ENG 5000-001: Introduction to Graduate Studies

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ENG 5000: INTRODUCTION TO GRADUATE STUDIES

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Required Texts:
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essay and Lectures
Joseph Gibaldi, ed., Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures
Michael Frayne, Headlong

Recommended:
Joseph Gibaldi, ed., MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

COURSE TRAJECTORIES:

This course is intended to provide graduate students with an opportunity to situate themselves as new members of a changing profession by supplying them a strong sense of where English Studies has been, where it is, and where it might go. We will do this, even as we develop the skills and methods that distinguish the work of professional readers from the activities of enthusiasts, by focusing on one figure from American literary history: Ralph Waldo Emerson. In particular, we are going to examine Emerson's literary production during a signal period of American history, the 1850s. This was the decade during which Emerson's New England became radicalized around abolition, the decade that would lead to civil war, and that which require Emerson to complicate and hone his earlier, youthful optimism about American exceptionalism significantly. It's also a period that resonates with our own in some ways, and since the point of reading the past is to learn more about the present, we'll strive to develop scholarship about Emerson that helps us to understand our own moment—and what you have to say about it—as well.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:

1. Oral presentations: Throughout the semester, each seminar member will be assigned a subject on which to report to the rest of the class. Often these will concern historical contexts for Emerson, but they may also include critical essays or chapters on Emerson insofar as these may seem useful for the way our discussion evolves. Put simply, presenters are responsible for (1) presenting their material to the class and for facilitating discussion of it, and (2) hazarding some ideas about how knowing something about the subject being reported on should shape our understanding of Emerson. This last requirement should involve a close reading of select passages from the text we have read. Handouts should accompany reports and supplied to class members. These presentations will begin during
week 2. (15%)

2. **Research Exercises:** This course is intended to outfit you with certain research practices and methodologies that define the kind of work done in our field. Periodically, I'll assign you a research task using these methodologies, and results of these assignments—as well as the experiences you have in undertaking them—will be shared at the next class meeting. (15%)

3. **Complete Bibliography:** The class as a whole will undertake a complete bibliography of critical writings on Emerson since his death in 1882. This is a massive undertaking. But by breaking up the task amongst one another (and yes, this means meeting as a whole to divide the labor), it's possible. In the first weeks of class, I will distribute a handout detailing strategies for completing this assignment, and explaining how grading will work. (15%)

4. **Annotated bibliography:** On some issue of concern in the field of Emerson Studies. This will give you a chance to enter into the professional conversation about some aspect of Emerson's writing, some problem about which you've become interested over the course of the semester. You will use this bibliography in writing a paper proposal and in pursuit of the next requirement. (20%)

5. **Research essay:** Prepared according to MLA format focusing on the issues pursued in the annotated bibliography above. A much-shortened version of this paper will be presented during our seminar's Class Symposium, which will occupy the last three class meetings and which will be opened to the English Department community (And during which all students will be responding to each other's work in writing). (35%)

6. **Participation in discussion:** Ours is a graduate seminar, and so I assume that everyone will appear weekly as strong class citizens, prepared and eager to participate energetically in a demanding discussion. As you surely know by now, participating well doesn't simply mean talking a lot—it means fostering a dialogue, frequently making comments showing that you are engaged in a process of careful reading and reconsideration of that already read, and showing that you are attuned to what others in the class say. Idle talk—the kind that simply does not indicate close engagement with the materials we'll be studying—does not help move the conversation forward, and hence does not qualify as participation.

**Attendance policy:** Don't miss class.

**Late assignments:** Generally, I don't give extensions. That said, there are of course sometimes truly unavoidable, unsurmountable circumstances that absolutely prevent a student from completing a paper on time. In such cases, students will provide a full account in writing, and I may then decide to give an extension. But note that in such instances, I will expect to see the extra time reflected in the final draft—assignments that have been given an extension are read with an even more demanding eye than those that have not. Lastly: in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me at least two days before the assignment's due date.
READING SCHEDULE: 8/24-9/14

THURSDAY 8/24: Introductions, Course Overview
In-class reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, from "American Slavery" (1855)

THURSDAY 8/31: Emerson, Nature (1836); "The American Scholar" (1837); "Self-Reliance" (1841); "Experience" (1844)
F. O. Matthiessen, from American Renaissance
Stanley Cavell, from Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome
Report: Emerson’s biography, 1803-49
Report: Emerson’s biography, 1850-82

THURSDAY 9/7: Emerson, "Address to the Citizens of Concord on The Fugitive Slave Law" (1851); "Seventh of March Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law" (1854); "American Slavery" (1855);
Cornel West, from The American Evasion of Philosophy
Report: The Fugitive Slave Law
Report: Abolition in New England during the 1850s

THURSDAY 9/14: Michael Frayne, Headlong
Report: Emerson and Women’s Rights
Report: Emerson and Margaret Fuller

THURSDAY 9/21: Emerson, English Traits (chaps. TBA)
Anita Patterson, from From Emerson to King
Philip Nicoloff, from Emerson on Race and History
Report: Anglo-American Relations, 1840-1860
Report: Saxons and Normans in the Popular Press, 1850-65