

English 225: Literature, Inequality, and Injustice Summer 2019

Instructor:

Dr. Harry Denny

Offices: HEAV 226 (The Writing Lab) or HEAV 122C

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Course description:

This course introduces students to literature that takes up inequality and social justice. Students will think about how a text helps us better understand and question social justice and in what ways it is created, maintained, undermined, and advocated for. Students might wonder if literature is able to address and understand these questions in ways other fields, activism, and governmental structures can't (or haven't). We'll think about how these texts might fall into larger literatures or communities of practice as well as how literature might contribute to the conventional fields where struggles over social justice happen. This semester will ask us to think about how social justice around race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect but diverge from one another. We'll also ponder how traditional literature might co-exist with other media, all of which advancing more critical understanding of the nature and practices of social justice.

Learning outcomes:

- State knowledge about diversity and inclusion.
- Articulate a critical awareness of the place of social justice as a point of conversation and social condition in contemporary society.
- Produce effective written communication that demonstrates critical thinking, creative problem solving, and empathy.
- Access and analyze information across a range of media.

Course texts (all available as ebooks on Amazon):

- Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Houghton Mifflin: New York, 2017.
- Garrard Conley. *Boy Erased*. Penguin, New York, 2016.
- Stephanie Land. *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*. New York, Hatchette Books, 2019, print.
- Morgan Parker. *Magical Negro*. Tin House Books: Portland, Oregon and Brooklyn, NY, 2019, print.

Assignments:

Journaling (25% of course grade)

- For anything that we read, imagine you're divvying it up into four parts, working to get through each quarter one day of the work week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday). Post your reaction to what you're reading each day. The post of this activity

is to keep you accountable, but also to push you to actively read (as opposed to reading while you have one eye on the Cubs game or whatever you're streaming on Hulu).

Social justice autobiography (25% of final grade)

- You come into this course with your own skin in the game. The conversations and politics of social justice and inequality are the stuff of legends and cliché on college campuses, but they're also lived and felt. What do this course's concepts mean to you? How have you experienced or witnessed them? How do you come to an interest in them? What do you want to learn and take away from them in this short, quick-paced course?

My potential opening if I were writing this essay: I'm the first in my own family to go to college; I was supposed to graduate into the military or work in one of the many (now dead) factories in my Midwest hometown. I remember growing up when my family was on welfare, housing assistance, and shopping with "food stamps" as they were called then (now people use more discrete debit cards). I remember when I first went off to college (Iowa), how the culmination of being working-class but also having little of the assumed cultural capital of higher education made my first years really hard. I have a sister who is deaf and has a developmental delay, so I have witnessed her own struggles with society understanding her as well as discriminating against her. I'm also a gay person, who has lived and been all around the world, where that identity is both easy and "natural" like when I lived in NYC as well as hard and unimaginable as when I visited China with a Purdue delegation. That all said, I move through life with considerable privilege today: My whiteness, maleness, passing sexuality, embodied middle-class identity grant me a certain deference other people just don't experience.

Analytic essay (25% of final grade)

- Think about something that strikes you in what we've read to date. Is there something about the craft that a writer is using? What devices does the writer use to get us thinking critically about the social justice elements that they're wanting to push us on? How do the writer push us to understand the complexity of the systems and institutions that make possible injustice or inequality? How effective is any of it?

Engagement project (25% of final grade). Options:

- Complicate the syllabus
Imagine you're teaching a 4-week, 6-week, or 16-week version of this course. What would you want to read alongside of/instead of what we're reading? How might you push at the concept of literature? What sort of engagement would you want? In sum, revise the syllabus, tell Dr. Denny about the selections and choices you're making.
- Action planning
Imagine you're returning to a site or space you care about. How might you use literature to get that site or space and its audiences thinking about social justice? What aspects would you want to take up and why? What might you do and how would you measure change?

- **Creative**
Do you have some prose in you that wants to take on the issues of social justice and inequality. Come at me with it, just share a coda where you walk me through the work and your thinking/process/goals.
- **Cross-media analysis**
Two of our readings have been produced into films and a streaming series. Pick any combination and think about what's lost and gained in the movement between media. What choices do screenwriters, directors, actors, or costume designers make that complicate the ones a writer makes? How might those choices complement or challenge the larger message or mission of the text?
- **Propose your own project**
Not feeling any of these other ideas. Come at me with what you'd like to take on, and we'll negotiate.

Production expectations:

Get me drafts on Blackboard by 10:00 a.m. (EDT), on Saturdays. You can submit earlier if you'd like. Everything will be run through Blackboard's SafeAssign feature. I don't use it as a gotcha, but rather hope you use the reports to help you work on signaling how you're taking up information (how you summarize other people's thoughts, how you integrate quotes, even how you might be overusing quotes)? Write as though your audience includes smart people like yourself, who may be more or less familiar with the texts and course themes (How would you tell friends what you're thinking about, as y'all sit around a table at Harry's Chocolates or Greyhouse?), and follow a documenting and paper style with which you have comfort (APA, MLA, Chicago). Produce a minimum of five pages of prose, with 10 or 12 point font and one-inch margins. Want to go longer? Do you come up short? The world won't end. Just think: "Dr. Denny's going to be reading with an eye/ear for whether I am really saying/analyzing/sharing what I can." Don't leave me wondering, "Really? That's all they have say?" Or, just as bad, "OMG, how much more of this stuff do I have to read?" If you're bored or unfocused, if you don't care or lack a point, I'll probably react to that. Also, beware of committing the fallacy that experiences that don't confirm your own aren't valid or true. Odds are people have vastly different experiences with the world, and they're entitled to that experience and respect – as are you. Let's just assume we're entitled to our own experience and just can't assume that they can be generalized as a social phenomenon without appropriate evidence or research. When in doubt, just reach out to me, or even better, make an appointment with the Writing Lab (I head it's a cool place) – they have virtual appointments where you can share a draft and chat online, or just get some feedback via email.

Policies

- **Plagiarism**
This is the copying, deliberate or not, of another person's work and/or ideas without proper citation. Plagiarism can result in failure of the project, the course, and other disciplinary action. We will discuss it further in class, but you also need to be aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. If you have any questions at all about plagiarism, please do not

hesitate to ask us. For further information please visit:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>.

- **Academic Integrity**
Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information that is submitted provides the greatest opportunity for the university to investigate the concern.
- **Late Work**
If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, you should contact me **prior** to the deadline to determine whether or not an extension is possible.
- **Grief Absence Policy**
The Grief Absence Policy for Students states that Purdue University recognizes that a time of bereavement is very difficult for a student. The University therefore provides the following rights to students facing the loss of a family member through the Grief Absence Policy for Students (GAPS). GAPS Policy: Students will be excused for funeral leave and given the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missing assignments or assessments in the event of the death of a member of the student's family. For more information, contact ODOS or visit <http://www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/>
- **Writing Lab**
You are welcome and encouraged to visit the Writing Lab at any point in this class. We all write, and we all need help with writing. Talking with others about our work is one very important aspect of strengthening ourselves as communicators. You can make an appointment at <https://cla.purdue.edu/wlschedule>.

Campus Resources

- **CAPS**
Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (765) 494-6995 and <http://www.purdue.edu/caps/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.
- **Disability/ Accommodations**
If you have a disability that requires accommodations, please see us privately at any point throughout the semester. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to talk to us and/or visit the Disability Resource Center:
<https://www.purdue.edu/studentsuccess/specialized/drc/>.
- **Campus Emergencies**
In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Information about possible

changes will be communicated by us through email. If you have questions, please email us, and for more information, see ITAP's Campus Emergency website:

<http://www.itap.purdue.edu/tlt/faculty/>.

Schedule:

Week 1

- Send Dr. Denny a journal entry letting him know you've read over the syllabus, share any questions/concerns, and introduce yourself (he's got your picture and major info).
- Read, Morgan Parker, *Magical Negro*.
- Remember to journal each day on your progress.
- Social justice autobiography due by **Saturday**, 10 a.m. EDT/Indiana time, in Blackboard assignments.

Week 2

- Read, Margaret Atwood's, *The Handmaid's Tale*.
- Remember to journal each day on your progress.
- Send Dr. Denny a journal entry about your thinking around engagement project.

Week 3

- Read Conley's *Boy Erased*.
- Remember to journal each day on your progress.
- Analytic essay due by **Saturday**, 10 a.m. EDT/Indiana time, in Blackboard assignments.

Week 4

- Read Land's *Maid*.
- Remember to journal each day on your progress.
- Engagement project due by **Friday** at 5 p.m. EDT/Indiana time, in Blackboard assignments.