ENG 3300-001: Seminar in English Studies

Randy Beebe
Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2016

Recommended Citation
Beebe, Randy, "ENG 3300-001: Seminar in English Studies" (2016). Fall 2016. 54.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2016/54

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2016 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2016 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
"...a select group of advanced students associated for special study and original research"

THE STORYTELLING ANIMAL

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do we tell stories?

Why is the Neverland of fiction so central to our social and psychological fabric of identity?

To explore this fascinating topic, we will study two interrelated paths of thought. In the first path, we will read excerpts from Jonathan Gottschall’s *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (2012), exploring and testing his ideas about the social and biological necessity of stories. Our class discussions (of short stories, films, and a novel) and writing projects will focus on a single question: do we tell stories to delight and amuse or is there a more fundamental (perhaps evolutionary) element at work in stories?

TEXTS

J. Austen, *Persuasion* (1818)


C. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859)


Other Readings (via D2L)
Once we have some preliminary answers to this question, we will turn to the second path and look—from an entirely different perspective—at the storytelling animal more broadly. In this phase of the course, we will look at storytelling from what's called "critical animal studies"—a viewpoint that studies how both the human and non-human animal are situated in literary and cultural texts.

**Seminar Format**
This English Department has designed English 3300 as a seminar, which essentially means participants share the responsibility of presenting material (usually your own writing projects and research) and facilitating discussion. Very likely that this course format will be very new to most of you—but it's designed that way to help you develop further your critical thinking and writing skills and prepare you for the challenges you will face after you leave EIU.

Here are some specific goals for the course:

- to develop advanced research skills (in using a variety of databases, verifying information, learning various research formats);
- to develop skills in deploying that research for use in both academic and popular writing;
- to sharpen critical thinking skills (in reasoning, close reading, data analysis);
- to increase proficiency in writing skills (for different audiences, in different formats);
- to gain more confidence in public speaking (through facilitating discussions, presenting research, collaborative learning).

**Assignments**
You will complete **three major writing projects**, each designed to build on your skills as an English major as well as to challenge you to re-think the kind of information you use, what you do with it, and how you present it. I will hand out an assignment sheet for each project.

You will also complete **several minor writing projects**, which can vary from response papers to smaller research projects—all of which are designed for use in class discussions or to give you some experience (or practice) in using a new research method or analyzing a complex topic.

You will also be making **presentations** in the class—a lot! Some of these are informal but others will ask you to be more formal (in preparation and presentation).

**Class Preparation**
In true seminar format, you should prepare carefully—that is, you need to come to class with, at the very least, one question and some commentary on the reading material for the day. In addition, you should be prepared to show how your comments or questions relate to the assigned material.
**Participation & Attendance**

This is not a lecture course. The writing projects extend from our discussions and substantial class time is devoted to your writing and to understanding underlying concepts of the writing projects. It’s vital that you’re present to participate, follow the discussion, and participate.

I usually allow 2 personal days. Thereafter, you will lose 5% from your final grade for each unexcused absence. Six or more unexcused absences will automatically result in a failing grade.

I follow the University’s policy on excused absences. However, you must document any excused absence and present any documentation to me (preferably in a conference meeting).

**Classroom Etiquette**

You’re welcome to bring your notebook computer/tablet to class. However, I ask that you observe common rules of etiquette and decorum when you use it. In brief, you may use it to take notes or complete an in-class writing activity. You may not use it for anything not directly related to class work.

---

Out of respect for the class and the integrity of class activities, please refrain from using your phone during class.

---

**Conferences**

The nature of this course will allow for a great deal of in-class conversations about your research and projects. However, it is vital that you work with me closely (and often) on your work. I am in my office many other hours besides the posted office hours and I urge you to get in the habit of talking to outside of class.

**Electronic Writing Portfolio**

This course is a writing-centered course and, as such, your papers satisfy the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio. If you plan on using work from this course for your EWP, I ask that you complete this before the last two weeks of the semester.

**Students with Disabilities**

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

---

**Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Writing Projects</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Writings</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>