EMINENT SCHOLAR/TEACHERS: MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE
ENGL J423 SYLLABUS
SUMMER 2012

CONTACT ME
Reid Wentz, College of Arts and Sciences
Phone (through Distributed.Learning in Columbia): 803-777-7210 or 800-922-2577
My cell phone: 803-446-5684. Call me; do not email me.

Please mail all course assignment with appropriate cover sheets to USC Distributed Learning, PO Box 2346, Columbia, SC 29202-2346. If you are in Columbia, you can hand deliver the assignments to Distributed Learning’s office at 1244 Blossom St. on the second floor between 9am – 4pm Monday – Friday.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Modern American Literature is a survey of the major American writers of fiction and poetry of roughly the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, the course attempts to place these writers and their works within the context of the most important literary movements of the time. This is an upper-level English course. Students must have completed Engl 101, 102 and one sophomore literature course (ENGL 282-289) before taking any upper-level course.

COURSE MATERIALS
Students should immediately order course materials from Distributed Learning and the Russell House Bookstore upon enrollment. Do not wait to order your materials. The materials list, order form, and other course information are available online at www.sc.edu/dl/cip/22/englj423

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Students will learn the elements of Realism and Naturalism as well as the significant themes in major late 19th and early 20th century American authors.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:
A = 90 – 100  D = 60 – 69
B = 80 – 89  F = Below 60
C = 70 – 79

DVDs
The course is structured around the lectures of several of the most noted scholars and teachers of modern American literature on DVDs as part of the Eminent Scholar/Teachers series. The assigned readings (as listed below) supplement these lectures.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Theodore Dreiser,  Sister Carrie
Edith Wharton,  The House of Mirth
F. Scott Fitzgerald,  The Great Gatsby
Ernest Hemingway,  A Farewell to Arms
William Faulkner,  As I Lay Dying
John Steinbeck,  The Grapes of Wrath
T. S. Eliot,  The Waste Land and Other Poems
Robert Frost,  Selected Poems*
Modern American Literature Student Course Companion*

* Order these two texts from Distance Education
# VIDEOS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**Due: May 28 – June 1, 2012**

1. LESSON #1: Realism and Naturalism in American Literature
   LESSON #2: An Introduction to Theodore Dreiser’s Fiction
   LESSON #3: Reading Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*
      
      **READ:** *Sister Carrie*

**Due: June 4 - 8, 2012**

2. LESSON #4: An Introduction to Edith Wharton’s Fiction
   LESSON #5: Reading Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*
      
      **READ:** *The House of Mirth*

**Due: June 11 - 15, 2012**

3. LESSON #6: Modern American Poetry
   LESSON #7: An Introduction to Robert Frost’s Poetry
      **READ:** From *Selected Poems*: “Home Burial,” “Mending Wall,” “The Road Not Taken,” “Design,” “The Gift Outright,” “The Oven Bird”
   LESSON #8: An Introduction to T. S. Eliot’s Poetry
   LESSON #9: Reading T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*
      **READ:** From *The Waste Land and Other Poems*: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,”
      *The Waste Land*
   LESSON #10: The Modern American Novel
   LESSON #11: American Literature of the Twenties

**Due: June 18 - 22, 2012**

4. LESSON #12: An Introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald's Fiction
   LESSON #13: Reading F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*
      **READ:** *The Great Gatsby*

**Due: June 25 – June 29, 2012**

5. LESSON #14: An Introduction to Ernest Hemingway’s Fiction
   LESSON #15: Reading Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*
      **READ:** *A Farewell to Arms*

**Due: July 2 - 6, 2012**

6. LESSON #16: An Introduction to William Faulkner’s Fiction
   LESSON #17: Reading William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*
      **READ:** *As I Lay Dying*
   LESSON #18: The Southern Literary Renaissance
   LESSON #19: American Literature of the Thirties

**Due: July 9 – 13, 2012**

7. LESSON #20: An Introduction to John Steinbeck’s Fiction
   LESSON #21: Reading John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*
      **READ:** *The Grapes of Wrath*
   LESSON #22: American Literature and Policies
Due: July 16 – 20, 2012

8. LESSON #23: Black American Literature
   LESSON #24: American Literature of World War II
   LESSON #25: The Profession of Authorship in America

Due: Monday July 23, 2012
Final exam due in mail.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Papers

   A. Students will write three papers, each approximately 750-900 words in length (three full double-spaced pages). All assignments must be typed. Papers must be mailed so that they will be postmarked by the due date. Papers submitted after the due date will be penalized 10 points per day.

   B. My normal turn-around time for grading the essays is one week after I receive them.

   C. No previous essays will be accepted after the exam period begins and will receive an "F" grade.

   D. A list of guidelines is included to help you understand what is expected in these assignments.

   E. Topics:

   First Paper must be postmarked by Monday, June 11, 2012
   Discuss the theme of the individual’s relationship to society in either *Sister Carrie* or *The House of Mirth*. Analyze the success or failure of either Carrie Meeber or George Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* or Lily Bart, Lawrence Selden, or Simon Rosedale in *The House of Mirth*. Choose only one character/work for discussion. You must consider elements of Realism or Naturalism in the work you choose to analyze.

   Second Paper must be postmarked by Monday, July 2, 2012
   Discuss why either Jay Gatsby or Frederick Henry idealizes romance in either *The Great Gatsby* or *A Farewell to Arms*. That is, define specifically what love/romance means to the protagonist, how it affects him, and what he learns (if anything). Choose only one work for discussion.

   Third Paper must be postmarked by Monday, July 16, 2012
   To what extent is John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* a novel of social protest? What is the protest? Does this aspect of the work detract from or enhance the quality of the fiction?

II. Resubmissions

   A. Do NOT simply resubmit an essay for a better grade. It will be returned unmarked.

   B. On the rare occasions, I allow a student to rewrite an essay. I will initiate the process in my comments on the original essay.

   C. Any resubmissions must also include the original essay and my comments on it before I will re-grade the paper.

   D. Resubmissions must be received before the beginning of the final exam period.
III. Graduating Students
   A. It is imperative that students who are expecting to graduate at the end of the semester submit all their assignments on time.
   B. Let me know in a note at the end of your first essay that you are planning to graduate so I can pay particular attention to your special situation.
   C. If you do not get any of your essays back, contact me immediately. Do not wait until the end of the semester.
   D. Final Exams/Essays must be submitted early enough for the postal service, Distance Education and me to process and grade them so the Final Grade can be turned in on time for you to graduate.
   E. Call me to verify that I have received your Final Exam.
   F. Failure to follow these procedures could prevent your graduating on time.

IV. Phone Calls
   A. Try to call during the day between 9am – 5pm.
   B. If I am not available when you call, leave your name, number, and times you will be available so I can return your call.

V. Final Examinations must be postmarked by Monday, July 23, 2012
   The course will conclude with a final at-home examination that must be submitted by Monday, July 23, 2012. The final exam will consist of four full one-page essay questions. These questions will be based on the video lectures and the readings for the course.
PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism, even a first offense, will earn you a failing grade in the course. The Freshman Program defines plagiarism as “presenting, as one’s own, the work or the opinion of someone else.” Most students define plagiarism as “copying material of some sort, either word for word or sense for sense.” Although that definition is accurate, the criterion is not merely copying material; ideas, conclusions, and ways of organizing material can also be plagiarized. Specifically, students are guilty of plagiarism when:

1. The words, sentences, ideas, conclusions, examples, and/or organization of an assignment are borrowed from a source (a book, an article, another student’s paper, etc.) without correctly acknowledging the source.
2. A student submits another student’s work in lieu of his or her own assignment.
3. A student allows another student to revise, correct, or in any way rewrite his or her assignment without having approval from the instructor.
4. A student submits written assignments received from commercial firms, fraternity or sorority files, or any other person or group.
5. A student allows another student to take all or part of his or her English course.
6. A student submits an assignment (a paper, library assignment, a revision, etc.) done together with another student.
7. A student knowingly aids another student in plagiarizing an assignment as defined in 1-6 above.

A NOTE ON CLIFFS NOTES

The use of Cliffs Notes is strongly discouraged. They provide a very superficial summary and critical analysis of a work. Unfortunately, they contain many errors and often mislead or confuse students. They are also quite tempting to copy or paraphrase in some manner. If you have trouble understanding your reading material, consult the bibliography attached to your syllabus, or contact your instructor.

GRADING AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The following grading scale will be used:

A  =  100-90
B  =  89-80
C  =  79-70
D  =  69-60
F  =  below 60

Each of the three essays will count as 25% of the final grade for the course; the final exam will count 25%. 
GUIDELINES FOR WRITING CRITICAL PAPER

Do Not give a plot summary. You will use elements of the plot, of course, to support your ideas — events, actions, characters’ thoughts, etc. — but your paper should not be organized around retelling the story.

Always write in the present tense all the way through your paper (except for direct quotations which are in the past tense).

Do Not Ever make any first-person references like “I think that...” or “I believe...” Similarly, do not use any substitutes for first person references such as “one thinks...” or “you can see that...” or “the reader often feels that...” Always write in the third person.

After the first mention of the author’s name, use his or her last name only. Identify the title of the work you are writing about and its author in the first paragraph.

Try to introduce direct quotes smoothly, and include the page on which the passage appears in the text. Note that page number is in parentheses at the end of the sentence and before the period.

Awkward and wordy: An example of this is when Crane describes a wave as “huge, furious, implacable” (141).

Smother: For example, Crane describes a wave as “huge, furious, implacable” (141).

When planning and organizing your essay, the most important point to remember is that you are arguing or trying to prove a point. Consequently, you should have a clearly defined thesis (or assertion) about the particular work you are writing on, and you must prove this thesis. You should organize your paper around proving your thesis, not around telling what happens in the story. You must develop your points by using direct quotes from the text and references to specifics in the story. Finally cite the DVDs for support of your points.

The titles of short stories, articles, or short poems put in quotation marks. Underline the titles of books, plays, magazines, journals, newspapers, and long poems.

Introduction should contain: Name of author and work
Thesis: a major evaluation and direction argument will take

Body should contain: Specific arguments
Textual evidence to support arguments

Conclusion: Some sort of ending and assessment of what you have argued

Each paragraph contains one major idea. Paragraphs begin with with a signal to the reader (a topic sentence), explain a point, and use textual support. No one-sentence paragraphs. No quotations stand alone.
EVALUATION OF ESSAYS

I. Generally I plan to follow this grade description (provided by Professor John Trimble of the University of Texas).

F Paper: Its treatment of the subject is superficial; its theme lacks discernible organization; its prose is garbled or stylistically primitive. Mechanical errors are frequent. In short, ideas, organization, and style fall far below what is acceptable college writing.

D Paper: Its treatment and development of the subject are as yet only rudimentary. While organization is present, it is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are frequently awkward, ambiguous, and marred by serious mechanical errors. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty or nonexistent. The whole piece, in fact, often gives the impression of having been conceived and written in haste.

C Paper: It is generally competent—it meets the assignment, has few mechanical errors, and is reasonably well organized and developed. The actual information it delivers, however, seems thin and commonplace. One reason for that impression is that the ideas are typically cast in the form of vague generalities—generalities that prompt the confused reader to ask marginally: "In every case?" "Exactly how large?" "Why?" "But how many?" Stylistically, the C paper has other shortcomings: the opening paragraph does little to draw the reader in; the final paragraph offers only a perfunctory wrap-up; the transitions between paragraphs are often bumpy; the sentences, besides being a bit choppy, tend to follow a predictable (hence monotonous) subject-verb-object-order; and the diction is occasionally marred by unconscious repetitions, redundancy, and imprecision. The C paper, then, while it gets the job done, lacks both imagination and intellectual rigor. It does not, therefore, invite a rereading.

B Paper: It is significantly more than competent. Besides being almost free of mechanical errors, the B paper delivers substantial information—that is, substantial in both quantity and interests-value. Its specific points are logically ordered, well developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in; the concluding paragraph is both conclusive and thematically related to the opening. The transitions between paragraphs are, for the most part, smooth, the sentence structures pleasantly varied. The diction of the B paper is typically much more concise and precise than that found in the C paper. Occasionally, it even shows distinctiveness—i.e., finesse and memorability. On the whole, then, a B paper makes the reading experience a pleasurable one, for it offers substantial information with few distractions.

A Paper: Perhaps the principle characteristic of the A paper is its rich content. Some people describe that content as "meaty," others as "dense," still others as "packed." The information delivered is such that one feels significantly taught by the author, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. The A paper is also marked by stylistic finesse: the title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; the tone enhances the purposes of the paper. Finally, the A paper, because of its careful organization and development, imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity. Not surprisingly, then, it leaves the reader feeling bright, thoroughly satisfied, and eager to reread the piece.

II. Papers are graded on each of the following areas. It is essential that all three of these components of writing be well handled or the grade will be low or failing.

I. RHETORIC

A. Rhetorical concerns

1. Unity: logical development and flow of thought
2. Focus: staying on the topic without wandering
3. Coherence: "sticking together" of major parts of writing, use of transitions
4. Pointedness: responding pertinently to the writing topic
5. Sufficiency: saying enough to get the job done
6. Value: the quality of thought
B. Rhetorical structure
   1. Introduction
   2. Body
   3. Conclusion

II. PARAGRAPHING
   A. Unity
   B. Development: “backing up” of generalizations by using details, examples, illustrations, comparisons, research, etc.
   C. Coherence: one sentence “fitting” with or leading into another; using transitional words or phrases

III. SENTENCE STRUCTURE
   * A. Sentence fragments
   * B. Run-on sentences and comma splices
   C. Awkward sentences
   D. Wordy sentences
   E. Choppy sentences
   F. Illogical statements
   G. Lack of sentence variety

IV. GRAMMAR
   * A. Subject-verb agreement
   * B. Pronoun-antecedent agreement
   * C. Pronoun reference and case
   D. Verb tense consistency

V. PUNCTUATION, MECHANICS, DICTION
   A. Use of punctuation marks, capitals, abbreviations, numbers
   B. Spelling
   C. Word choice

* Students should edit very carefully to avoid making these major errors.
** Indicates a major, serious grammatical or mechanical error. These errors are often signs of ignorance of forms or, worse, illiteracy. Any major errors are excessive and will constitute a lowering of your grade.
Title—yours, not the author’s

Introduction names author and
title of work

General introduction of topic—
here setting up a contrast. Do
not generalize about the work,
author, or world.

General thesis (controlling idea)
followed by more specific direc-
tion of the essay (sets up internal
sense of organization).

Topic sentence announces con-
trolling idea of the paragraph.
Everything in the paragraph
relates to this idea.

Followed by explanation, ex-
amples, and textual support.
Note smooth introduction of
quotes and format for pagination
after quotes.

Note that quotes do not stand
alone—they fit smoothly into
text and are followed by inter-
pretation and explanation. Do
not block quote, and be sure to
explain how quote proves your
point.

Topic sentence
Specific clarification

Example

Quote

Interpretation—Comment

Redeeming Qualities

In William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning,” the father, Abner Snopes, is
depicted as an immoral and corrupt man. His lack of respect for the
personal property and feelings of those who threaten his pride forces
his family to live a poor and nomadic life. Abner is a criminal, or more
specifically, a barn burner. In the 1890’s barn burning is the easiest way
to ruin another man’s prosperity. Although Faulkner reveals Abner as a
delinquent individual, Faulkner instills Abner with redeeming qualities as
well. Abner shows a sense of personal integrity unseen in most individu-
als. Abner is a fairly responsible father who always manages to keep his
family together. Most of all, he seems to genuinely love his son and want
something better for him.

Abner Snopes has a tremendous amount of honor for a man with few
worldly possessions. Faulkner portrays him as a man who clings to his
“wolflike independence,” who is very self-confident, and who is ardently
proud (162). He is not about to be belittled by people who have more
material goods, the people with “peace and dignity” (164). His attitude is
exhibited by his abrupt manner of walking into his landlord’s house and
ruining his carpet. Major de Spain represents a threat to Abner’s sense of
personal integrity, and Abner will not bow to de Spain’s authority. After
leaving de Spain’s house, Abner remarks, “Pretty and white ain’t it?” “That’s
sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain’t white enough yet to suit him. Maybe
he wants to mix some white sweat with it” (165). It is plain that Abner feels
Major de Spain thinks of him as slave labor, from which de Spain can make
more money. Abner feels dehumanized and must find a way to fight back.
The more de Spain threatens Abner’s honor, telling Abner to wash the
rug, the more corrupt Abner becomes. He wants to protect his honor so
much that he doesn’t see that his actions (burning barns) is wrong.

Besides a strong sense of personal integrity, Abner also has a strong
sense of family. Abner is responsible as a provider and he always keeps
the family together. He never has trouble obtaining work or a place to
live. Although they are constantly on the move, the children never worry
because as the narrator points out, “Likely his father had already man-
aged to make a crop on another farm....He always did” (162). The money
is never abundant, for they live a migrant life, but there is always enough
to get by. Landlords are attracted to his strong sense of self-worth, so they
continue to hire him, “as if they got from his latent ravenous ferocity not so
much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction
in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his” (162). Landlords believe Ab is a valuable commodity; therefore, Ab never lacks the ability to keep the family together and from going hungry. This is an attractive quality in a man who seems so unsympathetic.

Although he is not a demonstrative father, he is not simply a provider. He also tries to teach the children some family values. He expects the children to stick together and to take care of one another. He explains to Sarty, “You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain’t going to have any blood to stick to you” (163). He wants the children to understand that if they don’t support the family, they will be alone in the world. Abner’s attitude forces the children to support him, even though he continues to break the law. Even though he subjects the children to a life of illegal activities, Abner does seem to want more for them, at least subconsciously. Abner’s most impressive achievement in this story is allowing Sarty to escape from his way of life and to become his own person. By naming Sarty after Colonel Sartoris, Abner seems to believe that Sarty can become honorable and trustworthy. One of the judges explains, “I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in the country can’t help but tell the truth” (161). Abner does seem to understand that his view of the world may not be the right one for his son. Abner is sympathetic and responsible when he doesn’t tie Sarty up when Sarty is about to turn him in to the law. Although this could mean the death of Abner, he allows Sarty to escape and tell de Spain what is going to happen to his barn. Abner explains to his wife, “If he hets loose don’t you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder” (170). Abner gives Sarty the opportunity to break free from the “despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood,” and to become his own person, independent of his father (160). In this sense, he wants what every good father wants for his son.

Abner Snopes is not the epitome of evil. He is portrayed as a wrongful character, and these immoral characteristics overshadow his sympathetic qualities. He goes too far in trying to protect his sense of honor, but his pride is a good quality. Ultimately, Abner is responsible to his family, especially Sarty. Sarty cannot grow up to be the kind of person Ab is, and Ab realizes this. In the end, he allows Sarty to have his own life and thus wins the sympathy of the reader.
SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

• For Theodore Dreiser


• For Edith Wharton


• For Robert Frost


• For T. S. Eliot


• For F. Scott Fitzgerald


• For Ernest Hemingway

• For William Faulkner

• For Thomas Wolfe

• For John Dos Passos

- **For John Steinbeck**