

Rebecca Starr Nisetich
Teaching Portfolio¹

Office: University of Southern Maine, 96 Falmouth St, Portland, ME 04104-9300

Home: 13 Arcadia Street, apt. 2, Portland ME 04103

Phone: (978) 430-6023

Email: rebecca.nisetich@maine.edu

Skype: Rebecca.Nisetich

Assembled here are the following materials:

1. Professional CV (p. 2-4)
2. Teaching Statement (p. 5-6)

Writing course descriptions:

3. First-year Writing, “Identity and Sport”: This course explores the evolving relationship between American sports and American identity. (p. 7-9)
4. Upper-level Writing, “Contemporary Americans Coming of Age”: My aim was to create a writing-intensive course that would be appealing to students across the curriculum. (p. 10-11)

Writing courses recently designed and taught:

5. HON 311: Thesis Workshop, Honors Program: I designed this 3-credit course for the Honors Program at the University of Southern Maine. (p. 12-19)
6. HON 101: Entry Year Experience, Honors Program: I designed this 3-credit course, “Race: Reflection and Reality,” for first-year students in the Honors Program at the University of Southern Maine. (p. 20)

Literature course descriptions:

7. Upper-level Survey, African American Literature: This course traces African American literary form and discourse from Reconstruction through the Black Arts movement. (p. 21-25)
8. Upper-level Topics course: This course considers questions of identity in literature by ethnic American women writers, and explores issues of hybridity, memory, history, and assimilation. (p. 26)

Supporting Materials:

9. Student Letters of Support (p. 27-28)

¹ A 50-page version of this portfolio (including reading schedules, sample assignments, etc.) is available upon request.

Rebecca Starr Nisetich

Office: University of Southern Maine, 96 Falmouth St, Portland, ME 04104-9300

Home: 13 Arcadia Street, apt. 2, Portland ME 04103

Phone: (978) 430-6023

Email: rebecca.nisetich@maine.edu

Skype: Rebecca.Nisetich

Education

Ph.D. in English, University of Connecticut, May 2014

MA in English with honors, University of Massachusetts, 2007

BA in English *cum laude*, Colby College, 2005

Professional Experience

Assistant Director, Honors Program, University of Southern Maine, 2014-present

In collaboration with the Director, I oversee Honors Program operations (including recruitment, retention, and program assessment). In this role, I serve as Lead Academic Advisor for Honors students, and direct the Honors Leadership Development Scholarship and Peer Mentor Program. I manage the Honors Living and Learning Community on the Gorham campus, and serve on a variety of committees aimed at expanding the Learning Communities program at USM. I also design and teach interdisciplinary writing-intensive seminars for the Honors Program.

Community Service Learning Community Graduate Assistant, University of Connecticut Storrs, 2013-2014

I was responsible for organizing and implementing all curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities for the Community Service Learning Community. My responsibilities included designing and teaching curricula for two courses on civic engagement, social justice and service; planning and implementing co- and extra-curricular activities (e.g. coordinating visiting speakers, service opportunities, field trips etc.), and serving as both advisor and mentor to students.

Lead Graduate Assistant Coordinator for the Learning Communities Initiative, University of Connecticut Storrs, 2010-2011

I supported the implementation of the Davis Education Foundation Grant in Freshman English and First-Year Programs. I guided instructors to develop discipline- and interest-based writing courses and developed co- and extra-curricular connections among the different learning communities (e.g. Public Health, Animal Sciences, Community Outreach, Engineering, Pre-Pharmacy, Leadership, Chemistry, etc.).

Learning Communities Freshman Writing Assessment Lead Coordinator, University of Connecticut Storrs, Summer 2010 and 2011

I designed and ran an assessment of student writing which enabled a comparison between student writing in general Freshman English courses and Learning-Community-specific courses. I also co-authored a report for the Davis Education Foundation that summarized our work and charted a plan for subsequent years of implementation.

Freshman English Program Writing Assessment Reader and Reviewer, University of Connecticut Storrs, Summer 2009

This direct assessment project targeted student writing in required Freshman English courses. I worked on a team of graduate student and faculty readers to perform the assessment and write a comprehensive report that represents and analyzes that process, summarizes results, advances a few chief arguments about these results, and offers recommendations to the university's General Education Executive Committee, the Freshmen English program, and instructors for these courses.

Writing Center Coordinator, University of Connecticut Greater Hartford, Summer 2008

The Writing Center offers individualized tutorial sessions designed to support students at every stage of the writing process. Coordinator tasks include scheduling, documentation, tutoring, and promoting the Writing Center to instructors and students.

Academic Service

Director, Honors Leadership Development Scholarship, University of Southern Maine, 2014
 Director, Peer Mentor Program, University of Southern Maine, 2014
 Academic Advisor, University of Southern Maine, 2014
 Member, First Year Experience Committee, University of Southern Maine, 2014
 Mentor, Community Service Learning Community, University of Connecticut, 2013-14
 Group Leader, Freshman English Teaching Practicum, University of Connecticut, 2011-2012
 Chair, Aetna Graduate Student Teaching Award Committee, University of Connecticut, 2011
 Contributing Writer, Graduate Student Teaching Orientation Manual, University of Connecticut, 2011
 Invited Speaker, English Graduate Student Association Professional Development Seminar, University of Connecticut, 2011
 Invited Speaker, Graduate Student Teaching Orientation, University of Connecticut, 2010
 Mentor for First Year Graduate Student, University of Connecticut, 2010-2011
 Chairperson, English Graduate Student Association Diversity Committee, University of Connecticut, 2009-2010

Awards and Fellowships

Title III Mini-Grant, University of Southern Maine, 2014
 Faulkner Paper Prize, William Faulkner Society, 2013
 Non-Teaching Dissertation Fellowship, University of Connecticut English Department, 2013
 Pre-doctoral Fellowship, University of Connecticut English Department, 2012
 Summer Dissertation Fellowship, University of Connecticut English Department, 2011
 Summer Dissertation Fellowship, University of Connecticut Graduate School, 2010
 Aetna Graduate Student Teaching Award, University of Connecticut English Department, 2010
 Robert H. Elias Graduate Essay Prize, International Theodore Dreiser Society, 2009

Teaching Experience

Instructor, University of Southern Maine, Fall 2014-current (4 sections)
 Teaching Assistant, University of Connecticut Storrs, Fall 2007-current (12 sections)

Selected Course Descriptions:

HON 101: Entry Year Experience, University of Southern Maine (1 section):

A three-credit course for first-year Honors students. Students explore evolving conceptions of "race" in the United States, beginning in the antebellum period and extending into the present day. Course texts are

drawn from a variety of disciplines including literature, history, law, sociology, and anthropology. The course emphasizes the dynamic power relationships that are engendered and sustained by American legal and cultural and practices, and asks students to chart the conversations about “race” as they emerge in literature, law, and society. Special emphasis will be given to changing conceptions of “race” in Maine. Experiential activities include a field trip to Malaga Island, a walking tour of the Portland Freedom Trail, and participation in New Mainer’s Day.

HON 198: Honors Dialogue, University of Southern Maine (1 section):

Students engage in thoughtful dialogue responding to a weekly topic selected by the class (e.g. what is friendship? what is success? should gender matter?). Students will investigate meaningful questions by considering diverse perspectives, and achieve the confidence that comes from developing their own ideas and honing communication skills through writing, questioning, and dialogue. The goal is for students to engage in careful listening, to hone and to share their views on human life as a way to gain insight into themselves and the worlds they inhabit. The programmatic intent of the course is to enhance a sense of community among honors students and to foster student development.

HON 311: Thesis Workshop I, University of Southern Maine (1 section):

A three-credit course for advanced Honors students. The Honors Thesis course sequence at USM provides students with the opportunity to undertake and complete an independent research project. Students investigate the thesis subject thoroughly, write and revise a formal research statement, conduct a review of the appropriate literature, choose a thesis advisor and committee, embark on a research program, and produce a formal thesis prospectus.

ENGL 3214W: Black American Writers, Writing Intensive Seminar, University of Connecticut (1 section)

A three-credit writing-intensive course for advanced undergraduate students, which chart the development of African American literary form and discourse in the first half of the twentieth century. Authors included Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles W. Chesnutt, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison. The course considered themes such as individual identity and the assertion of humanity, freedom and literacy, citizenship and voting rights, prejudice and segregation.

ENGL 1011: Seminar in Academic Writing through Literary Texts, Community Service Learning Community, University of Connecticut (4 sections)

A four-credit required composition course for freshmen with a significant service-learning component: students commit to semester-long work at a service site for four hours per week, and each writing project asks students to put their service experiences into conversation with course texts. The course focus was memoir, and authors included Richard Rodriguez, John Edgar Wideman, James Baldwin, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Zora Neale Hurston.

EPSY 3098: Community Service Learning Community, University of Connecticut (2 sections)

A year-long interdisciplinary social justice-themed course for sophomores and juniors. The first semester considers the ethics of service and encourages students to reflect on their roles in their outreach work and their learning community. The second semester considers the issues attendant to global citizenship and asks students to put their community-based learning into action by organizing a campus-wide service event. Throughout the academic year, this course takes on issues of social justice and social inequality, and seeks to equip students with the tools to become active agents for positive social change. Authors include Keith Morton, Anne E. Green, Wendell Berry, Robert Coles, and Ann Beaufort.

Teaching Philosophy

I did not enter graduate school with the desire to become a great teacher. I badly wanted to become a great *scholar*, and I believed that teaching and scholarship were separate endeavors. To be completely honest, I saw them as mutually exclusive, perhaps even antagonistic activities. Today, I see how misguided that conception was; as I now understand, the different aspects of my work as a teacher and a scholar are deeply intertwined. Here I wish to explore these relationships between scholarship and teaching, writing and life. Through the study of literature and the practice of writing, I learned the reflective habits of mind that enable me to see the world in new ways. Through the process of becoming a teacher, I learned how to share this experience with my students; I learned, in other words, how to make intellectual work in the classroom usable and relevant outside of it.

My sense of these connections crystallized when I began to design and teach a service learning-based composition course at the University of Connecticut. Initially, I assigned texts I hoped would help my students make sense of their community work, and I believed the work we did in the classroom would enrich the work they did outside of it. I soon realized that the relationship between course work and service work was not one-way; instead, it was mutually constitutive. Students don't simply absorb meaning; they *create* it. And I do not simply present theories and texts for students to digest; rather, we continually make sense of them, throughout the semester.

Today, when I teach this course, I like to begin with Keith Morton's article, "The Irony of Service," in which he proposes an alternative model for understanding service work: instead of pushing students to grow out of charity work and to become advocates for social justice, Morton suggests that students deepen their work within the paradigm they feel most "at home" in—be it charity, project, or social change. Initially, students accept this theory and define their service in terms of Morton's paradigms; but as the semester unfolds, they often come to see the limitations of Morton's model. For many of my students, extended engagement with service reveals that their own work in fact does not fit one distinct paradigm; instead, it blends them. A student volunteering at a homeless shelter, for example, initially defined her work there as "charity," but she came to feel strongly that this definition was overly simplistic. Her sustained engagement with the community and her work in the classroom revealed that the boundaries supposedly separating charity from social change were permeable. Whereas Morton presses an understanding that growth happens *within* a given paradigm, my students often find that, as they grow, their work pushes *beyond* such limits.

Service learning gives students sustained opportunities to forge connections between classroom and community. But such connections are not unique to service-learning courses, and now I try to foster this dynamic in all the courses I teach. In the service-learning classroom, the reciprocal relationships between scholarship and outreach give students a sense of expertise and ownership over their experiences so that when they sit down to write, they do not simply fit their service work into a particular writer's theory or model of citizenship. The same is true in the literature classroom: the practice of putting texts into a variety of contexts empowers students to revise the models they are given, to reshape what works and to reject what doesn't—to become, in short, masters of their own material, and experts in their own right.

I came to this understanding only in hindsight, after teaching a seminar on African American Writers where I struggled to keep my students engaged. I now understand why this happened: when I realized that none of my students had any background in African American literature or history, I reacted by taking control over the material. I delivered course content *to* my students rather than encouraging them to harness the curiosity that spurred them to sign up for the course in the first place. Today, whether I am teaching an introductory

composition course or an upper-level course for English majors, I structure my classes in ways that enable students to harness their curiosity and to participate in the creation of our shared knowledge. To this end, in-class presentations and discussion leadership have become cornerstones of my pedagogy. Leading discussions gives students ownership over their course and makes learning an active process in which they get to decide what aspects of the readings we investigate and explore in class. Preparing and presenting research projects in class allows students to share their work and ideas with their peers, and encourages them to begin to challenge each other to work with ever-increasing integrity and insight. Both practices help students to see all of the ways that investing their thoughts, interests, and perspectives are integral to their course. Learning thus becomes a shared intellectual project in which students become the driving force in their own education.

The knowledge garnered from these teaching experiences has profoundly influenced my own research and writing. In the classroom, I encourage students to push beyond the niceties of political correctness and to work together to confront the difficult and uncomfortable silences around race, class, gender and sexuality. I ask my students to read between the lines, to look towards and beyond the margins, to listen for the silent spaces between the words on the page. This approach, discovered in the classroom, now inspires my dissertation's final chapter, in which I explore the narrative possibilities inherent in a set of minor characters whom readers and critics tend to ignore because they are silent, voiceless, and often rendered invisible or absent. I argue that they are vitally important because their portrayals serve to break the normative dynamic of racial definition, stasis, and death that determines the fate of the major characters. In all of these ways, scholarship and teaching do not simply influence each other; instead, there is a kind of intellectual crosspollination where discoveries in one area inspire and catalyze inquiry in the other. This is the dynamic I aim to have my students experience: I hope that the work we do in the classroom will enrich the lives they live outside it; but I know, too, that their experiences outside the classroom enrich the work we do in it.

I now believe that teaching reading and writing is a fundamental act of social justice that empowers students to find their own voices, to harness their intellectual power, and to take control over their own lives. Mastering these skills enables students to see themselves not only as learners but also as agents of change, within themselves and in their communities. Reflecting on my development as a teacher and a scholar, I realize the extent to which these aspects of my work are sources of intellectual stimulation and emotional fulfillment that have instilled in me an abiding belief in the powerful resonances of the work that we do. My work is inspired by my belief that we do not write for ourselves alone, we write to connect, to bridge gaps, to better understand our differences, and to rescue our shared humanity from the forces that isolate us from each other. Writing and engaging with the world are, I have found, inseparably intertwined. This is the vision that motivates both my teaching and my scholarly research. They are together now, as they should be.

First-Year Composition: Identity and Sport

Course Description:

This course is structured around the belief that reading and writing are fundamentally interconnected endeavors. Thus, our attention will be balanced between three activities: reading carefully, conversing thoughtfully, and writing reflectively. Throughout the semester, we will hone these skills while exploring the evolving relationship between American sports and American identity. We will begin with an exploration of whiteness, manhood, and mountaineering from Henry David Thoreau to Jon Krakauer. Subsequent units explore the ways that manhood, race, and nationalism are articulated through two of America's most popular sports: boxing and baseball. A final unit takes a multiracial look at American long distance running from the turn of the 20th century, through Title IX and into the *Born to Run* present day.

Course Expectations

At the end of the semester, you should be able to demonstrate that:

1. You can write from a place of inquiry and with a substantial purpose that you convey to readers.
2. You can write *through* (rather than just *about*) texts and can clearly demonstrate to readers the specific ways texts work to support, complicate, or extend your own projects.
3. You can use revision to develop your thinking (not just your organization or mechanics)
4. You can analyze your own contexts, choices, and development as a writer and can respond as an engaged reader of others' writing.
5. You can appropriately document your research using MLA style and can minimize mechanical errors that distract readers from your larger goals in writing.

Required Texts:

- August Wilson, *Fences*
- Trevor Von Eeden, *The Original Johnson*
- Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, (excerpts)
- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (excerpts)
- Kathrine Switzer, *Marathon Woman* (excerpts)
- Joseph Harris: *Rewriting: How to Do Things With Texts*

Films:

- Chariots of Fire*
- Touching the Void*
- Tyson*
- A League of Their Own*

Articles: (posted online)

- Gay Talese, "The Silent Season of a Hero"
- Richard Ben Cramer, "What Do You Think of Ted Williams Now?"
- Norman Mailer, "Ego"
- Davis Miller, "My Dinner with Ali"
- Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, "Hopi Footraces and the American Marathon, 1912-1930"
- Cynthia Gore, "A People Apart"
- Sir Halford John Mackinder, "A Journey to the Summit of Mount Kenya"
- Jon Krakauer, "Into Thin Air"

Course Requirements:

Reading: I expect you to complete the assigned reading before coming to class each day. Moreover, to succeed in this course you need to be able to read *and understand* about 100 pages of text per week. When possible, I assign more reading on weekends, and less during the week.

Informal Writing: The course material we'll be working with is demanding: the written texts require that we read carefully and reflect critically, and full investment in the course content requires attention and reflection. All response writing is meant to help you make connections between texts and concepts, and to generate ideas that will facilitate the drafting process.

- **In-class Writing:** Regular in-class writing assignments will be given. Topics will occasionally be freeform; at other times, I will assign specific questions. Non-attendance means you are not doing this writing, which has a negative effect on your participation grade.
- **Response Writing:** Most days, I will assign take-home response writing. Response writing need not be perfect, but you should be grappling with the complex ideas you've encountered in the texts we're reading and the ideas and concepts we're discussing in class. This is exploratory writing, and it is a vital initial step in the writing process. Some response topics will be yours to choose, others I will assign. Typical responses are **at least 2** double-spaced typed pages.

Formal Essays: The class is organized around the production of three revised essays. Revision and rethinking are essential parts of your work as a writer. Ample time to draft and revise will help you learn to think critically through your writing, to revisit and reconsider your ideas. I have designed this course to help you each establish a process of drafting and revising that works for you.

Writing Workshops and Conferences: Much of the learning in this class will occur in workshops. These will be held both in and out of class time, and their purpose is to give you an opportunity to learn from other students' work, as well as benefit from their insights into your own work. We'll work out the particulars of writing workshops in class, but generally, we will devise response questions to guide your reading of your peers' essays, and you'll email each other your drafts the day before the scheduled conference. Come to the conference prepared to discuss each other's writing in depth!

Final Reflective Portfolio: The final reflective portfolio is the capstone of this course, and asks each of you to reflect upon your own understanding of your ways of working as a writer, from question to conception to draft to paper. Throughout the semester, each of you will catalogue of your written work for the course (including all homework, in-class writing, drafting materials, revisions with teacher comments, etc.). At the end of the semester that assemblage becomes the central focus of your last written effort, the object of your analysis and reflection. The focus your writing about this body of work attends to two things: the discrete qualities of the papers in the portfolio itself and the applicable principles the portfolio reveals about academic writing and your own writing practices. In other words, the final reflective writing project asks each of you to look back on the work you have completed and to project forward a set of specific principles and practices that will help you in your future academic writing endeavors.

Participation: This is an integral component of your work for this course. Your participation grade can mean the difference between an "A" and a "B," and includes the following types of activities:

- **In-Class Discussion:** Talking your thoughts out is an integral part of understanding a text, and sharing your thoughts with others both exposes you to different points of view and helps you to understand your own unique perspective. We will discuss all readings in class before a rough draft is due. Remember – there are very few absolute rights and wrongs, so every student’s participation in the discussion will be expected and respected.
- **Discussion Leadership:** To help guide our explorations into each of the texts we encounter in this course, we will have two assigned discussion leaders per reading. Your role as discussion leader is to come up with a few targeted questions to inspire your classmates to think about the issues the text brings to light, to think about how this text relates to the other aspects of the course, to make connections between texts and ideas, and to put pressure on the ideas and assumptions of the author, of your classmates, etc. Discussion leaders may work together or separately, either way each leader should come to class with 3-5 targeted questions. I will assign discussion leaders at the end of class for the following day’s reading. Being a discussion leader will, of course, count towards your participation grade.

Grade Distribution:

Informal Writing: 10%
 Formal Essays (20% each): 60%
 Final Reflective Portfolio: 20%

Class Participation: 10%
 Discussion Leadership: 10%

Upper-level Writing-Intensive Course: Contemporary Americans Coming of Age

Course Description:

This course explores the works of contemporary American writers who imaginatively represent, shape, and challenge our conceptions of American identities. Gish Jen, Jeffrey Eugenides, Alison Bechdel, Junot Díaz, Louise Erdrich and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie share a fundamental interest in the formation of identity—individual, familial, communal, national, and global. Together, we will investigate the possibilities and limits of literature to shape identity and to construct (or deconstruct) the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This set of texts might also be broadly described as *Bildungsromane*—a German word that literally means “formative novels.” The main characters in each of our texts seek to more fully understand themselves and the worlds they inhabit. They search for authentic modes of self-expression. Particularly, each of our characters endeavors to develop a more complete and cohesive sense of self in the face of competing forces in a multicultural and multiethnic America, where “diversity” is purportedly valued but where difference is so often divisive.

Our challenge will be threefold: first, to recognize and interrogate the strategies our authors use to depict American identity in its many iterations; second, to situate our own ideas about American identity within the context of other articulations inflected by race, class, gender, and sexuality; and third, to come to a deeper understanding of whether there is such a thing as an essentially “American” identity at all.

Our writing assignments will ask you to conceive of this set of novels as in dynamic conversation with each other. I encourage you each to play with extending, challenging, problematizing and elaborating upon these conversations. To that end, throughout the semester, the writing assignments emphasize the design and execution of projects that will extend and deepen your understanding of the course material. My writing instruction will encourage each of you to develop unique research projects, strengthen your arguments, integrate secondary sources, clarify organization and structure, etc. Remember that the substance of each argument is yours to craft (i.e. do not give me an argument you think I want to hear, write from your own unique perspective and in your own voice). This course encourages you to improve your individual writing process, and to think critically about the relationship between your own thinking and writing.

Required Texts:

- Mona in the Promised Land* (1997), Gish Jen
- Middlesex* (2002), Jeffrey Eugenides
- Fun Home* (2006), Alison Bechdel
- The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Junot Díaz
- The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Mohsin Hamid
- The Round House* (2012), Louise Erdrich
- Americanah* (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- They Say, I Say*, Gerald Graff

Course Requirements:

Reading: I expect you to complete the assigned reading before coming to class each day. Moreover, I expect you to be able to read *and understand* about 100-200 pages of text per week. When possible, I try to assign more reading on weekends, and less during the week. We will read a diverse range of texts, attending to relationships between patterns of organizations and modes of articulation and argumentation.

Writing: This course intentionally builds upon the skills you have acquired in first-year composition: we will continue to read a diverse range of texts, and to develop writing projects through multiple drafts.

Co-Teaching: Each of you will “co-teach” two classes (sign-up for these will occur during our initial class). I don’t expect these to be formal lectures or presentations, and I don’t expect you to prepare additional readings. Rather, I want you to raise critical questions about the day’s readings for our class discussions. What do you find interesting, problematic, surprising and/or frustrating about the texts and the issues that animate them? How do these readings build off of and connect to previous days’ texts and discussions? Feel free to prod us to explore *your* particular interests.

Conversation Papers: For these papers, I expect you to put our authors into conversation with each other *and to enter into the conversation for yourself*. Conversation papers must actively engage with the ideas and themes that animate our course texts. The essays must be *no more than four pages*. Any publishing you do in your career will require you to meet word limitations, so I want to encourage you to begin this process now. As difficult as it may seem, I hope this will help you to hone your writing and focus your response so that you may present a sophisticated analysis. Conversation papers must be clean (i.e. free of typos and grammatical issues), and formatted according to current MLA citation guidelines. I have scheduled FOUR conversation papers throughout the semester; you are required to submit THREE. You may choose to opt out of one, or you may write all four and drop your lowest grade. I encourage you to think about these conversation papers as preliminary versions of ideas that you might develop in more detail (with additional primary and secondary texts) in your seminar paper.

Seminar Paper: An ideal seminar paper is one that puts forth an original and publishable argument. The seminar paper must focus in some way on the critical concepts addressed in this course on racial and legal discourses in early twentieth-century U.S. literature. Your thesis should connect your selected text(s) to cultural issues. At any point in the semester, please feel free to meet with me so that we can discuss your ideas, questions, and plans for the paper. The more we talk about your work, the more help I can provide.

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to participate in an ongoing critical discussion. Indeed, part of your job will be to determine what in the existing secondary literature is relevant to your project, and to articulate how and why your paper relates to—and differs from—what others have already said. I expect a minimum of 10 secondary sources for a research paper of this length. Feel free to make use of secondary sources from our course list.

During the last week of classes, we will workshop five-page drafts of seminar papers in pairs. Your draft may be the paper introduction, so you can receive help in honing the thesis, or it may be any part of the argument you are making. Select a section for which critical feedback will be of particular value to you as you craft your ideas. You will also hand in a copy of your draft excerpt to me. I am asking for a sixth page with at least three secondary sources, annotated and presented in MLA style.

Grade Distribution:

Conversation Papers (15% each):	45%	In-Class Participation:	10%
Co-Teaching (5% each):	10%	Seminar Paper:	25%

HON 311: The Honors Thesis Workshop

Course Overview:

The Honors Thesis course sequence at USM provides students with a unique opportunity to undertake and complete an independent research or creative endeavor. Most of you will ground your thesis in prior coursework, focusing on questions within your major or minor discipline(s). Another option might be to pursue an interdisciplinary research project based on extended engagement with community outreach. Each of you will be advised by faculty members in your discipline and in the Honors Program.

The Thesis course sequence may be completed in two to three semesters. In HON 311, you will investigate the thesis subject thoroughly, write and revise a formal research statement, conduct a review of the appropriate literature, choose a thesis advisor and committee, embark on a research program, and produce a formal thesis prospectus. In coordination with your primary advisor and committee, you will also set a date for submissions of your writing (these dates will depend on your own project and timeline). In HON 411 (and *optional* HON 412), you will complete your research and work through several drafts of the thesis, culminating in the submission of a final version and a formal defense.

Many students think of their thesis as a capstone to their undergraduate education: your completed thesis will thoroughly investigate the previous research on a topic *and* include your own insights and contributions on that topic. Your project will represent at least six credits worth of work, and will be more substantial than a term or research paper. Given that each course within the thesis sequence is worth 3 credits, we expect that you will spend 10 hours per week working on your project, starting from the beginning of the first semester and continuing through to its completion. Academic and professional writers do not binge-write; they integrate reading, research, and writing into their daily lives. Setting aside regular intervals of time for these tasks will make your thesis project manageable and enjoyable. This course is designed to help you form good reading, research, and writing habits that will carry you through to the successful completion of your thesis project, and beyond!

Course Objectives:

1. Forge a strong, viable thesis research statement that is grounded in your academic and/or community work.
2. Thoughtfully select your primary advisor and thesis committee.
3. Develop strong research techniques, and produce the following documents:
 - a. Keyword/Subject Heading List
 - b. Top 3 Books (annotated)
 - c. Top 10 Sources (annotated)
 - d. Ideal Citation Presentation
 - e. Working Bibliography
4. Write, workshop, and revise a thesis prospectus with the following elements:
 - a. Working title
 - b. Abstract
 - c. Description of your approach and the method(s) of analysis you plan to use
 - d. Detailed, chapter-by-chapter summary
 - e. Research and writing timeline
 - f. Bibliography of primary and secondary sources

5. Set a submission date for a “first chapter” to your advisor. This must be a substantial section of your thesis, edited for clarity and appropriately formatted. Coordinate subsequent submission dates with your primary advisor.

Required Reading: Available at USM Bookstore, amazon.com (students qualify for free “Prime” accounts and free 2-day shipping), bookfinder.com, Glickman Family Library

Lipson, Charles. *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2005.

Suggested Reading: Available at Glickman Family Library, amazon.com, bookfinder.com, or on loan from Dr. Nisetich

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research, Third Edition*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2008.

Silvia, Paul J. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007.

Turbian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th edition. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2010.

Grading: All assignments are graded according to the point value indicated parenthetically. 100 points possible.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thesis Committee List (5) 2. Research Statement (10) 3. Bibliographic Assignments: Top 3 Books; Top 10 Sources; Keyword List; Library of Congress Search Term List; Ideal Citation Presentation (25) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Prospectus Draft Pieces: Working Title; Abstract; Introduction; Methodology; Chapter Summary; Writing and Research Plan (30) 5. Final Thesis Prospectus (30) |
|--|--|

Seminar Environment: This classroom is a safe space where ideas will be expressed and respected. That does not mean that political perspectives, value debates, or conflicts over cultural differences are not allowed. On the contrary, you are encouraged to raise such issues in class. However, we do expect you to be mindful, respectful, and we strongly encourage you to be sensitive and careful about the language you use in both speaking and writing. Deprecating fellow classmates or others will not be tolerated. Prejudiced or hateful speech will be confronted.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Sept 3: Course Introduction and beginning your thesis

Due Today:

- Read Lipson’s *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapters 1-2 (1-34).
- Draft an initial research statement following the guidelines on pgs. 14-16, 21-24. Use the following format: “I am studying _____ because I want to find out what/why/how _____ to help my readers understand _____.”

Homework:

- Revise research statement.
- Write up a list of 3-4 professors who you believe could potentially serve as your primary advisor and second and third readers. After each person's name, write a sentence or two explaining what role each would play on your committee and how each would contribute to the intellectual structure and advising of your thesis.

Sept. 10: Information Literacy in Glickman Family Library, 2nd Floor

Due Today:

- Revised Research Statement
- List of potential advisors and readers, with explanations

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 3 (37-65). Begin researching and reading in earnest, and intentionally work to establish a note-taking practice that you can follow throughout the semester.
- Begin a document titled "Working Bibliography," with subheadings for "books," "primary sources," "encyclopedia/review articles," and "journal articles." Save this document: you will add to it over the course of this workshop, and will submit it periodically for review.
- Index Keyword List: drawing upon the books you listed in your working bibliography, make a list of index keywords (names, places, events, theories, ideas, etc.) that are relevant to your topic of research. This list will allow you to quickly scan book indexes in search of relevant materials. Start a list of index keywords based on materials you have added to your working bibliography—an easy way to do this is by perusing the index of your selected books, and also by noting any terms that generate productive results in search engines.
- Library of Congress Subject Headings List: make a list of the formal Library of Congress subject headings assigned to the books you've listed in your bibliography. Two good places to find subject headings are at the bottom of the complete listing of a book in the URSUS Library catalogue, and on the copyright page of most recently published books (often printed just below the ISBN number). You can click on Library of Congress subject headings in URSUS to find ALL books published on that particular subject. It takes time to learn how relevant materials are given subject headings by library cataloguers, and you will need to adjust these as you refine your search. Continue to add to and refine your Library of Congress subject heading list based upon your continued research (i.e. you should continue to work the stacks and catalogues of the library throughout the semester!).

Sept. 17: Beginning Research

Due Today:

- Printed copies of Working Bibliography, Index Keyword List, and Library of Congress Subject Heading List.

Homework:

- Read at least two review articles on your topic from top journals in your field (try to find review articles from two different journals, if possible). Based upon this research, write a brief (1-2 page) description of your field of study, including its basic assumptions or premises, major disagreements,

significant trends or hot topics. Come to class prepared to discuss the general lines of research in your field as presented in these articles. Place these citations into the appropriate sections of your working bibliography.

- Prepare a small packet of written materials for your introductory meetings with faculty. Print your name and email address on the first page, and include the following materials:
 1. Your revised Thesis Proposal
 2. A list of relevant courses you've taken
 3. A list of any relevant seminar papers you've written
 4. A list of any special skills you have (i.e. foreign languages, advanced statistics, etc.).
- Schedule a meeting with each faculty member on your list (the sooner, the better). Be sure to have a printed copy prepared for each meeting. Use this packet as a starting point for discussing your project, and make a note of any feedback/suggestions you receive from faculty. When appropriate, ask faculty to serve on your committee. Use the list you drafted to help explain your rationale in asking each particular person, and to help you describe how you envision that person's role on your advisory committee.

Sept. 24: Refining Your Topic

Due Today:

- Introductory Meeting Packet including revised Thesis Proposal, list of relevant coursework, seminar papers, special skills, etc.

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis*, Chapter 4 (66-86). Continue reading, research, note-taking and generative writing.
- Revise your research statement based on your consideration of initial research and meetings with potential faculty advisors. Below the revised statement, write a brief explanation of what revisions you've made to your statement and why. Bring a printed copy to class on Oct. 1 for workshops.
- Based on your reading of review articles, encyclopedia articles, or other sources, identify and locate in the library stacks THREE recent and important books on your topic (publication dates no earlier than 2000, if possible). Write down each book's full citation, and also the title of the books shelved to each side of it in the library (if you find this activity enjoyable, stay awhile and peruse the shelves as far afield as you like—this is a great way to find interesting and relevant sources). Examine these works and note down whichever of these books (or chapters/parts of books) you think will be useful in your working bibliography. Prepare a 5-minute presentation describing how you found each book, how you know it is an "important" book in your field, and how you plan to use it in your thesis.
- Plan to finish holding faculty meetings, and finalize your primary advisor and committee by next class.

Oct. 1: What is "good" thesis research?

Due Today:

- Revised Research Statement, Top 3 Book list, 5-minute presentation.

- Once your thesis committee is finalized, submit your final list, including an updated description of each person's contribution to your committee and thesis. Bear in mind that you should begin collaborating with your thesis advisor as soon as possible—s/he can help you establish writing timelines, refine your thesis proposal, working bibliography, etc.

Homework:

- Set standard working arrangements with your primary advisor: find out how often you should meet (we recommend weekly 1-hour meetings), what times are best, how you should prepare written materials, and how you should submit them to your advisor.
- In coordination with your primary advisor, schedule a meeting with your entire thesis committee at least 3 weeks before the end of the semester to address expectations for the thesis.
- Read, research, note-take, write, repeat.

Oct. 8: Building Research Skills

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis*, Chapter 5-6 (89-109). Continue reading, research, note-taking and generative writing.
- Top Ten List: Based on your working bibliography, choose what you believe to be the five most relevant books and five most relevant articles to your research question (if your field is more article-oriented, you can have perhaps seven articles and three books on your list). Below each citation, explain 1) why you believe this source is relevant to your question; and 2) why we should consider it a high-quality source. Bring one printed copy to class.
- Update your working bibliography, as necessary, and bring one printed copy to class.
- At some point this week, plan to meet with your primary advisor to share your list and bibliography (and incorporate any feedback/suggestions). Begin to discuss a research and writing plan for the rest of the semester.

Oct 15: Research Check-in

Due Today:

- Top Ten Source List, Working Bibliography

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* chapter 7 (110-119).
- Select and cite a single article/book chapter/book that you believe *best* serves as a model for the kind of thesis you would like to produce. Remember that an ideal piece of research may not necessarily address your exact topic (and hopefully it won't address your exact research question!), but may instead employ a promising method, exhibit a useful or novel approach to a subject, or ask an interesting question of a different topic than the one you have chosen to explore. Prepare a short presentation which describes in detail the kinds of methods employed, as well as primary and secondary sources that the author(s) used (look carefully at the footnotes, citations, etc.). Will you be able to employ similar methods and/or strategies in your thesis? Will you be able to get access to the kinds of primary and/or secondary sources used? If so, explain from where and/or how; if not, explain how you will address this.

Oct 22: Ideal Citation PresentationsDue Today:

- Ideal Citation Presentation

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 8 (123-142).
- Draft a thesis abstract and working title for your project. Share these with your primary advisor, and incorporate any comments/feedback into your revision. Bring these documents to class for writing workshops.
 - Working Title: your title will probably change as you prepare your prospectus (and, indeed, as you write your thesis), but it will help focus your thinking to begin thinking about this early on. As you progress, your title should become more refined until it is as specific as possible to the content that you will present.
 - Abstract: the abstract is a synopsis or summary of the main points of your thesis, and should clearly identify the question that your thesis research is designed to address. An abstract will be more detailed than a research statement, but less detailed than an introduction.

Oct. 29: Planning and Prewriting:Due Today:

- Printed copies of Working Title and Abstract

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 9 (143-158).
- Draft an introduction to your thesis prospectus. Be sure to include the following: background or historical development (including a survey of the field to date) *and* how your research relates to the background, what your intervention and/or contribution into your field of study is, and why it matters (i.e. what is important/significant about your research project?). The introduction should be written for a general readership. You will want to write clearly and concisely, and you will want to be precise and complete. Do not presume that your reader has a background in your subject—remember, the whole idea is that you are becoming the expert and you will convey your findings to an audience that is thoughtful but not specialized. Think of your HON 311 colleagues as your audience 😊
- Share this draft with your thesis advisor, and incorporate any changes/suggestions.

Nov. 5: Writing: Generating Ideas and DraftingDue Today:

- Printed Copy of Prospectus Introduction

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 10 (159-176).
- Draft the methodology section of your thesis prospectus. In your introduction, you describe *what* you plan to do; in the methodology section, you will describe *how* you will accomplish it. That is, how will you go about your research? What methods will you use to accomplish the task you have proposed to do? Your methods should be discipline-specific! Work with your primary thesis advisor

to ensure that you are working realistically and within the confines of your discipline(s). Be realistic: use skills you currently have or can acquire during the thesis course sequence.

Nov. 12: Writing: Effective Openings, Smooth Transitions, and Strong Closings

Due Today:

- Approach and Methodology

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 11 (177-191). Note: if you plan to present information visually, also read Chapter 12 (192-229).
- Draft "chapter" summaries for each section of your thesis. Your thesis project is smaller than a book, but bigger than a term paper. Therefore, appropriate subheadings will be crucial in helping you to organize your project *and* will be helpful in breaking a big, unwieldy project down into manageable, bite-sized pieces. You may not have enough information at this point to articulate what you will prove in each "chapter" or subheading, and that's fine! Acknowledge these gaps and think about how to address them now, with continued research. Your plans may change as you begin drafting; however, the more detailed your synopsis, the easier it will be to create a realistic writing timeline.
- Continue to meet with your primary advisor, sharing drafts of your work throughout the semester, and incorporate any suggestions or changes into your revisions.

Nov. 19: Turning Generative Drafts into "Good" Writing

Due Today:

- Printed copy of your Chapter Synopsis

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 13 (233-243).
- Draft a Research and Writing plan, incorporating advice and feedback from your primary advisor. This should be a manageable timeline that works for your schedule and your advisor's. Think of the "plan" as your writing syllabus: it should have writing goals, benchmarks, and due dates. Be realistic when budgeting time for research, drafting, and revising. Some writers work well with quotas—hours worked, paragraphs or pages produced, etc. Finding a way to track your progress will help to keep yourself on task in the weeks and months ahead.
- Consult with your primary advisor: you will want to be sure your timeline works with his/her schedule, and s/he can help you set realistic, achievable writing goals.

Nov. 26: Thanksgiving Break

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 14 (244-266).
- Talk about your thesis project with anyone who will listen. The more you are able to articulate your project, the easier it will be to shape it in your writing. Supportive family and friends will be an asset to you throughout the thesis-writing process, and they'll make a great audience at your defense!
- Draft your Research and Writing plan. Now that you have revised your research statement, surveyed your field of study, compiled a working bibliography of high-quality texts, refined your research

methodologies, and mapped out an academic research and writing program, you are ready to revise and submit your formal Thesis Prospectus (including a Bibliography, formatted according to the specifications of your discipline). The purpose of the Thesis Prospectus is to clearly communicate to your committee the identity, scope, and nature of your research project. The work we have done thus far has prepared you to articulate your project's purpose, importance, and contribution to your field of study.

Dec. 3: Preparing for Takeoff, I (or, planning for subsequent semesters)Due Today:

- Printed Copy of your Research and Writing Plan

Homework:

- Read Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* Chapter 15-16 (267-281).
- Revise your prospectus working title, abstract, introduction, methodology, and chapter summaries. Together, these disparate parts become your formal thesis prospectus. Share a draft of your thesis prospectus with your primary advisor and incorporate any suggestions/revisions.

Dec. 10: Planning, in EarnestDue Today:

- Final Prospectus

Homework:

- Coordinate with your primary advisor and committee to set a date to submit your first piece of formal thesis writing.

HON 101: Race: Reflection and Reality

Course Description:

In this course, we will explore evolving conceptions of “race” in the United States, beginning in the antebellum period and extending into the present day. To do so, we will draw upon a variety of disciplines including literature, history, law, sociology, and anthropology. Throughout the semester, we will explore the dynamic power relationships that are engendered and sustained by American legal, literary, and cultural practices, charting the conversations about “race” as they emerge in literature, law, and society. As our course texts demonstrate, “race” is not a stable identity categorization, but an ideological framework through which power and domination, liberation and self-determination have been articulated and enacted throughout American history. We will incorporate perspectives from a variety of writers, theorists, and community members. Special emphasis will be given to changing conceptions of “race” in Maine.

Learning Goals and Outcomes:

This course is designed to support and augment critical thinking, empathetic thinking, and creative thinking. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- ✓ Read a range of genres and texts and engage with them both orally and in writing
- ✓ Demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis
- ✓ Exhibit an intellectual curiosity and a propensity to act on that curiosity by posing and exploring questions in areas that are unfamiliar and challenging
- ✓ Adopt a self-reflective posture and be able to put your experience into context with other perspectives and voices
- ✓ Recognize the influences of social forces on our conceptions of “race” and appreciate the contingent and contested nature of racial categories
- ✓ Think critically about “race” in relation to your own individual experience, and recognize that your experience, thinking, and culture provide one of many possible perspectives
- ✓ Engage in effective and respectful dialogue with others in ways which honor diversity

Required Texts:

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Thing Around Your Neck*
- Charles W. Chesnutt, “What is a White Man?”
- Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*
- Ariela Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*
- Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*
- Gary D. Schmidt, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*
- Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Experiential Learning:

Learning in this course will occur both inside and outside the classroom. To facilitate this, I have arranged a number of activities which will encourage you to connect our discussions in the classroom to events and activities outside the classroom at USM and beyond. Detailed assignment descriptions will be provided in class, and will include the following experiences:

- Visit the African American Collection of Maine
- Portland Freedom Trail walk, with Daniel Minter, artist
- Tour of Malaga Island, led by Amanda Devine, coordinator of Malaga Island Maine Coast Heritage
- Participate in New Mainers Day, in coordination with Catholic Charities Immigrant and Refugee Services

Survey: African American Literature

Course Description:

This course provides a survey of African American literary form and discourse from the end of Reconstruction through the Black Arts movement. We will cover a range of texts: novels and short fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography and critical essays. Key issues of consideration include: freedom and mobility, literacy and the assertion of humanity, prejudice and segregation, citizenship and voting rights, identity construction and contestation.

I have assembled a set of works which are in dynamic conversation with one another, so that we may productively examine how our course texts fit into or defy ideas about race, gender, class, genre, period, and literary style. Throughout the semester, we will explore how our authors reflect upon, depend on, or revise one another. Short writing assignments ask you to put our course texts into conversation with one another *and to enter* into the various conversations between authors and texts for yourself. The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process.

Required Texts (available at university bookstore):

- Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, *Three African-American Classics: Up From Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk and Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Dover Edition)
- James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912, reissued in 1927)
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Claude McKay, Angelina Weld Grimké, Alice Dunbar-Nelson (selected poems)
- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)
- LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Dutchman* (1964)
- Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the rainbow is Enuf* (1975)
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973)
- Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?* (2011)

Supplemental Readings (posted on course website):

- Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (excerpts)
- David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (excerpts)
- Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926), “Passing,” “The Blues I’m Playing” (1934)
- James Weldon Johnson, Preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931)
- Richard Wright, “Down by the Riverside,” “Bright and Morning Star” (1938)
- Ralph Ellison, selected essays from *Shadow and Act* (1953)
- James Baldwin, selected essays from *Nobody Knows My Name* (1954)
- Deborah McDowell, introduction to *Quicksand* and *Passing* (Rutgers edition, 1986)
- Angelyn Mitchell, ed. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (1994) (selected essays)
- PMLA “What Was African American Literature” critical responses (2013)

Course Requirements:

This course offers a variety of assignments by which your performance is assessed so that your final grade is not dependent upon any single skill or performance. These include class participation and attendance, reading journals, quizzes, conversation papers, and a short answer/essay final exam.

Reading Journal:

You are required to keep a reading journal in which you respond to our course readings. “Responding to the reading” includes assigned informal responses to the day’s readings (approx. 2 pages), taking notes, asking questions, making observations, and sketching out preliminary thoughts about the readings for the course. My rationale for assigning informal writing in this way is threefold: first, regular informal written responses help you to keep up with the reading assignments; second, they allow you a private space in which you may critically engage with course texts on your own terms; third, they serve as an intellectual springboard for quizzes, discussions, conversation papers, and the course final exam. I will periodically check these journals in class to be sure everyone is up to date. A “complete” journal has a response associated with each class day’s assigned reading, so be sure to date and title each response. Incomplete journals will have points deducted. You may freely reference your journals during mid-term and final exams, so it is to your benefit to keep up with this writing.

Conversation Papers:

For these papers, I expect you to put our authors into conversation with each other *and to enter into the conversation for yourself* (additional instruction will be provided in class). Conversation papers must actively engage with the ideas and themes that animate our course texts. The essays must be *three pages*, double-spaced and with one-inch margins. They must be clean (i.e. free of typos and grammatical issues), and formatted according to current MLA citation guidelines. I have scheduled THREE conversation papers throughout the semester; you are required to submit TWO. You may choose to opt out of one, or you may write all four and drop your lowest grade.

Discussion Sessions and Exit Cards:

On the first day of class and again halfway through the semester you will be randomly assigned to peer “discussion groups” in which we will generally begin each class. In these sessions you will briefly discuss some of the questions, ideas or problems that you encountered in the readings for that day, and/or respond to the prompts that I supply. Discussion will generally occur during the first 15 minutes of the 75-minute class period. At the end of the day’s class, you will each submit an “exit card” on a 3x5 index card that outlines some of your questions/interests that remain for next time. These activities are designed to “prime” our in-class discussions, afford consistent feedback through which to better address your questions and interests, and monitor attendance.

Mid-Term and Final Exams:

Both exams will consist of passage identification and short essay questions. The final exam will be comprehensive. The exam will be partially open-book: you may freely refer to your Reading Journal. I will provide review sheets and sample questions a week in advance.

Grade Distribution:

Reading Journal	15%	Mid-Term Exam	15%
In-Class Participation	15%	Final Exam	15%
Conversation Papers (20% each)	40%		

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Creative Nonfiction: Introductions

Class 1:

-Introduction to African American Literature. Handouts: Frances E.W. Harper, “The Slave Auction;” Frederick Douglass, “Independence Day Speech.”

Class 2:

- Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*. Chapters I-V (p. 1-43); XIV (p. 105-15); Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Chapter 4 (p. 25-36) (posted online)

Week 2:

Class 1:

-W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Introductory Note” and “The Forethought” (p. 161-4); Chapter I-V (p. 167-211), Chapter XIV (p. 311-320); “The After-Thought” (p. 321-31).

Class 2:

-Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Chapter 7 (p. 53-69) (posted online)
-David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* Chapter 1: “On Autobiography and Theory” (p. 3-17) (posted online)

Week 3: The Novella: Racial Identity and Passing

Class 1:

-Langston Hughes, “Cross” (posted online)
-U.S. Antimiscegenation Laws (posted online)
-James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Chapters I-V, p. 1-34).

Class 2:

-Johnson, *Autobiography* (Chapters VI-IX, p. 34-62).
-W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art” (p. 60-68) (posted online)
-George S. Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum” (p. 51-54) (posted online)

Week 4: The Novella, continued: Passing, Queering

Class 1:

-Johnson, *Autobiography* (Chapters X-XI, p. 62-104).

Class 2:

-Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Part 1: Encounter, p. 1-36)

Week 5:

Class 1:

-Larsen, *Passing* (Part 2: Re-Encounter, p. 37-65)
-W.E.B. Du Bois, “Home to Harlem and *Quicksand*” (posted online)

Class 2:

-Larsen, *Passing* (Part 3: Finale, p. 66-96).
-Deborah McDowell, “Introduction” (ix-xxxviii) (posted online)

Week 6: Poetry: Creative Identity Constructions (all readings for this class are posted online)

Class 1: Conversation Paper #1 Due

-Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask,” “A Negro Love Song,” “Little Brown Baby,” “A Summer’s Night”

-Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues,” “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Song for a Dark Girl,” “Theme for English B,” “Harlem,” “Harlem Sweeties”

-Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (p. 55-59)

Class 2: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-Sterling Brown, “Slim in Atlanta,” “Chillen Get Shoes,” “Bitter Fruit of the Tree”

-Georgia Douglass Johnson, “Motherhood,” “Smothered Fires,” “Your World,” “Calling Dreams,” “Lost Illusions,” “A True American”

-James Weldon Johnson, Preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (p. 13-44)

Week 7:

Class 1: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” “The Lynching,” “Harlem Dancer,” “Harlem Shadows,” “Like A Strong Tree”

-Angelina Weld Grimké, “Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem,” “Poem,” “My Race”

-Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “I Sit and Sew,” “The Proletariat Speaks”

Class 2: **Mid-Term Exam (in class)**

Week 8: Short Stories: Uncle Tom’s Children and *The Ways of White Folks*

Class 1: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-Langston Hughes, “Passing;” and “The Blues I’m Playing”

Class 2: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-Richard Wright, “Down By the Riverside” (p. 62-124); “Bright and Morning Star” (p. 221-264)

-Richard Yarborough, “Introduction” (xi-xxxi)

Week 9: Essay: Notes of Native Sons

Class 1: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American” (p. 3-12)

-Ralph Ellison, “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” (p. 24-44); “Beating That Boy” (p. 95-101)

Class 2: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-James Baldwin, “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem” (p. 56-71); “East River, Downtown: A Postscript to a Letter from Harlem” (72-81)

-Ralph Ellison, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke” (p. 45-59)

Week 10:

Class 1: (all readings for this class are posted online)

-James Baldwin, “Alas, Poor Richard” (parts i-iii, p. 181-215)

-Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues” (p. 77-94)

Class 2: **Conversation Paper #2 Due**

-Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Act 1)

Week 11: Dreams Deferred

Class 1:

-Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Act 2)

Class 2:

-Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Act 3)

Week 12: Drama, continued: The Black Arts Movement

Class 1:

- LeRoi Jones, *Dutchman* (p. 1-38)
- Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" (p. 184-98) (posted online)

Class 2:

- Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the rainbow is Enuf* and Shange's introduction (p. ix-xvi, 3-64)
- Note: I will reserve a media classroom to screen either *Dutchman* or *For Colored Girls* (students' choice). If you cannot make the screening, you will watch the movie on your own and write a 2-page response paper (directions given in class).

Week 13: Contemporary Novel: Ancestral Legacies

Class 1:

- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (foreword, p. 1-48)

Class 2:

- Morrison, *Sula* (p. 49-85)

Week 14:

Class 1:

- Morrison, *Sula* (p. 89-137)

Class 2:

- Morrison, *Sula* (p. 137-174)

Week 15: Definitions: What Is African American Literature? (all readings for this class are posted online)

Class 1: **Conversation Paper #3 due.**

- Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature* Chapter 1, "Historicizing African American Literature" (p. 1-43)
- Amiri Baraka, "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" (p. 165-171)

Class 2: (all readings for this class are posted online)

- PMLA* responses to Warren (p. 386-408)
- Arthur P. Davis, "Integration and Race Literature" (p. 156-161)
- George E. Kent, "Ethnic Impact in American Literature: Reflections on a Course" (p. 172-183)

Final Exam: Date and Time TBA

Ethnic American Women Writers

Course Description:

This course considers questions of identity in literature by ethnic American women writers. Together, we will investigate the possibilities and limits of works by this set of writers, who explore concepts of identity and construct (or deconstruct) the categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and class. By placing course texts in dialogue with each other, we will explore issues of identity, hybridity, memory, history, assimilation, and generational relationships. We will be sensitive to the historical and cultural context for each text.

We will begin our exploration of ethnic American women's writing with a unit comprised of short pieces that defy convention by blending the genres of essay, story, memoir, and poem. In our second unit, we'll look at representations of girlhood and coming-of-age stories in focus on novels and novelized story collections. We will explore the connections and differences between representations of characters as "ethnic" and "American." Our third unit explores representations of manhood in coming-of-age novels by ethnic American women. A final unit is comprised of interviews and autobiographical essays, and explores the different ways that ethnic American women writers talk about themselves. How do our writers see their own writing in context of what we conceive of as "American" writing?

Central questions of this course include the following: what is "ethnicity" and how does it differ from ideas about "race?" how do ethnic American women writers contend with the fluidity and hybridity of ethnic identities? to what extent do they search for an "authentic," "ethnic" voice? to what extent do their works reflect the malleability of cultural expressions?

Required Texts: (available at university bookstore)

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*
- Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
- Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (1996)
- Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (2012)
- Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997)
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (2003)
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)
- Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (selected poems)

Supplemental Readings: (posted online)

- Marilyn Chin, "A MELUS Interview: Maxine Hong Kingston"
- Louise Erdrich, "The Art of Fiction, no. 208"
- Maxine Hong Kingston, "The Woman Warrior"
- Toni Morrison, "The Art of Fiction, no. 134"
- Bill Moyers, "Becoming American: Personal Journeys Interview with Gish Jen"
- Amy Tan, "Mother Tongue"

Student Letters of Support

October 8, 2014

Members of the Search Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I sit to write this letter of support for Dr. Rebecca Nisetich. Four years ago, I walked begrudgingly into Rebecca Nisetich's Freshman English course. "What could I possibly learn from another stupid English class?" I had complained to one of my high school friends the night before. I had taken AP English in high school and was convinced I knew everything there was to know about English. On that first day, my plan was to sit quietly, do the bare minimum, get the same B I'd managed to get in high school, and never have to take another English course again.

Then Rebecca Nisetich began teaching, and I learned just how wrong I was. She had an unstoppable passion about our coursework, and it quickly became contagious, carrying over to us. Rebecca had designed her syllabus around the specific needs of our Community Service Learning Community, a residential community designed to help students adjust to life at UConn by assigning them to live with peers who have a mutual interest in community service. Throughout the course of the semester, we were introduced to Morton's Paradigms of Service, an incredibly difficult work. But, by the end of the semester, my classmates and I not only understood it, but also were easily able to apply it to what we had been doing in our own community service work in the Learning Community. Discussions of Morton extended beyond the classroom, into the hallways of our shared living space.

She implemented a writing workshop model with great success. Peer feedback is incredibly challenging to manage, but Rebecca coached us to provide one another with meaningful and productive comments on one another's papers. I left our group feedback sessions feeling encouraged to continue revising. Writing became more than handing in an initial draft, getting a grade, and forgetting about it. I wanted to see where the revised draft would take me- it was one of the first classes where I began to understand what the writing process actually was.

But more than the discipline of English, in Rebecca's class, we were cared for and nurtured as students, in a way that does not often happen at large research universities. If one of her students was having a bad day, or looked sad, Rebecca would notice, check in with that student, and offer words of support. One snowy day, she trekked across campus to meet us in the common area classroom of our shared dormitory so that we would not have to walk to class. She met us for coffee outside of office hours. After the semester ended, Rebecca transitioned from teacher to mentor, making herself available to meet with students and provide advice on surviving college, or just an opportunity to catch up.

Four years later, I write this letter as a graduate student pursuing a Master's degree in Education. In my time studying instructional practice, I've come to learn that the mark of a good teacher is that students leave the class having learned the topic. But the mark of a great teacher is that students leave the class having awoken some of their own interests, interests that they may have never even knew that they had. Robert Frost calls these great teachers "awakeners," which carries the sentiment that these teachers go beyond the act of simply instructing, and unlock a student's passion. Rebecca's Freshman English course inspired me to take another English course, then another. Three years later, I graduated with a dual degree in English and Education, intent on becoming a teacher as well. That is the mark of a truly excellent educator.

Sincerely,
Kathryn Schneider
Former Freshman English Student

Maschal Mohiuddin
Biology, B.S.; Journalism, B.A.
Class of 2015

My peers often ask me why I have chosen to supplement my pre-medical education with a degree as dissimilar as journalism. In response, I have always attributed my decision to continue on this path to my freshman English professor, Rebecca Nisetich. Rebecca has served as a mentor throughout my undergraduate career. Her determination and endless support have helped me to succeed in my writing endeavors. She has been an inspiration and source of confidence through her teaching.

I started my freshman year at the University of Connecticut with little confidence in my writing ability. My experience in my high school AP English class was one of frustration and disappointment. I received no support from my instructor when it came to expanding my writing skills and understanding my weaknesses. My instructor had incorporated one style of writing that we were all expected to follow to earn an excellent grade. There was no room for integrating our own distinct writing preferences.

I began my fall semester with a negative attitude about my English class. I dreaded the countless hours I expected to spend writing almost fifty pages worth of analytics that we would be assigned throughout the course of the semester. Rebecca told our class her expectation that we would be constantly writing in her course. She had laid out an in-depth plan for the entire semester that consisted of four ten-page research papers as well as assignments scheduled on a weekly basis. Rebecca's reasoning behind such a rigorous course load was that "you don't succeed at something if you're not continuously working at it." This in fact served as a brilliant method to help us become consistently excellent writers.

Rebecca's clarity was the quality I valued most from her style of teaching. She was transparent with the learning objectives and expectations of the course from the first day. She was clear in her assignment requirements by giving us a detailed prompt outlining all the steps that were needed to build a successful argument. Rebecca was also straightforward in her feedback on graded and ungraded assignments. She utilized her education in these ways to help us improve in our progression as students.

Rebecca gave us countless opportunities to improve our work and empowered us to incorporate our unique styles into our writing. Every research paper had a timeline of revisions and drafts before we submitted a final copy. Rebecca provided us with a forum to converse about our papers. During in-class discussions we utilized our classmates to get different perspectives on the issues we were focusing on in our papers. Peer workshops allowed us to edit each other's work to get a sense of the different styles of writing and learn from one another's abilities. Finally, Rebecca made sure to meet with all of us individually during one-on-one sessions to give direct attention to our writing. I was able to work through many of my concerns, issues, and fears because Rebecca showed me the step-by-step process of becoming an avid writer through seeking continuous feedback.

As a result of this newfound confidence, I was selected to showcase the work I did in Rebecca's class at the Freshman Learning Community Symposium with other writing scholars. The paper I presented focused on the singer K'Naan's use of music to raise awareness for the current state of his home in Somalia. Through opportunities like this one, I realized my dream of becoming a Medical Journalist.

Rebecca has truly inspired me to keep working toward my career goals. She kindled my passion for writing in our freshman English class and showed me how powerful the written word can be through various service change models and exemplary works in this genre. Rebecca's genuineness and flawless work ethic make her an exceptional teacher. She has been an inspirational presence in my time here at UConn and has given me the confidence to be successful in my writing. I have Rebecca to thank for many of my achievements.