

Honors 475 (Seminar in American Cultures) General Syllabus Spring 2008

Honors 475: Honors Seminar (American Cultures); 3 Semester Hours; CID 4212

Overall Course Description. Taken as a whole, this seminar will be an examination of various American cultures viewed from multiple perspectives—history; regional and ethnic identity; prejudice and stereotyping; assimilation (or resistance to it); notions of Manifest Destiny; immigration issues; material culture; folklore; the popular imagination; High Culture versus Low Art; and other such considerations. While we will not pursue lockstep uniformity of treatment, the four parts of the course will be bound together by such subjects as these. To cement these connections, we will have “hand-off” days, in which all four instructors are present for discussions of connections (or disjuncture) between topics and treatment. Though changes might lie in the offing, the plan as of day one is for the following sequence, topics, and texts.

- ❖ Part I (January 22-February 12), Dr. Drew Lopenzina. Anglo and Native American Cultures, Five Centuries of Conflict
 - Required text: Louise Edrich, *Tracks*
- ❖ Part II (February 14-March 6), Dr. Gene Young, English and Honors. Mexicans and The E.E.U.U.: Border Crossings
 - Required text: Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing* (Vintage Intl. 1994, but any edition will do)
- ❖ Part III (March 20-April 10), Dr. Katherine Pierce, “Beneath the American Renaissance” in 19th-century American Culture
 - Required text: Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*
- ❖ Part IV (April 15-May 6), Dr. Jeff Crane, History. Modernism in America and the Culture of New York; Rural and Urban Cultures in America
 - Required text: Mary Karr, *The Liars’ Club*

NOTE: This schedule leaves three days unaccounted for: January 17, March 18, and May 8. January 17 will be a course introduction and ice-breaker. March 18 will be a “hand-off” day, in which faculty join together with students to discover and articulate connections between the course sections, so far. May 8 will be devoted to course review and feedback, as well as previewing the final exam.

Overall Goals for the American Cultures Seminar.

- The main curricular goal of this segment of the course is that you arrive at a heightened understanding and appreciation of the intersections and the disjuncture between the cultural and ethnic groups examined in the four sections of this course.
- It is also important that you expand your knowledge of what constitutes a culture, and why some of these features have caused tensions among cultures in the history of the United States
- Your objective for the readings is to understand how—as cultural more than literary texts—they inform our understanding of cultural issues in America over the past 100 years

Performance Objectives

- For the final exam in particular, you will need to be able to draw connections between the cultures and readings you encounter in the four sections of the course
- Be able to write and talk knowledgeably about how differences in American cultures have created tensions in our national past and present
- Be able to write and talk knowledgeably about the historical and current pressures of assimilation
- Be able to write and talk knowledgeably about how cultural and ethnic differences in America have been successfully bridged but also about the remaining impediments to such agreement

Separate Course Policies and Standards. Each instructor will provide you with a separate syllabus and schedule, with separate policies on attendance, course requirements, and such. However, at the end, the grade for each part will be one-fourth of your final grade. The overall, standard classroom standards, as required by the University, are stated below.

Student Syllabus Guidelines: Following are some official university guidelines for students to know about. There are more detailed descriptions online, as well as links to the specific university policy or procedure:

<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Academic Dishonesty: Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

Classroom Rules of Conduct: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days: Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

Students with Disabilities Policy: It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

Visitors in the Classroom: Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

Attendance Policy. This is an honors seminar, so there should not be serious absentee problems. Since all public universities are now under federal directives for keeping track of attendance, there is a heightened awareness of attendance here at Sam. University policy allows you three hours of absences, which for Tuesday-Thursday means only two classes. All four of us will take roll regularly, and we will total up absences at the end of the semester. Your attendance record may figure into your final grade (and if you are on the borderline, your attendance may mean the difference between the higher and the lower grade). If your attendance is perfect, you'll get a boost in your grade, and if it is excessive, you'll experience graduated deductions from your final grade.

Individual Schedules and Course Assignments

Part I (Dr. Andrew Lopenzina)

Tracking the Indigenous: Anglo and Native American Cultures, Five Centuries of Conflict and Engagement

This section of the course begins a discussion on borders and cultural identity in this space we think of as *American*. We will consider the ways in which identity is both constructed and contested within American space, and pay special attention to dynamics of "Contact" between European and indigenous cultures. Our understanding of this period and its historical ramifications has been largely generated and maintained by the decidedly one-sided accounts of European explorers and settlers. Our perception of Native culture has been further distorted by books and movies that continue to construct a fabulous Native identity, whether that identity be savage, noble, culturally depleted or invoked as spiritually "at one with nature" in "New Age" literature and old "do not litter"

campaigns. We will look at some historical narratives in which we see these productions of Native identity and culture being manufactured amidst the tensions of contact, and we will investigate how Natives themselves have resisted such portrayals and offered their own historical treatment of surviving the colonial endeavor. The section will cover five centuries of literary production. It is a survey in the broadest sense, beginning with the earliest exploration of the New World, touching upon the efforts of seventeenth-century French Jesuits to Christianize the northeast bands of Montagnais, Cree, and Huron in present day Canada, and examining the traumatic campaign of Indian education and assimilation in the boarding school narratives of the late nineteenth century. We will finish with *Tracks*, an acclaimed contemporary novel by Ojibwe writer Louise Erdrich. There will be a five page paper assigned at the end of this session involving a small amount of individual research.

Jan	22	Thomas King, "Borders" (handout)
	24	Amerigo Vespucci (handout) Genesis and Charm (handout)
	29	<i>The Jesuit Relations</i> (Electronic Resource)
	31	<i>The Jesuit Relations</i> (Electronic Resource)
Feb	5	Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) <i>The School Days of an Indian Girl</i> (Electronic Resource)
	7	Louise Erdrich, <i>Tracks</i> (1-95)
	12	Louise Erdrich, <i>Tracks</i> (finish)
	19	Paper Due (5-7 pages)

Part II (Dr. Gene Young)

Prof.: Dr. Gene Young **Office:** Evans 416/AB4 105 **e-mail:** young@shsu.edu
Office Hours: Honors Office—Monday and Wednesday 10-12 and 2-4; Evans Office—
Tuesday and Thursday 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Other times by
appointment. You can also probably find me in my office at other times, especially on
Tuesday and Thursday afternoons before and after this class. If you can't locate me, send
me an e-mail.

My Evans Office Phone: 294-1426. If I'm not there, leave a message. The Honors
phone is 294-1477, but that line is dedicated to Honors Office business. Call me there if
you really need to, but otherwise call my Evans number, or e-mail me.

Required Texts for Part II: Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*. Any printing will do.

Description of Part II. The focus of Part II will be the borders—geographical, cultural, political, and historical—between Mexico and the United States and how these borders have played into the sometimes tense relations between the two countries over the past 100 years. Since you are tuned in to the culture of the United States, but since your education about Mexican culture might be less refined, much of our time will be spent studying various aspects of Mexican culture and traditions secular and religious. (For instance, we will examine how the traditional *corridos* of the Mexican Revolution, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, morphed into the *narco corridos* popular today.) All of this will lead to a heightened awareness of some of the dynamics in Mexican culture and to gloves-off discussions of the root causes of our “Mexican problem.”

The Readings and Assignments. Our central reading text will be *The Crossing*, a coming-of-age novel about two young brothers who cross into Mexico (and back and back again), where they encounter traditional cultures entirely outside their ken. Cormac McCarthy is being placed in rarefied company—among the greatest writers America has ever produced. This is a great book and a great story. It is, however, a slow and dense book, especially for your “page-turning,” Xbox 360 generation. However, if you will let it, this book will pick you up and sweep you along and fully engage you in the story of these two ordinary yet remarkable boys and their adventures as strangers in a foreign land. We will not be reading it as a critical text (as we might in an English class) but rather as a cultural and historical (and geographical) document. In addition, there will be various but brief online (or electronic reserve) readings, such as segments of Américo Paredes’ *With His Pistol in His Hand* (which will be accompanied by a viewing of *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, starring James Edward Olmos). I hope that this segment of the course will leave you with a heightened understanding of some of the dynamics and traditions of Mexican culture, as well as a better platform from which to approach the difficult questions of immigration and the future of Mexicans in the United States of America.

Goals for Part II.

- The main curricular goal of this segment of the course is that you arrive at a heightened understanding and appreciation of the intersections and the disjuncture between the cultures of Mexico and the United States
- It is also important that you expand your knowledge of what constitutes Mexican culture, and why some of these features have caused tensions for immigrant Mexicans, both legal and illegal.
- Your objective for the readings is to understand how—as cultural more than literary texts—they inform our understanding of border issues over the past 100 years
- Another objective is not necessarily for you to change your point of view about the immigration question but at least to provide you with a cultural background for coming to grips with the current debate over that inflammatory subject

- Finally, for the final exam in particular, you will need to be able to draw connections between the cultures you encounter during Part II and those you study in the remainder of the course.

Course Requirements and Evaluation. In our preliminary planning, the four instructors have generally agreed to require one or more paper assignments and that we will give a comprehensive final examination (mostly or entirely essay). We are not going to give exams at the end of each part. The final exam will be 20% of your final grade. The remaining 80% will be divided equally among the four course segments (and each individual instructor will be responsible for assignments and evaluation for his or her segment). Here are the course requirements for Part II.

- **Short Assignments and Participation (one-half of your Part II grade).** A few times during Part II, there will be a short (about two page) semi-formal writing assignment on Blackboard. You'll have a limited number of days to complete these assignments, and you will be provided an explanation of the requirements for each. These assignments will differ slightly from one another. Any miscellaneous daily work we might do (Blackboard discussions, for instance) could factor into this assignment grade. So will class attendance.
- **Paper (one-half of your Part I grade).** You will write only one formal paper for Part II. The requirements will be described in much more detail, but the paper will be about 1,500 words and will be more formal and wider ranging than the assignments.

Date Readings, Assignments, and Deadlines

Thursday, Jan. 17	Course Introduction and Overview (All Meet)
Thursday, Feb. 14	What is American Culture (Is it This? Or This?) The Mexican-Immigration-Border Question. Anthony Bordin, et. al.; Read the first nine pages of <i>The Crossing</i> . (Discussion: "Reading Cormac McCarthy"; "Who is Cormac McCarthy?"; "Why Should I Care?")
Tuesday, Feb. 19	CORMAC MCCARTHY— <i>The Crossing</i> , Book 1 (through page 127). Borders and Border Crossings; The Boy and the Wolf; The Law of Possession.
Thursday, Feb. 21	<i>The Crossing</i> , Book II (pp. 129-214); Corridos and How They are Made; The Folk-Hero in American and Mexican Culture; The Mexican Belief in the Miraculous.
Tuesday, Feb. 26	<i>The Crossing</i> , Book III (pp. 215-332); The Ill-Will Between Mexico and Texas (Revolution/Mexican-American War/Treaty Terms/Drug Lords and <i>Narcocorridos</i> /Illegal Immigration); Factors and Figure in the Mexican Revolution
Thursday, Feb. 28	<i>The Crossing</i> , Book IV (pp. 333-426); Story and story-telling in Mexican and American Culture; Tracing the Corrido of the <i>Güero</i>
Tuesday, Mar. 4	<i>The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez</i> ; The Texas Rangers; Online reading from <i>With His Pistol in His Hand</i>
Thursday, Mar. 6	Turn in Part I paper. Wrap up discussion of Mexican and Texan/American Cultures.

Part III (Dr. Katherine Pierce)

**HONORS 475 (AMERICAN CULTURES)
DAILY READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS SCHEDULE
SPRING 2008—KATHERINE PIERCE**

Date	Readings, Assignments, and Deadlines
Tuesday, 18 Mar	America in the 1830s: Newspapers, Novels and New Forms of Cultural Imagination: Read e-reserve: Blackface, Barnum & Newspaper Ballyhoo
Thursday, 20 Mar	<i>The Murder of Helen Jewett</i> : pp. 3-151 Chaps: One-Seven
Tuesday, 25 Mar	Group Presentations: Moral Reform through the Gothic; The New Economy; Types of American Womanhood
Thursday, 27 Mar	<i>The Murder of Helen Jewett</i> : pp. 152-300 Chaps: Eight-Fourteen
Tuesday, 01 April	<i>The Murder of Helen Jewett</i> : pp. 301-Epilogue
Thursday, 03 April	Imagining National Futures: Race, Expansion, and a House Dividing
Tuesday, 08 April	Turn in Part III Paper. Final Thoughts & Discussion
	Final Exam: May

For 25 March: Tuesday: I would like each group to distill their article – passed out in class – for a ten minute presentation to the class. Members of each group should use their respective forum set up on Blackboard to communicate between now and Tuesday as to who will speak, preparing an agreed upon outline that I will post, and discussion of the content of the article. Remember that this weekend is Easter, so plan ahead to get your collaboration arranged and underway before everyone is suffering from a carb and chocolate induced haze on Sunday.

Please Note that these outlines and presentations will be graded, so everyone needs to contribute as all will share the final grade.