FOUNDATIONS OF THE ENGLISH MAJOR: THEORY
PROFS. BOVILSKY, PEPPIS, AND SAUNDERS

Description

The Foundations of the English Major is a three-course sequence (ENG 301, ENG 302, ENG 303) that introduces students to the discipline of English as it is practiced at the University of Oregon. The sequence provides English majors with a common intellectual experience and a foundation for future coursework in literary, media, and cultural studies and folklore.

English 302 introduces students to the concept of “critical theory.” This phrase refers to a diverse body of knowledge with roots in the ancient past and that continues to evolve. Many conflicting ideas fall under the heading of “theory,” but all theoretical works share at least one of three basic goals: first, to investigate the objects of critical activity (by asking questions such as “what is a text?” or “what is an author?” or “what is the nature of ‘literary’ value?”); second, to formulate general principles about how meaning is produced and circulated (by examining the effect of the material form of the text or artwork, exploring the processes whereby some acts of interpretation can be encouraged while others are ruled out of bounds, or considering the role of historical context); and third, to understand how acts of literary and artistic representation make things happen in the world (by, for example, stirring emotions, fostering identifications, reifying or refusing stereotypes, engaging with different ideological positions, forging collective experiences — all things that require us to think about how emotions, identity, ideology, and collectivity actually work). Because of this drive to understand how acts of representation work in the world, critical theory is constantly borrowing from or in dialogue with other disciplines and bodies of knowledge: philosophy, sociology, political science, history, psychology and psychoanalysis, feminist studies, queer studies, environmental studies, and the hard sciences have all inspired and invigorated critical theory.

This class will not attempt to offer a comprehensive history of critical theory but will instead attempt to show through a series of examples how our chosen texts can illuminate a specific theoretical question or debate — and vice versa.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will have: (1) built a foundation from which to engage with the wider canons of critical theory; (2) become better able to assess the interpretive potential and limits of a variety of theoretical approaches; (3) practiced using critical theory in their own essays.

The course meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00-11:20 in Fenton 110, as well as for one hour of discussion section for each student.
Contact information and office hours for professors and GEs:

Prof. Bovilsky, PLC 246  
Email: bovilsky@uoregon.edu  
Office hours: Mondays 11:15-12:45, Tuesdays 11:45-1:15, or by appointment.

Prof. Peppis, PLC 154 (Oregon Humanities Center)  
Email: ppeppis@uoregon.edu  
Office hours: Thursdays 12-3

Prof. Saunders, PLC 273  
Email: ben@uoregon.edu  
Office hours: Fridays 2-5

Will Conable, PLC 212  
Email: wconable@uoregon.edu  
Office hours: Tuesdays 12-3

Parker Smith, PLC 36  
Email: psmith5@uoregon.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10 am-noon, Fridays 11-noon

Required Course Materials and Texts

The following required texts are available at the Duck Store. Please use the specific editions listed below

Webster, *White Devil*, ed. Robinson (Bloomsbury Arden)  
Larsen, *Passing* (Dover)  
Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*, 30th Anniversary Edition (DC Comics)  

Additional course materials will be available on Canvas and/or distributed in class.

Useful Resources when Writing and Citing

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) offers extensive advice on grammar and usage, as well as clear guidelines for proper citation according to both MLA and Chicago formats. See https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl

For unfamiliar words, https://www.merriam-webster.com offers the highest quality online dictionary. But for words whose meanings may have changed over time, use the *OED* (Oxford English Dictionary), which tracks such changes and can help you figure out what meanings are likely/possible/impossible in the text. On the library’s homepage, click on “databases,” then on the letter O, then on the *OED* (scroll down to ‘Oxford’) and use your DuckID to log in.
**Course and Readings Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 1/8</td>
<td><strong>Course Introduction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Section I</td>
<td><strong>Bovilsky, Early Modern Race Theory and Intersectionality</strong></td>
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| Thursday 1/10 | *Operations of Race*  
Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race”  
Fields and Fields, *Racecraft* mini-excerpt  
Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 1 |
| Tuesday 1/15| **Theorizing Race: Modernity and Early Modernity**                      |
|            | Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play* excerpt                                       |
|            | Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 2                                        |
| Thursday 1/17| *Race, Nation, and Imagination*                                          |
|            | Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* excerpt                       |
|            | Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 3, Scenes 1 and 2                       |
| Tuesday 1/22| **Race, Gender, and Sexuality**                                          |
|            | Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”   |
| Thursday 1/24| *Race, Gender, and Sexuality II*                                         |
|            | *The White Devil*, Act 4, Scene 3, Act 5, Scenes 1-3                    |
| Friday 1/25 | **Theory Exercise 1 due (2-3 pp.)**                                      |
| Tuesday 1/29| *Race, Gender, and Performance*                                         |
|            | Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* excerpt                    |
|            | *The White Devil*, Act 5, Scenes 4-6                                     |
| Section II | **Peppis, Modern(ist) Race Theory and Intersectionality**               |
| Thursday 1/31| *Theorizing Race and Passing I*                                          |
| Tuesday 2/5 | *Theorizing Race and Passing II*                                         |
| Thursday 2/7| *Theorizing Sexuality and Race in Passing I*                            |
Tuesday 2/12  
*Theorizing Sexuality and Race in Passing II*
Butler, “Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge”; Larsen, *Passing*

Thursday 2/14  
*Theorizing Sexuality and Race in Passing III*
Butler, “Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge”; Larsen, *Passing*

Friday 2/15  
**Theory Exercise 2 due (2-3 pp.)**

Tuesday 2/19  
*Passing as Theory*
Larsen, *Passing*

**Section III**  
Saunders, *Theory and Popular Culture – the Example of Batman*

Wednesday 2/20  
Evening screening of Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (2008)
Exact time and location TBA

Thursday 2/21  
*Why So Serious?* (“Popular Culture” and/as/against “Art”)
**Handouts:**
- Excerpts from Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*
- Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry…”
- Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies”
**On Canvas:**
- Batman origin from *Detective Comics* #33 (1939)
- First Joker and Catwoman stories from *Batman* #1 (1940)

Tuesday 2/26  
*The Shadow of the Bat* (An “Archetypal” Reading of Batman)
Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns* (Parts 1 and 2)
**Handouts:**
- Extract from Jung, “The Archetypes …”
- Northrop Frye, “The Archetypes of Literature”

Thursday 2/28  
*Queer as a Bat Part I*
**On Canvas:**
- Selected Episodes of Batman TV show (1966)
- Selected *Batman* comics from the 1950s
**Handout:**
- Susan Sontag, “On Camp”

**Saturday 3/2**  
**Theory exercise 3 due (2-3 pp.) noon**

Tuesday 3/5  
*Queer as a Bat Part II*
Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns* (Parts 3 and 4)
Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*
**Handout:**
- Excerpts from Brooker and Klock

Thursday 3/7  
*Bat-Politics*
Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*
Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*
**Handout:**
- Excerpts from Weber and Cover
Tuesday 3/12  
*Bat-Art*
Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*
Moore and Bolland, *The Killing Joke*
Handout: TBA

Thursday 3/14  
Wrap-up

**Monday 3/18**  
Final Paper due (5-7 pp.)

**Participation**

Come to class having read/reviewed the assigned material and prepared to discuss it with your instructors and peers. Please arrive to class on time, with appropriate materials on hand (course readings, paper and pen for taking notes) and ready to focus on the day’s activities. Lectures may not be copied, taped, or videotaped in any manner unless you have a documented communication-related disability and have received permission from the course instructors.

The participation grade (see “Grades” below) rewards students who take an active and engaged role in discussions, who are willing to contribute thoughtfully and constructively to the collaborative process of in-class dialogue, and who conduct themselves in a collegial and respectful way. Participation can take many forms: asking questions, offering ideas, making room for others to contribute, visibly paying attention. Conversely, you can hurt your participation grade by talking over others, not listening, not treating others with generosity and respect, or by distracting others.

We expect you to pay attention for the duration of lectures and discussion meetings and not prevent others from doing so. Because they have been shown to make students learn less and earn lower grades, laptops and tablets require special permission to use. If you wish to use one, please contact one of the professors. Turn off and put away cell phones before class begins. **NB: Students using phones who have not received permission will lose all participation points for the day.** Earbuds should be removed. Please bear in mind that it is difficult to lecture or follow a lecture over whispering or “cross-talking.” Any activity that disrupts or distracts others from course material is inconsiderate, and GEs will ask you to stop it. Please be considerate and respectful of those around you.

**Attendance**

Attendance of both lecture and discussion section is mandatory. More than two unexcused absences from lecture or one unexcused absence from section will result in your final grade being lowered (see below for details).

Documented illness and personal emergencies are excused absences: you will not be penalized for an excused absence. If you are ill, contact your GE in advance of any missed class to touch base and find out what you will need to make up before next class.
Two lecture absences are allowed. Your final course grade will drop by two points for each subsequent absence unless arrangements have been made in advance. (Example: a final course grade of 94 would drop to a 92; a grade of 88 would drop to an 86.)

One discussion section absence is allowed; your final course grade will drop by four points for each subsequent discussion section absence unless you have contacted your GE and worked out an agreement in advance on alternative arrangements. You are responsible for work due or assigned on days you are absent. (Example: with a second absence, a final course grade of 94 would drop to a 90; with a third it would drop to 86).

If you miss a Lecture or Discussion Section it is your responsibility to contact a fellow student to find out what you’ve missed.

Grades

A grade of C or better is required in the course for English major credit.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- 10% Participation in section discussion
- 20% Quizzes (5 best out of 6 quizzes)
- 39% 3 Theory Exercises (2-3 pages each, due)
- 31% Final Essay (5-7 pages, due 3/18)

Late Work

Assignments are due by the day/time indicated on the syllabus. Late assignments will be docked 3 points (approximately 1/3 of a letter grade) for each day they are late, unless explicit arrangements have been made in advance with your GE discussion instructor (see “Extensions” below). Assignments that are extended will be judged late as above if not handed in by the extended deadline.

Extensions

You may ask for an extension if the due date is more than 72 hours (3 days) later, and the earlier the better. When you contact your GE, please let them know how long an extension you are requesting. In case of a looming or unexpected disaster, consideration will be given if you keep your instructors in the loop and communicate in advance – i.e. even if the assignment is due in less than 3 days. Stay in touch.

Grading Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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Academic Integrity

The University of Oregon requires academic honesty. You are here to engage your own mind in rigorous intellectual work. All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. This includes ideas you get from your classmates (discussion and kicking ideas around is encouraged, so long as you document where discussion with a peer impacted your argument) and ideas you get from websites as well as books and other media. See the library website (under “How-To Guides” on the library homepage) for citation practices. You are not allowed to cut and paste from internet sites into your paper.

N.B. Most internet essays aimed at students are not written at the college level. Taking from this work, even in the case that you are not caught, often results in a lower grade.

In accord with English Department policy, **academic dishonesty (plagiarism or cheating) will minimally result in an automatic failing grade for this course.** All incidents will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, as required by the University. Definitions of cheating and plagiarism are available in the “Student Conduct Code” section of the Student Life website (http://studentlife.uoregon.edu). Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism. Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words or ideas without due acknowledgment. It may be intentional or unintentional. To make sure you have avoided plagiarism in your work, you should:

- Accurately quote the original author's words if you are quoting.
- Enclose the quotation within quotation marks.
- Follow the quotation with an in-text citation.
- Introduce quotations with a phrase that includes the author's name (Baxter argues that...).
- **If you are paraphrasing someone else’s ideas or words rather than quoting, you must still cite the source** with in-text citation, footnote, or a phrase that includes the author’s name.
- Provide a list of references with full citation information at the end of the paper.

Please familiarize yourself with the above resources if you are not clear on what constitutes cheating or plagiarism. You are also welcome to contact any of us if you have any questions about these definitions. We are very happy to talk to you about this.

**Vericite is a plagiarism detection service employed by the UO that identifies potentially plagiarized or improperly cited text.** The service automatically checks submitted work against an index of online sources. It can be accessed through our Canvas course site. Your GEs will explain how to submit your written work.

Finally, if you are having trouble writing a paper or understanding what we are looking for, please contact one of us. We do not expect that you already know how to do what we are teaching you. Extra help is always available. There’s nothing wrong with getting something wrong; often it takes mistakes to learn, and this is not something to panic about. However, if you take ideas from elsewhere and pass them off as your own, you learn nothing – so the next paper will therefore be no easier – and risk extreme academic penalties.
Course Content

You should be aware that the texts we will read this term deal with adult themes and subject matter. Some are critical of conventional religious, political, and social attitudes; some even traffic in the language of blasphemy and obscenity. Some use vocabulary and terms that many of us would be uncomfortable employing in our everyday lives; and some contain painful and distressing scenes of violence, including episodes of racial and sexual violence. Encountering, analyzing, and discussing aesthetic, political, and cultural differences—including differences that challenge and even offend current day beliefs and ideals—and learning about the histories of current urgent debates, struggles, and conflicts are essential aspects of the discipline of the English major and the work of majoring in English. We believe that cultivating these skills will help best prepare students to live as effective and ethical citizens. To develop these skills, we remind all of you that it is vital that each of you is able to take risks and explore arguments—arguments you may continue to revise or may move away from. Similarly, we ask each of you to be respectful of viewpoints with which you may disagree strongly.

Lecture Notes and Missed Classes

Should you miss a lecture or discussion, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from your colleagues, so get to know other students who can help you and whom you can help. In no case should you take notes regularly for another student, unless you obtain the professor’s approval. However, comparing notes with a study partner or a small group can assist you with the course; please feel free to collaborate as you learn.

Tutorial Help

The Tutoring and Learning Center offers useful programs, workshops, courses, tutors, mentors, and drop-in assistance to help you learn and write successfully. The TLC is located on the fourth floor of Knight Library and their website is http://tlc.uoregon.edu.

Inclusive Learning Environments

This is an inclusive learning environment. Please notify one of the professors teaching this course by the end of week 2 if there are aspects of the instruction or course design that result in disability-related barriers to your participation so that we may make prompt changes. We also expect you to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoacc@uoregon.edu for additional resources and support.