*Any article (etc.) below not listed under “required texts” will be available on Western Online under “Content.”

**PART ONE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL AND LITERARY HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st, JAN 19th</td>
<td>NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd, JAN 26th</td>
<td>BEING “AMERICAN”</td>
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<td>3rd, FEB 2nd</td>
<td>NO CLASS (DR. HAMNER AT CONFERENCE), BUT A WEEKEND MOVIE …</td>
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<tr>
<td>READING: ~Ho Che Anderson, King: A Comics Biography</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIEWING: <del>A field trip (2/7 or 2/8) to see Selma at the Rave/Cinemark Theatre in Davenport (</del>$7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th, FEB 9th</td>
<td>PORTRAYALS OF MLK, JR. &amp; MALCOLM X</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIEWING: ~Spike Lee’s Malcolm X (streamable on amazon.com for $3-4; 5 copies available in public library system; 1 copy on WIU-QC library reserve for overnight check-out)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING: ~Paper #1 due online by Sun 2/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN CLASS: ~Martin the messiah, Malcolm the monster? Reclaiming their humanity, and ours ~Excerpts from MLK Jr’s Why We Can’t Wait and Malcolm X’s Autobiography</td>
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<td>TH 2/12: BUS TRIP TO FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO; IF ABLE TO ATTEND, SEE ESPECIALLY “THE ANCIENT AMERICAS,” “PAWNEE EARTH LODGE,” AND “AFRICA” EXHIBITS</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th, FEB 16th</td>
<td>GOING NORTH</td>
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<tr>
<td>READING: ~Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, prologue, ch 1-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN CLASS: ~Quiz #1 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 2) ~Trends in Paper #1’s novel and film reviews ~Getting acquainted with Ralph Ellison: African American literary context ~Listen to Ralph Ellison speech, “Origins of Invisible Man” ~Discuss Paper #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th, FEB 23rd</td>
<td>FALSE LEADS</td>
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<tr>
<td>READING: ~Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, ch 10-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN CLASS: ~Excerpts from René Girard, The Scapegoat (1986)</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Mar 2nd: Falling Underground</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>~Ralph Ellison, <em>Invisible Man</em>, ch 18-25, epilogue</td>
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| In Class: | ~How stories evolve: a look at Ellison’s “Working Notes for *Invisible Man*”
|          | ~A deleted scene, courtesy of Ellison’s papers at the Library of Congress |

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Mar 9th: Rising Again</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>~From <em>The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison</em>: “What America Would Be Like Without Blacks” and “The Art of Fiction: An Interview”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Writing: | ~Paper #2 draft due online (“Communication” → “Discussions”) by Sun 3/8
|          | ~Paper #2 final version due online (“Assessments” → “Dropbox”) by Sun 3/15 |
| In Class: | ~Quiz #2 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 5’s quiz)
|          | ~A sampling and discussion of Paper #2 drafts |

SPRING BREAK, MAR 16th: NO CLASS

PART TWO: LATINA/O LITERATURE AND BEYOND

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Mar 23rd: A Very Brief Latin@ History</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>~Ilan Stavans and Lalo Alcaraz, <em>Latino USA: A Cartoon History</em></td>
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</table>
|          | ~Clips from *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Maria Full of Grace*
|          | ~Pew Hispanic Center data on race in America, as of 2008; Daniel D. Arreola, “Hispanic American Legacy, Latino American Diaspora”

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Mar 30th: Latin@s in the Midwest</th>
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<tr>
<td>Viewing:</td>
<td>~<em>AbUSed: The Postville Raid</em> ($3 rental, vimeo.com) and “Welcome the Stranger” (short)</td>
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<td>In Class:</td>
<td>~Guest: Dr. Claire Fox (Univ. of Iowa); also presenting University Theme Lecture, 3 pm</td>
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Apr 6th: Magical Realism …</th>
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| In Class: | ~View excerpts from short documentaries, *Mojados: Through the Night* and *La Americana*
<p>|          | ~Discuss Paper #3 |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Apr 13th</td>
<td><strong>FOR A TECHNO-THRILLER WORLD</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>READING:</strong> ~Karen Tei Yamashita, <em>Tropic of Orange</em>, “Thursday”-“Sunday”&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>IN CLASS:</strong> ~Quiz #3 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 8’s quiz)</td>
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<td>13th</td>
<td>Apr 20th</td>
<td><strong>FACING ONGOING THEFT AND SIEGE</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>READING:</strong> ~Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, <em>Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt</em> intro, ch. 1-2 (xi-114)&lt;br&gt;~Flannery O’Connor, “The Displaced Person”&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>WRITING:</strong> ~Paper #3: 2-pp. proposal (questions, notes OK) due online (“Discussions”) by Sun 4/19&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>IN CLASS:</strong> ~What might a Catholic woman from the mid-20th-Century South say today?</td>
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<td>FRI 4/24: CAS RESEARCH &amp; AWARDS RECEPTION</td>
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<td>14th</td>
<td>Apr 27th</td>
<td><strong>FACING ONGOING DEVASTATION AND SLAVERY</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>READING:</strong> ~Hedges and Sacco, <em>Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt</em> ch. 3-4 (115-223)&lt;br&gt;~O’Connor, “Revelation”&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>WRITING:</strong> ~Paper #3: half-length draft due online (“Discussions”) by Sun 4/26&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>IN CLASS:</strong> ~Film: Alex Rivera’s border-crossing science fiction film <em>Sleep Dealer</em> (2008), 1st half&lt;br&gt;~Course evaluations</td>
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<td>15th</td>
<td>May 4th</td>
<td><strong>RE-IMAGINING REVOLT</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>READING:</strong> ~Hedges and Sacco, <em>Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt</em> ch. 5 (225-271) &lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>WRITING:</strong> ~Paper #3: full-length draft due online (“Discussions”) by Sun 5/3&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>IN CLASS:</strong> ~Quiz #4 (all assigned and in-class materials since week 12’s quiz)&lt;br&gt;~Film: Alex Rivera’s border-crossing science fiction film <em>Sleep Dealer</em> (2008), 2nd half</td>
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<td>FRI 5/8: WIU-QC STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FINALS</strong></td>
<td>Week 11th</td>
<td><strong>PRESENTATIONS</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>WRITING:</strong> ~Paper #3: final version due online (“Dropbox”) by Mon 5/11&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>IN CLASS:</strong> ~Paper #3 brief presentations</td>
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**Please Note:**

*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—that site has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).*

*I am happy for students to use complete electronic versions of texts so long as they use appropriate citation methods when writing papers and can accept occasional challenges in finding a given passage.*


**Recommended Reading/Viewing (ask me for more titles that may fit your particular interests)**

**Films**

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<tr>
<th>“O”</th>
<th>American History X</th>
<th>42 (on Jackie Robinson)</th>
<th>Monster’s Ball</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amistad</td>
<td>The Green Mile</td>
<td>A Family Thing</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
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<td>The Power of One</td>
<td>Driving Miss Daisy</td>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>The Apostle</td>
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<td>The Shawshank Redemption</td>
<td>City of God</td>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>Babel</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Motorcycle Diaries</td>
<td>A Day Without a Mexican</td>
<td>The Official Story</td>
<td>Moebius</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man Facing Southeast</td>
<td>Sin Nombre</td>
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**Fiction**

- Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig*
- Langston Hughes, *Simple’s Uncle Sam*
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*
- Sinclair Lewis, *Kingsblood Royal*
- Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth*
- James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
- Walker Percy, *The Last Gentleman*
- Richard Powers, *The Time of Our Singing*
- Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
- Samuel Delany, *Triton*
- Mat Johnson & Warren Pleece, *Incognegro*
- Elena Garro, *Recollections of Things to Come*
- Rosario Castellanos, *The Book of Lamentations*
- Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Leonardo’s Bicycle*
- Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*
- Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

**Theory and Criticism**

- René Girard, *The Scapegoat*
- Adam Bradley, *Ralph Ellison in Progress*
- Wilson J. Moses, *Black Messiah & Uncle Toms*
- Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound*
- Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance!*
- Daniel D. Arreola, *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places*
- John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution*
- Jean Franco, *The Decline & Fall of the Lettered City*
- Jean Toomer, *Cane*
- Nella Larsen, *Passing and Quicksand*
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy & Native Son*
- Flannery O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*
- Ralph Ellison, *Three Days Before the Shooting …*
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
- Toni Morrison, *Paradise*
- Ismael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*
- Rob Vollmar & Pablo Callejo, *The Castaways*
- Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
- Ana Castillo, *So Far From God*
- Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc o/l Rainforest*
- Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*
- Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*
- Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*
- Salvador Plascencia, *The People of Paper*

- Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*
- Alan Nadel, *Invisible Criticism*
- James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*
- Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*
- Martin Kevorkian, *The Black Face of Tech. in America*
- Jon Smith & Deborah Cohn, *Look Away!*
- Idelbar Avelar, *The Untimely Present*
- Jean Franco, *Critical Passions*
Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*  
Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture*  
Claire Fox, *The Fence and the River*  
Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*

**HISTORICAL ANGLES (inc. autobiography)**

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus*  
David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*  
Albert Murray, *South to a Very Old Place*  
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*  
David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*  
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*  
Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*  
Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*  
Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait*  
Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton*  
Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*

**Grading Criteria**

~An A recognizes broad and deep understanding of the course material, regular and insightful discussion contributions, and very strong written work—a major impact on the course’s success.  
~A B indicates good commitment to coursework, demonstrable contributions and achievements in both verbal and written analysis, and tangible positive impact on other students’ learning.  
~A C reflects adequate completion of coursework, including satisfactory participation and writing.  
~A D or F denotes incomplete or unsatisfactory coursework, unsatisfactory participation (missing more than 25% of class time or 4+ classes), and/or detraction from course goals (via plagiarism or otherwise).

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Assignment Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Quizzes (4 x 10% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Paper #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Paper #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Paper #3</td>
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I will add 1/3 grade on Paper #2 or #3 for a high-quality presentation of it at the WIU-QC CAS Research Evening and/or the WIU-QC Student Research Conference (the same materials should work in each context).

**Assignment Descriptions**

**Quizzes**: My goal is for these to be neither picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could do well merely by reading online summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned texts with good comprehension should average 60-80% of the points available (i.e., putting them in the “B” range). Understandably, students sometimes lament the quizzes initially, but in end-of-semester surveys, they almost unanimously agree that these simple assessments provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one. My best advice is to get the reading done well in advance, then go back over it, your reading and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

**Paper #1: Outside Novel or Film Review.** A 1000+word review of any novel or film from beyond the syllabus that you read or view in weeks 2-4 and that Dr. Hamner pre-approves. Works already on the syllabus under “Recommended Reading/Viewing” may be considered pre-approved; others should be discussed in person or via email. One option is *Selma*, which as many of us as possible will go see together at the Rave/Cinemark Theatre in Davenport on 2/7 or 2/8. Whatever your text, though, my evaluation criteria will be the following: 1/3 for how specifically, evocatively, and yet efficiently summarize the characters, setting, and overall plot of the novel/film; 1/3 for how insightful is your analysis of the text’s strengths and weaknesses and its relationship to related works and/or contemporary cultural issues; and 1/3 for clarity, organization, and mechanical polish.
Paper #2: Another Chapter of Invisible Man: A 1500+ word creative writing project that imagines an additional chapter to be inserted at any point within the text of *Invisible Man*. As will become quickly apparent, this may prove harder than it sounds. As we will be discussing, Ellison himself was forced to delete several whole chapters and many smaller scenes from the novel, and this is your opportunity to imagine what might transpire in one of the gaps between chapters, or even after the novel’s final events (which, we will discover, are actually narrated in the prologue). After a one-sentence preface indicating where your chapter might be inserted, your job is to mimic Ellison’s style as fully as possible while somehow intensifying the novel’s significance through your added material. You might expand our knowledge of a character who is treated only briefly in the actual text; explore an aspect of invisible man’s dilemmas that is hinted at but left relatively unresolved; create an entirely new character for invisible man to encounter; or imagine what occurs after invisible man returns to the surface and publishes his story. Whatever direction you pursue, aim both to have some fun with the language and images of the novel as it actually exists (demonstrating that you have read carefully, in other words) and to introduce a new element to the plot, characters, or settings that helps probe the novel’s meanings for our questions about racial difference. 2/3 of the grade will evaluate your chapter’s success in imitating Ellison’s style and provocatively expanding upon his novel; 1/3 will be an evaluation of your piece’s depth of character and setting, logical flow, and creative power in and of itself; and 1/3 will reflect matters of clarity, organization, and mechanical polish. More details about this assignment will be discussed in week 5.

Paper #3: A Comparative Analysis of One Chapter of *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* and Another Main Course Text. A 1500+ word argumentative essay that juxtaposes the treatment of race in Hedges and Sacco’s nonfiction/comic journalism volume with that in one of our other main course texts. Paying particular attention to the differing roles played by words and images in these texts, your goal is to build a non-obvious, risk-taking, interpretive thesis with which a reasonable person might conceivably disagree; it should help your readers to better understand both what you hear the texts in question saying and how you understand them to be doing so. 1/3 of the grade will reflect the insightfulness and significance of the overarching claim you develop; 1/3 will reflect your success in demonstrating its accuracy through logical paragraph-level presentation of carefully-selected evidence; and 1/3 will reflect matters of sentence-level clarity, organization, and mechanical polish. More details about this assignment will be discussed in week 11.

PLEASE NOTE: For Paper #2, there is a full-length draft deadline; for Paper #3, there are intermediate due dates for a 2 pp. rough planning document (in outline or other form, as you prefer), a half-length draft, and a full-length draft. These submissions are not individually graded, but I do weigh heavily evidence of progress in these stages when a student’s final course grade is on the border between two possibilities. Submitting these drafts is also to students’ advantages because I will respond to those submitted on time for Paper #2 and for the proposal and half-length drafts for Paper #3.
PLEASE NOTE:
The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keeping its generality in mind.

**My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students**

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other such endeavors, but my role is to challenge you beyond your comfort zone and to honestly assess the quality of your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even a semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and even your entire college GPA can never convey those fully.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not in order to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. That can only happen with your simultaneous investment, though. What you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond class meetings.

**Attendance & Participation**

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. *Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.*

**Classroom Courtesies**

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and other electronics should not be used during quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

**Making Contact**

While there are occasional exceptions, I do my very best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments during the course of the semester. Please read it thoroughly, as many routine questions I receive are answered somewhere in its pages. Also, please keep in mind that unless you anticipate being gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other routine challenges we share as human beings.

When you have an urgent question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, you are very welcome to contact me, preferably via email (much faster than phone). My goal is to respond within 2-3 business
days, if not sooner; however, I am unlikely to reply at night or on weekends or holidays. Please also note that I use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.

In short, while I ask you to turn to the syllabus and each other first for simpler questions about assignments or missed materials, I do so in order to save my time for more complex and substantial issues. Please feel welcome to ask questions after class or schedule a visit during office hours; I look forward to many good one-on-one and small group conversations over the course of the semester.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.).

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually get these posted on the course website (under “Content”) within 24 hours.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and those who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (= .80), then multiple that by 4 (= 3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. In each case, I reserve the right to bump the grade up a notch if I believe it’s warranted (or rarely down, most often when there are attendance problems like those described earlier in the syllabus).

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be down when a deadline is approaching, emailing the paper and then posting it asap is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers can take longer; in those cases, please alert me of your submission with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file.
The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”

Late Work

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course. We will briefly review proper citation in class, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic honesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 for additional services” (from Official University Policy Manual at www.wiu.edu/policies/syllabus.php).

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see www.wiu.edu/provost/students/.
Dr. Hamner's Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Will your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or forced?

2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?
   - **Strengthening your thesis:**
     - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
     - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
     - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g. too-short/disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
    - **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):**
      - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
      - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
    - **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:**
      - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
      - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
      - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
      - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?