

English 496: Senior Thesis: Capstone

Dr. Michael Germana

Spring 2019

Section C02: 4:00-6:50 p.m. Wednesdays 117 Armstrong Hall

Email: Michael.Germana@mail.wvu.edu

Twitter: @michael_germana

Office hours: 8:30-9:30 a.m. MWF and by appointment, 207 Colson Hall

Resources:

Graduate Mentor:

Nicole Chambers

nmc0021@mix.wvu.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday and Thursday 2:00-3:30 and by appointment, 135 Colson Hall

Course Librarian:

Lynne Stahl

Downtown Campus Library 1004-I

Lynne.Stahl@mail.wvu.edu

(304) 293-5440

Introduction:

In this course, you will develop a topic on a literary text of your choosing; extensively research, document, and critically respond to the scholarly conversation surrounding that topic; and craft an authoritative 20-25-page essay that, once completed, will be the crowning achievement of your undergraduate career.

Part peer workshop, part independent study, this class requires your consistent dedication, both to completing your own project and to improving the work of your classmates. Commitment to the classroom community is paramount, and falling behind is not an option!

At the conclusion of the semester, writers of the most accomplished essays, chosen by the class as a whole, will compete for the Department of English's Best Senior Thesis Prize.

Required Materials:

- Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *"They Say/I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. 4th ed., Norton, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-393-63167-8
- *MLA Handbook* (8th edition). ISBN: 9781603292627

The above texts can be purchased at the WVU Bookstore.

The remaining course reading is available in PDF form through eReserves. To access eReserves, follow these steps:

- 1) Visit the University Libraries eReserves page at <https://reserves.lib.wvu.edu>
- 2) Click “Log In” on the menu list to the left
- 3) Log in using your MyID username and password
- 4) Select our course from the list
- 5) Select the assigned reading (there’s only one for our class: David Anthony’s “ ‘Sleepy Hollow,’ Gothic Masculinity, and the Panic of 1819”)

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, enrollees should be able to

- Develop a research project, including area, line of inquiry, methodology, and thesis
- Employ skills in close-reading and critical analysis to develop sustained interpretations of literary texts
- Construct a complex, multi-layered thesis that develops over the course of 20-25 pages
- Understand and use the many writing genres involved in producing quality research
- Engage respectfully with peers in ways that encourage collaborative thinking, intellectual stimulation, scholarly community, and academic development

Assignments:

Overview:

Each student enrolled in this course will

- Complete three short Précis and Response papers
- Craft a compelling Research Prospectus
- Draft an 8-10-page Conference Paper-Length Draft of their Capstone-in-progress
- Expand this draft into a 20-25-page Capstone essay, and
- Deliver a professional Oral Presentation of their completed research project

Failure to complete all of these assignments will result in a failing grade for the course.

Précis and Response Papers (30% of final grade (each paper is worth 10%)):

During the semester you will complete three Précis and Response papers of approximately 1000 words apiece. To complete these papers you must use the MLA bibliography in conjunction with online resources like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and/or EBSCOHost to find, read, summarize, and analyze a single work of substantial, peer-reviewed scholarship on your research topic and/or primary source. Nota bene: your Précis and Response papers must summarize and respond critically to *a substantial work of literary criticism and/or cultural studies*, meaning an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal, a chapter in a scholarly book, or an essay in a published collection, not a biographical sketch, encyclopedia entry, or the like.

Your paper should begin with a lucid characterization and summary of the argument made by the scholar or scholars whose work you found. This précis must then be followed by a critical response from you that engages with, and responds to, the author of the secondary source. Remember, you're working toward constructing an argument of your own, so trashing the scholar for their writing style isn't going to get you very far. Consider instead how you might respond as a scholar of equal caliber by asking and answering critical questions like: How has this scholar's argument influenced your reading of the text? What has this person overlooked, in your opinion? Etc. The goal in the response is to *demonstrate* how the scholarly source influences *your* interpretation of the primary text. Finally, you must provide a bibliographic citation of the article you found, preferably in MLA format. Along with assigned grades, suggestions for revision and/or further inquiry will be provided in response to each paper.

You are strongly encouraged to use these three papers to hone in on a particular *approach* to your primary source. Three essays about *Invisible Man* might be useful, but three essays that take a Sound Studies approach to *Invisible Man* would be much more useful! Conducting this sort of targeted research is how one develops an authoritative line of inquiry.

Capstone Project (50% of final grade):

The capstone paper, like any sustained work of scholarship, requires constant revision and refinement. It is a process of *reckoning* as much as writing! These assignments, in conjunction with the aforementioned Précis and Response papers, are intended to help you bring your research project into focus and confidently enter the critical conversation surrounding your topic.

Research Prospectus (5% of final grade):

If the précis in each of your Précis and Response papers is a critical summary of another scholar's argument, methodology, and upshot, then the Research Prospectus is where you provide a similar snapshot of your own research project. Bear in mind that this is a *working* thesis—one that will probably continue to evolve as you get further along in the process. In other words, don't worry if subsequent discoveries necessitate changes to your thesis. After all, you aren't being graded on how closely the final paper corresponds with the prospectus! Instead, you're trying to get all your ducks in a row in advance of drafting the paper itself.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein provide an excellent tool for drafting engaging thesis statements on page 11 of *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*—a tool they call “The Template of Templates.” I suggest using this template as boilerplate for the initial draft of your Research Prospectus. I also suggest significantly revising this draft once you can fill in all the blanks (i.e., you should make it read less like a template with the blanks filled in and more like your own scholarly voice).

Conference Paper-Length Draft (10% of final grade):

Due February 27, this essay is where the work you've done on the Research Prospectus and in the Précis and Response papers comes together. Consider this an 8-10-page preliminary version of your Capstone paper. This is the place to move from a *working* thesis (in your Research Prospectus) to your formal thesis, and an occasion for drafting your support for this thesis in “athletic” form.

Final Draft of Capstone (30% of final grade):

What will (or should) change the most between the Conference Paper-Length Draft and the Final Draft is the presentation of evidence in support of your thesis. In other words, it should take roughly the same amount of space to get all your cards on the table as it did in the shorter version; what will be significantly expanded is the textual evidence that illustrates the validity of your argument. (Read: it should look a lot like the Conference Paper-Length Draft on the front end, but offer a more exhaustive, sustained support of the paper's thesis on the back end.)

Oral Presentation of Capstone Project (5% of final grade):

As the semester draws to a close, every member of the class will craft a 15-minute oral presentation of their research and deliver this presentation, first to the class, and then to the public (which will consist primarily of folks in the Department of English along with anyone you'd like to invite). Your presentation should be a mix of extemporaneous delivery and written recitation. We will rehearse these presentations in the last two class meetings of the semester (which is also when you'll be putting the finishing touches on your Capstone papers in preparation for their final submission).

Two things to remember as you begin working on your Capstone (and I draw here from my own personal and professional experience):

- 1) You won't *really* know what your Capstone essay is about until you're *done* writing it. This has been absolutely true of the two books I've written, each of which turned out to be a very different animal than the one I thought I was stalking! Bear this in mind when you discover—or suspect—that your working thesis has outlived its usefulness and needs to be revised. In other words, keep returning to and revising that thesis as your understanding of the topic grows! No one who does the kind of work in literary and cultural studies that we do knows what they are going to write before they write it. Seriously, no one.
- 2) Related to the above: there probably won't be a "Eureka!" moment that occurs *before* you have written a substantial amount of your Capstone essay. These moments of perfect clarity only happen in hindsight (or in our imaginations). As I mentioned before, sustained research and composition projects are about *reckoning* as much as writing: you need to engage with the scholarly conversation surrounding your topic/text, not just before you write, but *as you write*. My suggestion is for you to write your Capstone in order to learn something new about a subject that fascinates you, and you'll find it to be a much more rewarding experience.

Class Participation (20% of final grade):

I don't think I can adequately emphasize the importance of your engagement in this class. With the exception of those days set aside for writing and/or conferencing, every class meeting will revolve around in-class activities and peer workshops. This is where a significant portion of the important work of the course will be done, and where you can have the most positive impact upon the outcomes of your classmates. It is my sincere hope that you will be as invested in your peers' projects as you are in your own.

Grading System:

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale with grade ranges as follows:

+	100-98	+	89-88	+	79-78	+	69-68		
A	97-92	B	87-82	C	77-72	D	67-62	F	59-0
-	91-90	-	81-80	-	71-70	-	61-60		

Evaluation Criteria:

A (90-100): Submitted work demonstrates perceptive and thoughtful responses to the assignment. It is well organized with excellent development of ideas, and it reflects the writer's and/or speaker's command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the author is clearly in control of the standard conventions of academic writing and/or speaking.

B (80-89): Submitted work fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. Work is well organized with good supporting details. The prose is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics that do not interfere with reading.

C (70-79): Submitted work fulfills the assignment. The author's prose is adequately developed, clear, and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the work fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish above-average work.

D (60-69): Submitted work fulfills its respective assignment but exhibits major problems in execution. Work may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, inconsistent spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (59 or below): Submitted work is so poorly or incompletely presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. Work fails to present basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard academic usage.

0: Submitted work represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing that are clearly not one's own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

Attendance Policy:

Because participation counts for 20% of your grade you have to show up and contribute. After all, you can't participate if you aren't here. Bear in mind, also, that this class meets once a week, so every missed class is really a missed *week* of classes. **A failing grade for the course will be recorded for any student with more than three absences.**

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the (mis)representation of someone else's work as your own. It may be direct (e.g., not documenting a quoted source) or indirect (paraphrasing ideas, thoughts, etc. without due credit). In either case, neglecting to acknowledge sources for outside material is a serious offence and may result in failure for the assignment and possibly the course. Please see me if you are not sure about how to use or acknowledge certain materials.

Intellectual Property Statement:

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other materials provided to students for this course are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the Campus Student Code.

Academic Integrity Statement:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me *before* the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Inclusivity Statement:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Additional Resources:

The Eberly Writing Studio in G02 Colson Hall is committed to helping students become better writers. For more information about the Writing Studio, including its hours, how to make

appointments, and additional resources, visit their webpage at <http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/students>. You can also follow them on Twitter @SWStudioG02

Contact Information:

If you have questions about the course or concerns you would like to share privately with me, please contact me via email at Michael.Germana@mail.wvu.edu. **But please do not write to ask me for lecture notes or to request a summary of what you missed on any given day.** If you miss class and need class notes, ask one of your classmates. You may also message me through Twitter at your convenience.

Course Calendar:

Starting January 16, bring your primary text with you to every class meeting!		
Meeting Date	Due for Class	For Next Class
January 9	Introduction/s, Overview of Assignments, Finding Sources (First Library Information Session—class will begin in Armstrong Hall and relocate to Room 136 of the Downtown Libraries at 5:00 p.m.)	Read David Anthony’s “ ‘Sleepy Hollow,’ Gothic Masculinity, and the Panic of 1819” on eReserves + Chapters Two-Four of <i>They Say/I Say</i> ; choose primary source and come prepared to discuss it in detail next class. Be sure to bring your primary text, <i>They Say/I Say</i> , and Anthony’s essay with you to class next week!
January 16	Mapping an Essay, Writing Clear and Cogent Précis, Responding to Scholars In-class activities: 1) 5-minute presentations: briefly describe what interests you about the text you chose, with an eye toward possible approaches to its interpretation 2) In small groups: first map Anthony’s “ ‘Sleepy Hollow’ ” essay, then collaborate on a précis of the essay.	Research and write Précis and Response Paper One. Bring a copy of your completed paper as well as a copy of the peer-reviewed essay about which you wrote to class next week.

<p>January 23</p>	<p>Generating Research Questions, Entering Academic Conversations, Using Evidence</p> <p>Précis and Response Paper One Due</p> <p>In-class activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In small groups: using Précis and Response Paper One papers, formulate working questions for individual projects. What questions are raised but not conclusively answered by the scholar whose work you and/or your peer summarized and responded to in Précis and Response Paper One? 2) Individually: evaluate how the author of the essay you chose enters the conversation; then present your findings to the class. 	<p>Research and write Précis and Response Paper Two + Locate a passage in your primary text that lends itself to close reading. Bonus points for choosing a passage containing a word whose <i>OED</i> definition is integral to its interpretation.</p>
<p>January 30</p>	<p>Using Evidence Continued, Performing Close Readings, Integrating Quotations</p> <p>Précis and Response Paper Two Due</p> <p>In-class activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In small groups: re-evaluate research plans using your Précis and Response Paper Two and those of your peers; then complete quotation integration exercise. 2) Individually: execute a close reading of a key passage from your primary source and report to the class as a whole. 	<p>Research and write Précis and Response Paper Three.</p>
<p>February 6</p>	<p>Mapping a Scholarly</p>	<p>Read Chapter Seven of <i>They Say/I</i></p>

	<p>Conversation, Establishing Methodology, Generating a Working Thesis</p> <p>Précis and Response Paper Three Due</p> <p>In-class activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Delineating horizons, determining scope: now that you have summarized and responded to three scholars who have written about your topic/text, briefly characterize what has already been said and what remains to be said on this subject. 2) Then answer: what theoretical approaches or methodologies have been applied and to what effect? 3) Finally, answer: will you be working within the same or an adjacent theoretical paradigm as one or more of these scholars? How might you extend and/or complicate the work they have already done? 	<p><i>Say</i> + write Research Prospectus + prepare a polished “Elevator Speech” of your nascent project.</p> <p>Suggestion: use “The Template of Templates” on page 11 of <i>They Say/I Say</i> to test the completeness of your prospectus.</p>
<p>February 13</p>	<p>Filling Research Gaps, Giving Elevator Speech</p> <p>Research Prospectus Due</p> <p>In-class activity:</p> <p>Individually: each of you will give an “elevator speech” that outlines the scholarly conversation you are entering, and shows how you plan to contribute to this conversation. This must include a snapshot of your argument, methodology, and upshot.</p>	<p>Read copiously on your topic and take notes as you do! As much as you may tell yourself otherwise, you’ll probably forget the idea, quote, citation, etc. when you try to recall it later unless you write it down now.</p> <p>Begin drafting Conference Paper-Length Draft of Capstone.</p>

	There will be a Q&A after each presentation during which members of the class will ask questions about your work-in-progress.	
February 20	Writing Day—Class Does Not Meet	Write and revise Conference Paper-Length Draft (8-10 pages) of your Capstone Paper. Be sure to include a complete and accurate Works Cited page!
February 27	Meta-Analysis, Expanding the Conference Paper (Second Library Session—class meets in Room 136 of the Downtown Libraries). Conference Paper-Length Paper Due	Celebrate reaching this milestone—briefly. Then put that shoulder of yours back to the wheel! Seriously, though. Once you gain momentum on a big project like this, you want to maintain it. It is too easily lost.
March 6	Individual Conferences (Mandatory)	Start expanding that draft!
---Spring Recess---		
March 20	Writing Day—Class Does Not Meet (Optional Conferences will be held in my office (207 Colson Hall).)	Keep drafting!
March 27	Writing Day—Class Does Not Meet (Optional Conferences will be held in my office (207 Colson Hall).)	Finish drafting your Capstone Paper.
April 3	Peer Review Workshop Complete First Draft (20 pages) of Capstone Paper Due	Revise Capstone Paper.
April 10	Peer Review Workshop Revised 20-25-page Draft of Capstone Paper Due, including complete Works Cited	Continue revising Capstone Paper, and draft a 15-minute oral presentation of your Capstone project. Include all slides or other visual aides.
April 17	In-Class Final Presentations Begin in Preparation for Public Presentations	Keep revising; keep breathing!
April 24	In-Class Final Presentations and Preparations Continued, Final	

	Papers Due, Course Evaluations	
	Final Draft of Capstone Paper Due	

Final Presentations of Capstone projects to the public will take place during Exam Week. Because scheduling will be contingent upon enrollees' final exam schedules, the date, time, and place are yet to be determined.