

“A Morbid Longing for the Picturesque”:

English 258:

Popular American Culture

Section: 001

TH 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM

Hodges Hall | Room 401

Dark Academia in Literature, Media, and Culture

Instructor: Alexis Constantine

Defined as an aesthetic and subculture “that revolves around classic literature, the pursuit of self-discovery and a general passion for knowledge and learning,” Dark Academia is best known for its visuals of leatherbound tomes, gothic buildings, and fashion modeled on early 1900s prep school uniforms. Although Dark Academia is an aesthetic with roots in the pre-internet era, namely in the Romantic literary movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its popularity exploded in 2020 during COVID-19 lockdowns when students were unable to attend their classes in person.

Along with its distinctive Gothicized visual style, Dark Academia has also become a shorthand for modern books and media featuring elite educational institutions, secret societies, and oftentimes, murderous crime sprees. In this class, we will read, watch, and analyze Dark Academic content through lenses such as gender, race, class, and sexuality in order to consider what the recent rise in the popularity of the aesthetic reveals about modern American culture and the current state of higher education.



Potential Films/Media

How to Get Away with Murder (2020)
The Queen’s Gambit (2020)
The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (2020)
Dead Poet’s Society (1989)
Carmilla Web Series (2016)
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (2001)
You (2018-Present)
His Dark Materials (2019-Present)
School Ties (1992)
Social Media Posts/TikToks/YouTube Videos

Potential Readings

The Secret History – Donna Tartt
Catherine House – Elisabeth Thomas
Plain Bad Heroines – Emily Danforth
Never Let Me Go – Kazuo Ishiguro
A Lesson in Vengeance – Victoria Lee
Looking for Alaska – John Green
Ace of Spades - Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé
Various Articles on Dark Academia

