**USC** Dornsife

College

Department of English

**English 298g: Introduction to the Genre of Fiction (32663) Units: 4/Fall 2021**

**MW 9-10:30 am PT lecture via Zoom; sections face-to-face**

**Dr. Chris Freeman (cefreema@usc.edu; office THH 410, MW 11-12:30 & by appt. or on Zoom)**

**Section Leaders: Wednesdays noon (WPH B26) & 1pm (CPA 255): Carrie Guss (cguss@usc.edu); Thursdays 9 (THH 207) & 10am (CPA 255): Sam Cohen (samantec@usc.edu); Fridays 11am (CPA 255) & noon (THH 113): Nicholas Bredie (bredie@usc.edu)**

“That's what fiction is for. It's for getting at the truth when the truth isn’t sufficient for the truth.”—Tim O’Brien

“Reading is the finest teacher of how to write.”—Annie Proulx

“The ‘proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss.”—Virginia Woolf

“There are some writers without whom certain stories would never have been written. I don’t mean the subject matter or the narrative but just the way in which they did it—their slant on it is truly unique.”—Toni Morrison

**ABOUT THE COURSE**

What can we learn **from** fiction as we learn **about** it? And what can fiction teach us about our lives and our world? Those will be some of the motivating questions of this course. In this era of allegedly short attention spans and Tweet-length communication, we have the privilege and pleasure of savoring fiction, contemplating it, discovering it anew.

We will do all we can to make this class a conversation about fiction, reading, and writing—how they work, how they matter, and how forms and concerns have changed and remained the same. In lecture, we will cover important writers, movements, forms, theories, and larger questions about fiction’s relevance, its connections to and comments about the world. Our job is to get you more interested in what fiction is and what it does; your job, in the words of the contemporary American writer Mary Oliver, is “to pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.” I will ask for your engagement; you need to read our material, to think about it, and to come to lecture prepared to discuss it, to read it out loud, and to try to interpret it. We don’t “read into” fiction; we read out from it.

In your discussion sections, your instructors will elaborate on lecture material, and they will also pursue some of their own passions about literature. Essentially, the sections are “advanced” fiction, while the lecture is “introduction and intermediate” fiction; the simultaneity of these experiences should keep you challenged and inspired from day one. We will spend the final few weeks of the semester all working together on the same two novels; this segment of the course will let us see just how much we have learned.

We are going to do deep dives on four authors and some of their best work: the short story collection *In the Not Quite Dark* (2016)by Dana Johnson, who teaches at USC; the 2019 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Overstory* by Richard Powers; the classic Modernist novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf, and the reimaging of that novel as *The Hours* (1998), which won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for Michael Cunningham.

***You are expected to attend and to engage with the lectures and the discussion sections fully. However, if you are ill, COVID or otherwise, DO NOT ATTEND section face-to-face; notify your TA and me via email and we will make a breakout room for you and your TA at lecture (at the end of class) so that you can work out a plan for keeping up with class (perhaps dialing in and being on speaker, or some other method.)***

**NOTE ON ZOOM: PLEASE PLAN TO HAVE YOUR CAMERA AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE DURING LECTURE. IT CAN BE DISTRACTING TO SEE BLACK SCREENS; FEEL FREE TO USE A BACKGROUND OF YOUR CHOICE FOR PRIVACY REASONS. PLEASE SPEAK TO THE PROFESSOR AND YOUR TA IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO DO THIS AND IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND SYNCHRONOUSLY. ALL LECTURE RECORDINGS WILL BE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD, OF COURSE. You should watch the recording if you miss lecture and email a brief response to your TA in a timely fashion.**

What does it mean to participate actively in the course? You do that by reading, commenting, and asking questions; and you will of course do a reasonable amount of writing. Your assignments/ responsibilities will include writing short to medium length essays about fiction (analysis); doing some creative writing and reflection; completing a final exam assignment. It is of utmost importance that you do your part to participate in discussion, both in section and in lecture.

**Hot Seat**: At the beginning of class each day starting on week three, one section will be designated as the “hot seat.” Your job in hot seat is to help get the first 15-20 minutes of class going. You will ask questions; you will be the first responders to questions; you will volunteer to read passages aloud. Everyone in the hot seat is on the spot; everyone else may also participate, but they get recognized AFTER the hot seat students have their turn/say. This structure will facilitate the atmosphere of a seminar, instead of a large lecture course. Your TA will take roll of the hot seat section; if you miss TWICE, you forfeit all 5% of your lecture class participation.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES/GRADING**

Short response paper/introduce yourself exercise (750 words; week three): 10%

Essay One (1000-1200 words; due week seven): 25%

Essay Two (1200-1500 words; due week twelve or thirteen): 25%

Final Exam (1200-1500 words), due Monday, December 13 by 1pm PT: 25%

Participation and Attendance: 15% (5% lecture; 10% section: if you miss TWO ‘hot seat’ days, you forfeit lecture percentage; if you miss more than two section meetings, you forfeit that percentage)

Literary Event: we will encourage you to attend a literary event and submit a 500-750 word respone one week later; if you do so, you will be exempt from part of the final exam assignment; turn in write up to your TA before Thanksgiving.

Pass-No Pass: you must maintain C-level work or above to achieve “Pass”

Grading: A: 93-100; A-: 92-89; B+: 88-86; B: 85-83; B-: 82-79; C+: 78-73, etc.

**TEXTS:** Books/readings for lecture (see the syllabus from your TA for your section)

Dana Johnson, *In the Not Quite Dark: Stories* (Counterpoint, 2016)

Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (Norton, 2018)

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925; ***Norton Critical edition, 2021; please get this edition from Norton; ISBN: 978-0-393-65599-5)***

Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (1998)

**SCHEDULE (subject to revision as pacing of the course necessitates)**

Week One (8/23 & 25): introduction to course; Understanding Fiction and some of the elements of fiction; W: Powers, “Nicholas Hoel” (PDF on Blackboard)

Week Two (8/30 & 1): M: Elements of Ficton: Plot; Johnson, “Rogues” and “Sunshine”; W: Powers, “Nicholas Hoel” and “Mimi Ma”; **introduce yourself essay assigned in section**

Week Three (no class 9/6 for Labor Day; 9/8): **self-introduction paper (750 words, due to your TA this week);** W: Hot Seat: Carrie noon; Johnson, “Sunshine”; Powers, “Adam Appich” and “Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly”; hot seat starts today

Week Four (9/13 & 15): M: Hot Seat: Carrie 1pm; Character: Johnson, “Now, in the Not Quite Dark,” “Because that’s Just Easier” and “No Blaming the Harvard Boys”; W: Hot Seat: Sam 9am; Powers, “Douglas Pavlicek” and “Neelay Mehta”

Week Five (9/20 & 22): M: Hot Seat: Sam 10am; Setting; Johnson, “Buildings Talk” and “Art is Always and Everywhere the Secret Confession”; W: Hot Seat: Nick 11am; Powers, “Patricia Westerford” and “Olivia Vandergriff”; **discuss prompts for essay one in section**

Week Six (9/27 & 29): M: **TA Craft Talk by Nicholas Bredie**; W: Hot Seat: Nick noon; Themes; Johnson, “The Liberace Museum”; Dana Johnson visit via Zoom, 9:30-10:30; Powers, “Trunk” (first half); work on essay one in section

Week Seven (10/4 & 6): M: **TA Craft Talk by Carrie Guss**; W: Hot Seat: Carrie 1pm; Point of View; Johnson, “She Deserves Everything She Gets,” and “Two Crazy Whores”; Powers, “Trunk” (finish); **Essay One due (1000-1200 words, to your TA this week)**

Week Eight (10/11 & 13): M: **TA Craft Talk by Sam Cohen**; W: Hot Seat: Carrie noon; Style/Tone/Language/Description; Johnson: “The Story of Biddy Mason”; Powers, “Crown” (first half)

Week Nine (10/18 & 20): M: Hot Seat: Sam 10am; Powers, “Crown” (finish) W; Hot Seat: Sam 9am; finish “Crown”; **prompts for essay two in section**

Week Ten (10/25 & 27): M(Hot Seat: Nick noon) & W (Hot Seat: Nick 11am): finish Powers and wrap up first part of the class

**CASE STUDY: Woolf and Cunningham**

Week Eleven (11/1 & 3): M: Hot Seat: Carrie noon; Virginia Woolf diary excerpts and “Modern Fiction” in Norton Critical edition; *Mrs. Dalloway* up to p 50; W: Hot Seat: Carrie 1pm; VW up to p. 90; one essay from NCE

Week Twelve (11/8 & 10): M: Hot Seat: Sam 9am; VW, up to p 150 and one NCE essay; W: Hot Seat: Carrie 10am; VW, up to p 175 and one essay in NCE; **essay due this week or next (1200-1500 words) to your TA**

Week Thirteen (11/15 & 17): M: Hot Seat: Nick 11am; finish VW; one NCE essay; W: Hot Seat: Nick noon; Daniel Mendolsohn on “The Hours”; Cunningham, up to 48; **final exam prompts given this week**

Week Fourteen (11/22): M: Hot Seat: Carrie both sections; Cunningham up to 125; try to finish the book and watch the film by Stephen Daldry over Thanksgiving break; **literary event write up due to your TA by 11/23**

Week Fifteen (11/29 & 12/1): M: Hot Seat: Sam both sections; W: Hot Seat: Nick both sections; finish *The Hours*; wrap up discussion on Wednesday; online evaluations

**Final exam due to your TA by Monday, 12/13 at 1pm PT**

**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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus*and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/).

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university.  You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity*/*Title IX Office* [http://equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu/) and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* [http://dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/). This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage [http://sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu/) fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

## 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*[http://ali.usc.edu](http://ali.usc.edu/), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs*[http://dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially  declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information*[http://emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu/)will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Dornsife provides a full range of mental health resources, which can be found at <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

***COVID S​afety: Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC’s COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.***

**Support Systems:**

* *Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)
* *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)
* *Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*  
  Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)
* *Sexual Assault Resource Center*For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu/)
* *Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu/)
* *Bias Assessment Response and Support*Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)
* *The Office of Disability Services and Programs*Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)
* *Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)
* *Diversity at USC*Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)
* *USC Emergency Information*Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)
* *USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000*  
  24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)

**Definition of Excellence in Teaching**

**USC Department of English**

All writing is creative, and all civic engagement requires a sophisticated understanding of discourse and interpretation. The USC Department of English is committed to the power of the story, the word, and the image. We analyze and organize complex ideas, evaluate qualitative information, anticipate how real audiences respond to language, and study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values. We develop critical abilities for a successful life, but our stories tell us why life is worth living.

Excellence in teaching is an active engagement with these commitments, perspectives, and values. A student with a major in **English** should graduate with an appreciation for (1) the relations between representation and the human soul, and (2) the relations between words and ideas. Teachers will encourage this appreciation through their knowledge and conveyance of the subject, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the quality of their students’ responses. We expect our students to:

* understand the major representations in English discourse from earliest beginnings to the current moment; all literatures exist in conversation with earlier literatures;
* organize and interpret evidence;
* feel the experiences of others, both by engaging in literatures and by their own efforts to create new literatures;
* understand how periods, cultural intentions, and literary genres differ;
* grasp the skills and theories of interpretation, and the history of our own discipline;
* see how interpretive interests shift with time and place;
* attend to linguistic details of semantics, phrasing, and structure;
* assume there are reasonable alternative understandings of a text;
* adjudicate differences through reasoned arguments that honestly engage counter-arguments.

Our students will have lives in very different arenas, but all calling for skills in discourse, empathy, civil argument, and civic engagement. We cannot and should not say what those careers will be; we train students for jobs that have not yet been invented.

English Department students with an interdisciplinary major in **Narrative Studies** should expect instruction that inculcates an appreciation for all of the above, and coordinates with definitions of teaching excellence in USC’s corresponding departments.

The Department of English adheres to the modalities of instruction published in the “USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching.”

Approved September 18, 2018

Undergraduate Studies Committee

Department of English