

General Education Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry 120: Outsiders in America

Term: Spring 2018

Section: 35370

Meeting Time: MW 2:00—3:20

Location: Wait Phillips Hall 103 (WPH103)

Instructor: Dr. Chris Findeisen

Office: Tapper Hall 404 (THH 404)

Office Hours: MW 12:00-2:00 (o.b.a.)

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Course Description:

At some point in our lives, we've all felt like outsiders. Some of us may even understand being an outsider as an essential part of our identities. Through the medium of written language, in this course we will consider what it means for human beings "to belong" to something larger than ourselves. We will examine categories such as gender, nationality, institution, class, and humanity in order to figure out how each of us fit—or don't fit—into the social structures that constitute contemporary American life. Is there personal and moral strength to be found in refusing to belong? Are social bonds made stronger when we integrate, and can developing a sense of shared history, culture, and identity benefit us? Along the way, we will explore why archetypes and ideals shape human behavior, think about how radical opposition becomes incorporated into the mainstream, and consider how our entry into the USC community places us inside new groups while excluding us from others. After all is said and done, we will be able to see how to represent the feeling of belonging or not belonging, and we will think critically about why this appears as such a central issue in our time.

Learning Objectives:

This will be a problem-centered course, which means that it is ultimately up to you to figure out these books enable you better understand how the category of "outsider" functions in contemporary America. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- comprehend the contemporary moment through the written expression of others, engaging our critical faculties by analyzing, writing, and discussing texts;
- understand, articulate, and apply some of the central ideas of cultural criticism, such as irony, metonymy, and performance;
- produce informed opinions about relevant social, personal, and political issues both inside and outside of the academy;
- situate ideas across diverse cultures and within the context of the late 20th/early 21st century;
- explain how a language works, how it plays with ideas, how it makes us feel human, and how it expresses our essential selves.

Assignments

Simply put, because this is not a lecture course, our community of learning cannot function without the assigned readings. Our expectation is that each day's class work begins the night before, at home. Coming to class prepared for discussion means you are ready to question the text, speak with your classmates, and support your own beliefs.

Reading Responses: The reading responses are short (one to two, full pages) and are generally not graded on the “correctness” of your answers. I want responses to be places where you work through your thoughts on the subject, albeit in a tidy and analytical way. Note that responses are not “journal” entries, and should not be treated as such. In addition to posting them on Blackboard prior to class, you must bring them with you every day they are assigned, either digitally or by printing them out. I often randomly select a few students to read their responses at the beginning of class, so make sure they are clear and precise.

Midterm: The midterm will contain three areas: terms and definitions, multiple choice, and short answer. Everything covered in class is fair game, so I strongly suggest taking notes while engaging in discussion and during presentations, **as well as while you’re reading**, as a significant portion of the midterm is taken from these sources.

Papers: We will be writing two short papers (3-4 pages) that ask you to argue a position utilizing textual evidence and key terms. The cornerstone of this course will be a longer paper (6-8 pages) that analyzes a novel and makes an argument about its meaning utilizing at least one of the theories we covered during the semester. A detailed discussion of these assignments will occur during the semester.

Grading Breakdown

Note: The points represented here will be *weighted* totals.

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Paper 1	100	15
Paper 2	100	20
Paper 3 (Final Exam)	100	25
Reading Responses	10 (x10)	10
Midterm	100	20
Participation	100	10
TOTAL	500	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following (standard) scale:

A	95-100
A-	90-94
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 59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

All paper assignments should be submitted at the beginning of class. If assigned, digital discussion should be completed before class begins.

Grading Timeline

In most circumstances, graded assignments will be returned with comments within two weeks. Extenuating circumstances may apply.

Additional Policies

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (see <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>).

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (at <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (see <http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (see <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* provides 24/7 confidential support (see <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm>), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see sarc@usc.edu).

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>).

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations (http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html).

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see <http://emergency.usc.edu/>).

Reading List:

- Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot* (2017). 432 pg. This novel describes a Turkish-American Harvard freshman struggling to understand the dissonance between what she learns inside the classroom and the experiences she acquires outside of it.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me* (2015). 176 pg. Written as an epistle to his young son, Coates book—part essay, part memoir—considers how history and culture mark African Americans as permanent outsiders, and in doing so complicates the myth of an inclusive, post-racial American society.
- Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao* (2008). 339 pg. This novel explores a Dominican-American family whose principle character, Oscar, is obsessed with science fiction and fantasy stories. The book explores the communities to which Oscar belongs, the ones he aspires to join, and asks what it would mean to both himself and his family if he were to make his fantastical daydreams a reality.
- Egen, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011). 352 pg. A collection of short stories about people who, abandoning the idealism of their youth, have assimilated into the world of corporate America and now sell the very things they found sacred. Looking back on their younger selves, these characters think about the compromises they have had to make to become successful in the world and question where they belong.
- Millar, Mark. *Superman: Red Son* (2014). 168 pg. This is a speculative graphic novel that asks, “What would have happened if Superman had landed in Siberia instead of Kansas?” In addition to making the question about Superman’s humanity new again, this book explores how ideology can mark people as outsiders, and it makes its readers question the degree to which their birthplace shapes how they understand morality, truth, and justice.

Course Schedule:

Monday, January 8, 2018 Introduction to the course.	<u>WEEK 1:</u>
Wednesday, January 10, 2018 Hall, “Representations.” (Blackboard)	
Monday, January 15, 2018 (MLK Day. No Classes)	<u>WEEK 2:</u>
Wednesday, January 17, 2018 Hall, “Representations.” (Blackboard)	
Monday, January 22, 2018 Batuman, Elif. <i>The Idiot</i> .	<u>WEEK 3:</u>

Wednesday, January 24, 2018

Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*.

WEEK 4:

Monday, January 29, 2018

Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*.

Wednesday, January 31, 2018

Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*.

WEEK 5:

Monday, February 5, 2018

Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*.

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Paper 1 Due.

WEEK 6:

Monday, February 12, 2018

Brooks, Cleanth. "Heresy of Paraphrase."

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

WEEK 7:

Monday, February 19, 2018

Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

WEEK 8:

Monday, February 26, 2018

Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

Diaz, Juno. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

WEEK 9:

Monday, March 5, 2018

Van Engen, "Reclaiming Claims."

Review.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

Midterm.

WEEK 10:

Monday, March 12, 2018

Spring Break. No Classes.

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Spring Break. No Classes.

WEEK 11:

Monday, March 19, 2018

Egen, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Egen, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

WEEK 12:

Monday, March 26, 2018

Egen, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

Egen, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

WEEK 13:

Monday, April 2, 2018

Paper 2 Due

Wednesday, April 4, 2018

Millar, Mark. *Superman: Red Son*

WEEK 14:

Monday, April 9, 2018

Millar, Mark. *Superman: Red Son*

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Millar, Mark. *Superman: Red Son*

WEEK 15:

Monday, April 16, 2018

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me.*

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me.*

WEEK 16:

Monday, April 23, 2018

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me.*

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

Review.

WEEK 18:

Monday, May 7, 2018

(Final Exam / Paper Due)