

English Department

Graduate Course Descriptions

Fall 2025

**ENG 501: Introduction to Scholarly Methods**

**Prof. Nicole Morris Johnson**

**Wednesday 9:30 – 12:10**

**Registration Numbers: (A) 12983    (B) 14340**

English 501 is designed to help you succeed in UB's MA program and beyond. We will work together to learn basic research techniques and argumentative principles. This course will also provide you with an overview of English's development as a discipline over the last century. How have critics conceptualized their work and how have these ideas changed over time? What is the status of "literature" in literary studies today? How do people working in English draw upon material in other disciplines? How can you best situate your own research within contemporary scholarly conventions? The course will also help you grasp the conventions of various academic genres, including abstracts, conference papers, and seminar papers.

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**ENG 502: Introduction to Critical Theory**

**Prof. Jason Maxwell**

**Tuesday 9:30 – 12:10**

**Registration Number: 23049**

English 502 is a survey class designed to introduce students to twentieth and twenty-first century literary and cultural theory. While the course is invested in covering some of the key figures and movements that have constituted this field, our weekly meetings will focus on crucial concepts and problems that have animated work in the discipline. So, rather than organizing the semester around important theorists (Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, etc) or theoretical movements (deconstruction, New Historicism, psychoanalysis, etc), each week we will focus on a particular issue or "keyword." We will begin the semester by looking at some influential theories of language (Saussure, Austin, and Nietzsche) before moving on to the question of

authorship (Barthes, Foucault, Gilbert and Gubar). Subsequent topics will include reading/interpretation, ideology, culture, subjectivity, history, institutions, public, and ecology.

While organizing the course around key concepts and problems means that we will inevitably be moving forward and backward in time each week, I also want the course to provide students with a better sense of the discipline's history and the role that "Theory" has played in that history. Accordingly, as we move through the semester, we'll tackle some of the following questions: How have the discipline's theoretical interests and priorities changed over the decades? How have certain texts or theorists been taken up in new contexts? How do past theoretical debates and controversies shape the conversations that are happening in the present? Are shifts within the discipline prompted more by internal dynamics or external events? How might a deeper awareness of the discipline's history help us intervene more productively in the contemporary critical scene? In short, I am hoping that English 502 will be an opportunity to think about how you might use this theoretical material productively in your own writing moving forward.

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## **ENG 529: 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature**

**Prof. Rachel Ablow**

**Monday 12:30 – 3:10**

**Registration Numbers: (A) 23050    (B) 23051**

In his 2020 essay, "Hating Victorian Studies Properly," Nasser Mufti points to the historically significant yet institutionally marginalized work of West Indian historian, journalist, and activist C.L.R. James to claim that James's "love" for Victorian culture was both "a product of being formed by it" and precisely what "allows him to articulate [the "hatred" of that culture] in the form of West Indian independence." Hatred thus emerges from love, in Mufti's account, for those whose color, location, or political agenda exclude them from the hope of reciprocity. As literary critics, he implies, Mufti concludes we would do well to follow James's example by "hating properly," and so registering both our attachment to nineteenth century British literature and the ways in which that literature was always already implicated in, engaged with, and shaped by a global imperial project.

This course takes up these notions of hatred and love in relation to precisely the literature to which James was so (ambivalently) attached: the Victorian novel. Questions we will ask include: Is literary criticism that addresses political issues necessarily political? How do our politics shape our reading, and how does our reading inform or shape our politics? Does it matter if we love--or hate--what we read? Are love and hatred necessarily political emotions? And then more specifically: How can we understand the relationship between literature and empire (Said, Spivak, Jameson, Burton)? How can we think about canonicity and the ways in which "British literature" was produced as an instrument of empire (Viswanathan, Joshi, Gikandi)? We will read some of the texts that have proven the densest sites for postcolonial critique (*Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*) as well as the critiques that have been brought to bear on them.

Requirements for the course include active participation in the seminar, a short (4-5 p.) in-class presentation, and an 18-25-page seminar paper.

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## **ENG 588: CL1 Teaching Practicum**

**Prof. Kellie Sharp**

**Friday 12:30 – 2:10**

**Registration Number: 19850**

This practicum provides weekly support for new instructors of ENG 105, UB's CL1 class. The practicum comprises meetings with a community of people all teaching First Year Writing (ENG 105) at UB for the first time. It is structured to provide time for discussions about lesson planning, managing peer review, mutual class observation, and individual syllabus development, among other issues teachers of ENG 105 deal with.

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## **ENG 607: Studies in Renaissance**

**Prof. Christine Varnado**

**Thursday 12:30 – 3:10**

**Registration Numbers: (A) 23052    (B) 23053**

This seminar will explore the vectors of bodily sex, social gender, gender expression, erotic desires, and sexual behaviors in early modern literary and cultural archives.

We will read drama, poetry, and popular pamphlet literature (from England, Scotland, Ireland, the Atlantic, Barbados, Virginia, maybe France?) alongside recent scholarship in the field, with particular attention to the burgeoning scholarly conversations taking place in premodern critical race studies (#RaceB4Race) and early modern trans studies (#EmoTrans).

Shifting back and forth between close literary analysis and larger theoretical frames, we will develop a robust critical vocabulary for discussing and dissecting textual figurations of anatomical sex (human and otherwise), femininity, masculinity, gender variance and gender transformation, sexual and non-sexual desire, criminalization, and dissidence. Students will develop familiarity with the scholarly discourses enabling us to ask both historical questions (how did early modern societies

understand and interpret these categories?) and transhistorical questions (how can our readings of these texts enrich the critical study of terms and concepts they didn't have in the period?).

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## **ENG 613: Studies in 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Prof. David Alff**

**Tuesday 12:30 – 3:10**

**Registration Numbers: (A) 21443 (B) 21444**

### **THE PUBLIQUE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

What made something “public”—open to view, in print, about everyone—during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? This question will drive our seminar’s investigation of British society between the restoration of Charles II and the reign of George III. Together we will explore different ideas of publicity in the context of writings by Hobbes, Locke, Astell, Addison, Steele, Pope, Defoe, Swift, and Wheatley. Alongside this primary literature we will read works of modern social theory that elaborate and revise the public concept, including classic studies by Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Nancy Fraser, Michael Warner, and two critical anthologies produced by McGill University’s “Making Publics” digital humanities project. These pairings should spark many questions for seminar discussion: what is the relation between eighteenth-century usages of the words “public/publique/publick” and the bourgeois public sphere whose formation Habermas located in that period? To what extent did authors of the 1600 and 1700s understand themselves to be participating in public discourse? Who do eighteenth-century publics enfranchise and exclude, and upon what criteria? Methodologically, how do the keywords of cultural criticism facilitate and impede access to history? Our goal is to understand how British subjects imagined themselves to belong to social collectivities during the 1600 and 1700s. Seminar discussion and writing assignments will stress close engagement with course texts and fluency in genres of the academic profession.

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## **ENG 706: Publication Workshop**

**Prof. Elizabeth Mazzolini**

**Wednesday 12:30 – 3:10**

**Registration Number: 16649**

This publication workshop will take a practical, and practice-based, approach to academic work and publication. Students will bring to our workshop a seminar paper (or other work of academic prose around 5k-8k words) that they plan to revise and submit for peer-review publication. We will spend the first few weeks working through exercises in Wendy Belcher's workbook, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* (which assumes its readers to be beginning with a draft, as you are), as well as other materials helpful for thinking through the job of academic publication. This work will include identifying appropriate journals for submission. Then, the course will incorporate writing sessions (with attendance required of course), in which we meet, state goals for the session, and write in chunks of time during the seminar meeting time, celebrating our progress at the end of each session. The last weeks of the semester will be devoted to practicing peer review, reading each other's work and offering constructive feedback in the mode of journal reviewers. After another round of revision, we will conclude the semester with your submission to a journal.

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