

**Asian American Racial Formations**

Professor Nadeen Kharputly ([nkharputly@wlu.edu](mailto:nkharputly@wlu.edu))

**Office hours:** Wednesdays 3:45-4:45 (outdoors) and Fridays 10-12 (Zoom)

**Course description**

A study of fiction and nonfiction narratives across genre (novels, short stories, poetry, essays, film) to explore racial formations in contemporary Asian American writing. We will examine literary representations of race and racism through the lens of immigration and citizenship, faith and religion, mixed race identity, the model minority myth, the perpetual foreigner syndrome, and transracial adoption. Potential authors include: Ocean Vuong, Cathy Park Hong, Randa Jarrar, Celeste Ng, Viet Thanh Nguyen.

**An important note**

Our class reading list represents a wide range of experiences pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, ability, identity, and more. This list was intentionally curated; these differences in experiences matter. It is important for us to approach issues from a variety of perspectives and to challenge any one way of understanding and moving through the world. Reading these stories is only the first step towards becoming active, engaged, and empathetic citizens of the world. Our conversations will thus be grounded in critical analyses of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, politics, and more. Many of us are not well versed in having such conversations, as these topics are often avoided for the sake of “politeness.” However, it is crucial that we all learn to become fluent in the practice of holding space for difficult conversations so that we are better equipped to address the injustices that persist in our societies.

**Objectives and learning outcomes**

Students majoring in English will learn how to

- write clear, persuasive analytical essays driven by arguments about texts;
- read closely, recognizing subtle and complex differences in language use;
- seek out further knowledge about literary works, authors, and/or contexts, and document research appropriately, adhering to the highest standards of intellectual honesty;
- derive pleasure and edification from a broad range of texts;
- in optional creative writing courses, create literary texts and revise them to convey greater power and control.

**Assignments**

- Two essays (#1 1500 words minimum + #2 2000 words min.)
- Three self-assessments
- Journal posts (200 words minimum per post)
- Final exam

A note on due dates: with the exception of your midterm self-assessment, most of your assignments are due on Fridays. You may take until Monday to submit your Friday assignments if you need the extra time. You do not need to e-mail me to ask for an extension; any assignment that is due on a Friday automatically comes with a 72-hour grace period. This does not apply for assignments due during finals week.

**Required texts**

Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

*Minari* (rent through your preferred streaming platform)

All other texts are available through Canvas.

### **Grading policy**

Rather than using a traditional grade breakdown (where each component of the class is worth a certain percentage of the overall grade), I'm relying on the following guidelines in order to provide more flexibility for you during these eternally prolonged pandemic circumstances.

An A will be given to students who bring their utmost efforts to meet the following requirements:

- Meet the requirements for all assignments in this class. Basically, show me that you have a) understood the purpose of the assignments (this includes the essays, Canvas posts and/or exercises, self-assessments, and so on), b) completed them in a timely manner, in good faith, and with your best efforts, c) with careful attention to the particular requirements of each assignment and to the key concepts and specific examples we cover in class.
- Demonstrate a significant improvement in your progress over time with the end result of producing high quality analysis, writing, and engagement & participation.
- Demonstrate regular, thoughtful engagement with the material and with our class community - this means contributing meaningfully to our conversations and community, both in-person and online, making specific and knowledgeable references to our class material in your writing and discussion, acknowledging and working with feedback you receive on your assignments (i.e., are you revising your writing and analysis specifically with the feedback in mind; if not, do you articulate a good reason for not doing so?). If struggling to participate in class, communicate with me early and regularly in order to draw up and commit to a plan for improvement.
- Treat our class space with seriousness and respect by demonstrating a conscientious and appreciative approach towards our subject matter, our materials (including assignments), and most importantly, your classmates and professor.

Meet most of these requirements and you'll get a B, do the bare minimum and you'll get a C, and so on. Serious breaches of trust and community will result in a failing grade.

Letter grades will be provided only for a) your essays b) midterm grade (if you are eligible as a first year student and/or are on probation) and c) final class grade. I will provide qualitative feedback on your midsemester self-assessment, which will give you the opportunity to evaluate your progress, articulate your standing in the class to me, and make any necessary changes for improvement moving forward. I will also provide regular feedback on your Canvas posts.

### **Class policies**

While this syllabus lays out everything you need to know for this class, please understand that our present circumstances demand a certain level of flexibility. If any changes to the class arise, I will let know you ASAP. This policy applies to you as well: there are certain expectations that you need to meet for this class, but your situation may require flexibility from me. Therefore please maintain prompt communication with me should any changes or emergencies arise in your situation and we can work together to address them.

Please read the **Student Health and Expectations** section at the end of this syllabus.

### **Communication policies**

Please check your W&L e-mail at least once a day to keep up to date with any possible changes to our schedule. I'll generally respond to your e-mails within a day or two. I don't check my e-mail over the weekend so please plan accordingly.

**Zoom policy**

Should we need to meet virtually for class, please develop a setup that works best for you for our meetings: you can use virtual backgrounds or turn off your camera if a genuine need arises. Whether your camera is on or off, I expect you to stay engaged and be ready to respond to any question I pose to the class. Do stay on mute until it is your turn to speak in order to minimize background noise. Keep distractions (such as phones) out of sight in order to minimize distractions.

**Accommodations**

Students requesting accommodation will need to provide appropriate documentation of: (1) a disability, which is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; and (2) a need for accommodation, by virtue of the specific functional limitations of the disability, to have equal access to educational opportunities. It is the responsibility of a student with a physical or mental disability who may require any type of accommodation to make the accommodation request in a timely manner. In order to ensure sufficient time for the eligibility and accommodation decision process and to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations, a student should contact the Title IX Coordinator and Director of Disability Resources, Elrod Commons 212, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia 24450, (540) 458-4055 and submit the documents required for consideration of disability accommodations during the first month of the fall or winter academic terms. Requests submitted after the first month of either of those academic terms, or requests submitted with incomplete documentation (including insufficient testing data), could result in a delay of consideration and action on the request until the the following academic term. The student will need to complete a "Request for Accommodation of Disability" form, obtain a copy of the most recent medical or cognitive testing documentation, and schedule an interview with the designated administrator.

**Honor system and plagiarism**

Students will be held to the standards of the W&L Honor System. The inclusion of your name on all assignments indicates that you have understood and abided by the pledge, whether you write the pledge or not. Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is imperative that you review the university's statement on plagiarism before turning in any assignments: <https://libguides.wlu.edu/plagiarism> and <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/citation-documentation-and-plagiarism>

Plagiarism consists of but is not limited to the following: presenting another person's ideas or language as if they were your own, copying (words AND ideas) from the Internet, and failure to acknowledge and properly cite the sources of the language and/or ideas presented. Re-using language from a paper you have previously written for another class is unacceptable. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please check in with me ahead of time. It is your responsibility to be aware. You may find this plagiarism test useful: <https://plagiarism.iu.edu/certificationTests/>

**Writing resources**

The Writing Center on campus is not a tool for remedial purposes, but a crucial resource for writers across every skill and background. Good writing relies on feedback from other perspectives; I encourage you to visit the Center frequently in order to solicit feedback and improve your writing. **The Writing Center will be operating both in-person and online during fall term.** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/writing-center>

The Writing Program website (<http://www.wlu.edu/writing-program>) offers a good list of resources for your essays. Use right hand side menu/tabs for:

**Resources:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/resources>

**Specific Types of Writing:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/specific-types-of-writing>

**Writing in Different Disciplines:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/writing-in-different-disciplines>

**International Students:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/international-students>

### Weekly schedule

Please make sure you complete the assigned reading by the beginning of each week. E.g., for Week 1, come to class having watched Ali Wong's special and read her book chapter by Monday the 13th - for Week 2, read both the Mohyuddin poem and the Mahajan article by Monday the 20th, and so on.

Schedule	Topic	Reading	Assignment
<b>Friday Sept 10</b>	First day of class	None	
<b>Week 1 Sept 13-17</b>	Introduction: Race and comedy	Ali Wong, <i>Baby Cobra</i> (on Netflix) "My Least Favorite Question" (from <i>Dear Girls</i> )	<b>Syllabus quiz + Initial self-assessment due Fri</b>
<b>Week 2 Sept 20-24</b>	Conditional citizenship	Faisal Mohyuddin, "Denaturalization: An Elegy for Mr. Vaishno Das Bagai" Karan Mahajan, "The Two Asian Americas"	<b>Journal post due Fri</b>
<b>Week 3 Sept 27-Oct 1</b>	Race, religion, and the model minority myth	Mohsin Hamid, <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i>	
<b>Week 4 Oct 4-8</b>	Cross-racial solidarities	Cathy Park Hong, "United" and "Stand Up" (from <i>Minor Feelings</i> ) Hisaye Yamamoto, "Wilshire Bus"	<b>Essay 1 due Fri</b>
<b>Week 5 Oct 11-15 (no class Friday)</b>	Transracial adoption	Matthew Salesses, "The Rules of the Asian Body in America" Nicole Chung, "'Just Assimilate Her Into Your Family and Everything Will Be Fine'"	<b>Journal post due Fri</b>
<b>Week 6 Oct 18-22</b>	Mixed race identity	Celeste Ng, <i>Everything I Never Told You</i>	<b>Midterm self-assessment due Wed</b>
<b>Week 7 Oct 25-29</b>	Asian American foodways	Soleil Ho, "Do You Eat Dog?" <i>Home Cooking</i> with Samin Nosrat and Hrishikesh Hirway	<b>Journal post due Fri</b>

<b>Week 8</b> <b>Nov 1-5</b>	Ethnographic refusal	Nam Le, "Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" (from <i>The Boat</i> )	
<b>Week 9</b> <b>Nov 8-12</b>	Health, wellness, and resilience	Eric Tran, selected poems, Zeyn Joukhadar, "Worlds of Our Own Making," and Randa Jarrar, "What Love Is: On survival and miracles"	<b>Essay 2 due Fri</b>
<b>Week 10</b> <b>Nov 15-19</b>	Trauma, survival, and beauty	Ocean Vuong, <i>On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous</i>	<b>Journal post due Fri</b>
<b>Week 11</b> <b>Nov 29-Dec 3</b>	Rural homecomings	Movie: <i>Minari</i> (rent on your preferred platform)	<b>Journal post due Fri</b>
<b>Week 12</b> <b>Dec 6-10</b>	Conclusion	None	<b>Final exam and final self-assessment due next week (Wed)</b>

### STUDENT HEALTH AND CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

Our collective responsibility as a University community in the face of COVID-19 applies equally to students, faculty, staff and members of the Lexington and Rockbridge County community. Specifically, our responsibilities with respect to classroom behavior are as follows:

- Before coming to campus each day, you must complete the daily health attestation (<https://attest.wlu.edu>) to affirm that you are not exhibiting symptoms and have not recently been in contact with anyone suspected of having COVID-19. Refusal to do so will lead to a request to depart campus immediately.
- Masks (or face shields where approved) must be worn over your mouth and nose in the classroom at all times. You will be asked to leave the building if you do not comply.
- You also will be required to maintain physical distancing of at least six feet from others.
- You will be asked to wipe down tables, chairs, and desks that you use before you depart your classrooms.
- DO NOT attend class or other in-person course meetings if you are sick. Anyone with new onset symptoms of COVID-19 and/or recent close contact with COVID-19 should stay in their residence hall room or apartment. Seek medical advice.
- Students placed in isolation due to illness or quarantine because of possible exposure should be cleared by a health official before returning to class. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with faculty about how they can keep up with their studies and make up missed work.
- Personal travel should be limited, where possible, to the State of Virginia. In all circumstances, the University reserves the right to require a 14-day self-quarantine requirement upon your return.

Recall that behavior outside of the classroom, such as travel and social gatherings, has an effect on everyone in the community. You are expected to follow the guidelines in the full Statement of Community Expectations.