

English 380: Southern Autobiography

Southerners often feel compelled to explain their sense of southernness, a compulsion that Fred Hobson calls the “rage to explain.” This course will examine how several southerners and some non-southerners have represented the South in personal narrative. We will discuss the effects of race, class, and gender on autobiography, we will delve into the dynamics of southern identity, we will explore the process of self narration, and we will learn to distinguish between memory and imagination. Ultimately, we will ask if “southern” is an actual identity or an invented identity.

Professor

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Course Objectives

- To read and discuss representative southern autobiographies.
- To learn fundamental techniques for literary research and criticism.
- To cultivate essential skills in reading comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.
- To practice oral and written communication.

Course Requirements & Grading Policies

English 380 is a discussion-based course that uses a modified seminar format. Your success in this course depends upon attending every session prepared to contribute to our mutual understanding of the text. Attendance constitutes 19% of your course grade. Attendance grades are computed according to the following scale:

Absence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grade	100	97	93	85	75	60	40	20	0	failure

Entering class after attendance has been taken will count as a tardy, and three tardies will count as an absence. Missing class for a verifiable family emergency, participation in a



university-sanctioned athletic event, or religious holidays will not result in a deduction from your final grade, but it is your responsibility to inform me of your absence.

During the semester I will administer seven unannounced quizzes that will cover the reading assigned up to the day of the quiz. Quizzes constitute 21% of your course grade. You may replace up to two quizzes by writing replacement assignments. The replacement assignment requires that you write a seven hundred word synopsis of the reading assignment due the day of the missed quiz. Replacement assignments should be submitted on the day of the second class meeting after the missed quiz. Any missed quizzes beyond the two replacement assignments will factor into your quiz grade as a zero.

Your other assignments will allow you to practice your interpretive skills and to develop a significant level of expertise on the literature. You will deliver two eight-minute presentations on topics related to the day's reading assignment. Presentations will constitute 10% of your course grade each. One week after each presentation, you will submit an eight-hundred word encyclopedia entry on your topic. The entries will constitute 10% of your course grade each. Your most significant assignment will be a research-based interpretive assignment, which will constitute the remaining 20%.

Papers will be submitted to my email, davis_da@mercer.edu, by 6:00 pm on the due date. I will grade the paper electronically in Microsoft Word and return it with embedded comments. Papers will be returned to the initiating address, so be sure to send the paper from your own email account.

You may rewrite and resubmit a written assignment after it has been graded. Revised papers should be submitted at the beginning of the class meeting immediately after original papers have been returned. Revised papers should be accompanied by a self-critical analysis that explains how the paper has been improved. In cases of revision, the revised grade will be added to the original grade and averaged into the overall paper grade. Keep in mind that revising means more than correcting minor errors. In fact, a cursory revision could result in a lower grade. Papers submitted after the due date will automatically receive an F, but they may be revised to improve the final grade.

The students of Mercer University have a long tradition of honorable conduct, and I expect all students in this class to continue that tradition. Cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic misconduct will result in prosecution from the honor court, who may censure, suspend, or expel a guilty student. If you ever have any concerns about plagiarism, please consult me, and I will be happy to discuss your situation confidentially.

Students requiring accommodations for a disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. The instructor will refer you to the Disability Support Services Coordinator to document your disability, determine eligibility for accommodations under the ADAAA/Section 504 and to request a Faculty Accommodation Form. Disability accommodations or status will not be indicated on academic transcripts. In order to receive accommodations in a class, students with sensory, learning, psychological, physical or medical disabilities must provide their instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form to sign. Students must return the signed form to the Disability Services Coordinator. A new form must be requested each semester. Students with a history of a disability, perceived as having a disability or with a current disability who do not wish to use academic accommodations are also strongly encouraged to register with the Disability Services Coordinator and request a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information, please contact Carole Burrowbridge, Disability Services Coordinator, at 301-2778 or visit the Disability Support Services website at <http://www.mercer.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices>

In an ongoing effort to improve the quality of instruction, each student enrolled in this course is required to complete an end-of-semester course evaluation, to be administered on blackboard during the last week of class. Students failing to submit the evaluation by December 11 will be assigned the grade of "Incomplete," which will automatically turn into an "F" if the evaluation is not submitted by the midterm of the very next semester.

As a final note, I realize that you are busy and that unexpected crises sometimes arise, but as a general rule I do not give extensions on any assignments. I also do not excuse absences. If you have a major emergency or extended illness, you should contact Associate Dean Ed Weintraut to intervene on your behalf. I do not ever give extra credit assignments.

Course Schedule

August 25	Course introduction
August 27	Thomas Jefferson, <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> , Query 14 & 18
August 30	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> , 1-57
September 1	Douglass, 58-99
September 3	Douglass, 100-125
September 6	Labor Day
September 8	Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> , 11-66
September 10	Jacobs, 67-130
September 13	Jacobs, 131-188
September 15	Jacobs, 189-248
September 17	Jacobs, 249-303
September 20	Mary Boykin Chesnut, <i>A Diary from Dixie</i> , Ch. 1-2 & 20-21

September 22	Booker T. Washington, <i>Up from Slavery</i> , 1-4
September 24	Washington, 5-9
September 27	Washington, Ch. 10-13
September 29	Washington, Ch. 14-17
October 1	No Class
October 4	William Alexander Percy, <i>Lanterns on the Levee</i> , Ch. 1-7
October 6	Percy, Ch. 8-13
October 8	Percy, Ch. 14-17
October 11	Percy, Ch. 18-22
October 13	Percy, Ch. 23-27
October 15	Fall Break
October 18	Lamar Lecture
October 19	Lamar Lectures
October 20	Richard Wright, <i>Black Boy</i> , 1-101
October 22	Wright, 102-178
October 25	Wright, 179-313
October 27	Wright, 259-314
October 29	Wright, 315-384
November 1	Lillian Smith, <i>Killers of the Dream</i> , Part One
November 3	Smith, Part Two
November 5	No Class
November 8	Smith, Part Three
November 10	Smith, Part Four
November 12	No Class
November 15	Harry Crews, <i>A Childhood: The Biography of a Place</i> , Ch. 1-4
November 17	Crews, Ch. 5-8
November 19	No Class
November 22	Crews, Ch. 9-12
November 24	Thanksgiving Break
November 26	Thanksgiving Break
November 29	Dorothy Allison, <i>Two or Three Things I Know for Sure</i>
December 1	V. S. Naipaul, <i>A Turn in the South</i> , 3-76
December 3	Naipaul, 77-154
December 6	Naipaul, 155-220
December 8	Naipaul, 221-307
December 10	Course review

Course Assignments

Presentations

Twice this semester you will give an eight-minute presentation on an assigned topic related to the day's class discussion. You will sign up for presentations at the beginning of the semester, and you will give one before midterm and one after midterm.

After class on the day of your presentation, I will give you a brief critique on the four key criteria of a presentation: structure, content, delivery, and interest. A good presentation has a clear structure with a discernible beginning, middle, and end, and it demonstrates a significant depth of research far beyond a mere Wikipedia entry. You should deliver your presentation effectively with a clear voice, direct eye contact, and confident body language. Most importantly, your presentation should be interesting, since your classmates have to listen to it—whether they want to or not.

Encyclopedia Entries

Seven days after each of your presentations, you will submit an eight hundred word entry on your presentation topic for *The Encyclopedia of Southern Literature and Culture*. Your entry should demonstrate significant research, it should cite sources in MLA style, and it should include a list of about five sources for further information. Keep in mind for the entry that you are an expert writing for a general audience. Exemplary entries will be published on the blog.

Interpretive Research Essay

The theme for this year's Society for the Study of Southern Literature meeting in Nashville is "tell about the South." They are looking for essays that examine how southerners represent their own sense of the South.

They request 500 word abstracts by December 6, and 3,000 to 3,500 word papers are due on the day of our final exam. They seek essays that argue a unique and provocative thesis, engage a vibrant scholarly conversation, use sources responsibly and accurately, and aggressively interpret one or more texts.