History of American Literature (Catalogue Title)
Tastes of American Literatures (A More Accurate Title)
Summer I 2008

English 3340-001
Instructor: Dr. Roemer
Office Hours: M-TH, 1:30-2:30
M-TH, 10:30-12:30
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Schedule all apts.; leave name & phone # on my voice mail.
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Preamble: This is a “readings” course; the emphasis is on covering a large number of
performed or written works that have been labeled “American.” I have kept the readings
relatively short, but to succeed in the course, it will be important to keep up with the
readings so that (1) you will do well on the tests, and (2) benefit fully from the class
discussions. This is a heavy note-taking, attentive-listening course

Gentle Advice: It will be extremely important to be on time for class, since the brief-
answer tests will occupy the first 15-20 minutes. If you arrive late, you may have only
five minutes for the exam. No make-up tests will be given unless the request is
accompanied by written documentation.

GOALS AND MEANS

The primary goal is to acquaint students with important authors, literary movements, and
issues associated with the literatures performed or written in the United States. The
lectures, group and class discussions, brief Web site report, the short answer tests, and the
final examination will be the means of cultivating and assessing progress toward that
goal. Students who complete the readings, the report, and the tests successfully and
participate constructively in class and group discussion should have an awareness of the
work of 45 authors who composed in English, one in Spanish, a song in Navajo, and
narratives performed originally in Tsimshian and Yuchi languages. They should also
have some awareness of debates over how to define “American literature” and of the
generic, regional, gender, and cultural diversity of the literatures, significant literary
movements, and cultural and social issues raised by the literature.

In stating these goals, I use the words “awareness” and “some awareness” rather than
“knowledge of,” because it would be pretentious and misleading to claim that this type of
brief introductory overview offers anything approaching a thorough understanding of the
literatures of the United States. The awareness gained in the course should, nevertheless,
make students aware of the richness and diversity of the literatures and of the complexity
of the issues related to the discussion of the literatures.

The class discussions, the brief report, and the tests should also enhance oral and written
communication skills, but these are secondary, even minor, goals for the course.
REQUIRED READINGS  (Available at the UTA Bookstore)


Brief Course Packet

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, REPORT, AND EXAMS

Note: the page numbers refer to the required selections by the authors; you are also required to read the introductions to each of the authors. Thus for Emily Dickinson you would read the pages indicated AND pages 1295-97. You will need to purchase the _Heath Anthology_ the first day of the course if you have not already done so.

Classroom procedures: lectures, class and group discussions. Each class covers from one to five selections. Even though the assigned group discussion may focus on only two or one of the selections, you will be expected to have read all the selections before the test that covers that class.

5/27  Introduction to the Course & Defining “American Literature”

   Reading (browsing): handouts and [www.uta.edu/english/roemer/ctt](http://www.uta.edu/english/roemer/ctt)

5/27  American Indian Oral Literatures

   Viewing & Reading: By this Song I Walk” (Navajo); “Raven,” Tsimshian (36-38); “Creation of the Whites,” Yuchi (40); handouts

5/28  Exploration, Colonizing, Appropriating & Inventing America

   Reading: de Vaca (57-63); Smith (126-28, 132-35); Winthrop (156-57); Bradford (167-70, 172-73); Bradstreet (188-90)

5/29  First Exam

5/29  Secret and Experiential Gods

   Readings: Taylor (237-38, 240-42); Edwards (338-39)

6/2  Web site report due

6/2  Re-Inventing America

   Reading: Franklin (427-24); Crèvecoeur (441-46); Jefferson (481-84); Wheatley (572-73, 575, 578-79)

6/3  Second Exam
6/3 Two Angles on Independence
Reading: Apess (645-50); Emerson (694-706, 724-26)

6/4 Freedoms and Slaveries
Thoreau (765-75); Lincoln (835-37); Douglass (900-18) Jacobs (849-52)

6/5 Third Exam

6/5,9 Discovering an American Prose
Readings: Irving (940-53); Hawthorne (968-76); Poe (1001-14); Stowe (1053-55)

6/9 Questioning an American Prose
Melville (1058-83)

6/10 Fourth Exam

6/10 Discovering and Questioning (very) Public and (Very) Private American Poetry
Whitman (1225-33, 1286-94); Dickinson (1299, 1301, 1303-04, 1310-13, 1315, 1317-22)

6/11 Fifth Exam

6/11 Western Regionalism to Eastern Realism
Readings: Twain (1361-65); Howells (1445-54)

6/[11], Dark Undersides of Realistic American Psyches
12 Readings: James (1496-1517); Gilman (1597-1609); Zitkala-Sa (1687-96)

6/16 Sixth Exam

6/16 Discovering Modern American Poetry and Prose
Readings: Frost (1800-05); Anderson (1806-1810); Williams (1852-56); Cummings (1897-1900); Eliot (1901-05)

6/17 Long Island & Midwestern Cosmopolitan Prose
Readings: in CP -- Fitzgerald (excerpt from ch. 3 *Gatsby*); Hemingway (“Indian Camp”)

6/18 **Seventh Exam**

6/18 Southern Cosmopolitanism

Reading: in CP – Faulkner (“The Old People”)

6/19 **Eighth Exam**

6/19 Cultural, Racial, and Social Issues: Early to Mid-Twentieth Century

Readings: Toomer (1998-2006); Hughes (2008); Steinbeck (2133-35)

6/23, 24 Cultural, Racial, & Regional Identities: Mid- to Late Twentieth Century

Readings: Momaday (2437-45); Anaya (2447-55); in CP -- Morrison ([Baby Suggs’s sermon])

6/25 **Ninth Exam**

6/25 Non-Fiction & Oral Narratives Fictionalized

Readings: Kingston (2477-85); Silko (2514-20)

6/26 Re-Discovering and Decolonizing Colonization

Reading: Erdrich (2531-40); Alexie (2553-59)

6/26 Review for Final Exam

6/30 **Tenth Exam**

6/30 **Final Essay Exam**

EXAMINATIONS

All of the brief-answer exams will be closed-book, covering the previous material. Here are some examples of the types of questions *and appropriate answers* from the early part of the course. Some answers will require only a word or two -- e.g., In “The Author to Her Book” Bradstreet presents her book as being ____[her child]. Some identifications will require a sentence or two -- e.g., the “City Upon a Hill” *In his Model of Christian Charity, Winthrop uses this image to depict the potential of the Puritan community to be an inspiring example for the world to follow*. Some identifications will
require an awareness of a concept we discussed – e.g., hózhó [the traditional Navajo concept of beauty, harmony, and order; a key word/concept in the “By this Song I Walk” song]. The source of some of the questions will be lectures – e.g., Why was the discovery of Edward Taylor’s poetry so important to the young discipline of American literary studies? [The discovery demonstrated that Colonial America had produced a poet whose complex poems could be compared to respected British poets such as John Donne.] Others may come from discussions -- e.g., Indicate one issue about race and assimilation raised by Wheatley’s poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America”? [Among the many issues raised, one is how African Americans internalized and/or mimicked the values and beliefs of the dominant New England culture of the 18th century.]

The final exam will be an open-book, comprehensive exam. On the last day of class (June 26), I will distribute a study sheet for the exam. It will list several questions related to major issues we have discussed during the semester (e.g., how authors define what is “American”; differences between how key social issues are presented by authors from different regions or cultures; questions about why certain works are included or excluded during particular periods; questions about how one literary movement responded to a previous movement). I will pick one of the questions. You will support your response to the question with examples from a designated number of authors from different historical eras. Within these limits, you will be able to pick the authors; of course, appropriate selections will be important.

WEB SITE REPORT (500 words; due 6/2)

The preparation: (1) Browse the Web site listed above (5/27). (2) Select THREE anthologies: one from the 19th to early 20th century, one from the mid-20th century, and one from the late 20th or early 21st century. The writing: (3) Describe ONE significant type of difference in the selections found in the three anthologies. (Be sure to provide examples. You may have to consult the Heath Anthology or the Internet if you are unfamiliar with the titles or authors that you want to use to support your descriptions of the differences.) (4) Speculate about why the change occurred and what the change may say about how we define “American literature.”

APPROXIMATE GRADING WEIGHTS
(See below under absences, improvement, and participation, for further information on grading. If, at any point in the semester you are unsure of your grade status, please contact me.)

Ten Brief Answer Exams 70%
Final Exam 20%
Web site Report 10%
WARNINGS & ENcouragements

Warnings: (1) Dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism) will be handled according to University procedures, which can include expulsion. Chapter 2 of the *MLA Handbook* offers good examples of what constitutes plagiarism. (2) Professors are not allowed to drop students for excessive absences. If you drop, please follow University procedures. **In this course, with its two-hour class meetings, for every three unexcused absences, the semester grade will drop by a half-letter grade.**

Encouragement: Consistent and constructive **class participation and improvement** can elevate semester grades. Also I am very willing to work with students who have disabilities. At the beginning of the semester, these students should provide me with documentation authorized by the appropriate University office. Students seeking academic, personal, and social counseling should contact their undergraduate advisors and/or the Office of Student Success (817-272-6107).