

Professor Rebecca Entel
rentel@cornellcollege.edu

Office: 208 South Hall x4225
Office hours: by appointment

ENG 267: Multicultural Literature

Block 3 2015 * 108 South Hall

Course Description and Objectives:

In what ways does the past affect the present? The literature we read this block will demand we approach this question with a nuanced sense of history: individual, familial, communal, and national. We will be looking at how the characters' present stories play out with all of these levels of history in mind. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, some characters believe that their ancestors' country's curse looms over even their most personal dramas. In *Kindred*, a woman living in 1970s California is supernaturally transported back to nineteenth-century Virginia where her ancestors were enslaved, raising questions about her very sense of self. In *The Business of Fancydancing*, the poems and stories consider the relationship between historical trauma and modern life. And in *The Plague of Doves*, an extended family uncovers the truth about a past tribal event and grapples with the questions of how communal memory affects individuals. In addition to these main texts, you will be reading a range of short stories and poems that allow us to examine the complicated and varied relationship between the past and the present.

This course will deal with some difficult and disturbing material. As a course in literary studies, we are interested in the discussions prompted by the *representation* of these issues in our texts, not in making judgments about cultures or what we think individuals or communities should or should not do, think, or say. We will be continually returning to the words on the page to look at textual evidence for all of our claims and as such you are expected to read carefully and with great attention to detail, to re-read, and to take specific notes. (If you do not have experience with literary analysis, you are encouraged to meet with me early on about reading and writing for this course.)

Our course objectives include learning about a diverse group of authors; responsibly analyzing a variety of genres; working collaboratively to further the class's knowledge; recognizing how literature is engaged with social and global issues; expanding our understanding of the course themes outlined above; and clearly communicating ideas. This course, while important to both the English & Creative Writing and Ethnic Studies majors in particular, also more broadly contributes to the college's educational priorities and outcomes for all of its students. Our work this block will emphasize: *knowledge, inquiry, reasoning, communication, intercultural literacy, and citizenship*. (For more information, please see: <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/about-cornell/mission/> .)

Texts:

Sherman Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992)

Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)

Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)

Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (2008)

Shorter readings will be posted on Moodle and should be printed for class. (M)

Schedule:

This schedule is subject to change; if you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out about any updates or changes. Readings should be completed before the times they are listed for discussion.

WEEK ONE

M 10/26

9:00: Introduction and course overview

T 10/27

9:00: Reading time & 1:00: Diaz, through page 165

W 10/28

12:00: Diaz, pp. 166-261; Browse stories on Moodle for group sign-up

Th 10/29

9:00: Group meetings & 1:00: Diaz, pp. 262-335 and handout on reading poetry (M)

F 10/30

9:00: Butler, pp. 9-51

Sunday, 11/1: Diaz papers due to Moodle by noon

WEEK TWO

M 11/2

12:00: Butler, pp. 52-264 & Poetry TBA (M)

T 11/3

9:00: Group meetings & 1:00: Erdrich, pp. 1-95

W 11/4

12:00: Erdrich, pp. 96-217 and Alexie, pp. TBA

Th 11/5

9:00: Conferences and Group Meetings & 1:00: Erdrich, pp. 218-311 and Alexie, pp. TBA

F 11/6

9:00: **Midterm exam**

Sunday, 11/8: Butler papers due to Moodle by noon

WEEK THREE

The readings for Tuesday-Friday will be assigned according to the group presentation schedule. All students will read all of the stories being presented. **Reflection Papers are due by 9 a.m. *the day after your presentation.***

M 11/9

Group work day and Conferences

T 11/10

9:00: Group meetings & 1:00: Group presentations

W 11/11

12:00: Group presentations

Th 11/12

9:00: Group presentations & 1:00: Group presentations

F 11/13

9:00: Group presentations

WEEK FOUR

M 11/16

12:00: Comprehensive discussion of stories, discussion of final exam, course evaluations

T 11/17

Conferences and study day

W 11/18

9:00: **Final exam**

Assignments, Grading, and Policies:

Guidelines for all written assignments will be posted on Moodle. We will discuss the assignments as a class, but it is your responsibility to read the written assignments carefully, to ask questions, and to seek individual guidance (through office hours and/or the Writing Studio). It is also your responsibility to speak with me if you have questions about any of your grades or how to apply the feedback you receive on future assignments. I am happy to meet with you; contact me to set up an appointment.

Grade breakdown:

Diaz or Butler paper: 20%

Midterm exam: 20%

Presentations and reflective paper: 20%

Final exam: 25%

Participation and commitment: 15%

Participation and commitment: You should always be preparing for class not just by reading, but by reflecting on your reading and coming with notes and questions for discussion. If you are having any trouble preparing for class, please speak with me. This is a large class, so not everyone will be able to speak all the time; small group work will also be an opportunity for participation. You should be willing to share your ideas and be open to opposing perspectives. It is possible to disagree and still interact respectfully. Listening carefully, asking questions, and responding to what others have said all demonstrate respectful engagement. Inattention, sleeping, talking to neighbors, being distracted by computers and cell phones, and rude or disconnected responses all show a lack of respect for the members of this class and for your own intellect. Remember, each of you is responsible, not only for your own learning in this course, but also for the collective learning that will take place. Note: Two or more absences will negatively affect your grade. Showing up late and sleeping or appearing to sleep during class will result in you being marked absent. Group meetings and conferences with me also count as required class meetings. I also expect you to pay careful attention to all email correspondence about our course and to any written feedback you receive from me; not responding when I request it will result in a lowered participation grade.

Late work: Meeting deadlines is an essential professional skill. I expect all work to be turned in on time. Late work will be penalized 5% for every hour past the deadline (i.e., a paper that would have earned an A will be marked an A- one hour after the deadline, B+ after 2, etc.).

Withdrawals: Health withdrawals and 15th-day drops will be considered according to college policy outlined in the academic catalog. Please be in touch as soon as possible if you are considering either.

Course Accommodations: Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see:

cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml124 . At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

Academic Integrity: Cornell College expects all members of the community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. Any student in this course who is involved in academic dishonesty (portraying another person's work or ideas as his or her own, submitting the same or similar papers in more than one course without permission from the course instructors, facilitating plagiarism, etc.) will not earn credit for the relevant assignments, may be formally charged with academic dishonesty, and may receive a failing grade for the course. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in *The Compass*, our student handbook, under the heading "Academic Policies – Honesty in Academic Work."

Reminders:

- *Put all devices away before class begins.* Period. Eliminate any other distractions.
- Bring the relevant readings to class. Take notes.
- In general, any problems are easier to deal with earlier rather than later. Please be in touch if you are having difficulty with our course. I also encourage you to make use of the Writing Studio.
- Remember that your actions affect others, especially in a class with a significant group project. Don't create problems for your classmates or your professor by not doing what you're supposed to be doing. I work very hard to make this class worthwhile and expect the same level of commitment from all of you.
- Spend time in and out of class thinking, reflecting, and asking questions. Enjoy the learning process!