

The University in Fiction & Theory
English 8320: Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature
Prof. Samuel Cohen, University of Missouri
Spring 2025, Friday 1-3:30 PM, Tate 310
Office hours: Wednesday 3-4:30 p.m., Tate 208
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The Course

This seminar will have two foci: 1) American fiction about higher education and 2) American higher education. We will split the time we spend on the fiction talking about contemporary American fiction as a field of study and about the intersection between the novels we read and our study of higher education. Students will write daily questions about the reading, give presentations about the reading, write and present book reviews and conference-length papers.

The Texts

Willa Cather, *The Professor's House*
Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*
Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class*
Ishmael Reed, *Japanese by Spring*
Julia Schleck, *Dirty Knowledge: Academic Freedom in the Age of Neoliberalism*
Julie Schumacher, *Dear Committee Members*
Christine Smallwood, *The Life of the Mind*
Jane Smiley, *Moo*
Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Businessmen*
John Williams, *Stoner*

Secondary reading listed in "Schedule" below will be available in PDF on Canvas or online.

Ten Things You Should Know

1. This is a graduate seminar and so it depends on lively discussion. You will need to take part in the discussion for this class to work, or we will spend a lot of time staring at each other. You will also need to take part to earn an A in the class. I also have an annoying rule about not eating in class that I'm going to stick to no matter how annoying people think it is. We'll take a short break halfway through.
2. You will print out and bring to class all of the assigned secondary reading for that day's meeting, with scribbles all over indicating that you've taken notes. If you are one of those

electronic people who take electronic notes with their electronic gadgets, that's okay too, but you bring your gadget.

3. You will bring to each class a question (typed, no more than a page long, and printed out) prompted by some part of the day's reading. Questions should be interpretive rather than informational, exploratory rather than rhetorical; they should be the kind of questions that could lead to discussion. They will be shared in class.

4. You will give a presentation of no more than fifteen minutes on one meeting's reading (for fiction days, the secondary reading; for the other days, one of the primary readings). Presentations must not be read, though you can have notes (but no handouts, please); think of your presentation as a chance to teach.

5. You will write a 2000-word book review of a book about contemporary fiction (criticism and/or theory) published in the last ten years. Prior approval of book required. You will make a presentation to the class about the book you review (though, as with your other presentation, you will not read it but rather work from notes). Reviews will be followed with Q&A/critiques.

6. You will write a conference-style paper of eight to ten pages related to the course topic and built on original research (following MLA style). Paper topics must be approved in advance in a meeting with me; if you cannot make my office hours, we will set up an appointment at another time.

7. You will informally present (not read) your paper during our last meeting. Presentations should be no more than ten minutes. There will be a q&a after each presentation. Full length papers (see #6) will be due a week later.

8. Your grade for the course will consist of your participation in class discussion (20%), your daily questions (20%), your presentation on secondary reading (10%), your conference paper (30%), and your book review and paper presentations (10% each). (Note: I will be availing myself of the +/- grading option.)

9. Familiarize yourself with the University's Academic Policies and Expectations. Just a few of the [MU Policies and Expectations](#) you will find there include: Academic Integrity, Acceptable Use, Students with Disabilities, Statement of nondiscrimination, and FERPA.

10. This course maintains a strict policy against the use of AI software in any aspect of the learning process. Students are expected to rely solely on their own cognitive abilities and academic skills when drafting, editing, and revising assignments. This course policy is in place to uphold the principle of individual academic achievement and to ensure that assessments accurately reflect each student's independent learning and writing capabilities. This policy aligns with the UM System Student Code of Conduct 200.010. (MU CWP)

Schedule

Week 1 Jan 24	Introduction Thorstein Veblen, <i>The Higher Learning in America</i>
Week 2 Jan 31	Willa Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i> Sarah Kimmet, "Economic Ecosystems and Postcapitalist Futures in <i>The Professor's House</i> ," <i>Novel</i> 55.2 (2022) Jeffrey J. Williams, "The Rise of the Academic Novel," <i>American Literary History</i> 24.3 (2012)
Week 3 Feb 7	Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Pnin</i> Eric Naiman, "Nabokov's McCarthyisms: <i>Pnin</i> in the Groves of Academe," <i>Comparative Literature</i> 68.1 (2016) Wendy Brown, "Educating Human Capital," <i>Undoing the Demos</i> (2015)
Week 4 Feb 14	John Williams, <i>Stoner</i> Maureen Clark, "Listen to the Sound of the Quiet American: John Williams's <i>Stoner</i> ," <i>Orbit: A Journal of American Literature</i> 5.2 (2017) Heather Steffen, "Imagining Academic Labor in the US University," <i>New Literary History</i> 51.1(2020)
Week 5 Feb 21	Christopher Newfield, <i>Unmaking the University</i> & "Introduction," <i>The Great Mistake</i>
Week 6 Feb 28	Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> John Duvall, "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's <i>White Noise</i> ," <i>Arizona Quarterly</i> 50.3 (1994) David J. Alworth, "Supermarket Sociology," <i>New Literary History</i> 41.2 (2010) Sally Robinson, "Shopping for the Real: Gender and Consumption in the Critical Reception of DeLillo's <i>White Noise</i> ," <i>Postmodern Culture</i> 23.2 (2013)
Week 7 Mar 7	No meeting this week Leonard Cassuto, "Introduction," <i>Academic Writing as if Readers Matter</i> Paper proposals due
Week 8 Mar 14	Ishmael Reed, <i>Japanese by Spring</i> David Palumbo-Liu, "Introduction," <i>The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions</i> Crystal S. Anderson, "Racial Discourse and Black-Japanese Dynamics in Ishmael Reed's <i>Japanese by Spring</i> ," <i>MELUS</i> 29.3/4 (2004)
Week 9 Mar 21	Jane Smiley, <i>Moo</i> Mark McGurl, "The Program Era: Pluralisms of Postwar American Fiction," <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 32.1 (2005) Eric Bennett, "Introduction" and "Conclusion," <i>Workshops of Empire</i>

- Mar 28 Spring break
- Week 10 Mary Esteve, review of Michael Clune, *The Defense of Judgment in Twentieth-Century Literature* 70.2 (2024)
 Apr 4 Lori Askeland, review of Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*
 Samuel Cohen, review of Harilaos Stecopoulos, *Telling America's Story to the World: Literature, Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy, Genre* 57.3 (2024)
 Book reviews due
 Presentations
- Week 11 Christine Smallwood, *The Life of the Mind*
 Apr 11 Marc Bousquet, "The Waste Product of Graduate Education: Toward a Dictatorship of the Flexible," *Social Text* (2002)
 Leonard Cassuto, "Conclusion: In Search of an Ethic," *The Graduate School Mess* (2015)
 Marc Bousquet, "Moving the Goalposts in Graduate Education," *Inside Higher Education* 20 October, 2015
 Leonard Cassuto, "Yes, Alt-Ac and Activism Can Coexist," *Inside Higher Education* 30 Nov. 2015
 Natalia Lusin and Mai Hunt, "The MLA Job List, 2020–22," Modern Language Association
- Week 12 MU 2015
 Apr 18 Adam Dietrich & Arun Bajaj, *Concerned Student 1950*
 "Turmoil at Mizzou" <https://www.chronicle.com/package/turmoil-at-mizzou/>
 (access through library)
 Ryan Famuliner, "[4 Things You Might Have Wrong about the Mizzou Story](#)," *KBIA* 12 Nov. 2015
 Henry Reichman, Nicholas Fleisher, Shelia Kennison, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: University of Missouri (Columbia)," *AAUP Bulletin* May 2016
COVID
 Michael Bérubé, "Academic Labor, Shared Governance, and the Future That Awaits Us," *English Language Notes* 61.3 (2023)
 Trevor Norris, "Educational Futures After COVID-19: Big Tech and Pandemic Profiteering Versus Education for Democracy," *Policy Futures in Education* 21.1 (2023)
New College
 Stephen Brint, "If Trump Wins," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 6 Mar. 2024
 Kathryn Joyce, "The New College Gambit," *In These Times* 9 Dec. 2024
<https://inthesetimes.com/article/new-college-florida-republicans-higher-ed>
BDS
 Ryan Quinn, "AAUP Faces Criticism for Reversal on Academic Boycotts," *Inside Higher Education* 16 Aug. 2024

(<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/08/16/aaup-faces-criticism-reversal-academic-boycotts>)

Modern Language Association, "Report to the MLA Delegate Assembly from the Executive Council on Resolution 2025-1 <https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Delegate-Assembly/Agenda-for-the-2025-Delegate-Assembly-Meeting/Report-to-the-MLA-Delegate-Assembly-from-the-Executive-Council-on-Resolution-2025-1>

Matt Seybold, "What The MLA Is..." & "Who Owns the MLA?" *The American Vandal* 8 and 12 Jan. 2025

(<https://theamericanvandal.substack.com/p/who-owns-the-mla> & <https://theamericanvandal.substack.com/p/what-the-mla-is>)

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| Week 13 | Julia Schleck, <i>Dirty Knowledge</i> |
| Apr 25 | Evelyn Burg, "Cui Bono?: A Response to Julia Schleck's <i>Dirty Knowledge: Academic Freedom in the Age of Neoliberalism</i> "; Samuel Cohen, "University Control or, Conditions and Tendencies"; Rachel Ida Buff, "A Greenhouse of Dirty Knowledge," all in <i>Provocations</i> 6 (2022-23) |
| Week 14 | Julie Schumacher, <i>Dear Committee Members</i> |
| May 2 | Paper presentations |
| May 9 | Papers due |