LIT 342.01 Montana Literature – Spring 2017 – Syllabus draft

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[Note: this is a draft for discussion on first day of class; this and the schedule will be adjusted.]
Please be sure to read this syllabus and the schedule thoroughly, print it, bring it to class, and refer to it throughout the semester. Note that there will probably be changes as we go along.

Office hours: 3:30-4:30pm Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday, and many other times by appointment. I welcome conversations with students! In fact, conversation, to me, is the heart of education. Please note: be sure to confirm an appointment time even during posted office hours. Otherwise I might be with another student or at the copy machine.

DESCRIPTION: Surrounding it all, the land, the sky, the environment of Montana. What do we look for in Montana literature? And how do different lenses make different dynamics visible? An ecocritical and postcolonial approach to Montana literature will reveal not only how the environment is represented and understood or misunderstood, but also how dynamics of gender, class, and race are reflected in the stories of the land and its peoples. And are there aesthetic aspects of Montana literature that match the land and people, text and context?

Key Questions/Ideas: In contexts of Montana history, how do specifics of language use and narrative construction represent tensions of

1. civilization and wilderness?
2. genders of the West?
3. “rugged individualists” and encroaching societies?
4. Indian and white and black and Asian?
5. dynamics of 1-3 intersecting with differences of class?
6. dynamics of 1-3 intersecting with dynamics of colonialism?
7. all of these dynamics on the land?
8. all of these dynamics in the language?

– thus we are reading discourses of race, class, and gender on various sides of the “frontier.” Perhaps the primary question: how does the “nature” of Montana shape its “cultures”? How do Montana’s “cultures” shape its “nature”?

A NOTE ON REQUIREMENTS, OUTCOMES, ASSESSMENTS: The following list of activities tries to quantify your expected work. Ultimately, no one can “quantify the quality” of your writing or discussion. Grading in arts and humanities courses inevitably entails subjective criteria. Because of that subjectivity, more dialogue
between student and faculty can help the process of creating and grading humanities “performance.” Literature is a conversation. Literary criticism grows out of conversation. I hope you come to feel that I am open for you to get to know me in the classroom, online, and in my office. Please come see me to talk through assignments or anything else. On written work, both form and content will be graded, and explicit writing standards will be part of each assignment. Grades are based on a combination of written work (content & form), discussion questions, participation in class and attendance. In addition, if you have any certifiable disability or other issue that makes meeting the course requirements difficult, I will be glad to work with you on a strategy for your success in the course.

OUTCOME CRITERIA & GOALS

1) Recognition, demonstrated through writing and discussion, of the diversity of Montana literatures.
2) Recognition, demonstrated through writing and discussion, of key historical and literary issues of Montana as they are addressed by those diverse voices.
3) Recognition, demonstrated through writing and discussion, of different methods -- literary and historical, artistic and political, aesthetic and ethical, textual and contextual -- for considering texts; thus a balance of close readings and broad interpretations.
4) Demonstration of upper-division writing skills in thesis-driven literary analysis focused on an arguable analytical assertion.
5) Engagement, demonstrated through writing and discussion, with themes of the course as they apply to 21st-century lives.

OUTCOME ASSESSMENTS & GRADES

1) Discussion and Attendance: I’m strict on attendance. You are grownups, and can make your own decisions, but the class runs on a combination of readings, discussions, and lectures. Lectures and discussions both are founded on your attendance; so more than two unexcused absences (totals one week of class) can drop the final grade. An excused absence generally requires a medical crisis. (nb: don’t schedule routine medical, advising, or other appointments during class time.) Notice of any absence should be given in advance when we can pre-arrange for your make-up work. Late arrivals and early departures can mean an absence. Thus the goal here is to participate as both a listener and speaker in class discussions. nb: Do not be absent on due dates for papers. “I stayed in the computer lab to finish my essay” is not an excuse for missing that class day’s further study and peer review. (Verbal assessments of Criteria 1-5:)
   a. Discussion Questions: On Moodle, there will be a Forum for each required reading and an extra credit Forum for recommended readings. Discussion questions [timing to be negotiated?] are due on Moodle by midnight before the day that the reading is listed on the class schedule. Each student will be responsible for generating at least one question on each required class reading (usually two or three authors). Each student is also responsible for responding to at least two questions from other students on the Moodle Forum, also by noon before class. Good idea: if possible, each question should be anchored to a passage with a page number in the text.
   b. I will try to incorporate some of your perspectives into the next day’s lecture, so take the time to write thoughtful, critically driven discussion questions focused around a close reading of one or more of the texts. (See Moodle resource on How to Write Discussion Questions.) Plus we will project some of the Forum questions for use during the in-class discussions. This means you need to schedule your study time carefully to meet those
midnight deadlines. We will discuss and do close readings in class on some of the required primary readings (poetry, fiction, prose, etc.) and on some of the required secondary material (introductory and editorial commentary), and you are welcome to offer questions for discussion on any of these materials.

c. **Discussion groups** and full-class discussions: Participation in discussion of daily readings will be in small groups and with the full class. The course is designed for your input. Some of the best lectures happen when there are good questions or comments from the floor. “Participation” can be both vocal and silent, both speaking and listening, but not all of one or the other. Discussion is one of the best ways to learn, and the class can hardly flow without you there. This pedagogy is so crucial to the course that I’ll take a few more lines here to explain: Everyone’s idea is important. When you speak, try to give your idea away to the group. You don’t need to defend it once it’s out there. And equally, when you listen, give each speaker respect. Humor helps too. We don’t need to have everyone agree, but perhaps we can build a community in the classroom where each of us can feel engaged with the questions.

d. **Pop quizzes** as well as other in-class exercises on daily readings loom on the horizon of time. Surprising to say, students sometimes don’t get the reading done, and in turn the discussion falters. Student evals say this helps fix that.

2) **Writing Skills and Critical Thinking** in analyzing diverse literary texts through various methods: Note that the UM Writing Center is open for coaching writers at all levels. Writing assignments will be a combination of reading journals, response papers, microthemes, thesis exercises, and essays, all with bibliographic form, plus an optional research paper. On the microthemes, essays, and optional research paper, I expect days of work on rough drafts which should be turned in with the final draft. Generally, if you try to write the paper the day of class or even the night before, you will get a lower grade—writing takes time!—so think of these as writing exercises designed to help boost your skills. Proofreading is crucial as well. See handouts for more info on my grading criteria. In addition, writing skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism (see note below in “Legalities”).

a. The final draft of your written work must be sent to my email address as a single Word.doc attachment (don’t send title page, bibliography, or self-evaluation separately). Hard copies of earlier drafts may be sent either as email attachments or handed to me as hard copies in class on the due date, labeled with your name and stapled (no paper clips). Again, you can send drafts in one separate electronic file. There are also checklists for peer editing and for writing the papers that should be handed in with the rough stuff. My written responses to your papers will be on the electronic copy which I will email back to you with a different file name, so keep a clean electronic copy on file in case you want to revise it. NB: When you email me, be sure to put the exact spelling of the class number, 342, at the front of your email’s subject line. (Written assessments of Criteria 1-5:)

b. **Reading Journal**: Use a separate, dedicated spiral journal, or do this on computer. For each reading, on one side of a page, record the author’s ideas, facts, quotes, or note other important info; on the other side, record your questions, impressions, responses, and feelings as you read. These responses might develop into discussion questions, but they may go in any other directions toward essays as well. I will not be reading these journals but will ask for the total of journal pages at least twice in the semester.

c. **Essays**: After the assigned Response Paper on the introductory readings, each approximately three-week unit will finish with a Microtheme or a slightly longer Essay
assignment, combining personal response and critical analysis, graded on content and form; thus one Response Paper, two Microthemes, and two Essays across the semester. Microthemes are two-page essay answers to a question or questions on the readings, focusing on a thesis statement. Essays are a slightly longer version (3-4pp) of similar writing, with discussion of more examples and fuller development of a thesis. Both formats should quote from the text(s), and thus include Works Cited and in-text citations in MLA format. Skills in thesis development and in integrating quoted citations into your argument are crucial in written work. Thus, again, plan on a Works Cited page for each essay, with proper in-text citations and bibliographic form. Get to know the MLA Handbook. In addition, those skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism.

d. Here’s more coaching on the writing. Focusing on literary analysis, the essays should build three elements of a workable thesis statement that goes beyond summarizing or retelling a piece of literature: 1) narrow topic 2) assertion (not description) 3) preview. Generally, a thesis is preceded (in drafts if not in the final essay) by a focused question. The goal of literary analysis is to (gently) take apart and put back together some dynamic aspect of a text, so that the reader may understand it more fully and deeply and acutely, with more insight into form and/or content. Such literary criticism looks beyond what is said to ask how, why, or so what? Writing about literature is one of the best ways to read it, and it indeed can intensify the pleasure of reading. Too often, students write about a piece of literature without coming to a thesis, i.e., without really knowing what they have to say about it. We will do some focused work on thesis development apart from the labor of essay writing, and then bring this skill to the essays. Repeat: Do not be absent on due dates for papers.

e. Optional Research Essay: One 6-8 pg. essay, on either a new topic or revising and expanding one of your own course essays, using library resources and again emphasizing thesis development and integrated citations, is due during finals week, with a prospectus due three weeks earlier, tba. Depending on your library experience, the class might consult as a whole with a Humanities Librarian toward your research interests, focusing on your own research topic (even if you opt out of the paper itself).

f. Peer Editing: Study groups of 3 students will meet outside of class face-to-face or online during each of the take-home microthemes and essays. Editing each other’s work can be one of the best ways to develop yourself as a writer.

NB: The Writing Center is available to students of all abilities: LA 144, phone 243-2266, with on-site tutoring; paper coaching; plus writing and test-taking workshops, etc. Note that they, like all good writers, require lead-time for revising your paper before it’s due. They might turn you away if you come in so close to your deadline that you don’t have time to revise. Also online tutoring via http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/
REQUIRED READINGS
--This Syllabus: Again, read it thoroughly on Moodle, print it, and bring your hard copy daily to class.
--Moodle Course Supplement: accessible at http://umonline.umt.edu/ You will need to be able to access and work on Moodle to complete this class. If you are registered for this class, UMOnline automatically opens your access to this supplement on Moodle.
(After the three anthologies, books here are paired and roughly chronological order, matching the Units on the schedule; books avail. in Bookstore. Be sure to buy before they clear the shelves later in the semester.)

- Rick Newby, ed. The New Montana Story: An Anthology, selections
- Adrian Jawort, ed. Off the Path: An Anthology of 21st Century Montana American Indian Writers I
- Andrew Garcia Tough Trip Through Paradise, 1878-1879
- James Welch Fools Crow
- Norman Maclean A River Runs Through It
- D’Arcy McNickle Wind from an Enemy Sky
- Debra Earling Perma Red
- Judy Blunt Breaking Clean
- Richard Hugo Making Certain It Goes On, selections
- James Welch Riding the Earthboy 40

SOME LEGALITIES: Pay attention to these 8 items.
1) See the Cyberbear website http://cyberbear.umt.edu/ for Important Dates such as these: last day to add/drop with refund on Cyberbear; last day to drop without refund by drop/add form; last day to withdraw. I’m open to late drops if you find it unavoidable, but Incompletes are rarely available; see next item.
2) Per general University policy, a grade of Incomplete is granted only for a medical emergency that interferes with the end of the semester, so plan your time carefully.
3) The Credit/No Credit option must be arranged at the beginning of the semester, not in retrospect toward the end. If the class is taken for Credit/No Credit option, an average grade of D- or above constitutes Credit, and a grade of F equals NCR. (This system replaces Pass/No Pass.)
4) Plagiarism is defined as using another’s words or ideas (outside of common knowledge) directly or indirectly without citing them. It is shocking, but students waste their own education and my time by plagiarizing off the Internet. If they can find it online, so can I, and I have no mercy on academic deception. Consequences of plagiarism can range from ostracism to rehabilitation training to zero credit to failing and being dropped from the class to being expelled from the University. Please take this warning seriously. Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism is an affront to fundamental social and academic values, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student’s part in sustaining academic community. To avoid this
breach of trust, acknowledge all work that has influenced your thinking, using accurate bibliographic citations. The University’s official warning can be found on pg. 22 of the Catalog, which refers you to the Student Conduct Code (Academic Conduct), available on the web: http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321. For more information on plagiarism, go to Plagiarism Online Handout: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html.

5) & is it necessary to mention that cell phones, text messaging, emailing, and Internet surfing are not acceptable in class? Laptops for notetaking are welcome, but surfing the Internet is not allowed, unless requested by the instructor in discussion. Participation does not equal distraction. There are limits to multitasking. This is one.

6) Departmental Assessment: The English Department¹s ongoing process of assessing its curriculum requires professors to read student papers to learn how students in general are progressing through the program. Thus your professor may choose a copy of one of your papers or ask for an electronic version of it to use in this assessment process. All identifying information will be removed and no evaluation of student work outside the boundaries of the course will play any role in determining a student¹s grade. If you do not want your work used in such a way, please inform your professor and s/he will not forward it to the Assessment Committee. Otherwise, we appreciate your tacit consent.

7) In addition to the departmental assessment process, this course might be involved in a university-wide assessment of the efficacy of UM’s writing instruction. Thus this course requires an electronic submission of an assignment with your personal author information removed, to be used for educational research and assessment of the writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database with no link to your name. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty using a rubric that will be shared with you as part of the writing aspect of this course.

8) This syllabus and schedule may be subject to changes, which will be announced in class.