Department of English

Graduate course

Descriptions

SPRING 2020

**ENG 520 – PROFESSIONAL WRITING**

**PROF. ALEX REID**

Tuesdays, 3:30-610

Registration Numbers: (A) 23762 (B) 23763

This course introduces students to the field of professional-technical communication. As part of the certificate in professional writing and digital communication, the course addresses the concerns of students seeking to develop professional communication skills. It is also designed for students who want to expand their ability to teach professional technical communication and those interested in studying workplace communication and corporate-institutional discourse communities.

The last decade of technological development has significantly changed professional writing practices. Mobile technologies, social media, data science, Internet of Things devices, augmented reality, and machine learning, along with the longer trends of networked collaboration and multimodal composing, have shifted how professional writers compose media, collaborate with colleagues, and interact with participatory audiences. These technological shifts intertwine with ethical and political questions ranging from designing for individual user experiences to communicating across cultures on a global scale. Scholarly readings will include Clay Spinuzzi’s *All Edge: Inside the New Workplace Networks,* Liza Potts’ *Social Media in Disaster Response: How Experience Architects Can Build for Participation,* and Bernadette Longo’s *Spurious Coin: A History of Science, Management, and Technical Writing.* With sorter assignments in areas of data visualization, document design, and writing for the web and social media, we will also learn best practices in design and composing. The final project is flexible allowing students to focus on work specific to their particular educational objectives.

**ENG 522 – MILTON**

**PROF. SUSAN EILENBERG**

Wednesdays, 4:00-6:40

Registration Numbers: (A) 23727 (B) 23728

This course will be devoted to readings of John Milton's poems and major prose writings, including "Comus," "Areopagitica," Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes.  Our emphasis will be on figurations of power and patrimony, the analogical implications of the Trinity, the economics of giving and gratitude, and the generation of narrative out of what often seems to be the dread obsessive center of Milton's textual universe:  debt.

Students will be asked to deliver an informal presentation before the class and to write a single long essay on a topic of their choosing.

**ENG 538 – 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE: The American 1890s**

**PROF. CARRIE TIRADO BRAMEN**

Tuesdays, 12:30-3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23729 (B) 23730

William James predicted that the year 1890 would be known as “the great epochal year in American literature.” With the publication of *Principles of Psychology*, his brother’s *The Tragic Muse* and Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes,* James confidently saw the 1890s as a new era of American letters. That period, however, also marked a time of endings. The deaths of such figures as Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe represented the passing of the Civil War generation, at a time when Gray-and-Blue reunion narratives were featured in the commercial press.

This course will explore the literary, intellectual and cultural history of this transitional decade, which saw the waning of Victorianism and the rise of Modernism. At issue, at least in recent critical debates, is the question of periodization in the late nineteenth century and the distinction between Reconstruction and the Era of Jim Crow. This course will read an eclectic range of literary responses to this complicated period, ranging from Henry James’s realism of the “unsayable,” to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s poetry alongside her *Women and Economics.* Other themes will include local color as a genre of literary access, pragmatism and psychological theories of “multiple selves” and “double consciousness,” in combination with a range of genres from speeches to autobiography.

**ENG 548 – FICTION WORKSHOP**

**PROF. CHRISTINA MILLETTI**

Tuesdays, 7:00-9:40 pm

Registration Number: 18383

The Spring Fiction Workshop interweaves the practice of crafting fiction with the study of select contemporary novels, short stories, and theories of fiction. As an integral part of this inquiry, students will be engaged in the English Department’s writing communities, with a particular focus on the events in the Exhibit X Fiction Series and Poetics Plus Series, at which students will have the opportunity to meet and engage practicing writers from outside the university.

A workshop is made of a community of writers willing to take time and care with each other’s works-in-progress. This seems obvious enough, but signals a level of commitment outside your own writing and toward multiple and challenging conceptions of fiction that may differ from your own. Our goal as a community, then, is to therefore offer acute, critical insights about the manuscripts we examine—their structure, plot (if they have plots), conceptual conceits, language, voice, character development and so on—keeping in mind the evolution of distinctive individual techniques.

Our primary goals are to help each other see the potential in the work at hand, to take significant steps towards publication, and to better understand the critical mechanisms that, through praxis, shape fictional language into stories.

**ENG 550 – POETRY WORKSHOP**

**PROF. STEPHEN McCAFFERY**

Wednesdays, 12:30-3:10

Registration Number: 20578

The Poetry Workshop in Innovative Writing is an exploratory writing course: our focus will be on poetry and poetics as a mode of questioning through various kinds of research, discovery, and processes of making. Texts are chosen to reflect the last century or so’s palpable innovations: through Stéphane Mallarmé’s Un Coup de Des, the classic avant garde, extreme modernism, to post-war and post-millennium poems and poetics. Most importantly, in this course you will be **reading as writers**: not so much for a critical “mastery” of the texts considered, as for what you might examine and test within your own creative practice. This suggests that while you may thus take in texts idiosyncratically, you will also be reading at many different levels and with many different attitudes: noticing your own mind and body as it makes meaning - or has a thought - gets confused – resists - feels affected or resistant - drifts off - sticks on a sound-shape or rhythm or phrase - finds a connection - skips around - becomes aware of a silence or repression - imagines an elsewhere - or wants to pursue an idea. Because reading, *alongside* and *as* experience, is at the core of writing, you are strongly encouraged to take notes while you read, towards making your own work and towards aiding group discussion in class. Our exploratory processes of reading and noticing (in the capacious sense sketched above), and the writing that works through and reflects on those processes, will be the foundation of this workshop. It is hoped that at least two poets will visit the workshop.

**ENG 577 – LITERATURE AND WOMEN**

**Intersectionality in Motion: Socialist Feminism and the Global Proletarian Narrative**

**PROF. JAMES HOLSTUN**

Fridays, 12:30-3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23731 (B) 23732

Three non-existent books, yearning to be written:

1. Fredric Jameson: *Simone de Beauvoir and Feminist Totalization*.
2. Judith Butler: *Nawal el Saadawi, Social Reproduction, and the Limits of Gender Performance*.
3. Nancy Fraser: *The Feminist Proletarian Novel as Social Theory*.

Marxists indifferent to patriarchy chronically slight the conceptual grandeur of the socialist feminist tradition and its vital importance for a fully totalizing marxism. Feminists indifferent to marxism chronically slight socialist feminism and social reproduction theory. And social theorists indifferent to literature chronically slight the explanatory and utopian power of feminist proletarian fiction: we don’t just analyze it; it analyzes us.

We’ll try something different, beginning with two theoretical giants, who have had an enormous influence on the field. First, we’ll read Friedrich Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), which argues for the mutual formation of the patriarchal family and the state, and for an alternative based in part on Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) family forms. Second, we’ll read substantial parts of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), the founding text of “Second Wave” feminism, but also an under-acknowledged classic of Western Marxism, and one of the most astonishing intellectual achievements of twentieth-century Europe We’ll read some of her tradition—the Other French Feminism—including Monique Wittig and Christine Delphy.

We’ll read some “Second Wave” liberal feminist literary criticism of the seventies and eighties (including the socialist-feminist debates in Lydia Sargent’s *Women and Revolution*). We’ll read Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s *How We Got Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, and a series of essays in *Monthly Review* critiquing and adapting the concept of intersectionality.

We’ll talk about a recent theoretical development of socialist feminism, “social reproduction theory,” reading works by Maria Mies (*Patriarchy and Accumulation*), Sylvia Federici (*Revolution at Point Zero*, *Caliban and the Witch*), *Social Reproduction Theory* (ed. Bhattacharya), and *Feminism for the 99%* (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser). Try to read the latter, or write me for a shorter version in PDF.

We’ll be spending more than half the semester with proletarian novels from three areas:

**North America:**

—Agnes Smedley’s *Daughter of Earth* (US, 1929): her realist semifictional political autobiography

—Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnondio: From the* *Thirties* (US, 1930s/1974), her modernist finished fragment on work in mine, farm, factory, and household, and on battering.

—Ann Petry’s *The Street* (US, 1946), which revises Franklin’s *Autobiography* into an account of racism, capitalism, and violence in Forties Harlem.

—Alice Childress’s *Like One of the Family* (1US, 956), domestic labor and utopia in NYC: a series of vignettes by a black domestic worker that build into a brilliant under-appreciated novel.

*—*Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (US, 1993), the great Buffalo novel and a butch-femme communist classic, with some essays by Feinberg and other work on queer social reproduction theory. We’ll also read Amber Hollibaugh’s reflection on sex work and working-class lesbians, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (US, 2000).

**Middle East**

—Nawal el Saadawi’s *God Dies by the Nile* (Egypt 1974), on peasant life, sexual violence, and mayor-killing in a Nileside village; and *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), on sex work and pimp-killing in Cairo.

—Saadawi’s superb feminist historical sociology, *The Naked Face of the Arab Woman*, translated and butchered as *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977). We’ll restore the excised sections on women, work, and socialism.

—Sahar Khalifeh’s *The Inheritance* (Occupied Palestine, 1997), on gender and neoliberal projects in the Oslo-era West Bank.

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**East Asia**

—Kang Kyŏng-ae’s *From Wŏnso Pond* (Korea, 1934), and excerpts from *The Underground Village* (1930s): on the relations among men and women, peasants and factory girls, sex workers and new women, in Japan-occupied Korea; also, some Korean feminist theory of the period and of today.

—Agnes Smedley’s *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* (China, 1928-1941; 1993): excerpts from Smedley’s extensive fiction and journalism, written while she was marching with the Eighth Route Army and pondering the feminist revolution emerging out of wartime and revolution

—Ding Ling, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (China, 1948): peasants, family, and land reform during the Chinese Revolution.

—Sata Ineko, “Café Kyoto” (Japan, 1929) and “Tears of a Factory Girl” (1931), on proletarian workers and the communist underground.

So that’s what I’m eager to read with you and talk about—I am particularly obsessed with the theoretical acuity of proletarian feminist fiction. Of course, that list is impossible. Contact me after the solstice, when I will pare it down—the actual syllabus will be substantial but not punishing. Around then, I’ll also send you a page with hyperlinks that will help you order less expensive copies. Queen City Imaging will sell you a course reader. Everyone will write weekly informal essays (an hour or so). “Intensive” students will research and write a seminar essay of 6000 words or more. See me if you want to talk about the class: Clemens 319; [jamesholstun@hotmail.com](mailto:jamesholstun@hotmail.com).

**ENG 584 – POETICS: Ecopoetics & Biopolitics**

**PROF. JUDITH GOLDMAN**

Wednesdays, 3:30-6:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23733 (B) 23734

This exploratory seminar will study ecological and biopolitical poetics, on premises that ecological and biopolitical concerns obviously overlap considerably and that poetry endures as a set of practices for thinking through, representing, and consciously acting within and upon these concerns separately and jointly. We will focus attention on poetry and poetics attuned to the environmental consequences of white settler colonialism, colonial and neocolonial underdevelopment, and war; we will also explore how poetry has rendered nature as culture and culture as nature – in particular, its interest in the city as nature and as ever-changing, zoned space; and has analyzed the production and organization of capitalist nature and its various modes dealing with waste. With regard to biopolitics, we will work both on poetry zeroing in on the politics and marketization of life itself at the level of genomics, and on texts that examine the management and optimization of life at the level of population, with concomitant super-exploitation, abandonment, and violence for racialized others. We will also examine reparative texts that couple a decentering of language with a decentering of the human, proposing and enacting posthuman aesthetics and ethics as a critique of regimes of environmental degradation and dehumanization and/or as a means of encountering at various scales a world (humans included) otherwise reduced to an instrumentalizable alterity.

Topics for exploration may include: 18th- and 19th- century constructions of earth as “system,” geological time, and evolution; Western and non-Western cartographic technologies; Native American civilizations prior to and in encounter with United States white settler colonialism; early modern British pastoral and anti-pastoral poetry; the classification of species; GMOs and biopiracy; commons and enclosure; the production of urban space; industrial and postindustrial landscapes and “ecologies”; heliocentric general economy (Bataille); metabolic rift, ecological debt (capitalism as a system of unpaid costs), and ecological services; the plantation; gardens; forests; plant intelligence and ethics; the concept of “wilderness” and wilderness conservation; ruins and ruination; junk space; “planet of slums” and the shantytown as zone of creation; earth works and land art; environmental sound and soundworks; sustainability and green design; “green” capitalism and emissions trading; waste theory; extraction capitalism; ethnopoetics as ethnoecology; plastic and microplastics; animal studies; speculative realism/object-oriented ontology and “vibrant matter” (Bennett); theory of biopolitics (Foucault’s biopolitical governmentality; Agamben’s “bare life”; Mbembe’s necropolitics); the Human Genome Project and consumer genomics; eugenics; organ donation/sales and prosthetics; artificially extended life; debility and the political economy of health; refugee and INS camps, and national border phenomena.

**ENG 613 – STUDIES IN 18TH CENTURY: Knowledge Products of Enlightenment**

**PROF. DAVID ALFF**

Thursdays, 3:30-6:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23735 (B) 23736

This seminar will investigate enlightenment, the idea that early modern European intellectuals encouraged people to consult their powers of reason and think for themselves rather than submit to church, state, and scholastic authority. How did residents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries experience this demand for self-reliance? How do we know it even took place? Focusing on the years between the publication of Francis Bacon’s *Great Instauration* (1620) and the French Revolution (1788-1799), we will ask how enlightenment-attributed ideals like scientific rationalism and the liberal individual manifested across different written genres: poems, plays, long fictions, experimental correspondence, partisan manifestos, economic treatises.

We will ask where and when the word “enlightenment” might help explain the rise of institutions like capitalism and democracy, and where, conversely, its anachronistic usage inhibits the work of salvaging past thought and experience. Britain will be our geographical, cultural, and linguistic center of gravity, though we will ask constantly how authors in London and Edinburgh took part in debates that raged trans-continentally in Parisian salons, Frederick the Great’s Prussian court, and the port of Amsterdam among other spaces. Seminar readings will pair writing from the 1600 and 1700s by authors like Thomas Sprat, René Descartes, Mary Astell, Baruch Spinoza, Margaret Cavendish, John Locke, Alexander Pope, Adam Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Jefferson with twentieth-century theoretical works that contest, reject, and qualify the enlightenment concept, including essays by Max Horkeimer, Theodore Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Hortense Spillers, and others. Our goals will be to determine what kind of words and actions could have constituted enlightenment in early modernity, and more broadly, how we can understand the relationship of history to the concepts we formulate to explain it.

**ENG 645 – STUDIES IN THE NOVEL: Narratives of Migration**

**PROF. JOSEPH CONTE**

Mondays, 12:30-3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 20579 (B) 20580

Narratives of migration extend from the halls of Ellis Island at the turn of the last century to the globalized transit depots of the twenty-first century. In narratives of *im*migration, first-generation immigrants are often driven to these shores by the blight of poverty or the sting of religious or political persecution; hope to make for themselves a fabled but often factitious “better life”; and are riven between the desire to retain old-world customs and language and the appeal of new-world comforts and technological advances. Second-generation immigrants face the duality of a national identity—striving to become recognized as “real Americans”—and an ethnic heritage that they wish to honor and sustain but which marks them as always an “other.” Here we encounter the hyphenated status of the preponderance of “natural born” American citizens. The third-generation descendent will have only indirect or acquired familiarity with his or her ethnic heritage; the loss of bilingualism or at best a second language acquired in school; and frequently a multiethnic identity resulting from the complex scrabble of American life in a mobile, suburban, and professionalized surrounding.

*Mount Allegro* (1989), Jerre Mangione’s memoir of growing up in the Sicilian enclave of Rochester, NY, portrays ethnicity that is insular, protective of its “imported from Italy” values, and yet desperate to find recognition as an authentic version of “Americanness.” Colm Tóibín’s novel, *Brooklyn* (2009), introduces us to the postwar generation of Irish immigrants in the borough of Brooklyn in the 1950s. Although it may not strike us as radical now, Eilis Lacey’s interethnic marriage to an Italian immigrant, and the conflicting draws of remigration and family ties, bring her to the crossroads of dilemma. Viet Thanh Nguyen’s short stories in *The Refugees* (2017) show the exacting toll that forced migration can take as, after the American war in Vietnam, families are broken between the homeland that has expelled them and the country that only reluctantly receives them. Dave Eggers’ fictionalized *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006)

tracks the exodus of a Lost Boy of Sudan, whose tragedy and loss in the midst of genocidal warfare is framed by his assault in an American city that is supposed to give him refuge.

The narratives of immigration *to* America impress the assimilation of the foreign body into the dominant imaginary of a white, Rockwellian Protestantism; the naturalization not only of the “resident alien” but also of the exceptionalism on which those cultural values stand; and a tribalism that is irreconcilable with a blended, pluripotential society. The narratives of *re*migration *from* America express a transversal politics of differentiation, a transnational identity that bricolages self and other, and the cosmopolitanism of an open, borderless world. This transnationalism, however, isn’t the pure product of a postmodern or post-9/11 condition. One hundred years ago the radical progressive intellectual, Randolph Bourne, issued a call in 1916 for a “Trans-national America” as the first World War engulfed the countries in Europe from which much of America’s immigrant stock was derived. Bourne was among the first to declare “the failure of the ‘melting-pot,’” a rejection of the assimilationist metaphor in which the “impurities” of an alien ethnicity are annealed in the blast furnace of American industrial capitalism; an Americanization that was indeed touted in such immigrant narratives as the widely-read autobiography of Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (1912).

Novels of remigration include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), whose protagonists Ifemelu and Obinze encounter a dream deferred in the West before their return to Nigeria; Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011), which imagines a controversy arising from the juried architectural competition for the 9/11 Memorial, whose apparent winner is a young architect named Mohammad Khan; and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a dramatic monologue delivered by a Princeton-educated Pakistani émigré who returns to Lahore after 9/11 to lecture in the classroom against American imperialism.

Other literary and critical readings will be available through UB Learns or on graduate course reserve. Course requirements will include a twenty-minute seminar presentation by all enrolled students and a twenty-page research paper from those students registered intensively.

**ENG 653 – CRITICAL THEORY – Critical University Studies**

**PROF. JASON MAXWELL**

Tuesdays, 12:30-3:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 23740 (B) 23741

This seminar will engage with the burgeoning field of investigation known as “Critical University Studies.” In addition to reading some key texts and documenting changes within the field over the last twenty years, we will spend some time thinking about how Critical University Studies, which constitutes one strain of interdisciplinary scholarship, has drawn upon the insights of the critical humanities and social sciences in diverse and conflicting ways. How might other thinkers and concepts from this critical tradition be usefully deployed to analyze the contemporary university? Texts for the course will include *some* of the following: Jacques Derrida’s *Eyes of the University*, Bill Readings’ *The University in Ruins*, Frank Donoghue’s *The Last Professors*, Annette Kolodny’s *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*, Benjamin Ginsberg’s *The Fall of the Faculty*, Christopher Newfield’s *The Great Mistake*, Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works*, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades’ *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, Roderick A. Ferguson’s *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons*, Jennifer Doyle’s *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, David R. Johnson’s *A Fractured Profession: Commercialism and Conflict in Academic Science*, and Gerald Raunig’s *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*.

**ENG 689 – PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING**

**PROF. MING QIAN MA**

Mondays, 3:30-6:10

Registration Numbers: (A) 22427 (B) 22428

Following the established definition of phenomenology as “the study of the structure of

consciousness experienced from the first-person point of view,” this seminar will

examine the “enabling conditions” (*SEP*) and operational mechanisms whereby

phenomena are made manifest. It will engage 1) selected works in classical

phenomenology, focusing on constitutive issues such as “horizon,” “subjectivity-I,”

“intentionality,” “reduction,” “immanence,” “transcendence,” “givenness,” “perception,”

“distance,” “methodology,” etc. and the functional relations between them; 2) how these

said issues have been radically challenged, critiqued, and re-theorized in contemporary

continental philosophy on the one hand and, on the other hand, pragmatically localized,

modified, and narrated in what has been controversially referred to as critical

phenomenology; and 3) how these said issues are metamorphosed, deployed, and

perpetuated in the contemporary scene of poetic-artistic innovations. The notion of

“reading” is therefore broadly conceived, in this seminar, to cover a spectrum of sensemaking

practices ranging from the philosophical, the textual, to the multimodal.

The readings for the seminar will include, tentatively at this point, the following:

Edmund Husserl:

-----*The Idea of Phenomenology*

-----Selections from *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a*

*Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book---General Introduction to a Pure*

*Phenomenology*

Martin Heidegger:

-----“Introduction” in *Being and Time*

-----“Introduction” in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*

M. Merleau-Ponty:

-----“Preface,” “Introduction” in *Phenomenology of Perception*

-----Selections from *Phenomenology of Perception*

Emmanuel Levinas:

-----*Totality and Infinity*

Renaud Barbaras:

-----*Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception*

Michel Henry:

-----*Material Phenomenology*

-----Selections from *The Essence of Manifestation*

-----Other books

Jean-Luc Marion:

-----*Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*

-----*Being and Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*

Lisa Guenther:

-----*Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*

Michael Marder:

-----*Phenomena-Critique-Logos: The Project of Critical Phenomenology*

A group of essays on phenomenology of reading

A group of essays on critical phenomenology

A group of innovative poetic-art works selected by both the instructor and the students