

English 110C: Alternate Histories
MW 11:30-12:45
Rachel Trousdale
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Office: Buttrick 307, x6209
Office hours: T 11-12, TTh 1-2, and by appointment

This course is a study of literature and argument. Literary analysis is both an end in itself and a way to examine what makes arguments interesting and convincing. Students will read for nuance, noticing where and how authors make points, and use their insights to improve their own writing. Topics will include the thesis-driven essay, research, and the use of sources and evidence.

All sections of English 110 are primarily classes in college writing, but in this class we will also discuss writing about alternate histories: how, when, and why do writers set their work in opposition to or dialogue with established history? how do revisions of real-world history — whether they are based in fantasy or in reasoned arguments for new understandings of real facts — change our understanding of the present? what are the lines between speculation, fantasy, and revision? what kinds of thought experiments do alternate histories allow? how reliable is our understanding of the past, and why does it matter? We will discuss four literary forms—poetry, novels, a play, and comics. The class is writing-intensive, calling for three essays, a short story, a brief in-class presentation on one of the essays, a creative research assignment, a review, and an assignment on using the Oxford English Dictionary.

Required Texts:

Joy Harjo, *How We Became Human*
Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*
Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*
Alan Moore, *Watchmen*
Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*
Andrea Lunsford, *The St Martin's Handbook*

W 18: Introduction.

M 23: Harjo, 15-25, 33-39, 43-49

W 25: Harjo, 127-148 **OED exercise due in class**

M 30: No class: meetings to discuss papers.

W Feb 1: Workshop paper #1. *St Martin's Handbook* 252-3, 258-9, 281-286. Discussion of using sources

F 3: **Paper 1 (3 pp) due**

M 6: *Kindred* 9-107

W 8: *Kindred* 108-188

M 13: *Kindred* 189-end. **Due in class: time travel assignment (2pp)**

W 15: *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* 3-68.

M 20: *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* 69-138.

W 22: *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* 139-end.

M 27: No class: meetings to discuss papers

W 29: Workshop: Paper 2

F March 2: **Short Story (4-5 pp) due**

M March 5: *Arcadia*, Act I.

W 7: *Arcadia*, Act II.

M 12: SPRING BREAK

W 14: SPRING BREAK

M 19: Research paper topic discussion. **Due in class: Research Paper topic.**

W 21: LIBRARY DAY. Meet in McCain 211. Bring your laptop if you have one!

M 26: No class: meetings to discuss research papers.

W 28: No class: class cancelled for Writer's Festival attendance and research paper work.

Th 29: Reading by Benjamin Percy, 4:00; Reading by Joy Harjo, 8:00

F 30: Reading by Jaqueline Pardue Goldfinger, 1:00

M April 2: *Watchmen*. **Due in class: review of a Writer's Festival reading (1p).**

W 4 *Watchmen*. **Due in class: draft of the research paper.**

F April 6: Easter Break

M 9: Presentations on research paper

W 11: Presentations on research paper

F 13: **Research paper (6-8 pp) due**

M 16: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* 1-100.

W 18: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* 101-205.

M 23: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* 206-311.

W 25: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* 312-end.

M 30: Summary discussion

W May 2: **Paper 4 (5 pp) due**

Course requirements:

Each student will complete the following major assignments: two critical papers, one critical research paper, one short story, and a presentation on the research paper. There

are also some shorter assignments: an exercise in using the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a brief review of one of the writer's festival readings, and a brief research assignment in which you design a time-travel survival kit. All assignments must be typed or printed, double-spaced, in a twelve-point font, with standard margins.

Reading questions:

Bring a question about the reading with you to every class. These questions will be the basis for class discussions and paper topics. Reading questions may be typed or legibly handwritten.

Workshops:

We will hold in-class workshops on two of the papers. You must bring *finished drafts* of your paper with you to class for discussion with your workshop group, and a spare copy to hand in to me. Attendance at workshops is required; exceptions will be made only in the case of a serious emergency. Students who skip workshops without a really compelling reason, or who do not bring in a finished draft, will lose one full letter grade on the paper being workshoped.

Attendance policy:

This class centers around discussion. If you don't participate in discussions, whether by contributing or listening to your peers, you haven't really taken the class. You will be allowed up to three absences over the course of the semester, but after that, your grade will be penalized by one third of a letter grade for each absence. Since there is no way to make up discussions, this penalty will be applied even if your absence takes place for a legitimate reason. Frequent lateness will also result in a reduced final grade. Please note that the attendance requirement is a separate grading policy from the participation portion of your final grade; participation credit is based on how you behave once you show up.

Late paper policy:

You may have one three-day extension (i.e., from Friday to Monday) on any paper, no questions asked. After that, late papers are subject to a penalty of one third of a grade per day past deadline. Exceptions can sometimes be made for genuine emergencies. ("I'm a perfectionist" is not an emergency; "I'm in the hospital" is.) Most importantly, let me know if you're going to hand a paper in late. All major assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Honor Code:

Students are expected to abide by the Agnes Scott College Honor Code. Plagiarism is a very serious offence which can result in failure or even expulsion, so be scrupulous in your documentation, and always make clear the difference between your own ideas and those of others. By all means ask me if you have any questions about how to cite sources.

In addition to any penalties imposed by Honor Court, any student who is convicted of plagiarism in this class will automatically fail the class. Many students who plagiarize seem to do so because they are afraid to turn in papers late; remember that a late penalty is by far the lesser of two evils in this situation.

Accommodations:

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see Kelly Deasy in the Office of Academic Advising to register for services. Students who receive accommodation checklists, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible.

Grading Percentages:

Paper 1: 10 %

Paper 2: 20 %

Paper 3: 25 %

Paper 4: 20%

Presentation: 5%

Time travel assignment: 5%

Writer's festival review: 5%

Participation, OED assignment, and reading questions: 10 %

Failure to hand in any one of the major assignments will result in failure of the course.

Office hours and how to reach me:

I hold walk-in office hours T 11-12, TTh 1-2, and I will be glad to schedule extra appointments. Come to discuss paper topics or go over paper drafts, to ask questions about the class, to argue about a text, to get help with a confusing poem, etc. To make an appointment, or for any other contact, it's best to e-mail me at rtrousdale@agnesscott.edu.

Course tutor:

We are very fortunate to have Kelsey Clodfelter as our course tutor. You must meet with her to discuss at least one paper this semester. (I recommend starting with the first!) She can be reached at kclodfelter@agnesscott.edu.

Course Evaluations:

At the end of the semester you will receive an e-mail asking you to submit an evaluation of the course. Please give feedback! Your input is very important to the college as a whole and to me as a teacher. I take your comments very seriously.