
ENG 3014 - 01

Doors to Elsewhere: Understanding Theory and Criticism

Understanding Theory | Florida State University | Fall 2019

Instructor: Frances Tran
Course/Section: ENG 3014 - 01
Class: T/R 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM, WMS 201

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Office Hours: T/R 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as an introduction to contemporary literary and cultural theory. We will take as our point of departure Avery Gordon's assertion that "We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there." This invitation to deeply contemplate the worlds we inhabit, to participate in rigorous social, material, and cultural critique of existing conditions of injustice to enable the perception of more equitable worlds, will animate our approach to the theoretical and literary readings we engage in this class. We will explore how theory allows us to read literature more closely while also attuning us to the broader stakes and politics involved in the act of interpretation. We will discuss how theory deepens our understanding of the structures of power, social hierarchies, norms and narratives that organize our conceptions of what constitutes identity, belonging, home, and the human.

Over the course of the semester, we will spend time carefully unpacking the central arguments and ideas of theoretical texts from a range of scholarly discourses, including critical race studies, postcolonial theory, gender and sexuality studies, ecocriticism, affect studies, and biopolitics. In order to facilitate our discussion of these challenging vocabularies, concepts, and debates, we will analyze the theoretical selections alongside short literary readings and strive to make connections between the works we engage and contemporary social and political phenomena.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of key terms, concepts, and debates within contemporary theoretical scholarship in literary and cultural studies
- Enhance interpretive skills by applying different theoretical frameworks to the analysis of literary texts
- Refine written and oral communication skills through practice in expressing and supporting complex ideas
- Contribute to existing scholarly discourses by completing a final project that engages multiple theoretical approaches

COURSE MATERIALS

You are not required to purchase texts for this class. All PDFs and links to electronic course readings are available on Canvas under "modules" where they have been organized by date.

ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENT

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

For each class session (unless otherwise stated), students are responsible to contribute a post to the discussion forum on Canvas, marked by the appropriate date. **This post should be either (1) a question about one or more of the assigned readings OR (2) a brief response to another student's question.**

On posting questions:

Constructing effective and engaging questions is a difficult skill and one that we rarely have a chance to practice. Yet, learning how to ask thoughtful and inquisitive questions is also what will serve as the foundations for developing strong thesis statements for your critical essays, research projects, and creative endeavors, not to mention your career and lifelong pursuits. The discussion forums will be a chance for you to experiment with asking each other complex, difficult, and, above all, genuine questions about the readings and topics we will cover this semester. Here are some things to consider when developing your questions for the discussion forums:

- Craft your questions carefully and cite relevant page numbers when necessary.
- Avoid asking plot-driven or yes/no questions that are easily answered if you have read the material. Keep in mind that the goal is to challenge your peers to think deeply about the assigned texts and the issues and questions it raises.
- Before posting your question, read carefully through the questions your peers have posted. You will not get credit for repeating the same question someone else has already asked!

On posting replies:

Instead of asking a question, you can also choose to reply to a classmate's question for your discussion post, especially if you find one that is striking or thought-provoking. While your response does not have to be lengthy, it should demonstrate a substantive engagement with the question and/or any other posted comments. Here are some things to consider when developing your replies:

- Draw on specific ideas, examples, and/or passages from the assigned readings to support your response.
- Keep in mind that you are participating in an ongoing conversation. In other words, do not simply repeat what others before you have written but contemplate how you might build on, challenge, or take the discussion into a different direction.

- Feel free to speak to each other, i.e., use names when you are referring to someone's writing and ask questions if you are curious about a point another person has made.

Discussion posts are due before the start of class and will be evaluated on a check scale (✓+, ✓, ✓-) over the course of the semester for a cumulative grade. You are allowed 3 freebie posts, which you can miss without penalty. Discussion posts cannot be made up unless you contact me in advance for an extension.

SEMINAR FACILITATIONS

Once during the semester, students will work in groups to **lead and stimulate discussion about the assigned theoretical reading(s) for the first 30 minutes of a class session.** This assignment consists of an **in-class** and **written component.**

On the in-class group facilitation:

Working in small groups of 2-3 students, you will guide the class in a discussion and analysis of at least one of the assigned theoretical reading(s) for your facilitation date. On most days, there will also be a short story or poem that accompanies the theoretical selection. Your group can choose to include this literary piece as part of the facilitation but it is not required. The main goal should be to engage the class in a discussion about the theory. You should come prepared with well-crafted questions, presentation materials, and/or activities. Feel free to use the questions that your peers have crowd-sourced on the discussion forum as well.

In general, I will refrain from participating during student facilitations—this is your time to introduce questions and topics that you want the class to explore. As a facilitator, you may not read from a prepared speech. Consulting bullet points or note cards is permissible but remember that your job is less to give a formal presentation than to engage class conversation about the assigned reading(s). I encourage you to be as creative as possible!

You are expected to come fully prepared on your facilitation date and seminar facilitations cannot be made up. If you discover that you are going to be absent when you are the assigned facilitator, please let me and your group know at least 48 hours in advance so we can try to reschedule. Keep in mind, however, that this may not always be feasible depending on how many students are signed up for certain dates as well as where we are in the semester.

On the written component:

You are expected to write a **4-5 page thesis-driven essay** on the theoretical text you organized your facilitation around. **This essay is due exactly two weeks after your facilitation date.** No extensions will be provided unless you contact me in advance.

When crafting your essay, here are some things to consider:

- The essay should demonstrate your understanding of the assigned theoretical text that was the subject of your in-class group facilitation. As such, it should present an argumentative

claim about how and why this particular theoretical lens enhances, complicates, and/or deepens our understanding of a literary work. You may choose to apply the theoretical text to the short story or poem that was assigned along with it on your facilitation date or any other work you deem relevant.

- Although close reading the literary text itself will provide important and necessary support for your thesis, keep in mind that your main goal is to illustrate how applying theoretical frameworks and concepts offers new insights into the meaning, purpose, and stakes of the literature.
- Strong essays will include brief quotations and analyses of specific passages from both the theoretical and literary text to illustrate your main ideas and arguments.

MIDTERM EXAM

There will be an in-class midterm exam that will give you an opportunity to apply your understanding of the theoretical frameworks and concepts we have discussed to the practice of literary analysis. The exam will be composed of **short answer questions on material covered within the first two units of the course**: “Language, Identity, and the Stakes of Theoretical Scholarship” and “Encountering Difference: Reading Race, Gender, Sexuality, and (Dis)ability.” This assignment is designed to evaluate whether students have a strong grasp of the foundational theories and texts that will guide much of our discussions in the latter half of the semester. I will hold several review sessions in the classes leading up to the exam to ensure that students are amply prepared for the types of questions they will encounter.

My hope is that this exam will not only allow you to reflect on the materials we have already discussed but also serve as an opportunity to identify the ideas, texts, and critical debates that will be most generative for thinking ahead to your final projects. More details and instructions about the exam will be given in class 1-2 weeks in advance of the test date.

FINAL PROJECT

In lieu of a final exam, you will compose an **essay (8-10 pages)** that applies **at least two different theoretical frameworks to the reading of a specific cultural artifact**.

- You can choose to focus on a **literary or cultural text** that we have read in class or any external text you deem relevant.
- At least **one of the theoretical pieces you draw on must come from the second half of the semester**, i.e., the units on “Haunting, Traumatic Histories, and (Post)coloniality” or “States of Control, Ecologies of Ruin.”
- The final essay will be scaffolded with an **essay abstract** and **peer review session** where you will be able to share your ideas and works-in-progress with your classmates.

More details on this assignment will be distributed in advance of the deadlines marked in the course schedule below.

ESSAY SUBMISSIONS

- Students are expected to submit their essays **in MS Word format (.doc or .docx file) through Canvas under “Assignments” by 11:59pm** on the specified due date. Keep in mind that facilitation essays are due two weeks after your scheduled facilitation date.
- **Technology policy:** Electronic submission is a privilege that I extend to allow you more time to work on your essays in a setting that is most convenient for you. As such, I expect you to make sure to **properly attach your essay**—missing/corrupted attachments will be penalized in accordance to the lateness policy below.
- **Lateness policy:** The final grade for a late paper will drop one whole letter grade for each day it is late, including weekends. For example, a paper that merits a “B” will result in a “C” grade if it is turned in one day late. Deadline extensions, though rare, may be granted for extenuating circumstances.
- Graded assignments are typically returned within 2 weeks after the due date.

GRADING POLICY

Breakdown

Participation	10%
Discussion Posts	15%
In-class Seminar Facilitation	10%
Facilitation Essay	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Project	
Essay Abstract	10%
Peer Review Participation	5%
Final Essay	20%

GRADING SCHEME

Below, I have listed the numerical equivalents for letter grades, which you can use to track your progress in this class.

A	100% to 93%	B	< 87% to 83%	C	< 77% to 73%	D	< 67% to 63%
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A-	< 93% to 90%	B-	< 83% to 80%	C-	< 73% to 70%	D-	< 63% to 60%
B+	< 90% to 87%	C+	< 80% to 77%	D+	< 70% to 67%	F	< 60% to 0%

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Course content is accessible through Canvas. You should log on to Canvas at least once every other day to check for course updates.

You will need to be able to view videos, write and upload assignments, post to discussion boards, and take assessments. As such, you should have access to high-speed internet and updated software. To view the most current technology requirements, visit the FSU Canvas support site (<http://support.canvas.fsu.edu/>).

CANVAS SUPPORT

Need help with Canvas? Contact FSU Canvas Support:

- Email: canvas@fsu.edu
 - Phone: (850) 644-8004
 - Website: support.canvas.fsu.edu
 - Hours: 8am to 5pm, Monday - Friday
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COURSE POLICIES

COURSE CONTENT

The nature of this course will ask you to read and discuss issues that may be sensitive and controversial, such as sexuality, racism, colonialism, violence, political and religious beliefs, etc. In a college level course you are expected to think about these issues in a way that is critical, analytical, and mature, even if certain issues excite strong personal opinions from you. It is crucial that this class be a forum for the respectful exchange of ideas. Students engaging in conduct inappropriate for the classroom will be asked to leave; the same applies to online discussions. If you are unable to engage with the aforementioned topics in an open-minded and sophisticated manner, I encourage you to reconsider your enrollment in this class.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE/LATENESS POLICY

The success of this course depends on frequent, active, and sustained participation from all students. Participation entails coming to class having done the assigned readings and writing, prepared with the necessary texts and documents on hand (including materials made available electronically). Strong participation, however, involves being engaged in discussions, workshops, facilitations, and group activities. As such, I expect you to speak and contribute regularly, whether it

is by asking questions, offering to read a passage aloud, or voicing your own insights. I understand that not everyone is comfortable speaking up in class so I have structured activities throughout the semester that will help you practice getting out of your comfort zone. You may also visit me during my office hours, which counts as a form of participation as well.

Attendance and Lateness: In order to participate in class, you must be present during class meetings. As a result, failure to attend class and persistent lateness will negatively impact your grade. Over the course of the semester, **you are allowed a maximum of 4 unexcused absences**. Being late to class three times equals one absence. If you arrive more than fifteen minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent. One third of a letter grade will be deducted for each additional unexcused absence (e.g., your final grade is a "B," but you have missed five classes. You now have a "B-").

This course follows FSU's attendance policy for excused absences, which is outlined below in the "University Policies" section. If your absence is excused, I will give you the opportunity to make up exams or other graded assignments. When possible, please notify me of anticipated absences in writing as soon as you can. Appropriate documentation for excused absences is required.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Author integrity is vital to the mission of this class. Consequently, plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity will be penalized severely and may even result in a failing course grade. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people, including well-intentioned friends and family
- Failing to document paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim phrases taken from outside sources
- Collaborating on an assignment without the explicit permission of the professor*
- Submitting an essay written for one course to another course without the explicit permission of both professors
- Submitting work as your own that has been purchased or copied from a paper preparation service or website

*In this class you will be collaborating with your peers on a number of group assignments. I hope that these activities will help facilitate intellectual exchange and social interaction. As such, it will not be a violation of academic integrity for you to share resources and collaborate in developing discussion questions and activities. However, these group projects often include individual writing components as well, which should be completed in a way that preserves author integrity.

Please familiarize yourself with FSU's academic honor policy (detailed in the "University Policies" section of the syllabus).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (For more details see the FSU Academic Honor Policy and procedures for addressing alleged violations, found at:

<http://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy.>)

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
Email: sdrc@admin.fsu.edu
Website: <http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

FREE TUTORING FROM FSU

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring

Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' website (<http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring>) or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

"Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice."

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Below you will find our working class schedule of readings and assignments. Depending on the course of our conversations and the perspectives and contributions you offer, we can discuss possible changes to organizing themes and texts. I hope that we can work together to make this class as engaging, generative, and rewarding as possible for your studies and future pursuits.

Language, Identity, and the Stakes of Theoretical Scholarship

- T. 08/27 Introduction to course
Avery Gordon, Excerpts from *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), pp. 3-5.
Audre Lorde, "Power" (1978)
- Th. 08/29 Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 67-79.
Evie Shockley, "Separation Anxiety," in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000), pp. 51-68.
- T. 09/03 Gloria Anzaldúa, "Preface," "The Homeland, Aztlán: El Otro México," "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," "To live in the Borderlands means you," in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).
- Th. 09/05 Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *I Am Your Sister* (2009), pp. 39-43.
Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Afterword: Becoming Bilingual, or Notes on Numbness and Feeling," from *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* (2018), pp. 299-307.
Ken Liu, "The Paper Menagerie," in *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (2016), pp. 178-192.
Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival" (1978)
- T. 09/10 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," *TEDWomen* (2016) - https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en

Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1-15.
 Charles Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth," *The Atlantic* (1898)
 June Jordan, "Poem about My Rights" (2005)

Th. 09/12 Discussion and Review

Encountering Difference: Reading Race, Gender, Sexuality, and (Dis)ability

- T. 09/17 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation," in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994), pp. 53-76.
 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet," in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000), pp. 5-18.
- Th. 09/19 Mark Jerng, "Introduction: Racial Worldmaking," in *Racial Worldmaking: The Power of Popular Fiction* (2017), pp. 1-28.
 Douglas Jacobs, "We're Sick of Racism, Literally," *NY Times*, Nov. 11, 2017.
 Nana Kwame Adjei-Benyah, "The Finklestein 5," in *Friday Black* (2018)
- T. 09/24 Judith Butler, excerpts from *Gender Trouble*, in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism* (2001), pp. 2488-2501.
 Carmen Maria Machado, "Real Women Have Bodies," in *Her Body and Other Parties: Stories* (2017), pp. 125-148.
 Kalamu ya Salaam, "Can You Wear My Eyes," in *Dark Matter* (2000), pp. 86-90.
- Th. 09/26 Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: *Bringing Feminist Theory Home*," in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), pp. 1-18.
 Tananarive Due, "Like Daughter," in *Dark Matter* (2000), pp. 91-102.
- T. 10/01 Sara Ahmed, "Unhappy Queers," in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), pp. 88-120.
 Lysley Tenorio, "Save the I-Hotel," *Manoa* 20, no. 1 (2008): 1-18.
- Th. 10/03 José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), pp. 1-18.
 Daniel José Older, "Victory Music," in *Salsa Nocturna: A Bone Street Rumba Collection* (2016), 203-212.
- T. 10/08 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 3 (2002), pp. 1-32.
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892), pp. 647-656.
- Th. 10/10 Alison Kafer, "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips," in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), pp. 25-46.
 Octavia E. Butler, "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (2005), pp. 33-70.
- T. 10/15 Discussion and Review

Th. 10/17 **Midterm Exam**

Haunting, Traumatic Histories, and (Post)coloniality

- T. 10/22 Avery Gordon, "Introduction to the New Edition," in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), pp. xv-xx.
Tim O'Brien, "Speaking of Courage," in *The Things They Carried* (1990) 137-154.
Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Black Eyed Woman" from *The Refugees* (2017)
- Th. 10/24 Christina Sharpe, "The Wake," in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), pp. 1-22.
M. NourbeSe Philip, excerpts from *Zong!* & "Notanda" (2008)- read #1, #4, #14, #15, #22, #24, #26, "Manifest," and "Notanda," pp. 189-195 (use the glossary for unfamiliar words)
- T. 10/28 Edward Said, "Introduction" to *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), pp. xi-xxviii.
Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (2003)- Acts I-II
- Th. 10/31 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): pp. 333-358.
Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest* (2003)- Act III
- T. 11/05 Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62, no. 1 (1992): pp. 3-37.
Nnedi Okorafor, "Spider the Artist," *Lightspeed Magazine* (2011) - <http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/spider-the-artist/>.
- Th. 11/07 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1-40.
Thomas King, "Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre," in *One Good Story, That One* (1993), pp. 97-118.
- T. 11/12 Discussion and Review
Final Essay Abstract Due

States of Control, Ecologies of Ruin

- Th. 11/14 Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), pp. 195-228.
Bao Phi, "Revolution Shuffle," in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (2015), pp. 7-14.
- T. 11/19 Jasbir K. Puar, "Hands Up, Don't Shoot!" in *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017)
Michelle Alexander, "Introduction" to *The New Jim Crow* (2010), pp. 1-19.
Nana Kwame Adjei-Benyah, "Zimmer Land" from *Friday Black* (2018)

- Th. 11/21 Rob Nixon, Introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), pp. 1-44.
Adrienne Marie Brown, "The River," in *Octavia's Brood* (2015), pp. 23-31.
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "dirty river girl," in *Bodymap* (2015).
- T. 11/26 Mel Y. Chen, "Toxic Animacies, "Inanimate Affections," *GLQ* (2011): 265-86.
Ken Liu, "Build-A-Dolly," *Apex Magazine* (2013) -
<https://www.apex-magazine.com/build-a-dolly/>
- Th. 11/28 **Thanksgiving Holiday. No classes.**
- T. 12/03 Discussion, Review, and Final Reflections
- Th. 12/05 **Peer Review Session**
- T. 12/10 **Final Essay Due**