English 200: Foundations of Literary Study, (Un)Commonplaces

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T/TH 4:00-5:15

commonplace, *n.* and *adj.*

Etymology: A rendering of
Latin *locus communis* =
Greek κοινὸς τόπος ,
 in Aristotle simply τόπος ,
explained by Cicero
as a general theme or
 argument applicable
to many particular cases.

Little solace comes…
when thoughts keep drifting
as walls keep shifting
        Mark Z. Danielewski

There is no need to build a
labyrinth when the entire
universe is one.
        Jorge Luis Borges

English 200 is a foundation course, which means it concentrates on the fundamental components of literary study: reading, writing and research. A varied selection of course texts—poetry, fiction, essays—should spur productive conversations about rhetorical practices and research processes, as well as invite participants to discuss and discover the methodologies that English majors have *in common*. The course adopts the phrase *(un)commonplaces*, however, as its subtheme, because even as we acquaint ourselves with the common practices of English study, we will read authors who begin with commonplace themes, settings or structures, but de-familiarize them. The common places of the course texts prove inhabitable—expansively so!—at the same time as they prove unreliable, precarious, haunted or hostile.

Arguably (we'll definitely argue it, believe me), the place English majors inhabit in the current cultural moment is as hazardously hospitable as the intricate *topoi* of the course readings. We'll make room in this course to examine the scope and scale of the commonplace procedures, habits, timelines and professional boundaries of literary study, and we'll consider the collective (pre)occupation among English and Humanities students, instructors and departments to articulate our common place(s) in educational, political and cultural environments.

Course Texts

A Glossary of Literary Terms (M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Harpham)

How to Be Drawn (Terrance Hayes)

Labyrinths (Jorge Luis Borges)

House of Leaves (Mark Z. Danielewski)

Learning Outcomes

- Learn and analyze conventions of traditional literary genres.
- Draw and articulate connections between texts and genres.
- Contribute meaningfully to conversations about the social impact of English studies.
- Practice rhetorically effective writing and communication, through both thesis-driven argumentation and creative, speculative multimodal experimentation