

**E314V/AAS 314: Introduction to Asian American Literature  
Fall 2018  
Syllabus, Class Policies, and Reading Calendar**

**Instructor:** Amrita Mishra

**Unique number:** 32165 (for AAS)/35155 (for English)

**Class Time and Place:** T-TH 12:30-1:45 pm, GAR 2.128

**Course Website:** Canvas - <http://canvas.utexas.edu/>

**Prerequisites:** One of the following: E 303C (or 603A), RHE 306, 306Q, or T C 303C (or 603A).

**Course Description:**

In his 2017 latest Man Booker Prize short-listed novel, *Exit West*, Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid muses: “and when she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can’t help it. We are all migrants through time.” In light of an international refugee crisis and the simultaneous increase in deportations from and immigration restrictions to the US, what does it mean for the contemporary Asian-American novel to imagine the migrant, and the “migrant through time”? How might the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century “Asian-American novel”—in the various ways that we may define or destabilize the category— help make visible contemporary and older debates about the displacement of bodies, immigration, and the complicated relationship between a homeland and a diaspora?

As a class we will read a range of novels and secondary materials to explore issues of race, imperialism, diaspora, citizenship, and gender in the project of constructing “Asian-American” identity. Our readings will invite questions such as: what is the very idea of “Asian-American literature” and what contemporary political utility might it have? What can Asian-American novels teach us about historical Asian diasporas’ cultural and labor contributions to our present day understandings of “America,” and about the intimate relationship between US foreign policy and Asian refugees rehabilitated in the US? How might such literature force us to consider the ways in which recent anti-immigrant rhetoric in the US and elsewhere works to erase those older histories? Finally, how does the contemporary Asian-American novel complicate and unsettle the conventional immigrant narrative of moving permanently from a disadvantaged homeland to a new land of promise? What do we do, for example, with immigrant characters who voluntarily leave the US to return to other homes?

**Academic Goals:** The primary aim of this course is to help students develop and improve the critical reading, writing, and thinking skills needed for success in upper-division courses in English and other disciplines. Through short stories, novels, graphic novels, film and TV clips, and scholarly criticism, we will learn to:

1. Close read: to observe and analyze a creative text’s language, imagery, narration, form, and genre
2. Think through the story-telling and truth-telling techniques of different forms and genres of writing and what “fiction” writing means
3. Effectively utilize UT’s libraries and the internet for primary and secondary resources

4. Contextualize a given text with cultural, social, and political history
5. Recognize themes and conflicts in Asian-American literature and how they have changed with time in relation to the formation of Asian-American studies
6. Write proposals for academic papers and in a persuasive way that focuses on literary works and effectively incorporates appropriate secondary materials

**Cultural Diversity in the US Flag:** This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity in the United States. Cultural Diversity courses are designed to increase your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one U.S. cultural group that has experienced persistent marginalization.

**Writing Flag:** This course contains a writing flag. The writing assignments in this course are arranged procedurally with a focus on invention, development through instructor and peer feedback, and revision; they will comprise a major part of the final grade.

**Required Texts:** \*\*Students must purchase **physical copies** of the following texts and bring the text we are reading to class. \*\*

Feel free to purchase used copies and other editions—we will use chapters/ sections as references in class discussion, so page numbers do not need to be consistent amongst all of us. I encourage you to support local bookstores like BookWoman and HalfPrice Books or, alternatively, online used bookstores like Abebooks.

\*\*All other readings—short stories and scholarly criticism—will be provided by the instructor/ or will be posted on Canvas.\*\*

*Native Speaker*, Chang Rae Lee (1995, Riverhead Books)

*Letters to Memory*, Karen Tei Yamashita (2017, Coffee House Press)

*Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid (2017, Riverhead Books)

*Salt Houses*, Hala Alyan (2017, First Mariner Books)

*The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir*, Thi Bui (2017, Abrams ComicArts)

### **Requirements and Grading:**

You will have 3 papers to write over the course of the semester, which will make up the majority of your grade (70%). An important component of writing academic papers is the editing and revising process, as well as collaboration with instructors and peers. We will have individual student conferences for your first paper, which you will then revise and resubmit based on feedback. For the final paper, we will conduct an in-class proposal workshop where you will help peers in their brainstorming stage. Apart from papers, your class attendance, participation, class activities, Canvas blog posts that reflect on readings, and short class presentations will also contribute to your final grade.

### **Assignment Breakdown:**

Paper 1: Textual Analysis + Close Reading — 10%

Paper 1 Revised Draft—10%

Information Literacy Response—5%

Paper 2: Guided Contextual Analysis—20%

Paper 3 Proposal + Presentation—10%

Paper 3—25%

7 Reflective Blog Posts on Canvas—15%

Class Participation—5%

**Grading Scale:** A (91-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (84-86); B- (80-83); C+ (77-79); C (74-76); C- (70-73); D+ (67-69); D (64-66); D- (61-63); F (0-60). The university does not recognize the grade A+.

**Class Policies:**

- a) **Attendance:** You are allowed 3 unexcused absences, after which your final grade in the course will fall a half letter grade (so from A to A-, A- to B+, etc) for each subsequent unexcused absence. An excused absence must be for a serious or extenuating circumstance and have proper documentation (ex. Jury duty, religious holy day, hospitalization). If the nature of your absence is anticipated (such as a religious holy day), you must notify me of your absence one week before your absence. If the absence is unanticipated (such as a family emergency), you must bring in documentation when you're back.
- b) **Participation:** Your participation throughout this course will constitute 5% of your final grade—for our collective learning as a group, it's important for everyone to contribute! I encourage you to participate in order to cultivate your ability to articulate yourself, to build confidence in your voice, and to demonstrate that you are alert and have completed any assigned readings or exercises. Please remember that your voice is important and should be heard! You will have various opportunities to participate inside and outside the classroom: through your verbal contributions to each class discussion, class activities, and through initiatives taken to engage with material at office hours (if you feel inhibited to speak up enough in class). I will evaluate your participation by taking detailed notes of your contributions, but also negligence (falling asleep in class, being on your phone, tardiness, etc.) each class.
- c) **Tardiness:** Please be on time! If you are over 15 minutes late, you will be considered absent for the day. If you're a few minutes late very occasionally, I will understand, but if this becomes a habit it will adversely affect your participation grade.
- d) **Getting In Touch and Email Etiquette:** Please email me ([amrita.mishra@utexas.edu](mailto:amrita.mishra@utexas.edu)) for any questions or concerns, or to schedule an appointment to meet, if you are unable to make my office hours. I will be happy to get back to you, but as a doctoral student and human with many other commitments outside of teaching, I will respond **within a 24 hour window**. Keep this time frame in mind so that you do not email me an urgent concern about an assignment just a few hours before it is due. It is also important to remember that no grade-related queries may be addressed through email, due to FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) regulations. Such concerns can be discussed during office hours/ an appointment.

For your academic and professional development as college students, it is important to compose and structure emails appropriately. I expect you to write emails with a salutation and named recipient, and sign off with your name. For example:

Hi/Dear Amrita (any salutation and addressed recipient),

This class has changed my life! (email content)

Sincerely/Best,

Student (any appropriate sign-off with name)

If you choose to send an email without appropriate etiquette, I will ask you to send the email again before responding to your concerns.

**e) Submitting Work: Hard Copy and Electronically on Canvas:**

Each writing assignment must be **both** submitted as a hard copy in class and submitted electronically on Canvas by the beginning of class on the due date (12:30), apart from (approximately bi-weekly) blog posts, which you will only submit on Canvas. It is imperative to submit both, because I like to read and comment on printed-out copies, and use Canvas to record grades, use rubrics, and keep track of all submitted assignments. If you submit only a hard copy or on Canvas, you will automatically lose **5%** of the total points allocated to the assignment, so please remember to do both. If you are absent on a submission day, you must turn in a hard copy of your assignment in our next class period, otherwise you will incur the penalty; it is not my responsibility as an instructor to print out student assignments. The penalty is meant to encourage you to ensure that you submit both ways. Make sure you have enough time to print out an assignment before class in anticipation of number of unwanted variables—the printer not working, your computer crashing, etc.

**f) Late Work:** You have been given due dates for all assignments (right here, on this syllabus!) on the first day of our semester together, so please plan ahead to make sure you can submit everything on time. You will notice that all assignments are due at 3:30 pm, in class. For each day (24 hr period) that an assignment is late, you will lose **5%** of the total points available. In case an assignment is late, you should submit on Canvas, and then bring a hard copy to the next class period. The late penalty also applies to all Canvas discussion posts.

If you have extenuating circumstances, you may request an extension at no penalty, but this request must be made **at least 48 hours** before the assignment is due. If you submit an assignment after the agreed extension date and time, you will similarly lose 5% for each day that it is late.

**g) Grading Policy:** As your instructor and someone invested in your academic improvement and success, I will spend a considerable amount of time deliberating on grades for each assignment. I will usually give you a rubric of how assignments will be graded before they are due. If you're uncertain about why you received the grade that you did for a particular project, please spend at least one day going through my comments and thinking through your assignment before bringing concerns to me at office hours or at an appointment. It is not a good idea to try to talk about a grade a few minutes after you've received it. If you strongly feel that you deserve a higher grade, you will need to submit a single-spaced one-page explication of your reasoning.

**h) Technology Policy:** A literature and writing class that contains elements of peer feedback and in-class workshops requires the cultivation of community amongst peers, and a space where we can engage fully with one another. Throughout the semester you will be writing, looking at others' writing, and discussing texts together. To build community and not hide behind screens, **no technology** (laptops, phones, tablets, etc) will be permitted. I am particularly strict on the usage of phones—if you are texting during class it's always obvious and fairly distracting to your peers as well as to my teaching. If I see you on your phone, I will address the issue immediately as a warning, but if I see this happening again, you will be marked absent for the day. If you have special requirements to use technology, please see me so that we can work something out.

Occasionally we will require technology—to work on papers in class, workshop, or to practice research skills. I will ask you to bring a laptop / electronic writing device on those specific class days. **No technology in class means you must bring physical copies of all assigned texts to class.**

- i) **Accessibility:** Your success in this class is important to me. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. We will develop strategies to meet both your needs and course requirements together. I am committed to making all course materials as accessible as possible, and to working with students if any of these materials are inaccessible. We will all need some accommodations in this class, because we all learn differently. If you need specific accommodations, let me know. Any conversations we have about accommodations are confidential. I am happy to take extra steps to ensure accessibility for all students.

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. More information is available on the Services for Students with Disabilities website at <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>

- j) **Safe Space Policy:** This class strives to be a safe space for learning and development—a space where we can develop and refine the knowledge and skills necessary for culturally competent practice. We may sometimes need to stretch beyond our comfort zones to learn, but at the same time we need to feel safe. In order to create such an environment, please be respectful towards all colleagues. There is no tolerance in this space for slurs or derogatory language, or discrimination based on race, gender presentation, marital status, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

Everyone in our class has the right to be addressed in accordance with their personal identity. I will gladly address you by the name and gender pronoun with which you identify. Please let me know your preferred name and pronouns early in the semester, so your peers and I can address you appropriately.

We may sometimes disagree with one another about a particular reading, but think about how your comments will support our learning as a group. Challenging another person's beliefs and ideas is part of a productive learning space, but we need to make sure we can do this without belittling any given perspective. Be sure to challenge colleagues to explain their arguments in a thoughtful manner so that we can create an engaging learning community together.

- k) **Scholastic Honesty:** Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. This standard applies to *all* drafts and assignments, and a report of the incident will be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students and filed in your permanent UT record. Under certain circumstances, the Dean of Students will initiate proceedings to expel you from the University. So, take care to read and understand the Statement on Scholastic Responsibility, which can be found online at <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/rhetoric/firstyearwriting/plagiarismcollusion.php> If

you have any doubts about your use of sources, ask your instructor for help *before* handing in the assignment.

### **Class Schedule + Reading Calendar**

\*Some syllabus readings (such as page numbers, or secondary readings in particular) are subject to change\*

#### **Week 1**

1. **Thursday August 30<sup>th</sup>:** Class Syllabus, Introductions, What is “Asian-American” literature? What unifies the “Asian-American” experience?  
*For next class:* Complete Syllabus quiz on Canvas  
Read: “No Name Woman,” Maxine Hong Kingston; short excerpts from “When and Where I Enter,” and “Margin as Mainstream,” chapters from Gary Okihiro’s *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*

#### **Week 2**

2. **Tuesday Sept 4<sup>th</sup>:** Asian-American Studies Formations, Class Discussion on Kingston  
*For next class:* Read “Sexy,” Jhumpa Lahiri
3. **Thursday Sept 6<sup>th</sup>:** What is close reading? Discussion on Lahiri  
*For next class:* Blog Post 1 on Canvas on Kingston/Lahiri  
Watch the **film** *Crazy Rich Asians* if you have not—either independently or with class  
“field trip”

\*\*Arrangements to watch the film together at a movie theater close to UT over the weekend (at individual cost) TBD\*\*

#### **Week 3**

4. **Tuesday Sept 11<sup>th</sup>:** Close Reading *Crazy Rich Asians*, themes in Asian-American lit/film  
*For next Tuesday:* *Native Speaker*, pp. 1-110
5. **Thursday Sept 13<sup>th</sup>:** Writing Academic Papers and Paper 1 guidelines

#### **Week 4**

6. **Tuesday Sept 18<sup>th</sup>:** Non-linear narratives in *Native Speaker*  
*For next class:* *Native Speaker*, pp. 110-150
7. **Thursday Sept 20<sup>th</sup>:** Copies + Originals, Thematic Trends in *Native Speaker*  
**\*\*Paper 1 Draft (to be graded) due in class (submit on Canvas and bring hard copy)\*\***  
*For next Tuesday:* Blog Post 2 on *Crazy Rich Asians*  
*For next Thursday:* *Native Speaker*, pp. 150-230

#### **Week 5**

8. **Tuesday Sept 25<sup>th</sup>:** **Paper 1 Individual Student Conferences and Check-in; no class**
9. **Thursday Sept 27<sup>th</sup>:** *Native Speaker* class discussion  
*For next class:* *Native Speaker*, pp. 230- 300

## Week 6

- 10. Tuesday Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>:** *Native Speaker* Close-Reading, Introduction to Information Literacy: how do we navigate library and internet resources for secondary materials? What is a contextual source?

For next class: *Native Speaker*, pp. 300-end

- 11. Thursday Oct 4<sup>th</sup>:** *Native Speaker* Wrap-up, Keyword and database searches, OED, in relation to *Native Speaker*

**\*\*Revised Paper 1 due in class\*\***

For next class: Blog Post 3 on *Crazy Rich Asians*

## Week 7

- 12. Tuesday Oct 9<sup>th</sup>:** Researching Contexts for other texts we've looked at

For next class: *The Best We Could Do*, Ch. 1-5

- 13. Thursday Oct 11<sup>th</sup>:** Graphic Novel genre, close-read Bui's work

**\*\*Information Literacy Response due in class\*\***

For next class: *The Best We Could Do*, Ch. 6-10

## Week 8

- 14. Tuesday Oct 16<sup>th</sup>:** Historical, Political, Social Contexts for Bui's work

For next class: "To Begin," "Letters to Poverty," + "Letters to Modernity" from Yamashita's *Letters to Memory*

- 15. Thursday Oct 18<sup>th</sup>:** Memoir, Fiction, and Truth-telling in *Letters to Memory*

For next class: "Letters to Love," "Letters to Death," + "Letters to Laughter" from *Letters to Memory*

## Week 9

- 16. Tuesday Oct 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Contexts for Yamashita's work

For next **Tuesday**: Blog Post 4 on *The Best We Could Do/ Letters to Memory*  
Read *Exit West* Ch. 1-4

**\*\*Highly recommended:** Dr. Lisa Lowe, a renowned postcolonial studies and Asian/ Asian-American studies scholar from Tufts University, will be presenting a talk at UT entitled "Asian American Studies of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora":

**Wednesday Oct 24<sup>th</sup>, Time: 5:30 pm**

Location: Gordon-White Building (GWB) 2.206**\*\***

- 17. Thursday Oct 25<sup>th</sup>: Instructor commitment with South Asia Institute, no class**

**\*\*If you're interested in South Asian lit,** Bilal Tanweer, Pakistani novelist Bilal Tanweer, author of 2014 *The Scatter Here is Too Great*, will be presenting a talk at UT's South Asia Institute entitled "Trickster as Commando: Performance of Pakistaniyyat in Urdu Pulp Fiction":

**Thursday Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, Time: 3:30 pm**

Location: WCH 4.118**\*\***

### Week 10

**18. Tuesday Oct 30<sup>th</sup>:** Close-Reading and Contextualizing *Exit West*

*For next class: Exit West, Ch. 5-8*

**19. Thursday Nov 1<sup>st</sup>:** Close-Reading and Contextualizing *Exit West*

*For next class: Exit West, Ch. 9-12*

### Week 11

**20. Tuesday Nov 6<sup>th</sup>:** Refugees/ Displacement in *Exit West* and Other Texts

**\*\*Paper 2 due in class\*\***

*For next class: Salt Houses, “Salma, Nablus, March 1963” to “Alia, Kuwait City, Dec 1967” (pp. 1-76)*

**21. Thursday Nov 8<sup>th</sup>:** Close-Reading Salt Houses and Contexts

*For next class: Salt Houses, “Atef, Kuwait City, May 1977” to “Riham, Amman, July 1982” (pp. 77-130)*

Blog Post 5 on *Exit West*

### Week 12

**22. Tuesday Nov 13<sup>th</sup>:** Six-Day War, Kuwait, Gulf War Contexts

*For next class: Salt Houses, “Alia, Kuwait City, April 1988” to “Riham, Amman, Oct 1999” (pp. 131-201)*

**23. Thursday Nov 15<sup>th</sup>:** *Salt Houses* and Arab Transnational Lit

*For next class: Salt Houses, “Souad, Beirut, June 2004” to “Linah, Beirut, July 2006” (pp. 202-249)*

### Week 13

**24. Tuesday Nov 20<sup>th</sup>:** Does Palestinian Lit Count? *Salt Houses* vs the Asian-American Novel, How to write a Proposal

*For next Tuesday: Salt Houses, pp.250-end*

**25. Thursday Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>: Thanksgiving Holiday, no class**

### Week 14

**26. Tuesday Nov 27<sup>th</sup>:** What is Asian-American Lit? Texts Wrap Up

**27. Thursday Nov 29<sup>th</sup>:** Paper 3 Proposal Presentations + Workshop Pt 1

**\*\*Paper 3 Proposal due in class\*\***

*For next class: Blog Post 6 on Salt Houses*

### Week 15

**28. Tuesday Dec 4<sup>th</sup>:** Paper 3 Proposal Presentations + Workshop Pt 2

*For next class: Blog Post 7 to reflect on class/ what Asian-American literature means to you*

**29. Thursday Dec 6<sup>th</sup>:** Proposal Presentations Pt 3, Course Post-Mortem, Evaluations

**\*\*Paper 3 due on Canvas on Wednesday Dec 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm\*\***