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

Professor Christine Hoffmann
T/TH 1:00-2:15, Woodburn 106
cehoffmann@mail.wvu.edu

**commonplace, n. and adj.**

Etymology: A rendering of Latin *locus communis* ... explained as a general theme or argument applicable to many particular cases.

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

**Learning Outcomes**

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

---

**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, drama—should spur some productive conversations about rhetorical practices and research processes, as well as invite students 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 take the idea of the commonplace and de-familiarize it. The commonplaces of the course texts, that is, prove **inhhabitable**—expansively so!—at the same time as they prove precarious, **haunted,** unpredictable.

Arguably, 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 humanities students, instructors and departments to articulate our common **place** in educational, political and cultural environments.

*Don’t worry, you’re not buying all the books pictured. Many are short story collections; selections will be provided on ecampus. You do need to buy House of Leaves.*