

English 2220, Section 100
Literatures and Cultures of the United States
Spring 2019

Instructor: Mr. Luke McCarthy
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Office: Sprau Tower, Room 712

Time/Day: 2:00 pm-3:40 pm. M/W
Room: Brown Hall, Room 3045
Final Exam: April 25, 12:30-2:30 p.m.
Office Hours: Wednesdays from 4-5 pm

More office hours are available upon request. Please do not hesitate to email me if you want to arrange a time to meet!

Required Course Materials:

- Elizabeth Acevedo, *Poet X* (Hardcover; ISBN-13: 9780062662804; ISBN-10: 0062662805).
- *New Worlds of Literature: Writings from America's Many Cultures* (Second Edition; Norton, 1994) (ISBN-13: 9780393963540; ISBN-10: 0393963543)
- \$5 copy fee card, available for purchase at the bookstore.
 - This fee card pays for various class handouts and assigned readings I will be providing for you.
 - If you fail to turn it in by the end of the semester, you will fail the course.

University Course Description

Through study of literary works (and, when possible, other artistic achievements or cultural artifacts) by members of the varied cultures which comprise the United States of America, this course considers the perspectives and sustaining values of these cultural groups and considers the challenges, problems, and opportunities of a pluralistic American society. This course satisfies General Education Area III: The United States: Cultures and Issues.

Course Overview

Given the heated divisions in the U.S. today (as demonstrated recently by the Ferguson, Charlottesville, and Standing Rock protests), what keeps the country united? This course will focus closely on the challenges, problems, and opportunities of pluralism in American society by examining the literature (and the other artistic achievements and cultural artifacts) of the diverse cultural groups comprising the United States. Students will begin by reading Elizabeth Acevedo's *Poet X* while considering the cultural issues animating debate in American society today. As a class, students will begin formulating the essential questions that will guide our investigation for the rest of the semester. Next, students will examine the significance of "home" and the relation of one's family, heritage, and language to one's home. Then, students will consider how diverse cultural groups can all see America as home, yet still feel "alien" to each other. What happens when individuals attempt to cross the "fences" keeping us apart? Students will then consider two sets of ideals: those of the "American Dream" and those of the heritage received from one's cultural background. How can those ideals be reconciled? Students will finish the semester by considering how America's legal and political system has attempted to address the challenges and opportunities of a pluralistic society. Students

will primarily read selections from the Norton anthology *New Worlds of Literature: Writings from America's Many Cultures*, supplemented with recent work from authors like Adrienne Su and Paul Martinez Pompa. Students will also reflect on the challenges of pluralism while reading a number of political and legal texts, such as the U.S. Bill of Rights, the Supreme Court's opinions in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, selections from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, selections from John Rawls's *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, and other works considering the role of Congress and the Supreme Court in a pluralist society. The assignments will include online discussion posts and responses, a reading journal, class participation, a midterm in-class essay exam, and a final in-class essay exam.

Semester Overview
Essential Questions: <i>Poet X</i> and Contemporary America's Cultural Controversies
What cultural issues are currently being debated heavily in society today? Why do these issues matter? What is the basis for evaluating opinions on these issues? What questions do YOU want addressed?
Home
Where is home? America? The "mother land"? What is home? Why does home matter?
Family
What happens to a family when its members span multiple "homes"? How can families maintain a sense of connection and identity when members have differing cultural sensibilities?
Heritage
How is heritage passed on to us to help us form our own sense of identity? What happens to our sense of self when our familial heritage conflicts other aspects of American culture?
Language
How is language connected to heritage? How might a groups interpersonal interactions give rise to a shared language? How might a shared language give rise to group?
Aliens
How do we tend to view people form other cultures? How is a sense of the "other" related to our sense of self? How can we bridge this "otherness"?
Fences
How do cultural or personal "fences" tend to keep people apart? Why do such fences exist? How do we create them? What are the consequences of fences?
Crossing
What happens to those who attempt to cross fences? Why do people hesitate to do so? What happens to those who refuse to cross?
America
What is "the American Dream?" What pressures does the American Dream place upon our identity, our heritage, and our families? Why does meeting "American" ideals matter?

Beliefs
How are beliefs passed to us? Can beliefs be held passively? To what degree does our active engagement with belief affect our sense of self, our heritage, or families, or our home?
The Majority/Congress
How can democracy sustain a diverse membership of cultural groups? What challenges can a government by the majority pose to minority cultural groups? What role does Congress play in addressing the challenges of a pluralistic society? What legislative procedures help or hinder it from doing so?
The Courts
What role has the U.S. legal system played in addressing the challenges of a pluralistic democracy?

Course Calendar

You will be required to read selections of short fiction, poetry, drama, and critical essays as the semester progresses. Assignment sheets will be provided for each assignment prior to each due date. All the requirements and due dates for your assignments, projects, and required readings will be detailed at the class calendar on my site:

<https://lucasjmccarthy.com/teaching/engl-2220-spring-2019/engl-2220-calendar-spring-2019/>. That calendar will serve as the official record of what is due and when. I will be updating and revising the calendar as the semester continues. I suggest you bookmark it, because you will need to look at it constantly.

Elearning

- I will be providing various class materials and learning aids through Elearning. I will also update the site with your grades and attendance records on a regular basis. You will also be using Elearning to submit discussion posts.
- You may also be turning in certain assignments through Elearning. You must submit documents as a Word or PDF file in the appropriate Dropbox for the assignment or project.
 - You can generally save your work as a PDF by selecting “save as” in your program’s menus or choosing to “print to PDF” in your printer options.
 - If you submit multiple versions of the same thing, I will look at whatever the last submission is unless you instruct me otherwise.
 - If technical difficulties prevent uploading the work to dropbox, then students may email the work to me as a last resort.
- We will look at the Elearning website together in class, but it is your responsibility to know how to access the site and submit your work.

Essential Questions

I intend this class to be an ongoing inquiry led by students, with that inquiry focused on trying to answer three difficult “essential questions” developed collectively by all of you in class at the end of our second week. These questions will be hard to answer and open-ended, like “What is the meaning of life?” I have no clue now what those questions might be, but they should have something to do with the themes of our course. I look forward to

getting your input on this crucial part of our class. Those three questions will then guide our discussion for the rest of the semester.

To help us develop and pursue these questions, I will be periodically posting a concise summary of our class discussion on them and our attempts to develop them as a blog post on my website. A link to those posts can be found at the top right of every page on my site (click “Essential Questions”). The direct link is here: <https://lucasjmccarthy.com/questions/>. If after class I have any additional thoughts to add to a class period’s discussion, I may also include those in the post. My posts will be required reading. I will link to them in the class calendar of assignments when they are required to be read so that you do not have to keep checking. I anticipate that these blog posts will be frequent for the first two or three weeks until we get our class discussion going. Then, after the second week, you will be carrying on the discussion yourselves through an online discussion board for most of the semester. I might periodically post again throughout the semester, but I expect to try to summarize your findings from your discussion board in a post at the end of the semester.

Grade Scale

Your final grade will be based on the following percentages:

A (4.0):	93-100%	C/B (2.5):	78-82%	D (1.0):	60-67%
B/A (3.5):	88-92%	C (2.0):	73-77%	E (0):	59 and below
B (3.0):	83-87%	D/C (1.5):	68-72%		

At the end of the semester, I will round each student’s calculated grade to the nearest percentage. Example: a 72.513 calculated semester grade (a possible D/C) will be adjusted to a 73% (C).

Course Requirements

Your final grade in the course will be calculated from the following weighted components:

- Online Discussion Posts: 20% of your overall grade.
 - Starting in the third week of the semester, you will be responsible each week for posting to our online discussion board on our class Elearning site. A more detailed assignment sheet will be provided, but in general your posts will be focused on exploring three “Essential Questions” that the class will collectively decide upon at the end of the second week. These three student-created questions will guide our class for the rest of the semester.
 - Grading: Your discussion posts will be collectively graded twice based on a rubric to be provided.
 - Pre-Midterm Posts: 50% of your Discussion Posts grade
 - Post-Midterm Posts: 50% of you Discussion Posts grade
- Reading Journal: 10% of your overall grade.
 - Starting in the third week, you will be keeping a journal summarizing the class readings and including your personal reactions to those readings.

- Each class period, be prepared to read portions of your journal to the rest of the class.
- Near the end of the semester, your journal will be turned in and graded as an entirety.
- All journal entries can be entered into the same notebook and/or collected in the same folder. They do not need to be typed and will not be graded on grammar or spelling. These are expected to be quick, stream-of-conscious writings that “prime” your mind for class discussion, so do not spend considerable time on them.
- A more detailed assignment sheet with details on grading will be provided.
- Midterm Exam: 25% of your overall grade
 - There will be an in-class essay exam on the Wednesday prior to spring break. That exam will be comprised of various writing prompts related to the readings, assignments, and class discussions covered since the start of the semester.
- Final Exam: 25% of your overall grade
 - There will be an in-class essay exam during the scheduled final exam period. That exam will be comprised of various writing prompts related to the readings, assignments, and class discussions covered since the midterm exam.
- Class Participation: 20% of your overall grade.
 - Semester average for all class periods after dropping the 3 lowest class period grades.
 - Does not include the first day of class.
 - Grades for each period are assigned as detailed below under “Classroom Participation.”

I will be providing assignment sheets with more details on each assignment as the semester continues.

Classroom Participation

After our first class period, I will be assigning each student a participation grade each class based on my observations of each student’s contributions within the classroom. To do well in this class, you will need to be present on time, be prepared, and be an active participant in our classroom community. Your classroom participation will be graded on all the activities we may do in the classroom, such as class discussions, classroom writing activities, and peer review of another student’s work. Each of you will be called on to discuss any assigned readings, and no one can expect to hide in the back of the room. Periodically, you might be asked to respond to a creative writing prompt. You are not expected to be a creative genius, but you should still try to have fun and do your best.

Each of us is expected to be respectful and supportive of the work of others. Your classroom participation grade will be based in part on whether you treat your classmates with the dignity and respect they deserve. Hate speech, bullying, or disrespectful treatment of others will not be tolerated.

Please expect others in our class to read your work. Furthermore, I may ask you to share your work with the class or may discuss your work myself with the rest of the class. While our classroom is a safe place, I suggest you write about topics you feel comfortable sharing with others.

Your class participation each period will be graded based on the simplified grading system below:

- Check: Student showed a good faith effort to do his or her best work.

However, some of you may receive the following instead:

- Check Plus: Student showed exceptional insight or effort.
- Check Minus: Student showed an insufficient effort to do his or her best work
- Incomplete: Student failed to attend class, failed to participate at a level deserving credit, or failed to turn in work deserving credit.

If for whatever reason I cannot differentiate the basis for distinguishing work worth a check plus from a check or check minus, I will default to entering the grade as a check plus. For example, if we just watch a movie in class, I might not have sufficient opportunity or evidence to distinguish exceptional participation that day. In that situation, I would instead record a check plus for everyone instead of checks.

For calculating your final grade, the check system will be converted to grade percentages as follows:

- Check Plus: 100% (A)
- Check: 85% (B)
- Check Minus: 73% (C)
- Incomplete: 0% (F)

Because none of us can be excellent every class period, your lowest three class participation grades will be dropped.

Attendance Policy

You should plan on attending every class period. Rather than track a grade for each in-class activity, your final grade is based on the premise that you were present in class and participating. You are therefore only allowed a maximum of three absences before grade penalties will be assessed. For every absence after the third, irrespective of cause, your overall final grade drops by ONE GRADE for each additional absence. For example, a student with 5 absences whose overall grade at the end of the term is 93% (an A) will drop 2 grades (A and BA). Thus, the final grade will be a B.

I will be taking attendance at the start of every class. If you fail to be in class on time when I take attendance, you will be marked absent. If you arrive late to class, you will

need to stay after class to persuade me to change your record from absent to present. I will not discuss your late arrival during class. I dislike having to give directions again and/or make the rest of the class wait because someone has arrived late. Because arriving late disturbs the class, you should always be in class on time if you want to ensure being recorded as present. If you leave early, you will need to persuade me on why I should not change your attendance for the day to absent. Being present entails being present from the moment class begins until the moment the class ends.

Except for exceptional circumstances, I generally do not excuse absences. Requests for being excused, such as for serious illness or team activities should be accompanied with documentation and/or contact from other university officials. Absences due to religious observances should be discussed with me prior to the absence. Generally, you should save your absences for unexpected events, like car trouble or a death in the family.

Because attendance involves more than merely being physically present, if you seriously disturb my classroom, refuse to participate during class, or otherwise violate the text or spirit of university policies or the policies contained in this syllabus, I will mark you as absent.

Patterns of Poor Attendance

WMU is committed to ensuring that all students succeed. As part of this initiative, I will be reporting individual student attendance problems to WMU's registrar's office. If you have missed more than three classes or if I see a pattern of poor attendance that may jeopardize your success in this class, I will report this to the registrar. I do this not only because of the importance of academic success but also because I will be concerned for your welfare. Poor attendance can be a sign that a student is going through a difficult period and needs help. If the registrar's office determines that a student is missing multiple classes or appears to be in jeopardy of failing a class or multiple classes, they may contact your residence hall director, resident assistant, or other student support person at the university to make sure you are well and to see what can be done to help you succeed.

Perfect Attendance

At the end of the semester, anyone who has never had an unexcused absence during the entire semester will have his or her overall grade adjusted up by 1%. Many times, I have had this seemingly small bonus be enough to earn a student a higher final grade.

Computers

You are required to have computer access for work and correspondence for this class. If you do not have a personal computer, there are computer labs on campus (such as in Dunbar 4214 or the library).

Having your own laptop could be useful. If you have a laptop, you may bring it to class. However, you may only use your laptop when I give you permission to do so. Your laptop cannot distract you from classroom discussions.

Having your laptop open when I have not given you permission to do so will negatively affect your classroom participation grade and may result in you being marked as absent. If you need your laptop to keep notes, please talk to me beforehand for permission.

Cellphones

Cellphone use is strictly prohibited in our class. I expect all cellphones to be turned off. If I see you using a cellphone, I will only ask you once to put it away. If I see you using it again that class or your cellphone becomes a routine distraction each class, I will ask you to stay after class to discuss whether I should start marking you as absent due to cellphone use. I will not count you as attending class if you spend the time interacting with your cellphone instead. Please be aware that trying to hide that you are using your cellphone under your desk or behind your body does not work. I know what you are doing.

If for some reason it is necessary for you to check a cellphone during class, you will need to ask for my permission beforehand. My response will generally be “no,” except in special situations—such as if you are a parent who needs to stay available for your minor children.

Email

You are encouraged to contact me via email should you have any questions or concerns. Please allow me at least 24 hours to respond.

Pen and Paper

Please come prepared for class with paper and a pen or pencil.

Academic Honesty Policy

Students are responsible for making themselves aware of and understanding the University policies and procedures that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. The academic policies addressing Student Rights and Responsibilities can be found in the Undergraduate Catalog at <http://catalog.wmich.edu/content.php?catoid=24&navoid=974> and the Graduate Catalog at <http://catalog.wmich.edu/content.php?catoid=25&navoid=1030>. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s) and if you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with your instructor if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test.

Conduct

Students and instructors are responsible for making themselves aware of and abiding by the “Western Michigan University Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking Policy and Procedures” related to prohibited sexual misconduct under Title IX, the Clery Act and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Campus Safe. Under this policy, responsible employees (including instructors) are required to report claims of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator

or designee (located in the Office of Institutional Equity). Responsible employees are not confidential resources. For a complete list of resources and more information about the policy see www.wmich.edu/sexualmisconduct.

In addition, students are encouraged to access the Code of Conduct, as well as resources and general academic policies on such issues as diversity, religious observance, and student disabilities:

- Office of Student Conduct www.wmich.edu/conduct
- Division of Student Affairs www.wmich.edu/students/diversity
- University Relations Office <http://www.wmich.edu/registrar/calendars/interfaith>
- Disability Services for Students www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices

Writing Center

The Western Michigan University Writing Center is a free consultation service for all WMU students, where experienced writing consultants help writers of all levels and all abilities. Consultants help writers to determine strategies for effective communication and to make academically responsible choices at any stage in the writing process and on assignments in any field of study. Both appointments and drop-in sessions are available. The Writing Center is located in 1343 Ellsworth Hall. To learn more information, including hours of operation, and to make an appointment, visit the website: www.wmich.edu/casp/writingcenter.

Students with Disabilities

Both in compliance with and in the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I would like to work with you if you have a disability that is relevant to the work in this course. If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss reasonable academic accommodations, please contact me in a timely fashion at the beginning of the semester. You may also contact the Office of Disability Services for Students at 269-387-2116 (or at wmich.edu/disabilityservices)

NOTE: If you have questions regarding access to the materials for this course, you should contact me immediately.

Fifteen Minute Rule

If for whatever reason I am fifteen minutes late for the start of our class, please check your email. If there is no email from me stating otherwise, you are free to go.