

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

**Preliminary Statement**

Welcome to our revised, remote version of ENG 305. We want to take this opportunity to affirm our commitment to provide you all with the best learning experience possible—despite the challenge presented by our current circumstances.

Although we cannot proceed as originally planned, we can still:

- engage our minds and expand the horizons of our knowledge through purposeful reading;
- develop our analytic and argumentation skills through the practice of written argument;
- participate in forms of online dialogue that can enrich and advance our understanding of complex and vital intellectual matters;
- become better at understanding, applying, critiquing, and enjoying theoretical texts;
- learn how different forms of theory can be used to understand and make arguments about texts and representations from a variety of periods, from early modern to the present day.

This document addresses some of the necessary changes of our new online format, providing guidelines for when our procedures may be unfamiliar. It will also outline the basic requirements, policies, and assignment sequences of the course, in the manner of a traditional syllabus. Please read it carefully, and don't hesitate to reach out to us, or to your GEs, if you have any unanswered questions. (The best ways and times to reach us are detailed below, under the heading "**Communicating With Us.**")

**Course Description**

The Foundations of the English Major is a three-course series (ENG 303, ENG 304, ENG 305) introducing students to the discipline of English as practiced at the University of Oregon. The series provides English majors with a common intellectual experience and a foundation for future coursework in literary studies, media and cultural studies, and folklore.

English 305 introduces students to the concept of "critical theory." This phrase refers to a diverse body of knowledge with roots in the ancient past that continues to evolve today. Many conflicting ideas fall under the heading of "theory," but all theoretical works share at least one of four basic goals:

- first, to establish the objects and procedures 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 generated and circulated (by exploring the way in which some acts of interpretation are legitimated while others are ruled out of bounds—a process that might require, for example, considering the material form of the text or artwork; the relative cultural status of the text or artwork, and that of its interpreters; the role of historical context; etc.);
- 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 further about how emotions, identity, ideology, and collectivity might actually work);
- and fourth, understanding how real-world beliefs, cultural formations, and institutions are created, sustained, and changed.

Because of these last two goals, to understand how acts of representation can influence and shape the world in which we live, 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, studies of ability, environmental studies, the hard sciences, and insights from activist critique have all inspired and invigorated critical theory.

This class will not attempt to offer a comprehensive survey of critical theory but will instead attempt to show through a series of examples how different 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.

### **Communicating With Us**

Outside of our scheduled synchronous (real time) online discussions, all announcements and general emails will be made via Canvas. These will be automatically forwarded to your UO email. (Check and adjust your settings under Account > Notifications if you would also like to receive announcements via text.)

Each of us will also host office hours online each week at the times listed below via Zoom, Canvas Chat, or UO email. (Emails containing the URLs and links inviting you to join any Zoom meetings will be sent to all course participants via Canvas.) If for any reason you have trouble using Zoom or Canvas Chat during a scheduled session of office hours, please email us; we will

check our email during the sessions. Bear in mind that can also email us with questions at any time throughout the term, as usual.

### **Contact information and office hours for professors and GEs:**

#### **Prof. Lara Bovilsky**

Email: [bovilsky@uoregon.edu](mailto:bovilsky@uoregon.edu)

Online Office hours: Mondays 1-3, Thursdays 9-10, or by appointment.

Email Prof. Bovilsky at any time to make an appointment for a Canvas or Zoom chat during normal office hours.

#### **Prof. Paul Peppis**

Email: [ppeppis@uoregon.edu](mailto:ppeppis@uoregon.edu)

Online Office hours: Thursdays 2-5

Email Prof. Peppis at any time to make an appointment for an email, Canvas chat, or Zoom chat during normal office hours.

#### **Prof. Ben Saunders**

Email: [ben@uoregon.edu](mailto:ben@uoregon.edu)

Online Office hours: Thursdays 2-5

Email Prof. Saunders at any time to make an appointment for an email, Canvas chat, or Zoom chat during normal office hours.

#### **GE Megan Reynolds**

Email: [mreynol2@uoregon.edu](mailto:mreynol2@uoregon.edu)

Online Office hours: Friday 10-1

Email Megan at any time to make an appointment for an email, Canvas chat, or Zoom chat during normal office hours.

#### **GE Czander Tan**

Email: [czandert@uoregon.edu](mailto:czandert@uoregon.edu)

Online Office Hours: Tuesday 2-5

Email Czander at any time to make an appointment for an email, Canvas chat, or Zoom chat during normal office hours.

### **Technical Requirements, Guidance, and Best Practices**

The primary platforms that we will be using for this online course are Canvas and Zoom. If you have questions about accessing and using Canvas, visit the [Canvas support page](#). Canvas and Technology Support also is available by phone or live chat: Monday–Sunday | 6 a.m.–12 a.m. [541-346-4357](tel:541-346-4357) | [livehelp.uoregon.edu](https://livehelp.uoregon.edu)

### Specific guidelines for best practices using Canvas Discussion:

1. Use subject lines that clearly communicate the content of your post.
2. Write clearly and concisely and be aware that humor or sarcasm often doesn't always translate in an online environment.
3. Be supportive and considerate when replying to others' posts. This means avoiding inappropriate language, disagreeing with respect, and providing a clear rationale or evidence to support your different view.
4. Keep focused on the topic and cite readings and other class materials to support your points.
5. Proofread your submissions, and try to use correct spelling and grammar and. After submitting, use the edit feature to make corrections and resubmit (don't create a new or duplicate post that corrects your error).
6. Contribute and interact often!

### Specific guidelines for best practices using Zoom:

Zoom is an accessible online platform for video and audio conferencing.

You will be sent an invitation prior to each Zoom meeting via email. If you do not already have the Zoom app on your device, you will be prompted to download it the first time you click on the URL inviting you to the meeting. We recommend downloading the Zoom app **now** at <https://service.uoregon.edu/TDClient/2030/Portal/KB/ArticleDet?ID=101628>

1. Please test your video and audio prior to joining a live class session. You can learn more about testing your audio and video by visiting the Zoom Help Center at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>
2. Please make the same effort to join the meeting on time that you would make to arrive on time for class. It can be distracting to have participants join late. We will try to schedule things so that people can join the meeting up to ten minutes prior to the officially scheduled start of discussion.
3. Be mindful that others can see you and your surroundings if your video is on. If you prefer to use a static image instead of video, you can keep your video off.
4. Try to find a quiet setting without lots of noise or background activity. Please do not eat or multitask during the meeting; instead, treat our time online as if it were a regular class session, and conduct yourself accordingly.
5. If the Zoom meeting is set up to include audio options for you, **please mute your audio when you are not actively contributing**. When contributing, avoid making other noises such as typing or eating or having side conversations with others that might be present with you. (You can conveniently unmute while speaking simply by pressing the spacebar of your keyboard.)
6. **When you wish to speak**, use a microphone or speak closely to your computer microphone so that others can hear you. If you have video on, try to look at your camera, not the screen, when you are contributing.

7. While others are contributing, you can chat **by text** to pose questions or offer insights “on the side.”
8. Note that some Zoom meetings may feature a professor giving answers to questions you type “on the side” (in Zoom chat), but may not permit student audio (this may help keep things orderly).
9. For help and troubleshooting with Zoom, visit the Zoom Help Center at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>

If you face Internet access challenges: computer labs are currently open for students at the Eugene campus. Some companies are offering free access during this challenging time. To learn more about options visit Information Services’ [web page on going remote](#).

### **Required Course Materials and Texts**

The following texts are required. Please use the specific editions listed below:

John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Luckyj (Bloomsbury New Mermaids)

Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Dover)

Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley, *The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics)

Additional course materials will be made available on Canvas.

### **Course and Readings Schedule**

We will provide **recorded lectures and supplementary reading materials** via Canvas, Panopto, and/or YouTube in lieu of **one** of our weekly lecture sessions; we also plan to hold **one lecture per week as a synchronous (live) Zoom or Canvas Chat discussion meeting**. These discussions will be scheduled at one of the usual class meeting times (that is, either a Tuesday or Thursday, from noon to 1:20 pm). Further details are provided below.

Students are expected to **do their best to complete all readings and watch/listen to videos or else read video transcripts by the time of the live discussion chat** of each module

**Please note:** Due to the experimental nature of these adaptations to the online format, and the unique challenges of a multi-media, team-taught class, **the following schedule may be subject to revision**; we will announce all changes as far as possible ahead of time via Canvas.

## **Course Introduction**

**Tuesday, March 31, 12:10-1:20 Zoom conference with Profs. Bovilsky, Peppis, and Saunders: Welcome to ENG 305 + course orientation + What is Theory?  
Our Zoom chat trial! Look for a link in your email inbox (Canvas Announcement)**

## Section I — Early Modern Race Theory and Intersectionality (Bovilsky)

### Module 1 (March 31-April 2) *Operations of Race*

**Readings**      Reading questions for Module 1  
Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race”  
Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 1  
Plot summary of *The White Devil*

#### Videos/transcripts

- Overview of Prof. Bovilsky’s unit
- Appiah 1: Essay structure: why pair DuBois with biology?
- Appiah 2: What is Appiah’s argument about the fallacy of “common history”?
- Levi-Strauss and signification to understand Appiah
- Appiah 3: Appiah on the seductiveness of racial “positives”
- What is special about *The White Devil* + how will we use it?
- Things to look for in *The White Devil*, Act 1

**Thursday, April 2, noon-1:20—live online Module 1 Q&A with Prof. Bovilsky about Appiah (chats will be recorded and available for later viewing for two weeks).**

### Module 2 (April 3-9): *Theorizing race now and then and Race, Nation, and Imagination*

**Readings**      Reading questions for Module 2  
Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play* excerpt  
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* mini-excerpt  
Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 2, scene 1 through Act 3, Scene 2

#### Videos/transcripts

- *Barbarous Play* 1: race now and in the past
- *Barbarous Play* 2: racial “discourses”
- *Barbarous Play* 3: The incoherence of racial ideology
- Race in London circa 1612 1: diversity
- Race in London circa 1612 2: what about slavery?
- Anderson: imagined nations: how similar are nation and race?
- Things to look for in *The White Devil*, Act 2-Act 3, scene 2: are “Italians” (and others) nations or races?
- *The White Devil* and sexuality

**Thursday, April 9, noon-1:20—live online Module 2 Q&A with Prof. Bovilsky about racial discourses and ideologies and the lessons to take from historicizing race.**

### **Module 3 (April 10-16): *Race, Gender, and Sexuality***

**Readings** Reading questions for module 3  
Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"  
Webster, *The White Devil*, Act 3, Scenes 2 through Act 5, scene 3

#### **Videos/transcripts**

- Crenshaw 1: Critical race theory and intersectionality
- Crenshaw 2: Intersectionality again: difference within groups
- Intersectionality and literary reading
- *The White Devil* and intersectionality: Zanche
- *The White Devil* and sexuality: Vittoria

**Thursday, April 16, noon-1:20—live online Module 3 Q&A with Prof. Bovilsky about intersectionality and all things *White Devil***

### **Module 4 (April 17-21): *Race, Gender, and Performance***

**Readings** Reading Questions for module 4  
Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* excerpt  
*The White Devil*, entire play (new reading = Act 5, scenes 4-6)

#### **Videos/transcripts**

- Callaghan: theorizing race, gender, and performance
- *The White Devil*: theorizing race and performance
- *The White Devil*: theorizing race, gender, and performance

**Tuesday, April 21, noon-1:20 —live online Module 4 Q&A with Prof. Bovilsky about theorizing race, gender, and performance in**

**Theory Exercise 1 due Wednesday, April 22**

## **Section II —Modern(ist) Race Theory and Intersectionality (Peppis)**

### **Module 5 (April 22-28): *Theorizing Race and Passing***

**Readings** Reading questions for module 5  
W.E.B Du Bois, "The Forethought" & "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)  
Nella Larsen, *Passing*

### Videos/transcripts

- Overview of Prof. Peppis's unit
- Du Bois 1: The problem of the color-line
- Du Bois 2: How does it feel to be a problem?
- Du Bois 3: Double-Consciousness
- Du Bois 4: The red stain of Bastardy
- Applying/adapting Du Bois to *Passing* I: Encounter
- Applying/adapting Du Bois to *Passing* II: Re-Encounter
- Applying/adapting Du Bois to *Passing* III: Finale

**Tuesday, April 28, noon-1:20 Module 5 discussion — live online Q&A with Prof. Peppis about Du Bois & Larsen**

### Module 6 (April 29-May 5): *Theorizing Sexuality and Race in Passing*

**Readings** Reading questions for module 6  
Judith Butler, "Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge," *Bodies That Matter* (1993)  
Nella Larsen, *Passing*

### Videos/transcripts

- Butler 1: Theorizing difference(s): from feminism to Intersectionality
- Butler 2: Race and sexuality in *Passing*: inextricably linked
- Butler 3: *Passing*'s challenge to psychoanalysis
- Applying/adapting Butler to *Passing* I: Encounter
- Applying/adapting Butler to *Passing* II: Re-encounter
- Applying/adapting Butler to *Passing* III: Finale

**Tuesday, May 5, noon-1:20 Module 6 discussion — live online Q&A with Prof. Peppis about Butler and Larsen**

### Module 7 (May 6-12): *Passing as Theory*

**Readings** Reading questions for module 7  
Nella Larsen, *Passing*

### Videos/transcripts

- *Passing* as Theory: Overview
- Passing and Sexuality/ Marital Passing
- Social Passing
- Psychological Passing
- Narrative Passing

- Queering Passing
- Queering Language

**Tuesday, May 12, noon-1:20 Module 7 discussion — live online Q&A with Prof. Peppis about *Passing* as Theory**

**Theory Exercise 2 due Wednesday, May 13**

### **Section III — Theory and Popular Culture: The Example of Batman**

Precise reading and video schedule for Professor Saunders' section of the course TBA.

**Module 8 (May 13-19)**

**Tuesday, May 19, noon-1:20 Module 8 discussion — live online Q&A 1 with Prof. Saunders**

**Module 9 (May 20-26)**

**Tuesday, May 26, noon-1:20 Module 9 discussion — live online Q&A 1 with Prof. Saunders**

**Module 10 (May 27-June 2)**

**Tuesday, June 2, noon-1:20 Module 10 discussion — live online Q&A 1 with Prof. Saunders**

**Theory Exercise 3 due Monday, June 1**

**Final course essay due Monday, June 8**

#### **Participation and Grading**

Please read/review/watch all assigned materials for the day in question prior to signing on for online discussion. For synchronous (real time) discussions, please be sure to sign in on time, have appropriate materials on hand (course readings, paper and pen for taking notes), and be ready to focus on the day's discussion.

In accordance with administrative guidelines during this national crisis, we will not be penalizing students for non-attendance of lectures or discussions. Nevertheless, we will continue to reward students who take an active and engaged role in discussions by contributing respectfully, thoughtfully, and constructively to our in-class dialogue. Remember, participation can take several forms: asking questions, offering your own analyses and insights (based on the evidence of the text), asking others to elaborate further on their own comments or questions.

In addition, please bear in mind that non-attendance will likely diminish your understanding of the required texts and compromise your performance in written assignments. You should also bear in mind that a grade of **C or better** is required in the course for English major credit.

### **Grades**

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 Wednesday 4/22, Wednesday 5/13, Monday 6/1)

31% Final Essay (5-7 pages, due Monday 6/8)

### **Late Work**

Assignments are due by the day indicated on the syllabus (your GEs will specify times). 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.

### **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. Above all, stay in touch.

### **Grading Scale**

A+ 100	A 93-99	A- 90-92	
B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82	
C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72	
D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62	F 0-59

### **Academic Integrity**

In accord with English Department policy, academic dishonesty (plagiarism or cheating) will minimally result in an automatic failing grade for this course. In addition, all incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, as required by the University.

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.

The bottom line is that all work submitted in this course must be your own, and written exclusively for this course. The use of all external sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented, and 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. Stealing from this work, even in the case that you are not caught, often results in a lower grade.)

For further guidance, see the UO library website (under "How-To Guides" on the library homepage) for more on citation practices. If you remain uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, definitions are available in the "Student Conduct Code" section of the Student Life website (<http://studentlife.uoregon.edu>). Additional information is available at [researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism](http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism). You are also welcome to contact any of us if you have any questions about these definitions.

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 incurring significant academic penalties.

### **Inclusive Learning Environments**

This is an inclusive learning environment. Please notify one of the professors teaching this course as soon as possible, preferably 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 appropriate adjustments. Please also contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu) for additional resources and support.

**NB** If your work with AEC determines you may need accommodations, **please communicate with your GE or one of the faculty** within two weeks of meeting with the AEC to discuss details of the accommodations.

## **Course Content Advisory**

You should be aware that the texts we will read this term deal with adult themes and subject matter, and will often contain beliefs and opinions that are very different from our own. The ability to encounter unfamiliar and even disturbing ideas with an attitude of critical distance is fundamental to the work of majoring in English. We do not expect you to like everything you read or watch (indeed, we hope for a more complicated response than that). But you must be willing to approach these texts with an open mind, even if you ultimately decide that you do not agree with or share the values they sometimes express. We believe that the cultivation of such open-mindedness is good practice not merely for scholars of literature and media; it can also help prepare students to live as tolerant, ethically-minded members of a diverse and inclusive society.