American Literature: Celebrating Identity Formations (Fall 2011)

English 2329-011  Office Hrs:  Roemer: 1:30-3:00 T/TH + by appt., 405 Carlisle
                                     Baxter:  3:30-5 T; 9:-10:50 TH  402 Carlisle
Instructor: Dr. Kenneth Roemer      Roemer: roemer@uta.edu; 817-272-2729
Teaching Asst: Kelly Baxter         Baxter: kellyb@uta.edu
T/TH 11-12:20; Univ. Hall 11       Please schedule all appointments.

Notes: This syllabus is your roadmap. Bring a copy of it to class with you. Your @mavs.uta.edu email will be the primary means of out-of-class communication.

NATURE OF THE COURSE
This course is not an "introduction" to or "survey" of American Literature. (English 3340 is the survey.) Instead it introduces students to a chronological selection of significant American works that contributed to an on-going dialogue about defining American identities (individual, group, cultural). This dialogue is often a fascinating index to important American cultural and aesthetic values. Despite the selectivity of the readings, the course examines a broad range of time periods, genres (oral literature, exploration accounts, letters, essays, autobiographies, poetry, and fiction), geographical areas, and perspectives shaped by different gender, class, and ethnic backgrounds.

GOALS & MEANS OF ACHIEVING & ASSESSING THEM
By the end of the semester, students who have successfully completed the assignments should: (1) have a basic knowledge of nineteen significant American texts, and (2) have the ability to consider how various historical periods, literary forms, concepts of audience, environments, and personal, economic, and cultural backgrounds have influenced how Americans imagine and communicate concepts of who they are. Lectures, class discussion, small group discussions and the brief short-answer tests and essay exams will be the primary means of achieving these goals. The papers support the goals, especially goal two. But they also offer opportunities to help students to (3) examine how they form their identities from landscapes and stories (first paper) and (4) examine how personal experiences, values, and ideas shape their reading identities. Please see the criteria statements related to each of the in-class and out-of-class assignments and the approximate grade weights statement.

REQUIRED READINGS
Pace yourself. Read ahead of schedule. The two longest books come after mid-semester. Optional: Besides using Google to find information about authors, students can explore the visuals, audios, and primary sources in the “Explore the Archives” section of http://www.learner.org/amerpass.

-- Selected Readings (SR) from the Course Packet available at the Bookstore
-- Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain
-- Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (selections)
-- Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God
-- Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, EXAMS, PAPERS

Note: There will be a very short and simple quiz at the beginning of almost every Thursday class. It will cover the previous Tuesday class and the reading assignment for that Thursday. It will be very important to be on time.

Introduction to the course & An Identity Experiment

Identity Experiment Exercise Due 8/25
9/1

A Tribal, Multi-Cultural, Multi-Century Identity: Momaday's WTRM 8/30; 9/6,8

1st Exam Study Sheet Posted on e-mail 9/8

1st Exam (WTRM) 9/13


Godly Identities: By Extreme Chance, During Suffering, and By Resolution
Readings: de Vaca (exploration/survival narrative, SR), Bradstreet (letter SR), Edwards (resolutions SR) 9/[13] 15

1st Paper Due (WTRM Inventive Modeling) 9/20

Return / Discuss Exams 9/20

A Planned (sort of) Perfect American Identity (incl. Crèvecoeur)
Reading: Franklin (autobiography SR) 9/20

An Intellectual Declaration of American Independence
Reading: Emerson (speech SR) 9/22

2nd Exam study Sheet Posted on e-mail 9/22

2nd Exam (one hour) 9/27

Return / Discuss Papers 9/27

Return Discuss Exams 10/4

To What Degree Is Identity a Matter of Choice?
Readings:
Douglas (male slave narrative; focus chs. 1, 5, 10, 11) 9/29, 10/4
Jacobs (female slave narrative SR) 10/6
Thoreau (philosophical essay/autobiography SR) 10/11
Melville (fiction, short story SR) 10/13
Whitman (poem SR) 10/18

3rd Exam Study Sheet Posted 10/18

3rd Exam 10/20
20th-Century Identities in Shaped by Genre, Generation, Gender, Region, and Race

Two Souths: Town & Country . . . Black & White/Black/Indian
Readings:
  - Hurston (novel) 10/25, 27; 11/1
  - Faulkner (short story/novel SR) 11/3, 8

A Young Girl’s Identity Via a Lost Chinese Aunt
Reading: Kingston (autobiography/imagined biography) 11/10

A Mexican American Boy Child’s Magical Dilemma in an
In-between World of Mixed Families, Landscapes, and Religions
Reading: Anaya (novel by a shaman) 11/15, 17, 22

Thanksgiving Holiday 11/24
2nd Paper Due 11/29

Native Identities by Percentages and Living Mythically
Readings:
  - Harjo, Hogan, and Alexie (poems SR) 11/29, 12/1
  - Silko (short story SR) 12/1, 6

Papers Returned / Discussed 12/8
Study Sheet for 4th Exam Discussed 12/8
4th Exam 12/13

Note: for all the exams and papers: 90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; and below 60 = F. Unfortunately, UTA does not indicate plusses and minuses for the final semester grades, grades on all the essay exams and paper assignments will include pluses and/or minuses. Under normal circumstances, no make-up exams will be given and no late papers or e-mailed papers will be accepted. To be approved, the exceptions must be supported with appropriate documentation.

IDENTITY EXPERIMENT
I will describe the nature of this assignment and provide an example the first day of class. Grading criteria: A = two sets of contrasting columns with excellent detail that invites readers to imagine different identities for you. B = two sets with sufficient detail. C = two sets with vague language; D = one set with sufficient detail; F = one set with vague language; 0 = not turned in on time.

SHORT-ANSWER TESTS
With the exceptions of 8/25, 10/20, 11/24, and 12/8, there will be a brief short-answer exam every Thursday right at the beginning of the class (i.e., 12 exams). The exam will consist of five simple questions: two or three from the previous Tuesday class’s discussion and reading assignment and two or three from that Thursday’s reading
assignment: for example, We might ask students to identify a character name, ask for a brief comment on a concept we discussed, or ask a question about an important event in the text. The answers might be as short as a word or as long as a sentence. **Buy one Blue Book for all these exams.** The exams will be graded 0-5; the two lowest test scores will be dropped. At the end of the semester the scores will be averaged (5=A; 4=B; 3=C; 2=D; 1=F; 0 for not taking the exam) and the average of the 0-5 numbers will be converted into standard grades (e.g., a 4 average will be an 85). **Grading criteria:** either you know it or you don’t!

**ESSAY EXAMS**

Dates: 9/13, 9/27, 10/20, 12/13. Each exam will cover the previous untested material; the fourth exam will not be comprehensive. The class before each exam, a detailed study sheet for the exam will be distributed via students’ @mavs.uta.edu e-mail accounts. The first exam will be a close-reading exam: an application of our discussions to one or more sections of WTRM (**be sure to bring your copy of the book to this exam**). The other exams will also be applications of our discussions to the reading assignments with a focus limited to separate discussions of individual texts or a focus that requires comparisons of texts. **Grading criteria for the essay exams:** the ability to (1) focus arguments on the exam questions; (2) construct logical arguments; and (3) support claims with relevant examples. Although your "mechanical/editorial" writing skills will be taken into account, they will be examined more closely on the two papers than on the in-class essays.

**FIRST PAPER**

Due: 9/20. You will use WTRM as a model for your own autobiographical writing (one three-“voice” section). Examples from previous classes will be distributed. **Grading criteria:** demonstration of your ability to: (1) **utilize Momaday’s three “voice” form** (cultural, community, or family storytelling; historical or descriptive “factual”; personal memory): [Ask yourself does the first voice have a narrative (a beginning, middle, and end?) Is there something wonderful, strange, unusual or exciting about the story?] Does the second voice describe a particular place or time or object that will help a reader understand the origins or contexts of the story? Does the third voice present a personal experience that suggests how the story in voice one and the “facts” in voice two are part of your life in significant ways?] (2) use **relevant and sufficient details** that invite the reader to become engaged with each voice: [Ask yourself does your writing help the reader to imagine the events, people, and objects of the story, history, and memory] ; and (3) **use acceptable** sentence and paragraph structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**SECOND PAPER**

Due: 11/29. Reader-Response Paper: Transformative Associations. (Length: approximately 500-750 words). Select one of the reading assignments other than WTRM. As you (re)read it, note any especially strong positive or negative responses and attempt to explain why you responded this way (e.g., personal experiences, past readings, past courses, religious or political beliefs, etc.). Then look over your notes. Are there any repeated types of influences/associations shaping how you respond? Use these notes and discovered patterns to construct an outline or rough draft of a paper that identifies ONE of the most important types of influences that shaped your reading. **Grading criteria:**
Now “general” introduction is required. You will be evaluated in terms of how well you:
1) define the influence;
2) indicate which part or parts of the text that influence affected, most importantly;
3) discuss how the resulting responses were shaped by the interactions of the text and the influence you brought to the reading experience; and (4) conclude by briefly discussing what you learned from this reading/writing experience. You will not be “graded” on the type of association/influence you select. You are the expert on which types of influences you identify. We also expect competent writing, which includes demonstration of mechanical skills in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as the ability to construct coherent sentences and paragraphs, to support claims with relevant evidence, and to engage the reader with sensible and lively language.

GRADING WEIGHTS & KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR GRADES

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IMPORTANT CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Constructive Warnings: (1) Plagiarism will be handled according to University disciplinary procedures. Consult chapter 2 of the *MLA Handbook* or with me or Ms. Baxter if you are confused about plagiarism. (2) If you plan to withdraw, you must follow University procedures. Professors cannot drop students; if they disappear without dropping, they receive F semester grades. (3) As noted above, under normal circumstances, I do not prepare make-up exams or accept late or e-mailed work. To be approved, the exceptions must be supported with appropriate documentation. (4) The use of laptops and other electronic devices will not be allowed in class; they are often used for non-class related activities and distract other students. Exceptions to this rule will be approved with documentation related to disabilities. I will experiment with a four-minute period each class when students can text, use a cell phone, converse idly, meditate, etc. If the class can “get back to business” immediately after the four-minutes, I will maintain this practice throughout the semester. (5) Because the classes involve small-group discussions, attendance is important. Some of the quiz questions and essay test questions will be taken from these discussions.

Encouragement: (1) Class participation and improvement can be important factors in elevating the semester grade. (2) I am very willing to accommodate students with disabilities. These students should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide me with authorized documentation from the appropriate University office (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities, 817-272-3364). (3) Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the Office of University College programs (817-272-6107).
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| 1 | **Mother**  
(chauffeur, maids, her mother’s parents rented Carnegie Hall for her mother to perform)  
Worked as a maid, at one time so poor she had to dig clams to feed her children |
| 2 | **Father**  
His father owned the Packard that carried Charles Lindberg in his ticker-tape parade. He graduated from Harvard.  
So desperate for a job that he was willing to teach 7 courses and drive the school’s bus for $25 a week. |
| 3 | **Lecturer**  
Harvard graduate, graduate of other Ivy League programs, has traveled to Vienna, Lisbon, Tokyo, and many other international cities, during the 1990’s spent more than $200,000 on his children’s college education, spouse has given billions of dollars  
Worked for $10 a week, in Gallup, NM, farmhand on a hay and sod farm, first car cost $1 (it was a stolen car), spouse was a minimum wage cashier at a discount store |
| 4 | **Lecturer**  
Prolific artist, author of several books, received numerous awards  
Very poor speller never passed an entrance test for a school  
Published author, lover of German literature, talented comic  
Research engineer (worked on secret anti-gravity project during WW II)  
Writer who was Nominated for a Pulitzer,  
His books include one that offers poetry and photography, won two “Writer of the Year” awards, composes songs  
Very poor spellerto read, as a child avoided “outside of class” reading and favored short books with many pictures, 4.0 average in science courses in college |