

English 284.002
TR 2:00-3:15
HHH 222
Fall 2019

Professor David Shih
Office: CEN 4311 (36-3502)
Office hours: M 1:30-3; F 12-1
Email: shihd@uwec.edu

Introduction to Theory and Criticism

Course description:

This course is an introduction to a history of thought, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, centered on the practices through which meaning is made, not only within an academic discipline such as English or a field such as literary study, but within and across cultures at large and that has come to be known simply as “theory.” Interdisciplinary by nature, theory has nevertheless found a home within English departments because of the association between English studies and the search for meaning, usually within a group of texts designated as “literature.” This class aims to bring some of this history of thought to the student, not necessarily so that they will become more masterful readers of literature but so that they will become more masterful readers of texts in general, trained to make meaning by finding important connections among them. Students usually believe that one reads theory in order to arrive at a “truer” meaning of a work of literature, such as “using” feminist theory to interpret a Victorian novel. Rather, this class will ask you to do the opposite: to read texts, including literature, in order to arrive at a better understanding of theory. After all, this is what happens when we deeply enjoy a work of literature—it helps us to see connections beyond it that enrich our own lives and relationships. We will begin by exploring our personal relationship to literature and how theory—even those interpretive practices not commonly referred to as such—has influenced our experienced of it. From there, we will learn about some theories that have become part of the intellectual (and even popular) mainstream, understanding that they are not always distinct from one another and share a lot in common, most of all a skepticism of the belief that any perception or interpretation is beyond a theory of some kind.

Required Texts:

Beginning Theory, Fourth Edition, Peter Barry
Critical Race Theory, Richard Delgado
Native Speaker, Chang-rae Lee

You will receive other readings in the form of handouts or electronic documents. Paper handouts will be distributed in class, while electronic documents will be available for download from Canvas. Some video will need to be viewed outside of class before class discussion; these will usually be streamed via Canvas.

Course Requirements:

Reading questions (15%): Reading questions will be the basis for many of our class discussions (these are different from Discussion Posts). You are responsible for submitting two reading questions over the course of the semester. These will be assigned randomly to you and will pertain to a reading/part of a reading assigned for that day. You will upload these reading questions to our course Canvas site. I will put these questions on the projection screen and begin most class periods with them. All questions must be complex in that there are no simple answers to them. Reading questions will not have yes/no, one word, or simplistic answers that can be answered by referring to the text only. Additionally, you need to submit a one-page paper explaining why you chose the question and what leads you to answer it in the way that you do. You will receive a separate assignment sheet for this requirement.

Short essays (20%): Over the course of the semester, you will turn in two short essays demonstrating your understanding of theoretical positions and concepts. I will provide a “prompt” or guiding question to get you started.

Each essay should be at least 1,250 words. You will submit an electronic version of this paper (in .DOC / .DOCX / .RTF / .PDF formats only) to Canvas in addition to turning in a hardcopy to me. You will receive a separate assignment sheet for this requirement.

Critical essay (20%): Toward the end of the semester, you will submit a critical essay of at least 2,000 words in length (not including notes and Works Cited page). This paper will be based on our course materials and an argument that you develop yourself. You will receive a separate assignment sheet for this paper. You will submit an electronic version of this paper (in .DOC / .DOCX / .RTF / .PDF formats only) to Canvas in addition to turning in a hardcopy to me. You will receive a separate assignment sheet for this requirement.

Quizzes (30%): Occasionally I will ask you to write a brief response to the material assigned for the day we meet. Quizzes will usually be given at the start of class, before class discussions. You will not be allowed to refer to your books or PDFs during these quizzes, although you may use any notes you may have taken. Once the quiz is announced, you may ask me any questions about the text before I reveal the quiz question. If you have carefully done the reading, these quizzes should not pose much of a challenge. If you are absent on the day a quiz is given, your absence must be authorized in order for you to make up the quiz. Students missing a quiz will receive a grade of zero (0) on the quiz. This means that it is easier to do very poorly on this requirement than it is on your papers (assignments for which most will receive some partial credit). For example, getting no credit for just one quiz could drop your final course grade from a "B" to a "B-."

Class Participation (15%): Because I will not be lecturing for the full class period every day, the success of this course depends on the contribution of each person. For that reason, I place a high priority on class participation. Elements of strong class participation include vocal participation in discussion—especially for your classmates' reading questions—regular and punctual attendance, completion of Canvas discussions, timely submission of assignments, and respect for the civility policies of the course (see "Policies" below). Articulating your thoughts and ideas is crucial for your learning, and if you do not do so, I do not know whether you are having trouble following our discussion or if you simply haven't prepared for the class. Students contributing little or nothing to class discussions can expect a class participation grade that is no higher than a "D." If vocal participation is difficult for you, please see me to let me know why. I may be able to adapt our class dynamic so that you are better able to contribute to our discussions. Critical listening is also a component of class participation, and it means giving your full attention to the speaker and not formulating your own response or comment while another person is speaking (see "Civility" below). Interruptions and non sequiturs often result from a lack of critical listening. Students expecting a strong class participation grade should exhibit critical speaking and listening skills every week.

The most important thing you can do to put yourself in the best position to get a good grade is to attend every class, do all of the reading, and submit all of the assignments on time.

Policies:

Dropping and/or withdrawing from the class: The last day to drop the class with no record is September 17, 2019. The last day to withdraw from the class with a "W" is November 12, 2019.

Canvas: We will use Canvas as our course software. It will be used primarily as a way to distribute information and NOT as a method of calculating grades. Any information that I need to distribute to you will be uploaded to Canvas for you to download or stream. You will upload electronic versions of your assignments to Canvas.

Attendance: Mandatory. Poor attendance will adversely affect your final grade. Every unauthorized absence after the second will cumulatively lower your class participation grade. If you accumulate more than six unauthorized absences, you will fail the course. This means that you have a grace period of two classes for unauthorized absences. If you are absent due to illness, please inform me as soon as possible so that I can determine whether your absence is authorized.

If you suspect that you will have obligations that will keep you from attending this class regularly, please see me immediately so that we can reassign you to another class. If you know ahead of time that you must miss a particular class, please let me know as soon as possible. Any documentation that you have to support an absence (e.g. doctor's or instructor's note) will help you when I decide whether to authorize an absence.

Electronic devices: Use of electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops is not permitted during class. These devices can be distracting to your fellow students and to me, and there is no need for them during class discussion. (This means that you should print out PDF readings for class discussion rather than accessing them from an electronic device.) Please mute your cell phones and place them in your backpack or bag before class begins. If you have a legitimate and documentable need for using an electronic device during class, please discuss your situation with me. Use of electronic devices for activities such as texting or social media will significantly decrease your class participation grade.

Late papers: Any paper turned in for a grade will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for every day it is late, including weekend days. For example, if you would normally receive a "B" for a paper due on Thursday, but you turn it in on Sunday, you will receive a grade of "C" for it. The final critical essay cannot be turned in late.

Accommodation: Any student who has a disability or needs any classroom accommodation should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in Centennial Hall 2106, or call 715-836-5800. This office will treat any issue with complete confidentiality and will help put any necessary forms of assistance into place.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic misconduct will not be tolerated under any circumstances. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the University's policy on academic dishonesty and related disciplinary procedures. Ignorance is no excuse for any violations. See <http://www.uwec.edu/dos/Codes/ch14procedure.htm> for this information.

Civility: Due to the nature of this course, you may experience a highly personal connection to the readings and discussions. Your reaction may be one or a combination of multiple feelings or emotions, including defensiveness, embarrassment, guilt, anger, and shame. I would like for us to agree to the "ground rules" below (taken from the Racial Equity Institute's "Dismantling Racism" workbook):

- Keep it here. Exercise good judgment and respect if people share things that are obviously not meant to go any further. Avoid sharing who said what.
- Show respect. Show respect for yourself as well as for others. Challenge statements and behavior without putting down the person.
- We don't have to agree. When we disagree, challenge the statement or the behavior instead of the person. Avoid using blame, shame, and guilt on ourselves or others.
- Step up/step back. Fully participate and be sure to give everyone else a chance to talk. Listen to others and avoid interrupting.
- Speak for yourself and from your experience. Use "I" statements.
- Take risks and encourage others to take risks too. Take advantage of this opportunity to talk to each other. Feel free to be open and spontaneous with your ideas, even if they seem incomplete or contradictory. Use this opportunity to test new ideas, however brilliant or wacky they might be.
- Express feelings—emotions are good.
- There are no stupid questions. All questions are valid. Ask questions yourself and support others when they ask.
- Understand the value of discomfort. It is when we are uncomfortable that we have the biggest chance to learn something. This is especially true for those of us who are used to being in control. Those of us with power and

privilege tend to have less experience with discomfort, and sometimes feel that being comfortable is our right. Use this time as an opportunity to see what our discomfort can teach us.

- Help create a shared experience of learning.

Our civility policy requires an understanding of three concepts: comfort zone, learning edge, and triggers. I'll be referring to these concepts throughout the semester, so they are discussed and defined here (taken from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice).

- **Comfort zone:** We all have zones of comfort about different topics and activities. Topics or activities we are familiar with or have lots of information about are solidly inside our comfort zone. When inside our comfort zone, we may not be challenged and we may not be learning anything new. Often, when we participate in a discussion or activity focused on new information or awareness, or the information and awareness we have or are familiar with are challenged, we may find ourselves out of our comfort zone or on its edge. If we get too far outside of our comfort zone, we may tend to withdraw or resist new information. One goal in this course is to learn to recognize when we are on the edge of our comfort zone.
- **Learning edge:** When we are on the edge of our comfort zone, we often are in the best place to expand understanding, take in a new perspective, and stretch awareness. We can learn to recognize when we are on a learning edge in this course by paying attention to internal reactions to class activities and other people in the class. Being on a learning edge can be signaled by feelings of annoyance, anger, anxiety, surprise, confusion, or defensiveness. These reactions are signs that our way of seeing things is being challenged. If we retreat to our comfort zone, by dismissing whatever we encounter that does not agree with our way of seeing the world, we may lose an opportunity to expand understanding. The challenge is to recognize when we are on a learning edge and then to stay there with the discomfort we are experiencing to see what we can learn.
- **Triggers:** Triggers are words or phrases that stimulate an emotional response because they tap into anger or pain about oppression issues. The term trigger connotes an instantaneous response to stimuli without accompanying conscious thought. Typically, triggers convey, consciously or unconsciously, a stereotypical perception or an acceptance of the status quo.

We will have better, more productive conversations if we can understand when we are in danger of retreating to a comfort zone and when we decide to remain on a learning edge. Trigger words and topics that mean little to us may mean much more to our peers, so it is always beneficial to be conscious of the different ways that people can respond to a discussion. We should be aware that the utterance of racist, sexist, or homophobic epithets can cause real pain even when used in a critical, ironic, or well-intentioned manner. In the end, I believe that we should be able to discuss any and all topics important to our learning if we remain mindful and respectful in the way that we do it.

WEEK	DATE	READING	DUE
1	T, 9/3 R, 9/5	NO CLASS Syllabus overview	
2	T, 9/10 R, 9/12	“You Probably Mean to Say This” Presentation; Barry, “Introduction” Culler, “What is Theory?”	Discussion Post 1
3	T, 9/17 R, 9/19	Eagleton, “What is Literature?” Barry, Chapter 1, “Theory before ‘theory’”	Discussion Post 2
4	T, 9/24 R, 9/26	Reception theory Reception theory	Paper 1
5	T, 10/1 R, 10/3	Lee, Native Speaker Lee, Native Speaker	
6	T, 10/8 R, 10/10	Lee, Native Speaker Lee, Native Speaker	
7	T, 10/15 R, 10/17	Structuralist theory Structuralist theory	
8	T, 10/22 R, 10/24	Poststructuralist theory Poststructuralist theory	
9	T, 10/29 R, 10/31	Marxist theory Marxist theory	
10	T, 11/5 R, 11/7	Psychoanalytic theory Psychoanalytic theory	Paper 2
11	T, 11/12 R, 11/14	Delgado et al., Critical Race Theory Delgado et al., Critical Race Theory	
12	T, 11/19 R, 11/21	Delgado et al., Critical Race Theory Delgado et al., Critical Race Theory	
13	T, 11/26 R, 11/28	Postcolonial theory THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	
14	T, 12/3 R, 12/5	Feminist and Queer theory Feminist and Queer theory	
15	T, 12/10 R, 12/12	Feminist and Queer theory Course evaluations	Final paper
16	T, 12/17	FINALS WEEK	