

Fall 2017 Seminar Offerings

<u>Seminar</u>	<u>Professor</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Seminar Title</u>
English 247	S. Vint	Mondays	9:00am – 12:00pm	English Conference Room #2212	Science, Literature, Media— The Human and its Discontents
English 252	R. Rodriguez	Tuesdays	1:00pm-4:00pm	English Conference Room #2212	Readings in Contemporary Latina/o Literary and Cultural Studies
English 260	A. Denny-Brown	Fridays	10:00am-1:00pm	English Conference Room #2212	Multimodal Manuscripts: Techniques and Theories
English 270	S. Axelrod	Thursdays	3:00pm-6:00pm	English Conference Room #2212	Unreadable Modernism

**English 247: Science, Literature, Media—The Human and its Discontents
(Sherryl Vint)**

This course will focus on the question of the Anthropocene and ongoing crises of climate and other environmental change, looking to how “the human” has been defined as we ascribe this destruction to anthropogenic causes. Rather than grounding our discussions within philosophical discourses of posthumanism, however, we will take our cue from how science studies scholars investigate this terrain. Several recent works have rejected the nature/culture divide that sets the human apart from other species based on a biological understanding of how matter shapes humans and other beings. At the same time, they pay attention to the how structures of human social organization enter into the very substance of living systems, shaping and changing them toward specific ends. Biological histories of life are thus inevitably bound up with social histories of colonialization, industrialization, and other structures of power. Theorists considered will include Neel Ahuja, Samantha Frost, Donna Haraway, Heather Paxson, Jessica Riskin, James Shapiro, Anna Tsing, and Jason W. Moore. The aim of the course will be to understand “the human” in the context of recent biological theory and to explore the political and social implications of how we conceptualize, represent, and live this figuration.

English 252: Readings in Contemporary Latina/o Literary and Cultural Studies (Richard Rodriguez)

This seminar will examine recent work in the field of Latina/o literary and cultural studies. As we read a number of recent books and essays by scholars like Ylce Irizarry, Belinda Rincón, John Alba Cutler, Juana María Rodríguez, Claudia Milian, Julie Avril Minich, Paul Moya, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Michael Dowdy, Ramón Rivera-Servera, Ella Díaz, Licia Fiol-Matta, Randy Ontiveros, José David Saldívar, Elda María Román, William Orchard, and Yolanda Padilla, we will explore how topics like assimilation, war, migration, memory, blackness and brownness, visibility, disability, queer sexuality, social movements, and popular culture are both pertinent to Latina/o studies and to other fields stemming from distinct temporal and geographical locations. Overall, the aim of the seminar is to acquaint students with recent key concerns in Latina/o literary and cultural studies and to think about how these concerns may compliment the respective investments of seminar members.

**ENGL 260: Multimodal Manuscripts: Techniques and Theories
(Andrea Denny-Brown)**

This seminar will be an introduction to contemporary medieval manuscript studies. Its structure will be both technical and theoretical: on the one hand, the course will establish the key skillset necessary for advanced study of premodern, hand-written English manuscripts, comprised of book-making (codicology, bindings, pricking, ruling, parchment-making and ink-making), scribal activities (paleography, or how to read scribal handwriting), and illumination (the artistic decoration of the manuscript page). At the same time, the course will also examine the medieval manuscript as a multimodal phenomenon that brings together multiple overlapping material, visual, and literary modes of meaning: for example, how does one explore the hapticity of the manuscript object--a reader's physical and sensory experience of it--when it is simultaneously a literary text, an ornamentalized art object, and a refined piece of animal skin? How do a manuscript's intertwined texts, images, marginalia, grotesques, and blank spaces work together to create meaning? How do scribal practices and circumstances complicate, correct, erase, or enhance authorial meaning? The course actively engages with the manuscript holdings at the Huntington Library, using a digital archive of high-res manuscripts from the collection that showcases the rise of the English poetry anthology from 1350 and 1500, with a focus on English poets such as Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Lydgate. Because object-oriented digital reproduction is the hallmark of new manuscript study, this course will also address the relationships and tensions between material and digital objects and will include tutorials on online manuscript editing and curation applications such as Mirador and Omeka.

This seminar can be used to fulfill one requirement for the BAM (Book, Archive, and Manuscript) designated emphasis.

English 270: Unreadable Modernism (Steven Gould Axelrod)

In a well-known story, Gertrude Stein lay in her hospital bed in Nueilly, mildly anesthetized, awaiting the cancer surgery she would not survive. She asked Alice B. Toklas, “What is the answer?” When Toklas remained silent, Stein said, “In that case, what is the question?” At the very last linguistic moment, Stein made a joke of a cosmic unreadability that her role as a modernist pioneer had prepared her to identify.

This seminar will explore modernist illegibility. We will study the arbitrariness and materiality of language, the war of signification present in every sentence, and therefore the illegibility of all writing (however disguised). Illegibility produces meanings that are multiple and shifting. It provides access to fantasy and escape from regulation and supervision. Illegibility makes a text what I have called a *heterotropic* space, an other world of the overdetermined sign, an anti-panopticon where nothing stays still or is clearly visible. We will also study the legible and illegible politics that guides and limits each writer’s discursive choices.

This seminar will focus on literary and theoretical texts. We will study fiction by such writers as Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, William Faulkner, Yone Noguchi, Jean Toomer, and Clarice Lispector; Dada texts by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Man Ray; and poems by such poets as Hilda Doolittle, Langston Hughes, T. S. Eliot, Charles Reznikoff, Lorine Niedecker, Hart Crane, and Melvin Tolson. We will also look at such theorists as Walter Benjamin, Clement Greenberg, Paul De Man, Marjorie Perloff, Jean Jacques Lecercle, Ming-Qian Ma, Houston Baker, Michael Davidson, Leonard Diepeveen, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Johanna Drucker, Richard Sheppard, and Amelia Jones.