

Winter 2020

English Graduate Seminar Descriptions



	CRN	Course		Faculty
1	47676	ENGL	246	James Tobias
2	47677	ENGL	247	Sherryl Vint
3	47678	ENGL	262	James Funk
4	47680	ENGL	265	Padma Rangarajan
5	47682	ENGL	270	Steven Axelrod
6	47684	ENGL	278	Armando Garcia
7	48672	ENGL	410	David Lloyd

English 246 – Digital Poetics
Wednesdays, 11:00AM – 1:50PM, HMNSS 1407
Associate Professor James Tobias

This seminar examines theories, practices, and histories of post-cybernetic media, with an emphasis on “digital poetics”. Digital communications, networks, and cultural forms mediate globally extensive processes of cultural production; contemporary digital networks thus call our attention to the changing dynamics of historical networks of peoples, technologies, cultures, or sovereignties. The formal specificities of contemporary digital cultural forms (say, the graphical user interface, interactive narrative, user-generated content, remixes or mashups, behavioral targeting in social marketing, networked authorship and organizing) demonstrate significant shifts in the temporal-spatial dynamics of cultural production and reception in the contemporary - as well as shifts in the imaginary and affective modalities in which we experience displacement or belonging in the larger stream of historical time. Scholars have responded to these challenges with attention to digital art production, attending to both the specificities of the poetic capacities of the computational medium, as well as attention to the larger cultural and technocultural processes in which digital arts flourish. Digital poetics approaches have attended to large-scale re-evaluations of accounts of subjectivity, corporeality, situatedness, authorship, agency, performance, systematicity, and materialities of communication. Finally, beyond the specific mutations of digital cultural forms and the refiguring of time, space, and memory typical of hyperindustrialism, and in the contemporary moment, digital poetics is entangled with network activism, critical art practices, and cultural critique of everyday hyperindustrial life. This seminar explores the poetics of digital media, the larger historical transitions of which computational media are a part, and the ways we situate theoretical interventions into the operations and equipments of hyperindustrial cultures."

ENGL 247 – Seminar in Science, Literature & Media
Wednesdays, 1:00PM-4:50PM, HMNSS 2211 (ENGL Library)
Professor Sherryl Vint

Economics and Debt Culture

This course will examine the recent scholarship theorizing debt as the constitutive social relation of the twenty-first century, fueled especially by an expanding credit market with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, and the more recent turn toward financialization, through which indebtedness for most accumulates profit for others. Part of our purpose in this course will be to analyze economics as a discipline and material practice, focusing especially on the role that cultural representation plays in shaping hegemony through a reading of Hayek. In *The Financial Imaginary*, Alison Shonkwiler argues that the “growing abstraction of contemporary capitalism demands new imaginative conceptions of the real” (ix), and our second objective will be to analyze a variety of cultural texts—novels, films, television series—in this light. We will also read scholarship that will help us to conceptualize and thus respond to neoliberal governance, focusing in particular on what they mean for notions of social community and democracy. Theoretical texts will include work by Ivan Ascher, Wendy Brown, David Graeber, Max Haiven, Maurizio Lazzarato, Mary Poovy, Saskia Sassen, Joseph Vogl, and Mackenzie Wark. Fictional texts may include *Neptune’s Brood* (Charles Stross), *Capital* (John Lancaster), *84K* (Claire North), *Seasonal Associate* (Heike Geissler), *Lake Success* (Gary Shteyngart), *99 Homes* (Ramin Bahrani), *The Big Short* (Adam McKay), *Invisible Hands* (Shraysi Tandon 2018), *The Queen of Versailles* (Lauren Greenfield), *Mr. Robot* (Sam Esmail), *Succession* (Jesse Armstrong) and *I, Daniel Blake* (Ken Loach).

ENGL262 – Seminar in Renaissance Literature
Thursdays, 2:00PM-4:50PM, HMNSS 2212 (ENGL conference room)
Visiting Assistant Professor James Funk

Political Aesthetics and the Masque

This seminar will examine the Stuart masque and its influence on early modern English literature. A lavish combination of poetry, dance, and spectacle, the masque was the preferred mode of entertainment in the courts of James I and Charles I. We will explore the masque as an exemplary instance of what Christopher Pye refers to as early modern “political aesthetics,” which foregrounds “the question of the capacity of the polis to constitute itself in immanent form—to incarnate itself, as it were” (*The Storm at Sea: Political Aesthetics in the Time of Shakespeare*, pp. 5-6). Such a question was crucial for the Stuarts, who attributed the unity of the state to the embodied unity of the king, and for masque writers, whose work dramatized and therefore attempted to embody the metaphors underlying monarchy. Critics disagree, however, on the political significance of the form: while Graham Parry argues that the masque mystifies kingship by deifying the monarch, Kevin Sharpe and James Knowles have suggested that the genre carefully balances praise of the king with warnings about the absolutist impulses of Stuart sovereignty.

We will explore this tension between reaction and resistance in a number of Jacobean and Caroline masques, including Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) and *Hymenaei* (1606), Thomas Carew’s *Coelum Britannicum* (1634), and William Davenant’s *Salmacida Spolia* (1640). Along the way, we will consider the masque’s representation of gender and race and its depiction of the growing tension between king and parliament, which ultimately resulted in civil war. We will also trace the influence of the masque in the work of Shakespeare, Marvell, and Milton, each of whom drew on the form while interrogating its political, aesthetic, and theological assumptions.

ENGL 265: Seminar in Romantic Literature

Mondays and Wednesdays: 12:30 PM-1:50 PM

HMNSS 1502

Assistant Professor Padma Rangarajan

Romantic Praxis

In this class we will read British Romantic texts alongside their philosophical predecessors and counterparts. Hobbes, Locke, Smith, Hume, Burke, Hegel, Wollstonecraft, and Kant will buttress our readings of Byron, Hogg, Scott, Smith, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Moore, and Shelley.

ENGL 270 - Seminar in American Literature Since 1900
Tuesdays, 03:00PM to 05:50 PM, HMNSS 2212 (English Seminar Room)
Distinguished Professor Steven Axelrod

Confessional and Post-Confessional

In the mid-twentieth century, the confessional project arose in poetry, memoir, and popular culture, soon moving on to fiction and drama, and ultimately to reality shows, literary scholarship, and social media. This project came to include such latter-day developments as queer confessional, racial confessional, post-confessional, and meta-confessional.

This seminar will study the interrelation (not the binary opposition) of confession and performativity. We will be guided especially by Christopher Grobe's *The Art of Confession* (2017); and also by theorists Lauren Berlant, David Eng, J. Jack Halberstam, Jose Esteban Munoz, Rei Terada, and others recommended by seminar members.

Among primary texts, we will choose among such twentieth-century poets Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath, fiction writers Hisaye Yamamoto and Sandra Cisneros, memoirists Essex Hemphill and Rigoberto Gonzalez, and contemporary poets Frank Bidart, Marilyn Chin, Henri Cole, Joshua Jennifer Espinoza, and Claudia Rankine. Seminar members will also recommend additions to the reading.

In *The Critic as Artist*, Oscar Wilde wrote: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth." Wilde's undoing of the normative associations of "own person" with "truth," and "mask" with "least himself" will be our starting point as we consider the twin drives to disclose and to lie within the context of changing racial, gender, and generic relations.

ENGL 278 - Seminar in Minority Discourse
Wednesdays, 03:00PM-05:50PM, HMNSS 2212 (English Seminar Room)
Assistant Professor Armando Garcia

Illegalities

Illegalities is a graduate seminar on visual and literary narratives of migration and illegality in the Américas. The course examines the imaginaries of migrant peoples, both documented and undocumented, that emerged after September 11th and during the War on Terror. Their narratives and expressive cultures respond to politics and policies that reduce human beings to “(un)authorized” and “(il)legal” aliens and laboring machines, and this course situates them in the sociopolitical context of migration and illegality, especially in light of the current deportation regime. We study an archive of migrant arts –including film, fiction, testimonios, poetry, theatre, music, and podcasts/online radio and other digital media– that (un)documented migrant women, feminist and queer artists, and activists create to address the new immigrant rights movements and the legal production of illegality. Our discussions place visual and literary narratives in conversation with recent theorizations of bio/necropolitics, gender and labor, racial formations, queer migrations, and migrant subjectivity and illegality by Natalie Cisneros, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, Nicholas de Genova, Eithne Luibhéid, Mary Pat Brady, Karma R. Chávez, and Achille Mbembe, among others.

ENGL410 - Seminar in Professional Development

Distinguished Professor David Lloyd

This workshop on “professionalization” will be less a guide to how to be professional than it will be a genealogy of our “profession”. Why “do” English? Why are English Departments usually the largest humanities departments in any college or university? How does the civic rationale for education in English literature relate to the concept of the university and the formation of its larger social and cultural role? What was the relation of the “rise of English” as a discipline to colonialism and class struggle? What future does the discipline have in face of the current transformations that higher education is undergoing, whether that be towards an increasingly corporate model, privatization, online courses, vocational emphases, or, hopefully, towards increasing democratization? What role can and could English play in any framing of a more democratic mode of education?

In the course of the quarter we will read a number of short key texts on the rise of English and the fate of the discipline to enable informed discussion of the current conditions that anyone entering into the profession will find useful to demystifying both the genres of professional address (job letters, career profiles, self-presentation, etc) and the larger challenges that face anyone hoping to make the teaching of English a life-long career. That will not exclude practical advice and examples, but our focus will be on understanding current conditions and how we got here.