



INTRODUCTION TO HUMANITIES

FALL 2014: HUMN 1301

MWF 9-9:50 AM, BB 1215

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Applied Critical Thinking Statement

This course has been authorized by UHCL as an Applied Critical Thinking (ACT) Course, which means in addition to learning specific course content, students will engage with some or all of the *Elements of Thought* and *Universal Intellectual Standards* of critical thinking. The objective of an ACT course is to develop the student's ability to become skilled at analysis and evaluation by applying a set of intellectual tools that may be effectively used across all disciplines (as well as to the student's personal life). Based on the Foundation for Critical Thinking (<http://www.criticalthinking.org/>), critical thinking involves thinking for a *purpose*, asking *questions*, using *information*, applying *concepts*, drawing *inferences and conclusions*, identifying *assumptions*, anticipating *implications and consequences*, and recognizing different *points of view*. The *Universal Intellectual Standards* are applied to *Elements of Thought* in order to develop *Intellectual Traits* including *clarity*, *accuracy*, *precision*, *relevance*, *depth*, *breadth*, *logic*, *significance*, and *fairness*.

Course Description

HUMN 1301 is an interdisciplinary course informed by the principles outlined above. Very briefly, students will be introduced to different ways of thinking and writing about thought. We will learn how to assess and analyze cultural, political, philosophical, and aesthetic underpinnings of "Values" impacting individuals and society. We will learn to distinguish between criticism and critique, and why the distinction is crucial.

Themes framing the course (Steady undercurrents):

1. Responsibility, personal and social
2. Locality and globality
3. Empathy across borders

One Primary Focus **Connections**, Communication, Curiosity, Creativity

Critical thinking is the bedrock of humanities. It is the force that keeps pulling stable definitions and “timeless truths” back into the vortex of contestation and change. Critical thinking compels us to recognize our positions when we speak, so the depth and breadth of personal/individual viewpoint is enhanced by exposure to multiple points of view. It enables a more informed approach to complexity in the world. It unpacks “common sense” assumptions that structure our everyday lives. We aim instead for greater clarity and sophistication in our understanding of experience and consciousness.

Students will read, write, and think critically about thematic work in the humanities that enable the relation of “class reading” to their personal and professional lives, and widely debated “issues of the day” in contemporary public sphere”. The course readings focus on practical wisdom imparted by contemporary writers, thinkers and academics who emphasize the integral function of active critical thinking as an agent of healthy living. Students will be called on to compose their own critical analysis of films and poetry. These analyses must be responsive to the readings and to global histories of intellectual thought on the value of “values”.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will learn to:

1. Identify the questions at issue fairly and precisely;
2. Articulate various points of view in the readings clearly;
3. Interrogate personal and collective assumptions with logical and significant insights;
4. Define the broad and relevant purpose of a liberal arts education;
5. Describe the implications and consequences accurately of traditional pedagogy;
6. Interpret poetry and share critically inflected analysis that is deep and relevant

Course Format:

The course will consist of f2f lectures, discussions, small group work f2f and online, group presentations, films, and regular online communication.

Email:

Please communicate with me during office hours, via the office phone, or email me via Blackboard. The best way to communicate is through email via BB because I reserve that for student communication. Please identify the matter of your correspondence in the subject box. I will do my best to reply within the day, and thus, always err on the side of patience when awaiting a reply. Unless your questions if of a personal nature, such as family emergency you need to report, please direct your general questions in the “Questions for Professor” forum in Discussion Board so that everyone may benefit from the information.

Required Texts:

Students are responsible for gaining access to books for the course. Books should be purchased at the UHCL bookstore at the start of the semester since they will not be available beyond the first few weeks.

I also provide the course materials at our library reserve desk for 2 hour in-library use. Some of the materials on our “Schedule of Readings” can be found online or BB or the library site.

- a. Cristina Henriquez, *The Book of Unknown Americans*: A Novel (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014)
- b. Bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (NY: Routledge, 2010)
- c. George Saunders, *Congratulations, by the Way: Some Thoughts on Kindness* (NY: Random House, 2014)
- d. David Foster Wallace, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (NY: Little, Brown & Co., 2009)

Course Requirements

Short responses (ACT assignments)	30% (10% each)
Papers	30% (15% each)
Attendance and participation	15%
Online discussions	5%
Final Exam	20%

Grades are non-negotiable unless there has been a clerical error. I do not post grades or send them via email. Of course you can see your progress through BB Gradebook. Final grades are available through UHCL website.

Short Responses (ACT Assignment) – abbreviated as SRP

Due Friday, Sept. 12 at midnight – Write a one page critical response to Saunders and Wallace in which you express questions their text raises. In closely reading their short works, you will fairly and precisely articulate some questions they raise and responses you can garner towards these questions.

Student Learning Objective	Exemplary (E)	Acceptable (A)	Unacceptable (U)
SLO 1: Identifies the questions at issue fairly and precisely	Student captures the kernel of questions from both authors, integrates these into a coherent and well-connected piece that fairly and precisely reflects both	Expresses some key questions of both authors’ work. Makes an attempt at intervening with the authorial questions but the paper can be mostly a deft	Brief, incomplete and/or grammatically unsound sentences. Repetitive without a main arc of thought uniting the response. Regurgitates author’s positions without

	Saunders and Wallace. Student also confidently injects her own voice as response to questions at hand.	summary of Saunders and Wallace that can be strengthened in terms of fairness and precision.	inserting one's own voice into the response.
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1. Due Friday, Sept. 19 at midnight – In reading the creative work of (i) Junot Diaz and (ii) essays/ anecdotes by various young scholars in *Colonize This*, students will be expected to articulate the multiple points of view clearly in their one page critical responses. In doing so, students have to integrate how understanding a few different positionalities enhances their reading of the text had they simply assumed the one dominant position, which is the “reader.” Offer a more complex analysis after expressing and utilizing the presence of differing points of view in this critical response.

Student Learning Objective	E	A	U
SLO 2: Articulates various points of view in the readings clearly	Student weaves together multiple points of view with her own in order to fully articulate how texts can be understood in multiple ways and how/why this clearly produces a richer reading of the material	Student carefully lists multiple points of view in short story and essays with clarity. Student begins to engage with how these positions enhance the ‘reader’ lens.	Brief, incomplete and/or grammatically unsound sentences. Repetitive without a main arc of thought uniting the response. Regurgitates author’s positions without inserting one’s own voice into the response.

2. Due Friday, Sept. 26 at midnight - An issue that has been on our minds, as a nation, politically and personally where everyone has a stake, an opinion, and a personal story, is immigration. When we come to this issue, it is key to bear in mind that we arrive already loaded down with old ideas and value-laden assumptions. This intellectual exercise requires honesty and a willingness to be vulnerable as students articulate their own assumptions which limits their relationship or has been altered as they make their way into Cristina Henriquez’s debut novel, *The Book of Unknown Americans*. This one page critical response articulates how an awareness of our own assumptions can help deepen our own learning about a wide-ranging and relevant subject that is currently being debated through national policy and local politics.

Student Learning Objective	E	A	U
SLO 3: Interrogate personal and collective assumptions with logical and significant insights	Student expresses various assumptions (can be individual or collective) that limit an initial reading of the text. Student also is able to demonstrate how working through such assumptions can lead to more logical and significant readings of the novel.	Student manages to detail one or two assumptions that she brought to the text and how it impedes her relationship to the content. It is logical and/or significant to a degree.	Brief, incomplete and/or grammatically unsound sentences. Repetitive without a main arc of thought uniting the response. Regurgitates plot summary without inserting one's own voice into the response.