

UWS 24A: From the Margins to the Mainstream: Questions of Belonging in Contemporary American Literature

Monday and Wednesday 1:00-1:50 PM. **We do not meet Thursdays.**

Instructor: Daniella Gáti

Office Hours: W 2-3 and by appointment

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Introduction:

This course explores the questions and strategies with which writers from marginalized identities write their stories in contemporary American literature. Reading Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home*, we will ask how Latina/o, queer and other minority narratives can fit into a traditionally white and heteronormative literary scene. What strategies do these writers (and cartoonists!) use to negotiate their place within America's mainstream culture? How do their protagonists articulate their respective identities?

This is a University Writing Seminar, so our objective is to build the confidence and skills necessary to produce sophisticated analyses and clear, powerful writing. Written assignments designed to help you acquire university level writing skills will structure the term.

***Required Course Texts* (available in the bookstore)**

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz

Fun Home by Alison Bechdel

Write Now! (A collection of essays written in last year's UWS classes).

There will also be a number of handouts throughout the semester (LATTE).

Course Requirements

Essay 1: The close reading essay. In this assignment you will formulate an argument about *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Essay 2: The lens essay. For this essay, you will analyze *Fun Home* through the lens of a theoretical essay by Michel Foucault and make a claim about how concepts from the essay help to shape your understanding of *Fun Home*.

Essay 3: The researched argument. For this assignment you will develop your own argument about a text of your choosing and support it with evidence from that text and from secondary sources.

Portfolio: At the end of the semester you will assemble all of your work (including pre-draft assignments, rough drafts, final drafts, and peer review sheets) in an electronic folder and email it to me, together with a letter describing how your understanding of yourself as a writer has changed over the course of the semester. **This means that you need to save electronically all your writing from the semester.**

Drafting:

Four steps lead up to the final draft of each essay:

- **Pre-draft assignments.** Each essay will be preceded by two or three pre-draft assignments—short pieces of writing designed to help you develop ideas. These assignments will receive either a check or a note telling you to redo the work and will count as part of your overall grade. You can re-submit any work until the end of the unit. You can come and discuss your writing process, your questions and potential problems at any time during the course.
- **First drafts.** You are required to turn in a first draft of each paper. These drafts are important opportunities for you to receive feedback from me and your classmates in peer review. I do not expect these drafts to be polished, but I do expect them to be complete—otherwise I cannot give you useful advice.
- **Peer Review.** After the first draft of each paper is due you will form a group with two of your classmates and read each other's drafts. In class you will give your partners feedback. I will collect your peer review letters and they will count as part of your grade. These activities increase your sense of audience awareness and give you an opportunity to reflect on the concepts we have discussed in class.
- **Conferences.** Each student will have three twenty-minute conferences with me over the course of the semester, one to discuss each first draft. Attendance is required; missing a conference is the equivalent of missing a class. Sign-up sheets will be distributed in class or posted on LATTE.

Class participation: Your consistent participation in class sessions constitutes a significant portion of your grade and is the most critical component of a successful course. Class participation includes:

- Your prompt, prepared, alert, consistent attendance
- The completion of reading assignments by the dates listed in the syllabus
- Your thoughtful contributions to class discussions

Writing Center: The University Writing Center, located on Goldfarb 232 on the Goldfarb mezzanine of the library, provides free one-on-one help with your essays. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this service. Writing Center tutors are well trained and will work with you in 45 minute sessions that you can schedule online: (<http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/writingcenter/index.html>). **Students who take advantage of this service will receive a form during their tutorial that will entitle them to a 24-hour extension on the final draft of their essay.** Essays will be due electronically by midnight on the following day. Only one extension is allowed per essay.

Grades

Close reading essay: 20%

Lens essay: 25%

Researched argument: 35%

Class participation (includes research presentations): 10%

Portfolio (includes LATTE posts, pre-drafts, and peer reviews): 10%

Formatting

All essays will be submitted to me and your peers electronically (LATTE). Essays must use 1-inch margins and 12 point Times New Roman font. Do not enlarge your punctuation—I can tell. Essays must have a title and be double-spaced. Pre-drafts will be also be submitted online on LATTE, unless otherwise noted.

Late Work, Extensions and Minimum Page Requirements

I am usually willing to offer extensions, given legitimate reasons. **If a catastrophe happens and you are afraid your work will not be completed in time, contact me more than 24 hours before the due date and arrange for an extension.** Otherwise, late work, including first drafts, will be penalized by a third of a grade per day (B+→B→B- and so on) on the final paper. If a paper is due electronically at midnight then 12:01 AM counts as late and LATTE won't even accept your submission: you'll need my permission to upload your work. In addition, final papers that do not meet minimum page requirements will be penalized by a third of a grade for each page that the paper falls short.

Attendance

Missing classes is strongly discouraged. You are allowed three absences. For each additional absence your final grade will be penalized by a third of a grade. **Seven or more absences will result in a failing grade.** Please contact me in the event of an emergency.

Laptops

You will be allowed to use laptops for class purposes only. As soon as I see anyone breach this agreement, laptops will be prohibited for the entire remaining semester. (Laptops will be allowed, however, for those who require special accommodations.)

Academic Honesty

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually in section 5 of the *Rights and Responsibilities* handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

Accommodations

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in class, please see me right away.

UWS Outcomes

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

- Use writing and discussion to work through and interpret complex ideas from readings and other texts (e.g., visual, musical, verbal)
- Critically analyze your own and others' choices regarding language and form (e.g., in student texts or formally published texts)
- Engage in multiple modes of inquiry using text (e.g., field research, library-based inquiry, web searching)
- Incorporate significant research (as above) into writing that engages a question and/or topic and uses it as a central theme for a substantive, research-based essay
- Use writing to support interpretations of text, and understand that there are multiple interpretations of text
- Consider and express the relationship of your own ideas to the ideas of others
- Develop understanding for writing as a research process, not as the empty form in which you present your work

Processes

- Use written, visual, and/or experience-based texts as tools to develop ideas for writing
- Understand that writing takes place through recurring processes of invention, revision, and editing
- Develop successful, flexible strategies for your own writing through the processes of invention, revision, and editing
- Experience and understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique your own and others' work
- Be reflective about your writing processes

Knowledge of Conventions

- Understand the conventions of particular genres of writing
- Use conventions associated with a range of dialects, particularly standardized written English (but not necessarily limited to it)
- Recognize and address patterns in your writing that unintentionally diverge from patterns expected by their audience/s
- Practice using academic citational systems (MLA) for documenting work

Four-Credit Course

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Unit 1: Close Reading

Week 1

Thur. Aug 25 In-Class: Introductions, syllabus

Week 2

Mon. Aug 29 Read: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* pp. 1-75.
Write: Post to LATTE a paragraph identifying some aspect of *Oscar Wao* that strikes you as odd, interesting, or calling for explanation (a moment where you could ask, “Why would a writer write that or write it that way?”). Explain why you choose this aspect and cite at least one example of what you’re referring to with page numbers. **Posts are due by midnight on Sunday, Aug. 28.**
In-Class: How to start engaging with a text, close reading, assignment sequence

Wed. Aug 31 Read: *Oscar Wao* pp. 76-201
Write: Post to LATTE a short argument (a paragraph) that you could make about Dominican identity in *Oscar Wao*, and provide at least one point in the text (with page numbers!) which could work as evidence for that argument. **Posts are due by midnight on Tuesday, Aug. 30.**
In-Class: *Oscar Wao*, writing a thesis statement

Week 3

Mon. Sep 5 NO CLASS, LABOR DAY.

- Wed. Sep 7* Read: *Oscar Wao* pp. 202-335
Write: **Pre-Draft 1.1 (due on LATTE by midnight Sep 6): close reading a passage from *Oscar Wao* (bring to class)**
In-Class: *Oscar Wao*, motives
- Thur. Sep 8* Read: None
Write: **Pre-Draft 1.2 due: post your motive and thesis to LATTE no later than 5:00 PM on Wed., Sep 7. Respond to peers by midnight on Wed., Sep. 7**
In-Class: Structure, thesis, peer review, grading rubric

Week 4

- Mon. Sep 12* Read: None
In-Class: Introductions, conclusions, titles, passive voice
- Wed. Sep 14* Read: None
Write: **Draft of Essay #1 due with cover letter due electronically by midnight (Tuesday night) to me and your peers.**
In-Class: troubleshooting and style

Unit 2: How to Work with a Text as a Lens

Week 5

*****CONFERENCES on MONDAY (9/19) and TUESDAY (9/20)*****

- Mon. Sep 19* Read: Your peers' essays, introductions and conclusions
Write: Peer review letters and comments on their essays due by **midnight on Sun., Sep 18**. Email your peers their letters and essays and also post the peer letters to LATTE.
In-Class: lens assignment sequence, what is a lens, peer review
- Wed. Sep 21* Read: Foucault, excerpts from *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (pp. 64-70) on LATTE
Write: **pre-draft 2.1, the reverse outline (online by midnight Sep 20; bring a hard copy to class)**
In-Class: Foucault; how to read theoretical texts (and why)
- Sun. Sep. 25* **Revision of Essay #1 with cover letter due electronically by midnight**

Week 6

- Mon. Sep 26* Read: *Fun Home*, pp. 1-24
Write: None
In-Class: Foucault continued; towards the mini-lens

Wed. Sep 28 Read: *Fun Home*, pp. 25-86
Write: **Pre-draft 2.2, the mini-lens analysis (online by midnight Sep 27; bring a hard copy to class)**
In-Class: matching Foucault and *Fun Home*

Week 7

Mon. Oct 3 NO CLASS, ROSH HASHANAH.

Wed. Oct 5 Read: *Fun Home*, pp. 87-186
Write: None
In-Class: *Fun Home*, motive, connection between motive and lens

Thur. Oct 6: Read: *Fun Home*, pp. 187-232
Write: Post thesis and motive to LATTE by **midnight on Thur., Oct 6**

Week 8

Mon. Oct 10 Read: *Write Now!* Essay TBA
Write: Post a paragraph in which you summarize the argument and comment on the ways that the writer integrates the primary and lens texts for the *Write Now* essay. Cite at least one piece of evidence with a page number. Posts are due by **midnight on Sunday, Oct 9**.
In-Class: Discussion of students' theses and motives; commas, *Write Now!*

Wed. Oct 12. NO CLASS, YOM KIPPUR.

Week 9

Mon. Oct 17 NO CLASS, SUKKOT.

Wed. Oct 19 In-Class: Troubleshooting
Write: **Draft of Essay 2 with cover letter due electronically by midnight (Oct 19) to me and your peers.**

Week 10

*****CONFERENCES on TUESDAY (10/25) and WEDNESDAY (10/26)*****

Mon. Oct 24 NO CLASS, SHMINI ATZERET.

Tues. Oct 25 Read: None CHANGE: PEER REVIEW HERE plus HEADS UP
Write: None
In-Class: Introduction to research essay, problem sentences

Wed. Oct 26 Read: Your partners' essays OPT: PEER REV CONT. or?

Write: Peer review letters and comments on their essays due by **midnight on Tuesday, Oct 25**. Email your peers their letters and essays and also post the peer letters to LATTE
In-Class: peer review, plagiarism

Unit 3: Research Essay

Week 11

- Mon. Oct 31* Read: “Scholarly Sources” (LATTE); Research assignment sequence
Write: Bring in the title of the text that you plan to use for the research essay
In-Class: Discussion of the Research Essay, scholarly sources, pre-drafts 3.1 and transitions
- Wed. Nov 2* Read: Complete library tutorial on LATTE before class
Write: **Revision Essay 2 due with cover letter due electronically by midnight (Nov 2)**
In-Class: Library session #1: meet at Vershbow Computer Room (Goldfarb Mezzanine) punctually at 1pm!

Week 12

- Mon. Nov 7* Read: None
Write: **Pre-Draft 3.1 (Research paper plan) due online by midnight, Nov 6;** + Find 2 books at Brandeis and bring in the call numbers to class. (Be smart: these books could be ones you plan on using for your project.)
In-Class: Library session #2: meet at Vershbow Computer Room (Goldfarb Mezzanine) punctually at 1pm!
- Wed. Nov 9* Read: None
Write: None
In-Class: Source functions across the disciplines, MLA citation, presentation handout

Week 13

- Mon. Nov 14* Read: None
Write: **Pre-draft 3.2 (Annotated bibliography) due online by midnight, Nov 13** (recommended: bring it along to class)
In-Class: Modeling a research essay

*****CONFERENCES on TUESDAY (11/15) and WEDNESDAY (11/16) *****

- Wed. Nov 16* Read: None

Write: None

In-Class: Short presentations on research papers

Week 14

Mon. Nov 21 Read: None

Write: **Pre-draft 3.3 (Rough draft outline) due online by midnight, Nov 20**

In-Class: Short presentations on research papers

Mon. Nov 23 **NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING.**

Week 15

Mon. Nov. 28 Read: None

Write: None

In-Class: Guiding your reader; paragraphing; transitions

Wed. Nov 30 Read: None

Write: **Draft of Essay #3 due with cover letter due electronically by midnight, Nov 29, to me and your peers.**

In-Class: Short presentations on research papers, portfolio instructions

Week 16

Mon. Dec. 5 Read: None

Write: Peer review letters and comments on their essays due by **midnight on Sun., Dec. 4**. Email your peers their letters and essays and also post the peer letters to LATTE

In-Class: Peer review, short presentations on research papers

Wed. Dec 7 Read: None

Write: None

In-Class: short presentations on research papers, class recap

Post Term

Fri. Dec 9 **Portfolios due electronically by midnight (must be in one document), including: portfolio cover letter, final research cover letter and final research essay. See portfolio handout for order of assignments.**