

**Social Theory Foundations**  
**REL 501—Fall 2019**  
**Wednesdays 1:30-3:20, Manly 210**

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“A ‘term’ is a boundary line, a line of demarcation.”  
—*Critical Terms for Literary Study*

**Course Overview/Description:**

This graduate seminar introduces students to some of the terms and methods used in social theory and cultural analysis. As such, it presents the academic study of religion as an inevitably interdisciplinary field that draws from a host of various thinkers and texts. We will focus our readings and discussions around critical concepts important to studies of identity, text, and society.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students in REL 501 will:

- 1) gain a historical understanding of various influential schools in critical theory, especially from the 20th century
- 2) write academic prose that presents a critical concept as it has traditionally been understood and applies it to a particular topic relevant to their research projects
- 3) present effectively their analyses of readings and examples orally in class
- 4) practice applying different theoretical frameworks to literary and cultural texts
- 5) debate the cultural and critical value of different theoretical approaches

**Texts/Web Resources:**

\*Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds). *Critical Terms for Literary Study*

\*Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

\*UA Box: All course readings (including drafts of your own work) will be in a shared Box folder.

**Requirements and Course Policies:**

- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is required in a grad seminar: each unexcused absence will cost you 10 points on your final grade (a full letter grade). If you know you will need to miss class, please email me in advance and still turn in your writing for that week. I expect everyone to do the readings and to speak up during classes. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas.
- **Reading and Responses:** You are expected to read all assigned material (and/or watch any required films) before class. *By 5pm on Tuesdays*, post a précis in response to assigned texts, including suggestions for discussion and questions you'd like to see addressed in class. Everyone should read each other's précis before the next day's class.
- **Final Paper:** The final paper in this course will be an essay of no more than 15 pages that presents your own entry to a critical concept/term as applied to an element of your research topic. Specific guidelines will be discussed before the midpoint in the semester. The term relevant to your work will be determined at the beginning of the semester in consultation with your advisor. Readings/discussions of these terms will constitute our second and third class meetings.

**Grading:**

Participation (attendance + weekly précis): 50%

Essay: 50%

**Grading Scale:**

A 90-100

B 80-89

C 70-79

D 60-69

F below 60

*\*no grades of 'I' (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course*

**Statement on Academic Misconduct:**

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA's Honor Code in this class.

**Classroom Environment:**

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

**Consultations/Safe Zone:**

All students are encouraged to set up an appointment to see me in my office, and/or contact me by phone or email for assistance or with any questions. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

- The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website ([www.ua.edu/uact](http://www.ua.edu/uact)) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

**Disability Accommodation:**

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for

services.

**UA Severe Weather Protocol:**

UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at [www.ua.edu](http://www.ua.edu). In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign up on myBama). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use WVUA 7 Storm Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

**Tentative Calendar**

*(subject to change based on the direction our discussions take)*

August

21 Introduction to course; Introduction to *Critical Terms for Literary Study*  
Diana Fuss, "Teaching Theory"  
\*in class: Post-Structuralism Explained with Hipster Beards

28 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 1 & 2

September

4 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 3 & 4

11 Barbara Johnson, *Writing* (ch. 3, *CTLS*)  
Michel Foucault, excerpt from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (pdf in Box)

18 Donald E. Pease, *Author* (ch. 8, *CTLS*)  
Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"  
Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?"  
*Examined Life* (film)

25 Stephen Best, excerpt from *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (pdf in Box)  
Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience" (pdf in Box)

October

2 Paul A. Bové, *Discourse* (ch. 4, *CTLS*)  
"How to Do Things with Words," J. L. Austin

9 Roland Barthes, "Photography and Electoral Appeal," Roland Barthes (pdf in Box)  
Vilém Flusser, reading TBA (pdf in Box)

16 ***no class: MSA***

23 John Guillory, *Canon* (ch. 17, *CTLS*)  
Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Value, Evaluation" (ch. 13, *CTLS*)  
Frank Lentricchia, "In Place of an Afterword—Someone Reading" (*CTLS*)

30 *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison

November

6 Daniel T. O'Hara, Class (ch. 28, *CTLS*)  
"Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," bell hooks (1992)

13 Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler (pdf in Box)  
Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend" (pdf in Box)

20 Craig Martin, "Habitus" (pdf on Box)  
Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method"  
*A Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (film)

27 ***no class: Thanksgiving***

December

4 Judith Jack Halberstam, "The Power of Unknowing" (pdf in Box)  
In class: Presentations of final papers (essays will be turned in at the end of class)