

## The English Department Fall 2019

### Faculty

- \* **Mark C. Amodio**, Professor of English
- \* **Peter Antelyes**, Associate Professor of English  
**Heesok Chang**, Associate Professor of English
- \* **Robert DeMaria, Jr.**, Professor of English  
**Eve Dunbar**, Associate Professor of English  
**Leslie Dunn**, Professor of English  
**Katie Gemmill**, Assistant Professor of English  
**Wendy Graham**, Professor of English and Chair
- \* **Hua Hsu**, Associate Professor of English  
**Michael Joyce**, Professor of English  
**Jean Kane**, Professor of English
- \* **Paul Kane**, Professor of English  
**Amitava Kumar**, Professor of English  
**M Mark**, Adjunct Associate Professor of English  
**Zoltán Márkus**, Associate Professor of English  
**Molly McGlennen**, Associate Professor of English  
**David Means**, Visiting Associate Professor of English  
**Hiram Perez**, Associate Professor of English  
**Paul Russell**, Professor of English
- \* **Ralph Sassone**, Adjunct Associate Professor of English  
**Robert Smith**, Visiting Professor of English  
**Erin Sweany**, Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow in English  
**Tyrone R. Simpson, II**, Associate Professor of English  
**Talia Vestri**, Visiting Assistant Professor of English  
**Susan Zlotnick**, Professor of English

*For a description of faculty members' interests see pp 23-24. If you are looking for a senior thesis advisor, this is a good place to start.*

- \* *On leave in Fall '19.*

**Requirements for Concentration:**

A minimum of ten graded units plus 1.5 units of ungraded Intensive work. Three units must be elected at the 300-level, including at minimum of one taken in the senior year. No AP credit or course taken NRO may be counted toward the requirements for the major.

**Distribution Requirements:**

Majors are required to take two units of work in literature written before 1800 and one unit of work in literature written before 1900. Majors may fulfill the historical distribution requirement in one of two ways: by taking three courses focused on literature written before 1800, or two courses focused on literature written before 1800 and one course focused on nineteenth-century literature. Majors must also take one course that focuses on issues of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or disability. These courses must be taken at either the 200- or 300-level.

English majors who are members of the classes of 2020 and 2021 will be able to fulfill their major requirements in one of two ways:

- 1) They may elect to take 10 graded units plus 1.5 units of Intensives  
or
- 2) They may elect to take 11 graded units plus .5 units of Intensives.

The distribution requirements and minimum number of units at the 300-level will be the same for all classes.

**Recommendations:**

English 101 and 170 are strongly recommended as foundational courses, and students are also strongly encouraged to work from the 200- to the 300-level in at least one field of study. Acquaintance with a classical language (Latin or Greek) or with one or more of the languages especially useful for an understanding of the history of English (Old English, German, or French) is useful, as are appropriate courses in philosophy, history, and other literatures.

**Further information:**

Applicants for English 203 (New Journalisms), English 209 (Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative), English 211 (Advanced Creative Writing: Verse), English 304 (Creative Writing Seminar), and English 305-306 (Senior Creative Writing Seminar), must submit samples of their writing before pre-registration; please check with the Department office for the exact date of the deadline.

**Correlate Sequences in English:**

The department offers seven correlates in English: Race and Ethnicity; Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies; Poetry and Poetics; Literary Forms; British Literary History; American Literary History and Creative Writing. Further information on these correlates can be found below.

## I. Introduction to Literary Study English Freshman Course Descriptions

### 101.01

David Means

TR 12:00-1:15 CLS

#### **Beneath the Apocalyptic Landscape**

This course will explore characters caught in the dreamscape of violence and apocalyptic visions that is perhaps unique to American history and culture, from slavery to skinheads to school shootings. We'll examine the concept—coined by rock critic Greil Marcus—of Old Weird America, a folkloric history that has spawned murder ballads, the music of Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash, and a wide range of literary work, including poetry by Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Lucille Clifton, and Etheridge Knight; stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Joyce Carol Oates, Flannery O'Connor, Christine Schutt, and Denis Johnson. Longer works may include novels by William Faulkner, Gayle Jones, Robert Stone, William Vollmann, Hunter Thompson, and the graphic artist, Lynda Barry.

### 101.02

Leslie Dunn

TR 3:10-4:24 CLS

#### **Disability and Identity**

“Disability,” wrote the historian Douglas Baynton, “is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write.” Similarly, disability is everywhere in the contemporary world—in our spaces, institutions, technologies, and media—yet too often *ignored or misrepresented in their stories*. Drawing examples from literature, the arts, and popular culture, this course will explore the ways in which bodies and minds constructed as disabled are depicted, how those depictions reflect cultural understandings of normalcy and desirability, and how they affect the lived experiences of disabled people. We will pay particular attention to the intersections of disability with race, gender, and sexuality. We will also attend to the work of disabled writers, artists, performers, and activists who are challenging stereotypes and stigma, reclaiming disability as a source of identity and pride.

### 101.03

Amitava Kumar

MW 9:00-10:15 CLS

#### **The Essay Form**

The high-school essay trapped in the Darth Vader facemask called the topic sentence. And the immobile drapery of the five-paragraph costume armor. This is an exaggeration, of course, but to write in more imaginative ways let us examine the experiments in prose undertaken by essayists of the past hundred years or so: George Orwell writing about shooting an elephant, James Baldwin on his father's death and race riots, Jorge Luis Borges on his “modest blindness,” Susan Sontag looking at photographs, Joan Didion bidding goodbye to New York, Adrienne Rich recalling the strands that make up her identity. Also, Geoff Dyer on sex and hotels, Lydia Davis on “Foucault and pencil,” David Shields on the lyric essay, Jenny Boully on the body, Eliot Weinberger on what he heard about Iraq, and David Foster Wallace on anything. We will write brief essays (one to two pages) for each class and two longer essays (about eight pages in length).

### 101.04

M Mark

WF 1:30-2:45 CLS

#### **Deception: Some Truths About Lies**

Narratives told by someone who can't be trusted invite readers to explore the ambiguous border between truths and lies. An author's perceptions may differ from those of the first-person narrator—the “I”—who tells the story, and that discrepancy opens up intriguing psychological space. “Good readers read the lines, better readers read the spaces,” the novelist John Barth has written. This section of English 101 will analyze both words and spaces—both what is said and what is unspoken or unspeakable. We'll investigate a rogues' gallery of unreliable narrators who bring varying degrees of mendacity, self-aggrandizement, and self-deception to the stories they tell. Then, from both literary and neuroscience perspectives, we'll think about memory, the mind, and the brain. We'll ask: Are memories always fallible? Are they ever-evolving stories

we tell ourselves? Is remembering an act of creation rather than straightforward retrieval of the past? Are we all unreliable narrators? Authors may include Alison Bechdel, James Baldwin, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Lydia Davis, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ralph Ellison, Kazuo Ishiguro, Jamaica Kincaid, Tim O'Brien, Michael Ondaatje, George Orwell, Oliver Sacks, George Saunders, Charles Simic, Zadie Smith, and Oscar Wilde. Students will write both analytical and imaginative responses to the texts.

### 101.05

Paul Russell

MW 10:30-11:45 CLS

#### **The Story of a Text: How Did Christianity Happen?**

In the years after Jesus' execution, his followers, mostly in Asia Minor, the Middle East and North Africa, produced dozens if not hundreds of documents in an attempt to come to terms with the exhilarating strangeness of his teachings. These took the form of gospels, letters, visions and other tracts. Extending roughly from the time of Paul's letters, circa 50-64 CE (the earliest extant Christian literature), through Athanasius' promulgation, in 367 CE, of a group of twenty-seven texts that would eventually become known as the New Testament, this course focuses on a tumultuous three centuries in which early Christians struggled to establish a set of orthodox beliefs against a bewildering and fecund array of counter-beliefs. In addition to a representative sample of the canonical gospels and Paul's letters (both authentic and forged), the course explores a range of other texts that did not, in the end, merit inclusion in the New Testament (though some came close). Among these are *The Didache*, *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Secret Book of John*, *The Proto-Gospel of James*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and *The Letter of Barnabas*. Particular attention is paid to Ebionite (pro-Jewish) and Marcionite (anti-Jewish) Christianities, as well as the various strands of Gnosticism.

### 101.06

Tyrone Simpson

WF 10:30-11:45 CLS

#### **The Ends of Black Autobiography**

Autobiographical writing has been and remains a preeminent mode of African American expression. It was one of the first intellectual gestures that the formerly enslaved made when they gained literacy. It has fed music practices like the blues and hip-hop. It also may have created the circumstances by which the US could elect its first black president. Over the last three centuries, blacks have used this mode to insinuate themselves into literary modernity and register the often unacknowledged dynamism of their emotional and intellectual lives. This course will explore the aesthetics of black autobiographical narrative--its codes, tropes, and investments--from its beginnings in the eighteenth century to its most present iterations. If black autobiographical writing involves not only telling a story about a black subject, but also proffering a certain version of black life to its reading audiences, it is important to ascertain the nature of the cultural work that these stories (seek to) accomplish. Among the artists featured in this Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, W.E.B. Dubois, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Gloria Naylor, Barack Obama, Jasmyn Ward, Chris Rock, Oprah Winfrey, and MK Asante.

### 101.07

Susan Zlotnick

MWF 10:30-11:20 CLS

#### **Jane Eyres**

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* tells the story of a heated romance between a "poor, obscure, plain" governess and a Byronic landowner with a Gothic past. Published pseudonymously in 1847, the novel was a literary sensation as well as a bestseller, even though Brontë's rebellious heroine upended nineteenth-century notions of propriety and femininity. While popular in its day, *Jane Eyre* has also had a hypnotic hold on subsequent generations of writers, who have revised and re-imagined Brontë's text in order to contest its representations of love, madness, colonialism, Englishness, feminism, and education. In this first-year seminar, we will explore *Jane Eyre*'s complicated relationship with its literary descendants and ask fundamental questions about literary influence, canon formation, narration, and women's writing. In addition to *Jane Eyre*, readings may include Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow

Wallpaper,” Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. We will also screen different film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in addition to Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*.

**101.08**

Katie Gemmill

TR 3:10-4:25 CLS

**Reading and Writing About Poetry**

One of the most important lessons poetry teaches us is that language can do more than just explain things. Language can cast spells, perform ceremonies, make music; it can establish lines of communication with the dead, the divine and the nonhuman. Our work in this course is to tune into the many registers in which lyrical language can mean. To do so we will need to cultivate two different reading faculties: first, the intuitive skill of responding to poetic language, and feeling with it; and second, the critical skill of identifying and analyzing poetic devices and forms. Our goal is not to become perfect readers of poetry—after all, the best poems pull you in but also withhold, inviting you to pursue ambiguities and let their richness proliferate. We will push back against the tired idea that poetry is “inaccessible,” re-training ourselves to see all the ways in which obscurity can be productive.

This course satisfies the college requirement for the First-year Writing Seminar, and is therefore reading- and writing-intensive. Over the course of the semester we will read and discuss a great deal of poetry in English (and some in translation), from the Early Modern period up until our current moment; we will contextualize a range of poetic forms within literary history, from the sonnet sequence to contemporary free verse poetics; we will memorize and recite poems for each other; and we will write thoughtfully and often.

**101.09**

Talia Vestrie

MW 12:00-1:15 CLS

**Monstrous Bodies**

When the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* first opens its “watery eyes,” his creator, Victor Frankenstein, immediately “rushe[s] out of the room,” terrified of the monster to whom he has just given life. Yet this so-called “wretch” becomes the most eloquent, sensitive, and considerate voice of the novel. What, then, makes something a “monster”? Is it in the nature of the being itself or in the way others perceive and respond to it? This central question will inform our encounters with madness, murder, and mayhem in literature and film. Students will write frequent analytical papers as we consider the ways monstrosity has been constructed, both as material creations and as textual and cognitive phenomena, exploring the elements of gender, race, and class that shape these physical and psychological dimensions. Texts may include Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray*, James’s *Turn of the Screw*, Kafka’s “Metamorphosis,” Carter’s “Bloody Chamber,” Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*, and Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

**101.10**

Erin Sweany

MW 9:00-10:15 CLS

**Maladies and Medicines**

What does it mean to characterize the experience of illness as being a body under attack by elves and shielded by language (as the early medieval English did)? What can we understand about literature if we understand humoral theory (one of the most long-lasting theories of health in the western world)? Why is smallpox an important topic of Lady Mary Wortley Montague’s eighteenth-century poetry? How does understanding the inoculation controversy in eighteenth century England help us to analyze the twenty-first century anti-vax controversy? How are race and gender significant in the experience of illness and the practice of medicine?

In this multidisciplinary, cross-temporal course, we will explore medical categories such as health (mental, physical, and spiritual), illness, healing, pain, and embodiment in both practical and literary texts, attending to the ways medicine appears in literature and literature in medicine. Engaging with critical theories such as medical humanities, disabilities studies, posthumanisms, and science studies, we will consider the ways in which medical ideas are dependent upon the cultures and languages from which they emerge. By the end of

this course, you will be able to close-read both literary and pragmatic texts, attend closely to the history of representations of health and medicine (in terms of both language and culture), investigate the bases of textual categorization (such as literary v pragmatic), engage in academic research, and develop sophisticated literary and cultural analyses using primary and secondary sources.

### **101.11**

Rob Smith

TR

3:10-4:25

CLS

#### **The Russian Connection**

Some of the more controversial novels of the past century have depicted striking attitudes of religious belief. A faith in God (or the crucial lack of it) can trouble a novel's protagonist, drive the plot, and reveal the broader cultural norms of its readership. This course will investigate the ways in which works of fiction are uniquely capable of exploring questions of faith—and how, in turn, religious standpoints can be encountered, and sometimes publicly challenged, by particular fictional treatments. Selected texts and their respective spiritual frameworks will include: *Three Daughters of Eve* by Elif Safak (Islam), *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy (Hinduism), *Brighton Rock* by Graham Greene (Catholicism), *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson (Protestantism), *Only Yesterday* by S.Y. Agnon (Judaism), *The Temple of the Wild Geese* by Tsutomu Mizukami (Buddhism), *Native Son* by Richard Wright (Existentialism), and *Quarantine* by Jim Crace (Atheism).

### **English 170**

English 170, Approaches to Literary Studies, is designed as an introduction to the discipline of literary studies. While each section has a different focus (see descriptions below), they have a common agenda: to explore the concerns and methods of the discipline. Topics range from specific critical approaches and their assumptions to larger questions about meaning-making in literature, criticism, and theory. Assignments will develop skills for research and writing in English, including the use of secondary sources and the critical vocabulary of literary study.

Each section explores a central issue, such as “the idea of a literary period,” “canons and the study of literature,” “nationalism and literary form,” or “gender and genre” (contact the department office for current descriptions). Assignments focus on the development of skills for research and writing in English, including the use of secondary sources and the critical vocabulary of literary study.

As an introduction to the discipline, English 170 is recommended, but not required, for potential majors. It is open to first-year students and sophomores, and others by permission. Although the ideal sequence of English courses for first-year students interested in majoring in English is English 101 in the Fall and 170 in the Spring, 101 is not a prerequisite for 170. First-year students wishing to take English 170 in the fall semester must have AP English credit. Students should not take 101 and 170 during the same semester. Note that English 170 does not fulfill the Freshman Writing Seminar requirement.

### **170.01**

Mr. Chang

WF

12:00-1:15

CLS

#### **Approaches to Literary Studies**

##### **Topic for 2019a: *Tools for Reading Narrative***

Everyone today has a story to tell. But are all stories worth telling? What makes for a good story? What's the difference between telling stories and telling lies? In order to come to terms with the “narrative turn” in the arts and sciences we will adopt a dueling approach: the first technical and the second imaginary. On the one hand, we will pillage useful studies of narrative from the ancients to the moderns. Here our goal will be to acquire a durable set of tools and concepts: plot, description, narrator, free indirect style, focalization, storyworlds, etc. On the other hand, to test these lenses, we will examine (and perhaps create) fictional texts that both bind and unravel narrative conventions. These might include: Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City*, Franz Kafka's “The Burrow,” Daniel Clowes's graphic novel *Ghost World*, and short stories by Ernest Hemingway, Kathy Acker, Alice Munro, Lydia Davis, Mary Butts, and others.

## I. Introductory Intensives

### 180.01

Ms. Kane

M

6:00-6:50

INT

#### **Improvisational Writing**

This intensive uses techniques of improvisational generation of creative material, drawn from schools such as Oulipo, writers such as Raymond Roussel, and teachers such as Ruth Danon. All of them aim to subvert the critical mind in order to allow the unexpected to emerge in directed free writing exercises. The intensive consists of such writing exercises, as well as direction in using the material that emerges as a platform for further work and drafts. It focuses on the genres of fiction and poetry.

This is a .5 unit intensive limited to 8 students.

### 183.01

Mr. Perez

W

1:00-3:00

INT

#### **Building a Queer Oral History**

(Same as WMST) This intensive seeks to provide students with practical training and experience in conducting oral history interviews. The goal is for each student, by the end of the semester, to contribute an oral history (including transcription) to the Vassar College LGBTQ Oral History Archive. In addition to practical training, students will read about oral history methodology and theory in preparation for interviewing their subjects. Students will also familiarize themselves with the LGBTQ Oral History Archive collection. Additionally, students will collaborate in expanding the LGBTQ Oral History Archive to include a queer mapping component that geo-locates queer spaces and memories at Vassar and within Poughkeepsie. Our goal is to complement the oral histories in the collection with a map that documents the spaces that hold queer memories for our narrators.

This is a 1 unit intensive limited to 4 students.

## II. Intermediate Studies

**205**

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

Study and practice of various forms of prose and poetry. Reading and writing assignments may include prose fiction, journals, poetry, drama, and essays. Not open to first-year students in the fall semester.

One 2-hour period and individual conferences with the instructor.

**205.01**

Ms. Mark

T 1:00-3:00 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

Students in this course will read and write narratives in a number of modes. Though we'll focus on short fiction and the elements of its composition (characterization, plot, structure, point of view, dialogue, voice, style, and so forth), we'll also explore the increasingly permeable boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, prose and poetry. This section of Introductory Creative Writing is both a seminar and a workshop: students will read the work of experienced practitioners, analyze what they've read, and apply what they've learned to their own work. Readings may include works by Ashbery, Baldwin, Bambara, Barth, Barthelme, Beattie, Bishop, Bloom, Borges, Calvino, Carey, Carson, Chekhov, Cortázar, Edson, Erdrich, Faulkner, Hughes, Jen, Joyce, Kafka, Kincaid, Lahiri, Mullen, Munro, Nabokov, O'Connor, Packer, Paley, Saunders, Simic, Trevor, Wallace, Winterson, Wolff, and Woolf. Frequent conferences.

**205.02**

Mr. Smith

T 10:30-12:30 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

In this section we will focus on the short story form. In a supportive workshop environment, we will discuss recently published short fiction, engage in creative writing exercises, address key elements of craft, and offer constructive peer feedback on works in progress. Stories will not be limited to traditional narrative styles to encourage innovations in form, including prose poetry. Special emphasis will be placed on characterization, language, narrative voice, and the rigorous revisions often necessary to achieve what Edgar Allen Poe called 'unified effect.'

**205.03**

Mr. Smith

R 10:30-12:30 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

In this section we will focus on the short story. In a supportive workshop environment, we will discuss recently published short fiction, engage in creative writing exercises, address key elements of craft, and offer peer feedback. Stories will not be limited to traditional narrative styles to encourage innovations in form, including prose poetry. Special emphasis will be placed on characterization, language, narrative voice, and the rigorous revisions often necessary to achieve what Edgar Allen Poe describes as 'unified effect.'

**205.04**

Ms. Shengold

M 3:10-5:10 CLS

### **Introductory Creative Writing**

There are countless ways to tell a story. Pairing selected readings from different genres--short fiction, essays, plays, poems, and hybrid forms--we'll discuss each piece in practical carpentry terms. How did the writer construct it? What other choices are possible? During the first weeks of class, you'll read extensively and write short pieces in many forms, exploring the range of your creative voice. Later, we'll spend more time in workshop mode, learning the skills of constructive critique and revision. You'll become close readers and sounding boards for each other's work, honing your editing skills and applying the same care and rigor to your works in progress. In conference with the teacher, each student will choose a manuscript to expand and refine as a final project.

**206.01**

Mr. Joyce

M

6:30-8:30

CLS

**Introductory Creative Writing**

**Topic for 2019b: *Healing*.** In this section we will pay special attention to writing as a healing art. We will read and write narratives, poems, and memoirs as well as explore hybrid forms, including non-fictional narratives, multimedia, imagetexts, and so on. The course will be of particular interest to—but not restricted to—those interested in medical professions. In writing about how a “physician enjoys a wonderful opportunity actually to witness the words being born,” the American poet and physician William Carlos Williams spoke of how healers “begin to see that the underlying meaning of all that [patients] want to tell us and have always failed to communicate is the poem, the poem which their lives are being lived to realize.” We will try to approach that poem together here.

**Prerequisite(s): open to any student who has taken English 205.**

**209.01**

Mr. Kumar

W

10:30-12:30

CLS

**Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative**

Development of the student's abilities as a writer and reader of narrative, with particular emphasis on the short story.

**Topic for 2019a: *The Breath of Life*** The title comes from a line by writer and editor William Maxwell:

“After forty years, what I came to care about most was not style, but the breath of life.” It is one of my favorite quotes. I think Maxwell is saying that we need not worry too much about well-ordered paragraphs or achieving a distinctive syntactic rhythm—that all we need to catch is something ordinary but vital. I’d like us to devote our energies to the act or the practice of accessing both life and style. Readings will include Vivian Gornick on the difference between the situation and the story; John Berger, John McPhee, and Ira Glass on structure; Svetlana Alexievich, Claudia Rankine, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, and Jonathan Franzen on finding words for living and dying; Janet Malcolm and Ian Jack on reporting about a world of differences; David Foster Wallace and Carolyn Forché on travel writing; and the words delivered in court by a woman raped on Stanford campus—to get to what exactly? Not life simply, or style alone, of course, but to understand what it means to find the right words to challenge the givenness of the world, to make it open to expression and change. Each session will begin with ten minutes of free-writing and will end with a brief discussion of rules of writing. At the end of the course, each student will be expected to have one developed or refined piece of writing (5-10 pp.) that can be submitted for publication.

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English office for the *exact* date of the deadline.**

\*ENGL 209 is no longer a year-long course but is now being offered as a semester-long course for Fall and Spring semester.

**216.01**

Mr. Markus

TR

10:30-11:45

CLS

**Modern Drama: Text and Performance after 1800**

Study of modern dramatic texts and their embodiment both on the page and the stage. Authors, critical and theoretical approaches, dramatic genres, historical coverage, and themes may vary from year to year.

**Topic for 2019a: *20th American Drama: Dysfunctional Families*.** This course explores modern American plays that present debacles in the private sphere and its most widely accepted, codified, and institutionalized social manifestation: the family. As a site of incessant conflicts and negotiations between the individual and the other, and between the intimate and the public, the family offers an ideal framework and subject matter for commentary on a variety of moral and social issues. Through an overview of 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century American drama, this course pays particular attention to the vestiges of the American Dream in a range of dramatic representations of dysfunctional families. As a survey with a special focus, the course may include plays by Edward Albee, Lorraine Hansberry, David Henry Hwang, Stephen Karam, Basil Kreimendahl, Tracy Letts, Taylor Mac, Arthur Miller, Marsha Norman, Eugene O'Neill, Suzan-Lori Parks, Sam Shepard,

Tennessee Williams, and August Wilson. We also read selected theoretical texts about the plays and the role and significance of family in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today. We place a great emphasis on the performative aspects of our discussed plays: we perform selected scenes as well as view and discuss a theater production staged at Vassar or in our larger area during the semester.

### 219.01

Mr. Perez

TR 12:00-1:15 CLS

#### **Queer of Color Critique**

(Same as AFRS 218 and WMST 218) "Queer of Color Critique" is a form of cultural criticism modeled on lessons learned from woman of color feminism, poststructuralism, and materialist and other forms of analysis. Among its main contentions, queer of color critique argues that gay liberation often has been defined too narrowly in terms of legal equality and that queer theory too often has universalized from privileged positions of power. Hence, queer of color critique seeks alternative analyses and politics especially attentive to the interdependence of race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, and nation. How are poverty, immigration, policing and massive incarceration, health care, reproductive rights, and collective bargaining queer issues? Throughout the semester, we evaluate what "queer" means and what kind of work it enables. Is it an identity or an anti-identity? A verb, a noun, or an adjective? A heuristic device, a strategy for political mobilization, or perhaps even a kind of literacy?

### 222.01

Ms. Vestri

MW 10:30-11:45 CLS

#### **Love, Labor, & Loss: Romance and Gender in Early British Literature**

This course introduces students to British poetry, drama, and prose from the middle ages through the eighteenth century—a wide swath of historical territory, indeed. To ground our discussions, we will explore texts that deal with themes of romance, love, courtship, sex, and marriage. From the bawdy farce of Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* to the murderous tragedy of Shakespeare's *Othello*, our attention will focus on both careful close reading—attending to formal nuances of genre and style—as well as ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, religion, and nationality. Canonical authors may include Spenser, Sidney, Donne, Milton, Pope, Dryden, Swift, and Richardson, to be read alongside female writers such as Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

### 227.01

Ms. Dunbar

TR 1:30-2:45 CLS

#### **African American Literature**

##### **Topic for 2019a: The Harlem Renaissance and its Precursors**

(Same as AFRS 227) This course places the Harlem Renaissance in literary historical perspective as it seeks to answer the following questions: In what ways was "The New Negro" new? How did African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance rework earlier literary forms from the sorrow songs to the sermon and the slave narrative? How do the debates that raged during this period over the contours of a black aesthetic trace their origins to the concerns that attended the entry of African Americans into the literary public sphere in the eighteenth century?

### 235.01

Ms. Sweany

MW 1:30-2:45 CLS

#### **Old English**

*Desire you to read old English? Speak plainly.*

Wait, wait, that *is* old English, but it isn't *Old English* (it's Early Modern English, the language of Shakespeare).

*Desirest þu to reden olde englische?*

No, no, that isn't it either. That is also an older English, but it is still not Old English (it's Middle English, close to the dialect of Chaucer's English).

*Biþ þis ealde englisc??*

Yes, *that* is Old English!

In a time when Latin was the language of the learned and the literate, the language of the law and of the prevailing Christian faith, Old English was significant enough (in England) to be used for legal, religious, scientific, and literary texts. Thus, Old English is significant not only in the history of English itself but also in the history of vernacular writing in western Europe. Furthermore, texts recorded in Old English have important, if seldom-acknowledged, effects on the modern world. For example, Thomas Jefferson thought that instruction in Old English should begin in elementary school and that the language had democratic ideals embedded in it—ideas that are only the tip of his disturbingly expansionist and nationalistic agenda for the language. And, in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Old English was the vehicle by which American women scholars advanced academic careers in a period when the academy was dominated by men (although while still reifying existing hierarchies of race and class). Vassar may have been the first women’s college in the United States to offer Old English, making this course a significant Vassar tradition.

In this class we will learn and practice the grammar and vocabulary of this earliest form of English. You will also get to experience the genres of writing in which Old English was used by its speakers and learn about the social values and literary motifs that this corpus preserves. This knowledge will prepare you to read *Beowulf* in its original form, which is the focus of English 236.

**237.01**

Mr. Hill

TR 1:30-2:45 CLS

**Medieval Literature**

This course serves as an introduction to medieval literature, with a focus on Middle English literatures (c. 1066-1550). Students will become familiar with the linguistic and stylistic features of Middle English, and will read a variety of texts from the period. Special topics for the course will vary from year to year; examples of topics include: Arthurian literature, Chaucer, the Chaucerian tradition, women’s writing in the Middle Ages, transnational/comparative medieval literatures (including French and Italian), medieval “autobiography,” the alliterative tradition, *Piers Plowman* and the *Piers* tradition, dream visions, fifteenth century literature and the bridge to the “early modern,” literature and heresy, gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages, and medieval mystical writing. Students will engage throughout with the process of establishing English as a “literary” language; authorial identity; the grounding of English literary tradition; and the role of translation and adaptation in medieval writing.

**Topic for 2019a: Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*** In this course we will spend the semester on the road with Chaucer in a collective reading of his encyclopedic human comedy, *The Canterbury Tales*, sauntering with him through fourteenth-century England. An important part of this leisurely immersion will be sensory and linguistic, as we experience the text in the original Middle English, acquiring as an added benefit facility in English philology. Through close reading, class discussion, and writing we will consider the *Tales* as they provide diverse, intersecting pathways into Medieval critical attitudes toward social and class distinctions, religious and gender antagonisms, town/gown animosities, discourses of desire and sexuality, and conflicts born of a developing urbanism during England’s transformation from a feudal to an early modern society. Besides this “social Chaucer” we will consider the “clerkly Chaucer,” and what the *Tales* tell us about his influential insights into authorship and reading, language and meaning, science and nature, philosophy and ethics, history and collective memory, psychology and the construction of a modern self.

**240.01**

Mr. Markus

TR 3:10-4:25 CLS

**Shakespeare**

Study of some representative comedies, histories, and tragedies.

**Topic for 2019a: *Shakespeare and Gender*** This course offers an introduction to Shakespeare studies through the discussion of seven Shakespeare plays: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*. Situating these plays in the cultural and historical contexts in which they were written and performed, we will be able to appreciate significant differences as well as intriguing continuities between early 17<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century interpretations

and representations regarding such basic concepts and institutions as gender, family, filial and marital duties, marriage, the “private sphere,” and sexuality. Moreover, by examining these plays in production both on the stage and on the screen, we will try to determine their current meanings and cultural significance. To attain this second crucial aim, we will view and discuss a stage production as well as several film adaptations of our plays and organize staged readings of selected scenes.

Not open to students who have taken English 241 and English 242.

### **248.01**

Ms. Gemmill

TR 12:00-1:15 CLS

#### **The Age of Romanticism**

**Topic of 2019a: *The Age of Romanticism: Revolution and Rebellion.*** This course surveys the literature of the Romantic period through the lens of revolution and rebellion, both of which characterize this period in British history on a number of levels. Across the English Channel, French civilians were overthrowing their monarchy; revolutions in science and technology were catapulting Europe into the industrial era; English poets were rebelling against what they perceived to be the antiquated poetic forms of the eighteenth century; and prose writers were producing some of the original human rights manifestos, calling for women’s empowerment and the abolition of the British slave trade. Paying close attention to these historical and political contexts, we will examine how writers of the period mobilized the concept of revolution in their literary works and used it as an impetus for experimentation, on both thematic and formal levels. Surveyed poets include Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Barbauld, Robinson, Byron, Shelley and Keats; fiction writers include Austen, Shelley and Polidori; and prose writers include Burke, De Quincey, Prince and Wollstonecraft.

Themes, topics, genres: The Gothic and the supernatural, Origins of the vampire myth, Literature of addiction, Poetry and dreams, Theories of poetic innovation, Abolitionism, Political and feminist poetry, The Romantic sublime.

### **255.01**

Ms. Zlotnick

MW 1:30-2:45 CLS

#### **Nineteenth-Century British Novels**

The nineteenth century was a preeminent age for novel writing in Great Britain, and in one semester we cannot acquaint ourselves with all the great books, or all the major novelists, of the period. Instead, the aim of this course is to learn how to read a nineteenth-century British novel by familiarizing ourselves with the conventional plots of the period (i.e., the marriage plot, the inheritance plot), its common literary idioms (such as realism, melodrama, and the Gothic) as well as some characteristic forms (the bildungsroman, the fictional autobiography) and central preoccupations (domesticity, industrialism, urbanization, imperialism, social mobility, and class relations). We will also focus on careful reading and writing through short close reading assignments as well as through a few longer critical essays. Finally, this course introduces students to secondary literature, in anticipation of the work carried out in 300-level English courses. Readings vary but will include novels by Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy.

### **256.01**

Mr. Russell

MW 1:30-2:45 CLS

#### **Modern British and Irish Literature**

British and Irish Literature from the first half of the twentieth century. The mix and focus of genres, topics and authors varies depending on the instructor. However, the period in question covers such writers as Joseph Conrad, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Vera Brittain, Samuel Beckett, George Orwell, and Graham Greene.

## II. Intermediate Intensives

### 283.01

Ms. Dunbar

Various Fridays 12-4 INT

#### **Storytelling and the Black Literature Archive**

This intensive is for students interested in Black literature, archival research, and/or creative fiction/non-fiction writing. By the end of the semester, students will be invited to tell an “original” story inspired by digging through the black literary archives. Toward that end, students will gain practical training in undertaking archival research within the “manuscripts, rare books, and papers” division of centers devoted to Black Studies. We will take multiple visits to the Schomburg Center for Research In Black Culture in Harlem (NYC), as well as access various digital archives available for the study of Black literary history. Additionally, we will read Black archive theory to consider the stakes inherent to any archival collection. We will discuss how the archives shape the craft of creating (non-traditional) literary writing. Writing workshops dedicated to the production of dynamic, accessible fiction/non-fiction prose round out this intensive experience.

This is a 1 unit intensive open to 4 students.

### 290 a or b.

#### **Field Work**

INT

Field work is open by special permission of the associate chair, and is usually offered for one-half unit of credit.

Field Work projects are sponsored by individual faculty members in the department. Students interested in Field Work should see page 30 for further details on the requirements.

**Independent Study**

Independent Study is open by special permission of the associate chair. Independent Study is intended to supplement (not duplicate) the regular curricular offerings by defining special projects in reading and writing under the direction of an individual faculty member. **The prerequisite for Independent Study at the 200- or 300-level is 2 units of 200-level work in English.**

Application forms for Independent Study are available in the English department office.

**298 a or b.**

(1/2 Unit)

Open by permission of the associate chair. 1 unit of credit given only in exceptional cases.

**399 a or b.**

(1/2 Unit)

**Senior Independent Work**

Open by permission of the associate chair. 1 unit of credit given only in exceptional cases.

### III. Advanced Courses

#### 305.01

Mr. Means

T 3:10-6:10 CLS

#### Senior Creative Writing Seminar

Advanced study and practice of various forms of prose and poetry. This is a year-long course open to students from all majors. *Special Permission*.

**Writing samples are due before pre-registration. Check with the English office for the exact date of the deadline.**

#### 329.01

Ms. Graham

T 10:30-12:30 CLS

#### American Literary Realism

(Same as AMST 329) Advanced study of literary realism and naturalism focusing on the historical bent of the great American novel between 1870 and 1910, the first period in American literature to be called modern. What constitutes reality in fiction? How is verisimilitude in characterization and context achieved? What is the relationship of realism to other literary traditions? Authors may include Henry James, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Charles Chesnutt, Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, Thorstein Veblen, Theodore Dreiser, and Willa Cather.

**Topic for 2019a: *American Literary Realism and Naturalism: A Reading of Major American Novels Written Primarily Between 1870 and 1910.*** After the Civil War, the U.S. experienced increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth of industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population due to immigration, and a rise in middle-class affluence, which provided a fertile literary environment for writers interested in explaining these rapid shifts in culture. A grand explanatory narrative directs the plot and action of these novels. Authorial intentions give way to a set of laws or principles derived from the dominant ideologies that supported America's maturation into a super-power: Social Darwinism, the Gospel of Efficiency (new Protestant work ethic), or Imperialism (new Manifest Destiny). Surprisingly, the myth of American 'progress' is tested and found wanting in almost every book on the syllabus. In seeking scientific objectivity, writers plied a representational strategy focused on 'hard facts' and minute detail, which as often as not found the protagonist at odds with his or her environment. Though post-war, the terrain we cover is embattled: race riots, strikes, downward economic mobility, criminality, and homelessness. Shut out of the canon by reason of changing fashions in literary tastes, the less familiar authors on the syllabus belong to the emerging protest novel. Authors will include: Henry James, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Charles Chesnutt, Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, Thorstein Veblen, Theodore Dreiser, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison.

#### 342.01

Ms. Dunn

W 1:00-3:00 CLS

#### Studies in Shakespeare

Advanced study of Shakespeare's work and its cultural significance in various contexts from his time to today.

**Topic for 2019a: *After Shakespeare: The Poetics and Politics of Adaptation.*** Adaptation is one of the primary processes through which the cultural meanings of texts migrate and change. This course explores the theory and practice of Shakespearean adaptation in literature, theatre, film, comics, and popular culture. We'll address such issues as authenticity and authority, representations of difference, postcolonial appropriation, feminist revision, and cross-cultural translation. We will also reflect critically on our own positions as contemporary readers, viewers, and consumers of Shakespeare. Plays include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*. Each seminar member will complete an original research or creative project. Some prior study of Shakespeare is recommended.

**355.01**

Ms. Kane

T 3:10-5:10 CLS

**Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Poetry**

The course focuses on Anglophone verse. Our intensive examination of various formal "modernisms" will include attention to contexts such as internationalism, emigration, visual art, anthropology, eugenics, politics, technology, and literary celebrity. Among the poets we'll study are Yeats, Owen, H. D., Oppen and Moore; Eliot, Frost, McKay, Williams, Stevens, and Bishop. Later in the semester we will explore recent and contemporary work by poets such as June Jordan, Claudia Rankine, Medbh McGuckian, Anne Carson and Tina Chang. Assignments will include opportunities for procedural and archival activities, such as recital, examination of material practices, imitation of forms, and redaction.

**357.01**

Mr. Chang

T 7:00-9:00 CLS

**Lost In Translation: Some Other Modern Novels**

**translate** (verb): early 14c., "to remove from one place to another," also "to turn from one language to another," from Old French *translater* and directly from Latin *translatus* "carried over," serving as past participle of *transferre* "to bring over, carry over" (see transfer), from *trans* "across, beyond" (see trans-) + *lātus* "borne, carried"

We will read some great modern novels (and short stories) that are (as far as I'm aware) rarely taught at Vassar: Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City*, Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*, Anna Seghers's *Transit*, Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Adolfo Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, some short fiction by Gertrude Stein, Mary Butts, Augusto Monterosso, Robert Walser, Lydia Davis, and others. This selection seeks to ramify our understanding of what modernity meant for diverse human bodies in and around the world. Several of these texts we will read in English translation. Translation "itself" – as praxis, ethical task, stance in being, and means of travel – will frame and dislocate our inquiry.

**380.01**

Mr. Simpson

M 3:10-6:10 CLS

**English Seminar** (Same as AFRS 380)

**Topic for 2019a: *Then Whose Negro Are You? On the Art and Politics of James Baldwin.*** When interviewers sought out some sense of James Baldwin's ambition, the artist often responded, "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." The forces constellated around Baldwin's career made this hardly a simple declaration. The issue of becoming a writer was an arduous task in itself, so much so that Baldwin felt he had to leave the United States, particularly his adored Harlem, to do so. Getting in the way of his artistry was the nation's troubled negotiation with its own soul: the US was trying to figure out what it wanted to be—an apartheid state? A nuclear dreadnought? A den of prudish homophobes? An imperial power? A beloved community? A city on the Hill? This course looks at all things Baldwin, or at least as many things as we can cover a four moth period. It certainly indulges his greatest hits—his essays, *Notes of A Native Son*; his novel, *Giovanni's Room*; his play, *Blues for Mr. Charlie's*—and several other writings both published and unpublished. It does so with an eye toward understanding Baldwin's circulation as a celebrated author and a public intellectual both in the mid-twentieth century and the present day.

**381.01**

Mr. Joyce

R

6:30-8:30

CLS

**English Seminar**

**Topic for 2019a:** *Fanny Howe*. "I traveled to the page where scripture meets fiction./The paper slept but the night in me woke up," begins Fanny Howe's poem, "A Hymn." In this seminar we travel through the work of this American poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, and activist, the author of more than 40 books of poetry and prose, doing so not only in hopes of waking the night in us, but also exploring what Howe calls "bewilderment as a way of entering the day as much as the work. Bewilderment as a poetics and an ethics."

**382.01**

Mr. Russell

T

3:10-6:10

CLS

**English Seminar**

**Topic for 2019a:** *James Joyce's Ulysses*.

A close reading of *Ulysses*.

### III. Advanced Intensives

#### Senior Year Requirements

The College requires a special exercise to distinguish the work of the senior year in one's major. In the English department, that requirement takes the form of English 300, Senior Tutorial, or enrolling in at least one 300-level course in the senior year.

**Description of English 300:** All senior English majors should consider taking this intensive. The tutorial should reflect and extend the intellectual interests you have developed in your earlier course work. The tutorial itself involves working with an individual faculty member to produce a long paper (approximately 10,000 words or 40 pages). The project may consist of a sustained critical essay or a series of linked essays, or one of several alternatives, such as primary research in the Special Collections department of the Library, a piece of translation, a work of dramaturgy, a work of fiction, a collection of poems, or a scholarly edition of a particular work or group of works.

#### 300 a or b

##### Senior Tutorial

INT

Preparation of a long essay (40 pages) or other independently designed critical project. Each essay is directed by an individual member of the department. *Special Permission.*

#### 388.01

Ms. Graham

T

3:10-5:10

INT

##### True Crime and the American Novel

This intensive is open to the general student body as well as students enrolled in ENGL 329, American Literary Realism, where the relationship between journalism and literature is a constant feature. Most of the writers on the syllabus were either journalists before they became novelists, or wrote for or edited magazines throughout their lives. Literary naturalism, a sub-genre of realism, eschews literary devices and stylistic preciosity, instead describing characters and events in the direct, unembellished prose of the newspaper account. From Charles Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition* (inspired by the Wilmington, NC race riot of 1898) to Frank Norris's *Mctague* (inspired by the murder of a charwoman) to Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* (inspired by Charles Yerkes's financial chicanery) to Richard Wright's *Native Son* (inspired by newspaper accounts of a murder) the American novel has relied on 'real events' to generate ideas for character and plots. Students may conduct research into the events inspiring these and other novels for the course and present their findings to the group enrolled in the intensive). In addition, students may choose a crime from any period or region (be it *Lizzy Borden's* alleged murder of her parents, Jack the Ripper's murders, serial killers, political assassinations, the murder of Emmett Till) and locate and compare multiple representations of the event (whether in novels, plays, movies, comics, newspapers, trials, forensic science). In most instances, representations highlight historical, class, and racial tensions (or obliviousness) over the subject and even who has a right to speak for the victim. (The recent controversy over the Whitney museum's exhibition of Dana Schutz's depiction of the open casket funeral of Emmett Till is a good example. Schutz is a white artist and her detractors objected to her appropriation of an iconic black figure and potentially profiting from her work.) Students are not limited to nineteenth century crimes or media for their final projects. The recent Kavanaugh hearings raise questions about the extrapolation of the principle that one is innocent until proven guilty beyond the courtroom. What should be the status of hearsay or personal testimony in determining 'the truth' of allegations?

While enrollment in English 329 is a plus, it is not required.

Six-week intensive offered second half of the semester. This is a .5 unit intensive open to 8 students.

## **Notice to Majors**

**Students may receive credit toward the major for other courses offered in the programs (when taught or team-taught by members of the department) upon the approval of the curriculum committee. Please consult with the chair if you have questions about a particular course.**

**Courses That Fulfill English Major Requirements  
For Academic Year 2019-2020**

**pre-1800, pre-1900, Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality**

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Requirement Fulfilled</u>
216 Modern Drama: Text/Performance	
218 Literature, Gender, and Sexuality	Race, Ethn.
219 Queer of Color Critique	Race, Ethn.
222 Early British Literature	pre-1800
226 American Literature 1865-1925	Race, Ethn.
227 Harlem Renaissance/Precursors	Race, Ethn.
228 African American Literature	Race, Ethn.
235 Old English	pre-1800
236 <i>Beowulf</i>	pre-1800
237 Medieval Literature	pre-1800
240 Shakespeare	pre-1800
247 Eighteenth Century British Novels	pre-1800
248 The Age of Romanticism	pre-1900
255 Nineteenth-Century British Novels	pre-1900
256 Modern British and Irish Literatures	
257 The Novel/English after 1945	
287 Reviewing Shakespeare	Race, Ethn., pre-1900
326 Racial Melodrama	Race, Ethn.
329 American Literary Realism	Race, Ethn.
340 Studies in Medieval Literature	pre-1800
341 Studies in the Renaissance	
342 Studies in Shakespeare	pre-1800
345 Milton	pre-1800
350 Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Literature	pre-1800
351 Studies in Nineteenth-Century British Literature	pre-1900
352 Romantic Poets	
355 Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Poets	
357 Studies Twentieth Century Literature	
365 Selected Author: Virginia Woolf	
380 Then Whose Negro Are You?	Race, Ethn.
381 Fanny Howe	
382 James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i>	

\*As course topics change, so do the requirements they fulfill. Therefore, this list is only applicable for the 2019-2020 academic year.

## Correlate Sequences in English

The curriculum in English presents a broad array of courses representing a variety of subjects—literatures from different periods of history and geographical locations, genres, and approaches or methods of study. Given the scope of the discipline, the correlate sequences we offer allow students to tailor their programs to individual interests within the discipline while maintaining a broader understanding of the contexts surrounding that area of focus.

Here are the correlate areas:

1. Race and Ethnicity
2. Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies
3. Poetry and Poetics
4. Literary Forms
5. British Literary History
6. American Literary History
7. Creative Writing

These correlates are designed to articulate coherent plans of study that build from a foundation in introductory and intermediate courses to great depth and complexity in advanced courses. Students are advised, then, to try to take the courses in sequence, beginning with either English 101 or 170 (or both), moving on to 200-level courses, and concluding with 300-level seminars. Each sequence offers a number of courses from which the students must elect six to complete the sequence.

The correlate sequences are defined, in part, to suggest intellectual compatibilities between literature and other disciplines. Students majoring in Africana Studies or Women's Studies, for example, will find that the correlate in "Race and Ethnicity" supplements and extends their work in the major. At the same time, because these correlates articulate issues of central interest within the discipline, English majors will discover in them useful guides for developing a sequenced and coherent plan of courses to fulfill the requirements in the major.

Since many of the courses in the English Department are topics courses that change from year to year, we cannot list all the courses that, in any given year, may be applied to correlate sequences. If you wish a special topics course to count towards one of the correlate sequences, you should check with the associate chair to make sure that course is appropriate for the correlate sequence you are pursuing.

### 1. Race and Ethnicity

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following: English 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 251, 252, 253\*, 262, 286
- At least one of the following: English 319, 326, JWS 350, 370

### 2. Theory, Criticism and Transnational Studies

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least one of the following: English 217, 317
- At least one of the following: English 218, 252, 256, 257, 262
- At least one of the following: English 320, 331, 362, 370

### 3. Poetry and Poetics

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following: English 211, 222, 236, 237, 248, \*249
- At least two of the following: English 304, 315, 345, 352, 355

#### **4. Literary Forms**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two of the following:
- English 207, 209, 211, 215, 216, 217, 240, 241-242, 247, 255, 256, 257, 262
- At least two of the following: English 304, 315, 317, 325, 326, 329, 342, 345, 352, 355, 362

#### **5. British Literary History**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170, 222
- At least two of the following:
- English 215, 235, 236, 237, 240, 241-242, 245, 247, 248, 249, 255, 256, 262
- At least one of the following: English 340, 341, 342, 345, 350, 351, 352

#### **6. American Literary History**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least one of the following: English 225, 226
- At least one of the following: English 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 251, \*252, 253
- At least two of the following: English 326, 328, 329, 330, 331

#### **7. Creative Writing**

- At least one of the following: English 101, 170
- At least two literary courses in the genre or genres of focus
- At least three of the following: 203, 205, 206, 207, 209, 211, 304, 305-306
- At least one course in the correlate must be taken at the 300 level

\* Courses that may be counted when the topic is appropriate.

## The Faculty

The following list of the English department faculty suggests its range and vitality, and it reveals hidden talents and interests. Members of the department have described themselves in terms of their intellectual interests—the subjects they study and teach and the areas in which they have directed tutorials and guided independent studies. Please consult this list when you are selecting an advisor, a tutor, or looking for a faculty member to sponsor Independent Study or Field Work.

**\*Mark C. Amodio:** Old and Middle English poetry and prose; oral theory; history of the English language; literary theory; linguistics; Old Norse language and literature; Renaissance drama and poetry; Milton, Orwell; film and literature.

**\*Peter Antelyes:** American literature, Jewish Studies, comics and graphics novels, film, and music.

**Heesok Chang:** Twentieth-century British and Irish literature; literary modernism; critical theory; rhetoric; media and visual studies.

**\*Robert DeMaria, Jr.:** Milton; Seventeenth-century literature; Eighteenth-century literature; history of media; history of language; lexicography; biography.

**Eve Dunbar:** Nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American literature; Women writers of color; Science-fiction cinema.

**Leslie Dunn:** Early modern literature, including Shakespeare and women writers; feminist literary and cultural studies; literature and music; literature and medicine; and disability studies.

**Katie Gemmill:** Eighteenth-century literature and Romanticism; the theory and history of the novel; book history and textual studies; queer critical approaches and the history of sexuality.

**Wendy Graham:** American Literature; American Culture, emphasizing issues of gender and sexual nonconformity as well as the relationship between fiction and the emerging social sciences (psychology, anthropology, museology, sociology, biophysics); Literary Decadence, Pre-Raphaelitism, and the notion of “sister arts”; literary and critical theory; African-American literature.

**\*Hua Hsu:** Transpacific/Asian American literature; 20th Century American literature and culture; literary transnationalism; philosophies of race and ethnicity; American historical fiction; protest literature; autobiography and genre; film and music criticism.

**Michael Joyce:** Writing in all its forms as a contemplative, hybrid, transgressive, healing, and translative art including autofictions, multimedia, imagetexts, prose|poems, and so on.

**Jean Kane:** Post-colonial literatures; modern and contemporary British literature; imperial discourse; women’s studies; creative writing.

**\*Paul Kane:** American and British literature; poetry; literature and the environment; Australian and other post-colonial literatures; literary theory and criticism.

**Amitava Kumar:** Reportage; essay-form, both in prose and film; literatures describing the global movement of goods and people; memory-work.

**M Mark:** Twentieth-century literature; contemporary literature; postcolonial literature; modern South Asian literature; modern Irish literature; literary modernism; drama; literature and film. Creative writing: fiction and literary nonfiction.

**Zoltán Márkus:** Early modern literature, especially drama; Shakespeare studies; European drama; cultural, literary, and performance theory.

**Molly McGlennen:** Native American literature, Native American Women and Feminisms, Native American Urban Experience, Native American literary theory, Ojibwe literature and identity, Contemporary Ethnic poetry, Poetry writing.

**David Means:** Creative writing; fiction and poetry; modern fiction.

**Hiram Perez:** Immigration and Diaspora, Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Literature, African American Literature, Asian American Literature, Feminism, Queer Studies, Film, Popular Culture, Psychoanalysis.

**Paul Russell:** Twentieth and Twenty-first century prose fiction, especially Joyce, Woolf and Nabokov; Dickens; Queer Studies; Mormons.

\* **Ralph Sassone:** Creative writing; twentieth-century literature; contemporary fiction and literary nonfiction.

**Erin E. Sweany:** Old and Middle English languages and literatures; philology; history of medicine; health/medical humanities; posthumanist, New Materialist, and feminist approaches to language and literature study.

**Tyrone Simpson, II:** Urban literature, cities and ghettoization, autobiography, critical theory, cultures of US imperialism.

**Talia Vestri:** British Romanticism; eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; poetry and poetics; Victorian novels; history of marriage and the marriage plot; kinship and family studies; queer theory; film studies.

**Susan Zlotnick:** Victorian studies; gender studies; the novel; working-class literature; the intersections of history and literature; independent projects welcome.

\*On leave in Fall '19.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Area Requirements

**Does English 226 (American Literature, 1865-1925) count as a pre-1900 course?**

No. Although the course covers material from the latter half of the nineteenth century, it deals substantially with literary modernism. English 225 (American Literature, Origins to pre-1900) does satisfy the pre-1900 requirement.

**Can area requirements be covered by courses taken JYA or during summer session?**

Yes, with approval from the associate chair. In order to receive approval, make an appointment with the associate chair; bring with you a course description from the college or university catalogue and a copy of the syllabus.

### Credit Questions

**I received an AP credit in English. Does this count towards my English major?**

No. Your AP English credit does not count as 1 of the 11.5 credits you need to complete the English major. However, *it does count towards your total college credits* (1 of 32 needed to graduate).

**My English JYA credits appear in my transcript as ungraded work. Will they count towards the major, even though the departmental requirements state that 10 of the 11.5 required units must be graded units?**

Yes. As long as your JYA credits are approved English credits, they will count towards your English major.

**What about English credits taken over the summer at another institution? Do they also transfer as ungraded work; do they count towards my major?**

Yes. But this work must be pre-approved by the associate chair of the department. In order to get approval make an appointment to see the associate chair; be sure to bring the catalogue course description and a copy of the syllabus.

**Can any of the English credits I have earned at other schools, either JYA or during summer session, count as a 300-level credit?**

Generally speaking, no. However, the associate chair will take into consideration certain cases where the student can demonstrate that the course in question and the work produced for it are comparable to that of a 300-level English class at Vassar.

**Can a Vassar course I have taken outside of the English department count towards my major?**

Yes, under the following circumstances:

You can count any course that has been cross-listed with the English department or if it has been approved by the associate chair to count as an English credit. The quickest way to find out if such a course will count towards your major is to ask the instructor, since she or he is responsible for petitioning the department for such approval.

**Before declaring my English major, I NRO'd an English course. I did well in the class and received a letter grade for it on my transcript. Can this course count towards the major?**

Unfortunately, no. Even if you received an "A" for the course, the non-recording option counts towards the quota of your allowable nongraded units. Your transcript may show a letter grade for the course, but our records will indicate it was elected as NRO.

## **Independent Study and Field Work**

### **How do I apply for English 298 (Independent Study), 399 (Senior Independent Study), or 290 (Field Work)?**

Permission to elect Independent Study and Field Work is granted by the associate chair, but you first must find a faculty sponsor. If you wish to do 298, 399, or 290 and you don't know who would be an appropriate sponsor, consult the associate chair first. Occasionally, a request for Independent Study or Field Work requires permission of the chair after consultation with the associate chair.

### **What kinds of Field Work will the department sponsor to oversee?**

The project must fall clearly within the scope of our concerns as an English Department. Projects involving a student's work in television, radio, or advertising, for example, are best referred to either the American Culture Program or the Department of Sociology (which offer courses in those fields).

You are required to submit a written proposal. The proposal should address the relevance of the project to your work as an English major (or work in English courses) as well as outline clearly and specifically your duties on the job.

### **Is there a Creative Writing Program at Vassar?**

While there is not a separate program for creative writing within the Vassar English Department, we offer an array of creative writing courses. Students should begin with English 205: Introductory Creative Writing, which may be taken in either A or B semester. This course serves as an introduction to the writing of both fiction and poetry and is a prerequisite for English 206, which is also usually offered in both A and B semesters and, open to students who have taken 205. One section of 206 may be designated as a poetry section for those students who wish to work exclusively in that form.

The department also offers English 209, Advanced Creative Writing: Narrative, and English 211, Advanced Creative Writing: Verse, that are open to both majors and non-majors. Students who wish to be considered for these courses must submit a writing portfolio prior to the beginning of pre-registration; please check with the English office for the exact due date. A portfolio should consist of 15 to 20 pages of fiction or 6 to 8 poems.

Creative writing courses are not open to first-year students in the Fall semester.

A writing portfolio is also required admission to the following creative writing courses: 203, 209, 211, 304, and 305-306. Please check with the English office for the exact due date. English 305-306 is open only to seniors.

Independent study in creative writing is also available for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, subject to the ordinary rules for independent study in the English department, and English majors may elect to undertake a creative thesis.

All of our creative writing courses include study of established authors as well as in-class consideration of student work.

Vassar sends many graduates on to MFA Programs in Creative Writing. Recent graduates have studied at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Columbia, NYU, University of Montana, University of Massachusetts, Washington University, University of Wisconsin, University of Texas, Brooklyn College, and University of Arkansas. Notable writers who have attended Vassar include Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, Muriel Rukeyser, Mary Oliver, Jane Smiley, Erica Funkhauser, Elizabeth Spires, Carole Maso, Keith Scribner, Curtis Sittenfeld, Adam Ross, Amber Dermont, Jesse Ball, Aimee Friedmann, Miranda Beverly-Whitmore, Joe Hill, and Owen King.

## **Planning Your Senior Year**

Students should begin planning their senior year well in advance. As a part of this process, there are a number of questions you should ask yourself. For example: How do my various courses connect with each other? What is my trajectory through the major and how might the senior year serve as a capstone for it? Do I want to write a thesis? If so, what kind of preparation do I need? Do I want to apply for the one-semester Creative Writing Seminar or the year-long Senior Creative Writing Seminar? If so, what preparation do I need? Are there ways in which my interests outside of the department connect to my work in my major? The department encourages English majors to think imaginatively about these and similar questions and to seek advice from their major advisers as well as their course instructors.

If you decide to enroll in English 300 and write a critical or creative thesis, you should make sure that you have adequately prepared yourself for undertaking the project. Take coursework in your chosen field before you write the thesis. Consider how your JYA experience, or courses taken in other departments might support/anticipate the work you want to do on your thesis. In the semester before you write the thesis, talk to both your major and thesis advisor about the kind of work you might be able to undertake independently over the summer or during winter break.

If you choose, in lieu of English 300 you can enroll in a 300-level seminar during your senior year. While the department hopes that students will sample the rich diversity of its offerings, the department also strongly encourages students to work up from the 200- level to the 300-level in at least one field.

Students wishing to apply for any of the senior writing courses should prepare themselves by taking the writing courses offered at the 200-level.

## English 300: The Thesis

### **A term deadlines:**

All students writing a critical senior thesis during a-term must meet two departmental deadlines: the first for a working title, due **September 25, 2019**, and the second for the final draft of the thesis, due **December 18, 2019**.

Within the first three weeks of the term in which you are writing the thesis, but no later than **September 25, 2019**, you must submit to the department office a typed sheet of paper with the following information: your name, your email, your thesis advisor, and the working title of your thesis.

Students and their individual advisors are responsible for determining interim deadlines for the drafting of the thesis. Some advisors ask that you submit a few pages each week; others may request that you submit completed chapters or sections during the semester. Whatever you do, be sure to have a discussion with your advisor early in the thesis process about interim deadlines so that you know what your thesis advisor expects.

### **B term deadlines:**

All students writing a critical senior thesis during b-term must meet two departmental deadlines: the first for a working title, due **February 12, 2020**, and the second for the final draft of the thesis, due **May 6, 2020**.

Within the first three weeks of the term in which you are writing the thesis, but no later than **February 12, 2020**, you must submit to the department office a typed sheet of paper with the following information: your name, your email, your thesis advisor, and the working title of your thesis.

Students and their individual advisors are responsible for determining interim deadlines for the drafting of the thesis. Some advisors ask that you submit a few pages each week; others may request that you submit completed chapters or sections during the semester. Whatever you do, be sure to have a discussion with your advisor early in the thesis process about interim deadlines so that you know what your thesis advisor expects.

## **Creative Work in the Senior Year**

### **What exactly is the Senior Creative Writing Seminar (English 305-06)?**

The Creative Writing Seminar is a course in reading and writing like all other courses in the department; it is not solely a “writing workshop.” Reading is drawn for the most part from the twentieth century to provide examples of various types of writing: fiction, poetry, and nonfiction outside of literary criticism. Class time is divided between discussion of this reading and discussion of student writing.

### **Who can take the Senior Creative Writing Seminar and how can I apply?**

This course is open only to seniors from all majors. To be considered for admission to English 305-306, you need to submit two copies of samples of your writing; please check with the English office for the exact date. Try to submit samples of the kind of writing that you think you may want to concentrate on in your senior project. However it is more important that you submit writing that you feel best shows your abilities than to predict what you will write in this year-long course. If you are interested in writing fiction, you should submit one or two completed stories; if poetry, a number of poems; if literary nonfiction, an extended prose piece, and so on. You may also wish to submit a variety of pieces (poetry and prose). You should not submit traditional critical essays (papers), although papers that veer toward literary nonfiction are a possibility. Feel free to use samples of writing you have done for other courses; that is, you need not write something new for this process. The names of students selected for English 305-306 will be posted outside the English Office. Enrollment is limited to twelve students.

### **What is the Creative Writing Seminar?**

The Creative Writing Seminar is a one-term course open to juniors and seniors from all majors. To be considered for admission, you need to submit samples before pre-registration.

### **What other creative writing courses are open to seniors?**

All the 200-level writing courses are open to seniors. Seniors may also elect to write a creative thesis (English 300).

## **Rumors and Queries**

### **Do professors in the department keep secret grade books?**

Some do and some don't. But even if a professor keeps a private entry of grades for papers, exams, oral reports, participation, and so forth, it functions more as a memory aid than an official record. Since your final grade will be determined by your performance over the course of the semester—taking into account factors like effort and improvement—the professor's written comments on papers will provide an index of how you are doing.

### **Why don't professors in the English department put grades on papers?**

This long-standing practice in the English department is based on the theory that an English course is a conversation. The conversation takes place in class among students and teachers; it takes place in conferences and e-mail; and it takes place in the dialogue between a student's paper and a teacher's response. The placement of a grade on the paper puts an end to this part of the conversation. A student paper is not an exam but is rather an opportunity for the student to speak on a particular subject. The instructor's response is not a grade, but it is an informed response to what the student has said.

### **Why doesn't the department offer courses on literature in translation?**

Because we are an English department, not a comparative literature department, foreign literatures in translation fall outside of our field.

### **Whom should one ask about graduate study in English?**

The chair of the department and the associate chair are available by appointment to discuss graduate school plans and applications for post-graduate grants.

## Guidelines for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

Every academic year, members of the English department write hundreds of letters of recommendation for students and former students. This is, of course, a part of their work as teachers and mentors, and students should not be shy about asking for recommendations. However, faculty members take considerable time on the task; write in detail and make every effort to present a candidate in the best possible light. They write different letters, of course, for each individual, and they write letters designed for a variety of applications, including graduate school, law school, medical school, summer fellowships, traveling fellowships, study abroad programs, prizes, employment prospects, and internships. Students, therefore, should do what they can to give faculty the time and information needed to write successfully on their behalf. Here are some guidelines, adapted from those issued to undergraduates at Harvard:

- \* Give at least three, preferably four or more, weeks notice for any request. Even if you know that the instructor has a letter already on file, do not assume that it can be changed and quickly printed. Letters may need significant revision best to fit a particular purpose.
- \* Include a written statement of the due date and whether it is a postmark or a receipt date.
- \* Provide a written description of the purpose of the letter and/or a copy of instructions intended for the person writing. If there are multiple letters for different purposes, provide a description for each (e.g., graduate school, law school, traveling fellowship).
- \* Make sure to provide the instructor with your statement of purpose or letter of intent for each application. This statement is crucial to the success of your application, and it is essential for your instructor to read it when writing on your behalf. If your instructor is willing to work with you on the statement, you should certainly take advantage of the opportunity.
- \* Offer to provide copies of class papers and of any other papers directly relevant.
- \* Fill out any forms as completely as you can. Do not expect the person writing for you to fill out any information that you yourself know.
- \* Offer to provide a copy of your transcript (an unofficial one is fine) and a CV.
- \* Offer to have an individual conference about the reasons for your application(s). At the very least, explain these reasons either by including a written statement or by including a draft of your project or statement of purpose submitted with your application.
- \* Include fully addressed envelopes for each letter and affix sufficient postage.
- \* Make certain to fill out any waiver request, either yes or no. This is easily missed.
- \* Do not email requests for letters along with attachments. Print out everything and give or send all materials to the person whom you are asking to write for you. In other words, don't expect the person writing for you to print out your work or to visit a web site (unless strictly required by the party receiving the letter).
- \* Never assume that a letter can be faxed or e-mailed at the last minute. This puts unacceptable constraints on the person writing on your behalf.