

**USCDornsife  
College  
Department of  
English**

**English 492: Narrative Studies Capstone  
Telling Stories, Telling Lives (32763)**

**Spring 2024, Thursdays 2-4:20 pm PT  
Location: SOS B50/ Units: 4**

**Professor Chris Freeman  
Office Hours: T/Th 8:15-9:15 am & after  
class on Thursdays  
Contact Info: cefreema@usc.edu**

**Course Description**

The major in Narrative Studies (NARS) requires a senior capstone project, either a research project (MDA 490) or creative project (MDA 494). Each student designs an individual project that brings together what the student has learned about narrative through coursework available in many departments and programs across the entire university.

The NARS Senior Seminar provides a way to fulfill the required individual capstone in the context of a seminar. Students will meet weekly, in a workshop format, to discuss a mix of fiction, poetry, film, graphic novels, theory, and creative writing, while creating their own materials and critiquing one another's work. Their materials will be presented throughout the semester as a series of at least three self-directed portfolios that will draw upon their prior studies in narrative, bringing those varied studies into a whole and individualized vision.

The seminar is restricted to NARS majors in senior standing. Admission is by application only and preserves the application process already used for independent NARS capstones. Admission to the seminar will be based on the quality of a student's proposed portfolio projects.

**Learning Objectives**

The capstone experience is central to the completion of a major in Narrative Studies. This seminar will provide students the opportunity to assimilate the components of their studies and focus their creative endeavors. Students will use their experience and knowledge from prior courses in the major, and at the end of the semester, students will make a 15-minute formal public presentations of their portfolio work to the community of scholars in Narrative Studies. This semester, final presentations will be on Zoom and recorded and submitted for departmental archiving.

**Course Notes**

This course is primarily a workshop. In addition to the brand new craft book by Carl Phillips, *My Trade is a Mystery*, we will read and discuss essays by writers such as Alexander Chee, Patricia Hampl, and Barrie Jean Borich, posted on Blackboard. These texts will serve as a source for some of our writing conversations and analysis; otherwise, the bulk of your job will be to develop your capstone project, to present it in workshop approximately four times by mid-April, and to respond to your classmates' work. Discussion and active participation are essential to your success in the course and in the program. The final examination will be a public presentation of your capstone project.

## **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

Carl Phillips, *My Trade is Mystery* (Yale, 2022)

Readings posted on Blackboard, including excerpts from H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (theory, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2008)

## **Grading Breakdown**

- 30% Workshop participation: quality and timely engagement and feedback
- 10% Discussion/participation
- 60% Final Project (including public presentation on 4/29 & 4/30)

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO AMENDMENT)**

January 11: welcome to the class; work on schedule and groups; go over requirements, process, and expectations for successful completion of capstone project; watch one previous capstone presentation

January 18: groups organized (3/4 per group); Phillips, essay one, "Ambition"; Blackboard readings and topic updates; guest from previous Capstone class: Dixie Lonergan; google doc for library visit

January 25: NOTE: MEET AT DOHENY 241 for library/research workshop with reference librarian Dr. Sophia Lesinska; Phillips, essay two, "Stamina"

February 1: readings from B'board; Phillips, essay three, "Silence"; Blackboard readings (Abbott); update all around and prepare for workshops

February 8: Group one workshop one; Phillips, essay four, "Politics"; Blackboard readings (Hampl and Borich)

February 15: Group two workshop one; Phillips, essay five, "Practice"; Blackboard readings (Chee)

February 22: Group one workshop two; Phillips, essay six, "Audience"

February 29: Group two workshop two; one-on-one meetings as needed this week and next (before spring break)

March 7: roundtable progress reports from everyone; finish Phillips, "Community" and wrap up conversation; plan second half of semester

Spring Break: WORK on your capstone project

March 21: Group one workshop three

March 28: Group two workshop three; one-on-one meetings as needed this week or next

April 4: Group one workshop four

April 11: Group two workshop four

April 18: dress rehearsal/full run-through

April 25: dress rehearsal/full run-through

April 29 & 30<sup>th</sup>: Ide Room, all day: presentations with other 492 sections (20 minutes each); plan to attend as many as possible...

All work due via Google Drive by May 6<sup>th</sup>

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### **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:

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

#### Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

##### Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university’s mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity’s website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

##### Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

##### Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis. Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.