

Bruce Levy
blevy@smu.edu
Office Hours:

May Term
x82505
After Class

English 1365: Literature of Minorities

M-F: 10:00-12:00 (morning session) and 1:00-3:00 (afternoon session)

The course interrogates from historical and literary perspectives the category of "minority" as a cultural paradox, one that simultaneously asserts and marginalizes identity. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of identity as both self-selected and imposed, as both fixed and flexible, as located and displaced, as both local and global. We will construct throughout our short term a knowledge base that we will be able to use to discuss contemporary issues of politics and popular culture. The Literature of Minorities helps prepare students for the diverse workplace and society they will live in throughout the twenty-first century.

This course fulfills the Human Diversity Requirement and can be used toward the Human Rights major or minor.

Course Instructor: Bruce Levy holds a PhD in American Studies from Brown University. In addition to the subject matter of this course, he has taught courses in American popular culture (film and music), the Literature of Inebriation, Addiction and Recovery, and American literature.

Nikki Finney, *Head Off & Split*

Jose Antonio Burciaga, *Drink Cultura*

Dagoberto Gilb, *The Flowers*

Nella Larson, *Passing*

Phillip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus*

Adrian Tomine, *Shortcomings*

Bruce Norris, *Clybourne Park*

(*Selected Short Stories*—(Distributed and/or Blackboard))

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course you will be expected to:

- **Write analytical essays on a college level.**
- **Have an educated grasp of the overall issues of “minority” literature.**

Grading:

Papers: 30%

Tests: 50%

Participation: 20%

You are also encouraged to conduct extra credit presentation/workshops on topics relevant to the course. Presentations from historical and contemporary perspectives about social/political issues and media are encouraged. Come see me early in the term about your presentations.

Schedule:

Thursday, May 15: Introduction to course

Discussion of Syllabus

*Reading: **Shortcomings***

***Our Spiritual Strivings** (handout)*

*Film: **Ethnic Notions***

Friday, May 16:

*Film: **Bamboozled:***

*Reading: **Passing***

Monday, May 19

Reading: *Passing*, (continued)

Film: *Imitation of Life*

Tuesday, May 20

Film: *Jazz Singer*

Reading: *A Wife's Story* (handout)

Wednesday, May 21

Reading: *Who's Irish* (handout)

In-Class Exam; Paper Due

Thursday, May 22

Reading: *Goodbye, Columbus*

Friday, May 23

Reading: Defender of the Faith (handout)

Writing about Jews (handout)

Film: Annie Hall

Tuesday, May 27

Reading: *The Flowers*

(selected Handouts)

Film: A Class Apart

Wednesday, May 28

Film: Raisin in the Sun

Reading: Head Off & Split

Thursday, May 29

Reading: Clybourne Park

Review Session

Friday, May 30

Final exam

Paper Due

Procedures: (make sure you fully understand this section of the syllabus)

Because this is a small class, we will have plenty of time to get to know one another and to engage in conversation about the materials. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class. It is extremely rude to have your phones or computers or tablets on during class. We will have breaks throughout the day when you can get back on the grid. But **while we are in class, all devices will be turned off.**

Students will be on time to class. On time means that students will be seated with their books on their desks ready to begin class at the top of the hour. Lateness will be duly noted and marked. Habitual tardiness will result in a lower final grade and may lead to removal from class.

Students will have completed the assigned work. Assignments are not optional. You are expected to have completed the assignments at the time indicated on the syllabus or handouts and are expected to be able to participate intelligently in class activities. Come to class prepared to work!

Advice: If in your reading you encounter a word you do not know, you are to look it up. If you encounter in your reading an event about which you are unfamiliar, you are expected to do some research to find out about it. Quizzes will be given on occasion to give you an opportunity to demonstrate that you have done the reading. Students who habitually fail to demonstrate that they have done the reading (through poor grades on quizzes, an inability to answer questions raised in class, or an inability to participate intelligently in class discussions) may be dropped from the class at the instructor's discretion. Failure to demonstrate engagement with the reading as described above will undoubtedly work to lower your final grade.

Written Work: The paper work will be handed in when expected. You will be marked down if your paper is late. The paper must be properly formatted and stapled. When you present sloppy or shoddy work you send a powerful negative message to your instructor, which is never a good idea. If you don't own a small stapler, I suggest you buy one and carry it with you in your backpack. Written work that fails to meet these minimal standards will be marked down and will undoubtedly work to lower your final grade.

Attendance: Your presence in class is not optional. Because this is the MayTerm, a missed class is the equivalent to more than a week missed. You must attend every class—or make special arrangements and provide explanations for absences.

Conferences: Individual conferences are optional. It is up to you to take the initiative to seek help and advice from me about your performance. I can say with certainty that there is a clear statistical correlation between conferences and results. Students who take the initiative to set up conferences almost always perform better in the class. I will always be available after our sessions for conferences.

When you come to a conference you need to be prepared. I expect you to have an agenda. A conference is a give and take. If you are passive in the conference you are wasting my time. Come to the conference ready to interact. At the outset of the conference I expect you to tell me what you hope to accomplish and what you have done to prepare yourself before the conference to accomplish this objective. If you are unprepared for a conference, I will ask you to leave. If you miss a planned conference, it will count against your grade the same as an absence from class.

Advice: It is unwise to reel off at the beginning of a conference all the things you think are bad about your paper (you may write down a critiques of your draft and show it to me after I have read your work). Let me be the judge of what is good and what needs improvement, although I am happy to discuss your self-critique. In your writing and in other forms of self-presentation it is a good idea to convey a sense of confidence. You should, of course, have an open mind and accept constructive criticism with both maturity and the resolve to improve your work.

I reserve the right to limit the number of conferences you may come to see me for each assignment. I do this because your work is YOUR work; it is not a collaboration between us. I am happy to give you editorial advice, but don't expect me to write your papers with you. The point of a conference is to enable you to take the training wheels off, not to encourage you to keep them on.

Another note about conferences: As your teacher I am also a diagnostician. During conferences, I will decide on the **two** most pressing writing and thinking issues raised by your work. Do not think that

simply by addressing these issues that your paper is now perfect. Experience has taught me that it makes no sense to overwhelm you with things to work on. Rather, we work together to improve your writing in manageable increments. Do not think that by incorporating into your paper suggestions made in conferences that you will get an A. You can expect me always to point out the good aspects of your writing. Knowing why something works is as valuable as knowing why something doesn't.

Grammar/Spelling/Proper Form: These things count. Different writing occasions might have different rules. The rules of texting, for example, if in fact they exist, are quite different from the conventions of university-level written English. These rules and conventions are not difficult to learn, but are at times tricky and puzzling. Good grammar, for example, is a hallmark of an educated person. Bad grammar is a sign of laziness, sloppiness, poor education, and/or, I regret to say, stupidity. Of course, if English is not your first language, it makes sense that the rules of English grammar and usage might present challenges to you that have nothing to do with your intelligence. If that is the case, however, you need to work doubly hard to master these conventions.

Students will follow rules of professional **decorum**. This means that students will dress appropriately (no hats are to be worn in class), will not slouch in their chairs, and will not engage in cross talk during class. All electronic devices are to be turned off during class, including computers. Successful students are students who respect their co-workers and treat college as a job they love—and want to keep.

Advice: Three things never to say to a Professor: 1) "I need to get an A in this course"; 2) "But my friend read my paper and thought it was really good"; 3) "Why did so-and so get a higher grade than me?" If you don't understand why it is inappropriate to say these things (or things like them), come see me. You can rest assured, I know what an A paper looks like. I know what a B paper looks like. I know what a C paper looks like.

Students will take notes during class. You are expected to have a notebook and a pen on your desk during class. Yes, notes are to be taken the old fashioned way—by hand!!!! It is also a good idea to jot down your thoughts and questions while you are doing the reading for class. On occasion I will ask you to whip out your laptops, tablets, phones, etc. and look something up. In general, however, I am the only one using a computer during class time.

Students are expected to be fully conversant with the University Honor Code and University policies about plagiarism and other forms of academic fraud. Violations of the University Honor Code compromise the integrity of the class for all participants, and will not be tolerated. Any student suspected of violating the University Honor Code will be duly charged and brought before the Honor Council. When I encounter a violation of the University Honor code, whether intentional or unintentional, it is my professional responsibility to the class and to the University to report it. Do not be put me in the position of having to do so. If you are unsure of whether or not you may be in violation of some aspect of the Honor Code, come see me.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

•**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that requires missing class **should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester**, and should discuss with me in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.

•**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. **It is the responsibility of the student** to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.

Schedule: Because this class will be conducted as a writing seminar/workshop, the following schedule indicates what we will be covering weekly, rather than daily. In our workshop, we will often need to improvise as particular writing and critical thinking issues arise. All of this is to say that the following provides a roadmap of where we will be from week to week in terms of our assignments. Within each week, we will do our best to cover the material as indicated below. On every Friday I will provide you with a more detailed sense of what I imagine the next Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to look like.

It is assumed from here on in that you are fully conversant with the rules and procedures for the course. You cannot legitimately claim that you are unfamiliar with them. Just as I am aware that you have other courses, you should be aware that I have other students—lots of them. The more obstacles placed before me by any one student, the harder it is for me to do my job. When a student presents me with those obstacles, he or she diverts my attention from other students. This form of selfishness is anti-social, and as such, unacceptable. So, let's all follow the rules and procedures so that we need not trouble ourselves with discussing them anymore.

You will be asked to sign a statement that indicates that you have read the syllabus and are fully conversant with its terms and that you agree to abide by them. It is a good idea to re-read the syllabus a number of times throughout the semester.

NB: I have a fairly casual teaching style. Do not confuse my casual style with a lack of standards or expectations. My standards are high. I just happen to think that learning is a blast and should be fun!

I reserve the right to make amendments and alterations to the rules, procedures, the course schedule and the percentage of value for each assignment and activity, always with advance notice to you.