

English 399: Beyond English

CRN: 18520

3 Course Credit Hours

Fall 2025

Tuesday/Thursday, 3:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.

Face-to-Face

Schleman 117

Instructor

Dr. Harry Denny

Krach 230B (OWL Admin Suite)

(765) 496-2814

hdenny@purdue.edu

Office hours: 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., on Tuesday/Thursday, message me on Teams, or drop by the OWL.

Description:

A couple days after I graduated from the University of Iowa, I packed my car and a UHaul trailer and headed to Boston, where I expected to start a gig as a manager of a branch of Babbage's, a software store that eventually became GameStop. After 1,200 miles, I pulled up in Jamaica Plain, a hipster neighborhood in Bean Town. Coming from a relatively small town in Iowa, I didn't know that a person shouldn't leave a car filled with the stuff of their life on the streets of the Boston. Someone promptly tried to steal my car that night, and failed. They succeeded in messing up the car and stealing everything of value. Once the trauma of that experience settled out, I realized the company I'd come east to work for had reassigned me to a rusting city in Western Mass. I'd come to the east coast because I wanted that life, and almost immediately, I was being asked to settle for what I hadn't expected, didn't want. Eventually, I ended up working in Cambridge as a staff writer for a spin-off company of McKinsey, then and now, a major management consulting firm.

In those years after college, I didn't know what I didn't know. I thought the world was for me to own. I didn't know how to leverage my American Studies BA to anything. I didn't know what it meant to be a professional, even though I was surrounded by professionals. I was living in Boston and quickly discovering my Big 10 degree didn't mean what I thought it meant in a context where Ivy League pedigrees competed with one another. I didn't know that being first-gen educated didn't signify in ways I wanted or signified in other ways I was clueless about.

This semester isn't going to be about me teaching the lessons of the problems I encountered. Instead, I offer my own experiences as object lessons that challenge you each to prepare and visualize life after college, to start imagining potential futures, and to know how our awareness of social and cultural capital and the landscapes we hope to enter mark us in a million different ways. Developing an awareness of those practices and beginning to control for them, or even problem solve them gives us leverage, maybe opens possibilities that might not otherwise be possible or knowable. Let's be cultural informants on a world (even worlds) that might not be familiar to us, or familiar in different ways.

This course came into existence when the department recognized that our students were wrapping up their time in our curriculum and needing more scaffolding to life beyond English. "What's next?" becomes a haunting question in your final months of college. Of course, my goal isn't for you to develop an unyielding plan, but perhaps to imagine what's beyond and begin to demystify those options and inch toward contingent plans. Ideally, at the end of the term, you will have compelling answers to the question of "what's next?", even if that means saying to people, "I don't know yet, but here are the options I'm exploring."

Objectives

- Develop an individual mindset/rationale toward the humanities and English Studies.
- Reflect on your experiences to date in English Studies.
- Foster a rhetor about the value and utility of your major.
- Assess your strengths and needs around professionalism, the job market, and future education.
- Craft a (placeholder) plan for life beyond English at Purdue.

Outcomes

- Articulate takeaways for your English Studies experience for a variety of audiences and rhetorical contexts.
- Develop a familiarity with a range of genres and documents related to your professional future.
- Hone an understanding of the sociocultural assumptions of education broadly, but English Studies training in particular, for life “beyond English.”
- Create a tangible short- to medium-term plan for life “beyond English.”
- Practice performing spoken and written rhetoric about your plan.
- Identify and plan to experience what you haven’t academically experienced in English at Purdue. What’s missing? And what can we do about it?

Grades

- Grades in the “B” range for the course represent “strong” performance, including substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of course material (theories, methods, research, articles, other readings), strong argument, and well-edited prose. Reading quizzes indicate mostly careful reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are also insightful for a writer’s process and self-awareness. Presentations are strong, but slight important elements of the topic.
- Grades in the “A” range represent “outstanding” performance, including deep revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose. Reading quizzes suggest outstanding reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are sophisticated studies of a writer’s process and self-awareness. Presentations are very effective and leave few if any gaps in the assigned topic.
- Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent performance, including uneven revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. Quizzes are spotty or inconsistent evidence of reading and understanding of texts. The meta-text is missing or inadequate. Presentations verge on ineffective, incomplete, and leave the audience wondering about significant elements of the assigned topic.

Readings

- Brooks, Katharine. *You Majored in What?: Designing Your Path From College to Career*. New York: Plum/Penguin, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-452-29600-8.
- Jay, Meg. *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—And How to Make the Most of Them Now*. New York: Hachette, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-5387-5423-8.

Assignments

- Being Present/Journaling/Reading Responses (30 points)
 - For us to pull off community, you need to come to class and be present. Unfortunately, life after college isn’t always sustainable if your position is to curl up on the couch and watch videos (or play video games). You’ve gotta show up, on time, and be ready.
 - As you prepare for the market or the professional world, you also need to get comfortable with the culture of expressing your thinking through appropriate rhetoric as well as being

challenged on it. I doubt we'll have many debates, but we will push one another through discussion thread workshops and private journals with me.

- Grading: Do all three aspects for each period (August/September, October, November), and you get all the credit. Slight any aspect, you'll get less.
- Vidcasts (50 points)
 - You're on the far side of your college education. Somewhere in Stanley Coulter, first-years in English are arriving on campus. They're bright eyed and often clueless. What would you want them to know? How would sell the major or your experience in Purdue's English Department?
 - In a 5-10 minute vidcast (or reel or some other video stream that the university actually supports/doesn't ban), what would you say? How might you do it in a fun, creative, clever way? How might you also make it unique from your classmates?
 - Create a script, but don't read the script. Talking head or action?
 - Workshop in class, and workshop a draft at the OWL.
 - Videoexpress.purdue.edu or go out on your own.
 - Audacityteam.org (open source, audio only)
 - iMovie (for you Mac people)
 - YouTube Create
 - AdobeExpress (might be a fee as a student).
 - Upload your vidcast or podcast by October 9. A link to an accessible version suffices. We'll discuss options in class.
 - Grading: I have no expectation that anyone is going become the next breakout influencer or videographer for the department. Take it serious, do it, get the credit.
- Job Search, or Graduate School Portfolio (100 points)
 - By the time October rolls around, you should have had the opportunity to hear from Purdue's CCO and CLA's Career Office. We will have also discussed what's involved with applying to graduate school. You will pick one direction or both, and then develop materials to apply. You pick what you're interested in, and you'll get lots of help and support developing your materials.
 - Application letter
 - Resume or CV
 - Statement of Purpose/Personal Statement
 - Social Media Presence (LinkedIn, Academia, Instagram, SnapChat, etc.)
 - Letters of recommendation/Reference interest
 - Think about the protocol of asking for letters.
 - Consider how your letters of rec signify. What story do they tell? What do they embody? What do they know?
 - Writing Sample
 - Workshop in class, and workshop drafts at the OWL (journal about the experience).
 - Grading: I want these documents to be authentic and applicable to your future. I want you to see what needs to be changed from job to job (or school to school). For assessment, I will place a premium on quality and refinement. If you're going through the motions or not serious, I suspect that mindset will show up in your documents.

- Mock Interview Prep (for the professional world, or for graduate school). (20 points)
 - Face to face
 - Zoom interview
 - Practice interviewing for 2 potential gigs (realistic and aspirational)
 - Prep partners to role play as the interviewers
 - Self-assess performance
 - Assess peers through collaboratively produced rubric.
 - Grading: Do it, get the credit. This experience is as much about you gaining experience answering questions about a gig. I want you to experience speaking impromptu as well as feeling comfortable improvising when you just don't know. I also want you to become self-aware of how to perform to a camera. Granted, many of you became accustomed to Zoom (or the like) apps during Covid, being the object of focus might be new.
- Elevator Pitch(ing) (20 points)
 - Dealer's Choice (chatting a potential prospect up, chitchat a professor considering you for graduate school, impromptu social discussion with a potential employer in a social situation).
 - You'll be assigned to get on an elevator with a buddy in class, or with me. Someone will record on their phone for you. And you'll practice chatting someone up before you reach two-to-three floors up, depending on the building.
 - Alternatively, go attend an event/participate in an experience (e.g., Undergraduate Research Conference), where you sell/tell strangers about your work, about you.
 - Self-assess performance.
 - Grading: Do it, get the credit. This experience is as much artform and comfort speaking to strangers than anything. As someone who is as socially awkward as most anyone, I feel your pain if you're anxious about self-presentation and interaction.
- Road Less/Not Traveled (50 points)
 - Imagine a scenario where you decide to take 3 months to a year off after college, but before you go on to professional life or graduate school. When I was a professor in NYC, one of my students, after graduation, decided she wanted to bike across the USA, from Queens to San Francisco. And she did it! I had joked in class that if she ever did it, she should take a pitstop at my parents' farm in Iowa. And she did it! My mom called me up, "Um, one of your students just showed up. . ."
 - What's the plan look like? Where would you go? How would you survive? Imagine a worried advisor, professor, mentor, or parent-figure wanting to know what's what.
- Final Presentation/Road Map Portfolio (50 points)
 - Share with the class where you're ending up with your road map.
 - Don't feel like you're committing to one plan, but have a plan that you can share and we can support. Heck, we might want to come along (or still the idea), if it's a road trip and not a job or grad school application.
 - Don't have it in your to become the next Jack Kerouac or Blythe Roberson? Revise your job documents or grad school application materials.
 - Grading: See above. What I'm really hoping that you demonstrate by the end of the term is an acute awareness of your audiences and your rhetoric as well as an awareness of the context.

Policies

Attendance & Deadlines

- Attendance is critical. Missing sessions undermines our sense of community that just can't be duplicated. Adhering to deadlines is also crucial. However, life intrudes from time to time, and I understand that reality. Communicate, and negotiate.

- Please be aware that postings need to be done no later than the deadlines outlined above or in the schedule, so also factor access to technology into your schedule. Assume, as I always do, that when you most need technology, it will fail you. In other words, have a back-up plan to your internet access.
- If you cannot participate or meet a deadline because of a religious observation, please let me know, and we'll negotiate equitable due dates.

Disability and Special Circumstances

- If you have a learning disability, you are under no obligation to inform me but knowing that information can help me make your learning experience better. If you suspect you may have undiagnosed issues and want help, I can provide appropriate, confidential contact information. If you've had an accommodation made with the DRC, they will reach out, but often their letters don't help me help you.

Academic Integrity

- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. However, you'll be doing quite a bit of writing in class and individual enough in nature that such cheating will be difficult—I'll get very familiar with your voice and natural means of expression. Also, be aware that your prose needs to be in your voice—if someone else edits your work, in certain cases your writing no longer is "yours." Passing it off as yours is still plagiarism. In most cases, plagiarism is unintentional or happens because of anxiety. Rather than get yourself in trouble, talk to me, and we can work through the problems.
- ChatGPT, or artificial intelligence with large language models has created quite a bit of angst on campus, for your peers, for your professors, and maybe even for you. The technology has quite a bit of promise to help writers who get in a bind, so we'll talk about how to, when to, and whether to use the technology in your own learning process. I don't love that it flattens all voice and audiences, but that's my bias as a rhetoric/writing professor. I want you to learn to understand literacy, reading and writing, as a broad activity that represents innumerable genres and communities of practice, not just in English, not even considering the broader humanities, social sciences, arts, and STEM disciplines. This instructor cares about you as a writer and budding English major; I plan to be actively engaged in learning and studying with you, so I hope to help foster your personal relationship with knowledge and your representation of it. If you want to check out or use LLMs, let's do it as a class and see what it gets right, wrong, and how it goes afoot of teaching and learning in college.
 - **A bit of a warning:** Talk to your other professors about how they feel about the technology in their classes. Some faculty, some departments have very different relationships to the issue of LLMs than we will have in this course.
- 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 is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace table of contents, under University Policies. Please note: If you get accused of an academic integrity violation and the judicial board finds that you just need to know more, guess where you wind up? With me and the Purdue OWL because we care about help writers get better.

Writing style and conventions

- All class assignments and projects must be word-processed unless otherwise noted. Handwritten or informally produced documents will not be accepted. Please number your pages and follow MLA or Chicago citation and format guidelines as detailed on the Purdue OWL. If MLA or CMOS are styles that you'll never use in your professional life, talk to me and we'll figure out another that will help you down the road.

Conduct

- Students are expected to adhere to the university's code of conduct. While I will encourage wide diversity in opinions and talk, everyone must be allowed to have a voice. On the flipside, being a passive, withdrawn presence in our community is not appropriate. Though some courses on campus don't enable students to have much agency, this course will prize everyone's engagement and talk (whether face-to-face or online). Students should not expect me to just transmit what I want or impart knowledge; I'm here to get you to express and hone your thinking, writing, and speaking. Please don't assume everyone agrees with your life experiences or shares them with you. We will frequently discuss how people opposed to ideas come to them, assuming some of "those people" likely are in class and just don't embody what they're thinking. Students who don't actively participate may pass, but they will likely get a low grade. If you're a quiet and shy person, use our activities on BrightSpace as an outlet.
- Purdue University and I are committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his, her, or their potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies. For details, see Purdue's full [Nondiscrimination Policy Statement](#).
- Mental Health/Wellness: A link to CAPS is on the Brightspace listing of resources of Student Services and Resources section. 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 mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.

Communications

- I'm pretty plugged in and on campus most days. Always feel free to pop by the OWL, make an appointment, or come to office hours. I promise to respond to messages and assignments with a day or two. We'll see one another often enough that if something is going on, I'll share it.
- For you, please keep to deadlines. Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good, and don't let a crappy draft get in the way of submitting something for feedback. I'm a huge fan of getting stuff out of my brain and onto screen to share and contemplate.

Schedule (Subject to Change, Renegotiation)

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Module 1: Reflecting on what's been, 'Splaining it to the outside world		
1	August 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syllabus Overview. Introductions. Common terms. 	August 28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class Journaling, Sharing. "Looking back, Stepping into the Future." Reading: Frost.
2	September 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toward a theory of being marked, marking oneself. Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bourdieu, Introduction to <i>Language & Symbolic Power</i>. Jay, Introduction and Chapter 1 (Identity Capital) 	September 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education as Coding Ourselves. Vidcasting 101. Vidcast planning. Reading: Anyon, "Hidden Class Curriculum in Education."
3	September 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Center for Career Opportunities. Debriefing/lingering questions. Reading: Brooks, Forward and Chapter 1. 	September 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towards Graduate School. Two philosophies. Reading: Brooks, Part 1.
4	September 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vidcast Workshopping. Brooks, Part 2. 	September 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLA Career Services with Kristi Roza-Cabello Debriefing/lingering questions.
5	September 23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interim Assistant Dean Sartore on Experience the World Abroad after College. Debriefing/lingering questions. 	September 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop Websites, LinkedIn, anything Social Reading: Brooks, Part 3.
6	September 30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop websites & social continued 	October 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to 1-2 Prospects (Jobs, schools, etc). Come prepared to talk about your choices Schedule OWL Appointment between October 3 and October 15. Reading: Brooks Part 4.
Module 2: Imaging futures, Mapping Rhetorics		
7	October 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coverletter and resume/CV Practice ChatGPT and CoPilot as scaffold, not crutch toward documents. 	October 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshopping coverletters, resumes, other statements The Elevator Pitch
8	October 14 No class, fall break	October 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post Job/Post Grad Docs to "Assignments" by noon Post OWL Log to "Assignments" Record your elevator pitch, upload to BrightSpace or Email to Harry.
9	October 21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop elevator pitching. 	October 23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop elevator pitching.
10	October 28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take 2 Elevator Pitch Upload/Email to Harry (Be sure to confirm if you email). Include a self-assessment. 	October 30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prep for mock interviews Reading: Jay continued.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading: Jay, "The Brain and the Body" 	
Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Module 3: Toward a (Strategic) Action Plan		
11	November 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock zoom interviews 	November 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock zoom interviews Self-assessment due by noon Friday, November 14.
12	November 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock Zoom Interviews 	November 13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock Panel Interviews.
13	November 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock panel interviews 	November 20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock panel interviews, wrap up. Road Not/Less Traveled Planning
14	November 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop Road Not/Less Traveled Plan on Discussion Thread. Asynchronous meeting/not in-person at Schleman. Self-assessment due by noon. 	November 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class – Thanksgiving Break
15	December 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road Not/Less Traveled Plan due by 3:00 p.m., on BrightSpace. Conferencing with Harry on Final Portfolio. 	December 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferencing with Harry on Final Portfolio.
16	December 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Portfolio Presentations 	December 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Portfolio Presentations
17	December 15-19, Final Exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road map plan due on BrightSpace by December 15 at noon. 	