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2020

Spring 1-15-2020

ENG 5008-001: Studies in Colonial American Literature

Angela Vietto

Eastern Illinois University

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Recommended Citation

Vietto, Angela, "ENG 5008-001: Studies in Colonial American Literature" (2020). *Spring 2020*. 81.
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Eng 5008

Early American Life Writing and Fiction After *Hamilton*

Spring 2020

(on campus section 001; online section 600)

Prof. Angela Vietto

Office phone: 217-581-2428

Cell phone: 217-549-3203

Virtual office hours: Sunday 7-8:30 pm & by appointment

Physical office hours: 334I Coleman, Tuesday 9-10 & by appointment

More information about contacting the instructor appears on p. 2

Introduction: Every generation or so, the United States re-tells the story of its founding. The differences in the story tell us a great deal about the moment when the story is re-told. The smash Broadway musical *Hamilton* is arguably a pivotal moment in today's national understanding of our origins. As a scholar of the era, I think it's essential to attend to popular renditions of early American culture with both an appreciative and a critical eye, and *Hamilton* provides a tremendous opportunity to think through issues of racial, gender, and class identity in early America.

So we will begin with an appreciative and critical consideration of *Hamilton*. *Hamilton* will, I hope, prompt you to pose some crucial questions about early American culture. We will turn then to biographies, autobiographies, and novels from early America in search of answers to those questions, returning to *Hamilton* periodically along the way.

On-campus and online sections: Online (section 600) and on-campus (section 001) students will share the same online platform. The readings and major assignments for both sections will be the same. The primary difference in the two sections will be the participation grade. For students in the online section, weekly discussion postings will be the determinant of the participation grade. Students in the on-campus section, rather than posting in all discussions, will take turns summarizing the major points of our weekly in-class discussions; for students in section 001, the participation grade will be based on in-class discussion as well as this reduced number of online postings.

Textbooks from TRS:

C. B. Brown, *Wieland*

C. B. Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*

Ed. Mulford, W. H. Brown, *The Power of Sympathy* and H. W. Foster, *The Coquette*

Franklin, *The Autobiography*

Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*

Manvil (ed. Anthony), *Lucinda or the Mountain Mourner*

Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*

Students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Learning goals and objectives

As a graduate course in English, the course shares several broad goals with (I hope) all our MA courses: to enable you to enhance even further your sensitivity to language, awareness of rhetorical situation and genre, skill in formulating your own arguments, nuanced understanding of scholarly writing, and ability to produce your own sophisticated, insightful, and well-crafted writing.

As a literature course, we add some additional broad goals: to develop awareness of the literary tradition in English and to enhance your ability to read, critically and appreciatively, literary texts that may be unfamiliar and challenging in their language, artistic techniques, or cultural valences. In the context of this course, that would mean becoming aware of the traditionally labeled literary period called the Enlightenment and some of its ideas, generic conventions, and cultural manifestations as well as getting comfortable with eighteenth-century prose. Finally, in this class we also aim to consider the role of pop culture in thinking about the past and to learn some specifics about the development of two genres: life writing and fiction.

In successfully completing the course, then, you should be able to:

- Draft, revise, and edit effective writing at various levels of formality that accurately conveys complex logical arguments
- Read and accurately summarize academic writing in cultural history and literary criticism
- Describe major aspects of early American cultural history, including emerging political values and the roles of race, class, and gender in those values
- Identify generic characteristics of eighteenth-century biography and autobiography
- Identify generic characteristics of sentimental fiction and Gothic fiction
- Describe the position of early American novels in the history of the novel
- Synthesize knowledge about early American literature and culture into writing related an area of your own expertise

Contacting the instructor

Whenever you think it would benefit you to talk with me one-on-one, I encourage and invite you to contact me. Here are some recommendations on the best ways to make this happen. If you need to talk with me at the soonest possible moment, the best bet is to use the phone. During *weekday business hours*, start with my office number (217-581-2428), which is the main English Department line; if you don't reach me there, you will either reach a staff member who can give you an idea of when I will return and/or take a message, or you will get our voice mail. *Evenings or weekends*, please feel free to call or text me at my cell number (217-549-3203). If you have a question about course requirements, deadlines, etc., and you can wait up to a day for an answer, use the "Help!" discussion thread in the Course Resources module in D2L. That will be the first place I check each day when I sign in to our course. When you want to have a longer discussion, the online meeting room (in the Course Resources module) is a great place for us to meet and talk. Text me (217-549-3203) and we can find a time that will work for both of us to meet there. What about email? Well, I get a mountain of email, and I don't want your message to get lost there, so I'd rather talk with you by text or phone or videochat or class discussion board. But if for some reason email is best for you, please use my main EIU address (arvieto@eiu.edu), not D2L mail.

The Student Success Center: Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (<http://www.eiu.edu/~success>) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Academic integrity: Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

The English Department Statement on Plagiarism: Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Office of Student Standards. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

Late work & extensions: If an emergency arises and you must miss a deadline, please let me know, preferably by text message, before the deadline and simply ask for an extension. If you do this, I will give an extension; there will be no penalty to your grade.

Grading and assignments

Final grading scale

Participation/discussion	30%
Article summaries/critiques	15%
Reflective writing assignments	15%
Final project	30%
Final exam	10%

A	90-100%
B	80-89.99%
C	70-79.99%
D	60-69.99%
F	59.99% and below

Participation/discussion: Thinking together about what we've read is central to the humanities. Thus, it's important both that you show up for discussions and that you're willing to put in the requisite effort. I'm *not* talking here about length, but about thoughtfulness and risk-taking. In general, be working toward an interpretation and make your comments as analytical as possible: focus on how and why. Have an idea that you're not sure about? Float it in discussion to see how others will respond. Confused by some part of something we've read? Say so, being as specific as you can about what confused you and why. Take the same approach when you're responding to classmates. Rather than merely agreeing or disagreeing, explain how and why. If you don't understand a classmate's comment, ask a question—as specific as you can make it. For online students, participation is all about the discussion boards, so make sure you're keeping up—unfortunately, there's no way to have true discussion unless we have some deadlines so that others can get a chance to see your ideas and respond. In general, after the first week, postings will be due twice a week: initial postings on Wednesdays, and responses on Sundays. For on-campus students, of course, since so much discussion will happen in our meetings, showing up for those will be essential.

Article summaries/critiques: One or two of these will be due in each module except the first and last. We'll start with simply summary, since it's hard to critique meaningfully when you're still new to a subject. I'll provide more instructions in D2L with each assignment.

Reflective writing assignments: One or two of these will be due in each module. The prompts will vary, but they're intended to be very open, so if you have something you want to say that doesn't seem to fit with the prompt, feel free to include it.

Final project: For the final project, I ask that you work in a genre that has some relevance to your professional interests or, if you prefer, civic interests. For example, if you are a working teacher at any level K-12, you might choose to develop a unit plan using some of the content from our course—but you could also consider something like a series of blog postings for other educators about these materials and how they might be useful, or a podcast or other multimedia presentation for your students or for a professional audience. If you are a creative writer, you might choose to write some historical fiction using the archival materials we will work with (creative work such as this will require brief introduction or afterword that traces your use of course materials). A working or future librarian might develop materials for an exhibit related to some set of our course materials, or a proposal for purchasing/developing a collection of materials around the course topic/themes. If you are considering applying to PhD programs in literature, you should plan to write an article of the type published in academic literary journals, or some other academic format (two conference papers or a thesis prospectus would be good choices). And if you're doing something else that I haven't thought of, I'm happy to work with you to help you find some genre that makes sense for your project. We will begin discussing potential topics as we move through the content of the course.

Final exam: Since the final project will offer you an opportunity to demonstrate your interpretive and analytic skills, the final exam will focus on your understanding of the content specific to the course: the literary genres and relevant cultural structures of the late-eighteenth-century United States. The final will also include a final discussion of your assessment, knowing what you know now, of *Hamilton* and its depiction of that cultural past.

Overview of Modules, Weeks, and major primary texts
(details will appear in D2L, including due dates for all short assignments)

- Jan 13-19 1 & 2: Getting Started and *Hamilton*
- Jan 20-26 2: *Hamilton* continued
- Jan 27-Feb 2 3: Early African-American Life Writing (Venture Smith, Equiano, *Royal African*, Elizabeth Freeman)
- Feb 3-9 3: Early African-American Life Writing (continued)
- Feb 10-16 4: Writing the Lives of the “Founders” (Franklin)
- Feb 17-23 4: Writing the Lives of the “Founders” (continued) (Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams, Burr)
- Feb 24-Mar 1 5: Founding Documents as Literature (Declaration of Independence, Constitution & Bill of Rights, selected Federalist Papers)
- Mar 2-8 6: White Women’s Life Writing (Ashbridge, Bleecker, *Lucinda*)
- Mar 9-15 7: Sentimental Fiction (*The Power of Sympathy*)
- Mar 16-22 Spring break
- Mar 23-29 7: Sentimental Fiction (*Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*)
- Mar 30-Apr 5 8: American Gothic Fiction (*Wieland*)
- Apr 6-12 8: American Gothic Fiction (*Arthur Mervyn* Part I)
- Apr 13-19 8: American Gothic Fiction (*Arthur Mervyn* Part II)
- Apr 20-26 9: Final Project Development
- Apr 27-May 1 9: Final Project Development (final project due May 1)
- Thurs. May 7 Final exam due by 9 pm