

USC Dornsife  
*Department of English*

# SPRING 2025

## GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

**ENGL-508**

# History, Theories and Practice of Cultural Studies

## *Cultural Studies in Television*

**Kessler, Sarah**

TH | 10:00-1:50 PM

SECTION: 32778

One might argue that no amount of “prestige” programming can undo popular perceptions of television as a debased cultural medium. One might also argue that no amount of brilliant research and writing in cultural studies can undo scholarly perceptions of the field as a debased academic arena. In this graduate seminar on cultural studies in television, we will neither claim TV for the fantasy of high culture nor dismiss it as “trash.” (Obviously.) We will have no patience, either, for debates on the validity of cultural studies as an area of inquiry. Rather, we will devote ourselves to examining the always already relevant mass medium of television through the theoretical frameworks cultural studies—and its attention to the intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and disability—provides for us.

Make no mistake! We will critique these theoretical frameworks! And we will critique TV down to its unabashedly capitalist foundations! But we will do this while remaining attentive to the highly classed, racialized, and gendered dynamics of both the popular and scholarly discourses that surround television and its positioning as an object of study. Our goal is to come out of the seminar with deeper knowledge of TV’s material and discursive histories, a workable genealogy of television studies (including a clear sense of its positioning within/without the field of cultural studies), and a toolkit for analyzing television beyond representation alone.

Expect to read the work of: Racquel Gates, Stuart Hall, Hunter Hargraves, Michele Hilmes, Amanda Lotz, Alfred Martin, Tania Modleski, Brandy Monk-Payton, Margaret Morse, Susan Murray, Laurie Ouellette, Rebecca Wanzo, Kristen Warner, Raymond Williams, Kristal Brent Zook, and more. Expect to watch a lot of TV.

Image by Frank Dicksee, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1884.

**ENGL-520**

# Renaissance English Literatures and Cultures

## *Making Race*

**Smith, Ian**

M | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32755

The developments in reading Renaissance English texts and cultures over recent decades have produced an increasingly richer alternative to the old humanism. The course examines texts, mostly drama, paying special attention to the race-making that was such an important part of early modern culture and practice.

**ENGL-563**

# Poetry and Prose into Drama

\* *Crosslisted with THTR-501.*

W | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 63219

Plays for the stage shall be written using public-domain poetry and prose as inspiration and source material, complemented with exploring poetry, prose, and varied dramas as context for the student writer. Students should be well-versed in literature, and have written in one or more genres.





# 19th Century American Literatures and Cultures

*Transnationalism and 19th Century U.S. Nationalism*

Rowe, John

W | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 32788

This seminar looks at canonical and non-canonical U.S. literature and culture as a response to U.S. imperialism in the period of nation-building. The paradox that U.S. nationalism is deeply transnational is explained simply by the fact that the United States legitimated itself as a nation by immediately turning to a wide variety of colonial projects inside North America and on a global scale that by the end of the century, marked by the Spanish-American and the Philippine-American wars, had been systemized into what we term “imperialism.”

The seminar will provide excellent coverage of the main nineteenth-century literary classics – selections from Emerson, Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Whitman’s poetry (selected), and Henry James’s *Daisy Miller* – all of which help support popular notions of U.S. nationalism. We will also consider lesser known works that will transform our understanding of these canonical authors and texts – Martin Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America*, Frederick Douglass’ *The Heroic Slave*, Sarah Winnemucca’s *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, and an anthology of writings about/by Chinese Americans in the period of the “Exclusion Laws” (1869-1943), all of which challenge the existing boundaries of U.S. nationalism in the period.

Requirements: each seminar participant will lead the discussion in one part of a seminar, submit a 3-5 pp. proposal for a seminar essay, deliver a brief progress report on the seminar essay, and complete a seminar essay (20-25 pp.).

Image by Gideon Jacques Denny, *Brigantine William G. Irwin off Diamond Head*, 1890.

# Practicum in Teaching English and Narrative Studies

Freeman, Christopher

M | 2:00-3:20 PM

SECTION: 32793

English 593 is a course designed to help advanced PhD candidates with their teaching and with their shift from graduate school to first job. We will do some reading and discussions around those issues, but we will spend more time talking about your teaching and your work as a scholar. You’ll observe members of the English department, watching them teach from your point of view as a TEACHER, rather than as a student. The course will be a workshop on the profession; we will have guest speakers who will also share their wisdom. The class will meet seven or eight times during the semester. You’ll keep a journal based on your teaching, our sessions, your reading, etc.

*Note: this course will be conducted entirely on Zoom.*



# Special Topics

## *Theories of Diaspora*

**Collins, Corrine**

T | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32811

This class examines theories and tropes of diaspora through Caribbean literature and scholarship. The Caribbean is a multicultural, multiracial, transnational, and polyglot space, with overlapping diasporas, distinct racial formations, and specific histories of colonialism, enslavement, indentured servitude and migration. As such, the Caribbean is a both a generative and fraught space through which to discuss diaspora theory and diaspora tropes. Diaspora is largely understood as the dispersal of a group of people who maintain connections and cultural retentions to a homeland, and we will examine not only diaspora as a theoretical concept, but also its usefulness in thinking about and through histories of dislocation, migration, exile, capture, enslavement, and displacement.

Throughout this class we will also consider the efficacies of diaspora theory's critique of the nation, in addition to the similarities, differences, and intersections between diaspora and other theoretical approaches such as the transnational, postcolonial, and hemispheric. We will pay particular attention to ways that comparative approaches to race, culture and diaspora work within Caribbean contexts, and question what diaspora means for kinship, personhood, citizenship, and culture.

In addition to theoretical contributions by Alexander Weheliye, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Sara Ahmed, Lorgia García Peña, and Lisa Lowe, we will examine novels by Edwidge Danticat, Shani Mootoo, Julia Alvarez, David Dabydeen, and Nelly Rosario.

Image by Esteban Chartrand, *Una tarde en Puentes-Grandes*, 1881.

# Theory and Criticism

## *Criticism Today*

**Leal, Jonathan**

T | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 32810

To echo a famous question posed by poet-critic Matthew Arnold over one hundred fifty years ago: what 'is' the function of criticism at the present time? Is it to reveal? To sift? To champion or dismantle? What do we hope for when reading criticism, and what do we strive for when writing it? In what specific ways do creative and critical modes of writing converge? Diverge? Today, what critical styles and methods are illuminating our world(s)? For whom? Why? What pressures do institutions like universities, legacy publications, corporations, and more exert on working critics, and how do those pressures shape writers' questions, methods, styles, and senses of expertise? How are contemporary technologies and media platforms shaping critical activity? And in and beyond academia: how are writers and readers exploring relationships between criticism, theory, and lived experience? This course will offer graduate students opportunities to consider and expand these questions while pushing their critical and creative crafts. Readings will vary widely in genre and style and include selections by Barbara Christian, Cherríe Moraga, Karen Tongson, Merve Emre, Leslie Jamison, Carina del Valle Schorske, Melissa Febos, Joan Didion, Lucy Sante, Hua Hsu, Simon Wu, Hanif Abdurraqib, Walton Muyumba, Jonathan Kramnick, John Guillory, and more.





**ENGL-620**

# Literature and Interdisciplinary Studies

*Writer & Composer*

**McCabe, Susan**

T | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32812

This course serves as a structured collaboration on creative projects between student writers, composers, and singers. Activities include discussion of the fundamentals of poetry, comparative listening of song settings from literature, and creation, workshop and performance of three original works for voice and piano and/or other instruments.

The main goal of the course is to provide students a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the art of creating vocal music in a collaborative fashion. Students will explore a wide range of issues concerning poet/composer/singer collaborations, such as text setting, mood, tone, imagery, expressive range, style, vocal techniques, etc. They will learn about professional issues such as personal contract agreements, publisher agreements, performance rights, ownership, and royalty allocations. Students will workshop and perform newly created vocal works. Additionally, this course might serve as a springboard for long-term collaborative relationships.

Note this is a course designed for graduate students in Thornton and for those in the PhD Creative Writing program (Poetry). If there is space, other students can apply to attend.

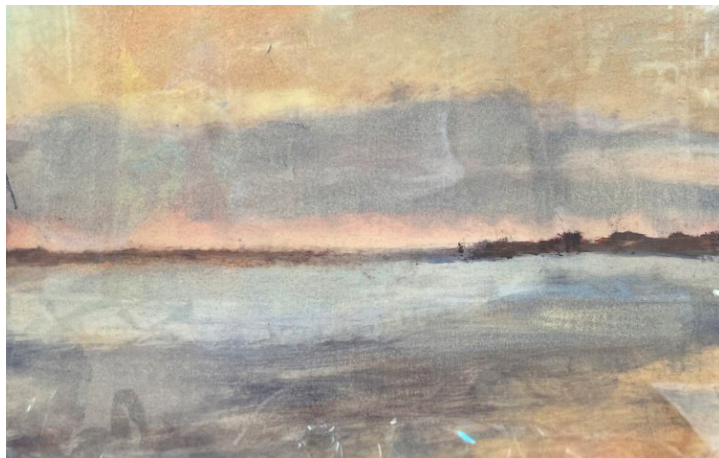


Image by Annie Dillard, *Sky and Sea*, Undated.

**ENGL-621x**

# Second-Year Pro-Seminar

**Kessler, Sarah**

T | 12:30-1:50 PM

SECTION: 32815

This two-credit course is designed to help you begin the transition from coursework to independent research. On a nuts-and-bolts level, it will introduce you to the genres of professional writing (the conference proposal, grant application, abstract) that you are expected to know but might not learn in other classes. We will also explore the important concept of an academic field. What is a “field,” or area of specialization? How do you locate the fields you want to join? Once you have done so, how do you then identify, familiarize yourself with, and ultimately participate in their most pressing ongoing critical conversations? Finally, we will approach professionalization from both traditional and so-called “alt-ac” perspectives. What kinds of careers do English PhDs pursue off the tenure track?

**ENGL-640**

# Individual Writers

*Annie Dillard*

**Dyer, Geoff**

M | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 32814

In Michael Ondaatje’s novel “Divisadero” one of the characters quotes something from “Annie Dillard, that marvel.” This provoked a reviewer in the London Review of Books to ponder wryly if she was his cleaner. So what kind of writer is the marvelous Ms. Dillard? How best to read and make sense of her? What were her influences (where did she come from?), what tradition does she fit into, what constitutes her achievement -- and her limitations? -- and what will be her legacy? With which other writers does this singular writer share a particular, even if unconscious affinity? How does a novel like “The Living” stand up to the larger claims she makes in her non-fiction study “Living by Fiction”? Which are her best books? Well, to find out, we’ll read and discuss everything she wrote, and (some of) what she read along the way.

ENGL-694

# Graduate Nonfiction Writing Workshop

Treuer, David

W | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32833

One of the pleasures (and perils) of nonfiction is that it can (almost) take any shape. This makes it different than fiction. There is, it feels, much more diversity in CNF than there is in fiction. Braided. Circular. Plotted. Meandering. Autobiographical. Linear. Story-like. Chronological. CNF can be, it seems, “like” almost anything. It is fundamentally Protean. It is my belief that nonfiction can and should be a way of thinking and that for every NF project there is, out there (or rather, IN HERE—“here” being your brain), the perfect shape: that the shape of the thought or question will, in turn, shape the story; that the form will ideally mirror what it contains; that what it contains determines the form.

As such: this course will be something of a hybrid; the coming together of three different narratives. We will read and analyze examples of the form; produce analyses of those examples; and write and lightly workshop our own narratives.



ENGL-695

# Graduate Fiction Form and Theory

Senna, Danzy

TH | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32875

In his essay, “Lightness,” Italo Calvino argues: “Thoughtful lightness can make frivolity seem dull and heavy.” In this graduate workshop-style seminar, we will explore the concept of lightness in our own work. How do we define lightness on the page? What makes a work of fiction feel light and/or swift even - or especially - when the content is heavy? What are the benefits of lightness in writing? How can we utilize suspense and levity to create a state of propulsion to our writing? How can we use white space and omissions to create openings for the reader to more actively engage with the text? Indirection, minimalism, swiftness and humor are all aspects of “lightness” we will explore together as we read assigned and workshop stories together.

ENGL-696

# Graduate Poetry Writing Workshop

*Manuscripts, Long Poems, Sequences*

Lewis, Robin

TH | 2:00-4:50 PM

SECTION: 32880

This course is a poetry workshop for PhD students who are working on compiling a manuscript or folio. These can be defined broadly to include either a poetry collection, a long poem, a series of poems, video poems, or artists books. All are acceptable. The aim here is on durational organization where experimentation and risk will be encouraged over traditional performances. Other than excavating issues surrounding order and presentation, we will also read a few essays on poetics and craft. This course will run very much like a traditional workshop. The only distinction will be that instead of reading single poems, we will consider your projects in their entirety.

Image by Ugo Flumiani, *Primavera*, Early 1920s.



ENGL-697

# Graduate Fiction Writing Workshop

Johnson, Dana

TH | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 32826

The basic idea behind this fiction workshop (and most others) is that graduate students learn best about literary fiction by writing, by reading published examples of literary fiction, by reading the creative work of peer writers and constructively discussing it in class, by listening to others constructively discuss their work, by talking about their work in conference with the instructor, and by rewriting and revising.

The aim of the course is to help you write quality literary fiction by providing you with a supportive and, at the same time, critical environment and by helping you to develop a sound technical sense of your own work as well as the work of others.

In addition to submitting stories or chapters from novellas or novels (approximately 40-60 pages by the end of the semester), you will read and critique the course texts as well as critique and discuss one another's creative work.

ENGL-698

# Graduate Poetry Form and Theory

St. John, David

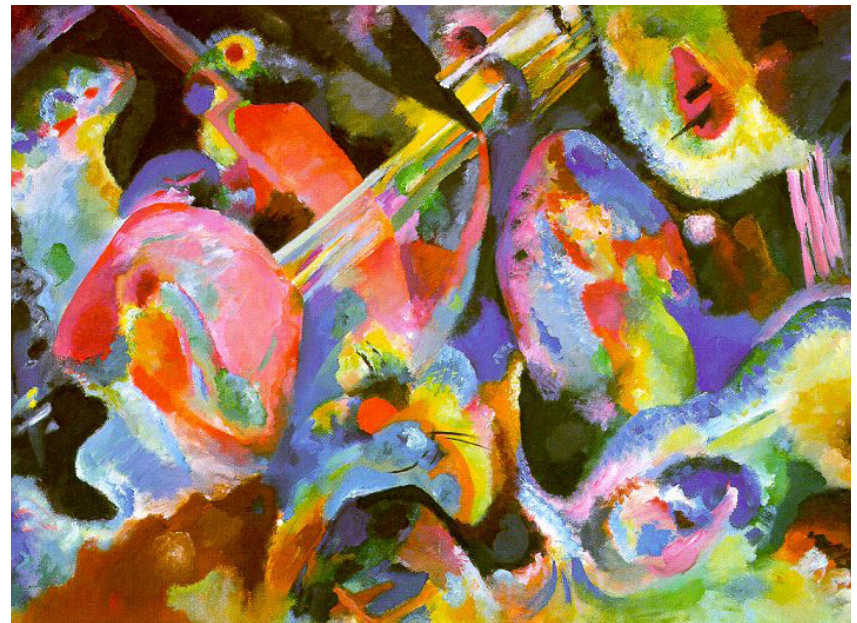
T | 5:00-7:50 PM

SECTION: 32828

With Adrienne Rich's *Dark Fields of the Republic* as our point of departure, we'll consider forms of poetic reckoning reflecting our contemporary moment of rising precarity. How has poetry traditionally offered the consolation of witness alongside the music of the imagination? How do poetic models help to renew faith in human presence and possibility?

We'll read, among others: Alice Notley's *The Descent of Alette*; Brenda Hillman's, *Three Talks*; Douglas Kearney's, *Fear, Some*; Wassily Kandinsky's, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*; and Jane Hirshfield's, *Of Gravity & Angels*.

Expect to do a substantial amount of writing, both poetry and prose.



Top Image by Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913.

Bottom Image by Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation: Deluge*, 1913.





**ENGL-700x**

# Theories and Practices of Professional Development I

*Dissertation Project Design*

**Cohen, Ashley**

W | 11:00-1:50 PM

SECTION: 32830

This course will take you from fields to quals by helping you develop and design a dissertation project, and write a prospectus for it.

**ENGL-701x**

# Theories and Practices of Professional Development II

**Román, Elda María**

F | 3:00-4:40 PM

SECTION: 32831

Where do you want to go, and how are you supposed to get there?

This 2-credit seminar is a practical workshop for the genres, codes, and strategies that will help advance your career as a researcher and writer after finishing your Ph.D.

Topics: application materials including the job letter and c.v., genres of the interview and presentation and how to prepare for them, sample teaching documents, writing samples, letters of support, job market analysis, the difference between liberal arts and R1 institutions, the difference between postdoc and job applications, and above all: how to cope with the stress of the market and to support each other.

The seminar will meet on a bi-weekly basis, and in addition, will be expected to participate in periodic mock interviews and job talks.

Image by Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema, *World of Dreams*, 1876.