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Introduction To Latinx Literature And Culture (SPAN015 / LITR 15S) Syllabus

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Swarthmore College
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
Spanish Section
Fall 2017

SPAN015 / LITR 15S
First Year Seminar
Introduction to Latinx Literature and Culture

Professor Désirée Díaz
Mondays and Wednesdays. 1:15 – 2:30 pm
Office Hours: T/Th 1:30-2:30 pm (or by appointment)

Writing Course
Eligible for Latin American and Latino Studies (LALS)

I. Course Description

This First Year Seminar is an introduction to the writings of Latino/as in the U.S. with emphasis on the distinctions and similarities that have shaped the experiences and the cultural imagination among different Latinx communities.¹ We will focus particularly in works produced by the three major groups of U.S. Latinx (Mexican Americans or Chicanos, Puerto Ricans or Nuyoricans, and Cuban Americans) during the 20th and 21st centuries but will also include (mostly toward the end of the course) some pieces representative of other Latinx identities. By critically analyzing works from a range of genres and cultural expressions including poetry, fiction, memoirs, film, and performance, along with recent literary and cultural theory works, the course will explore some of the major themes and issues that inform the cultural production of these groups. Topics to be discussed include identity formation and negotiation in terms of language, race, gender, sexuality, and class; the colonial subject; diaspora and emigration; the marketing of the Latinx identity; and activism through art.

As a First Year Seminar and a Writing Course, the contents of the course will be delivered through assignments designed to develop and reinforce three particular skills: Research Methods, Critical Thinking and Interpretation, and Academic Writing.

To reinforce those skills, students will participate in a semester-long Research Workshop on the topic: “**Contemporary Latinx Digital Media**” that will explore and analyze different aspects related to the representation of Latino/as in the media with an emphasis on digital content produced by Latinx groups and communities such as news outlets, blogs, magazines, video channels, social media platforms, advertisement, independent films, among others. Since the readings of the course offers mostly a panoramic chronological survey of Latinx literature, the workshop will offer the students the possibility of establishing an ongoing dialogue between the canonical readings and more recent representations of Latinx communities. This project is supported by the Digital Humanities Curricular Development Grant from the Provost Office.

¹ This syllabus uses the term Latinx as a non-gendered, umbrella term to refer to different Latin American-descent population groups and communities. Students are encouraged to use other terms that they find more useful or appropriate depending on the context, such as Latin@, Latino, Latina, Chicano, etc.

II. Learning Goals

Through this course students will:

- Understand and critically analyze the concept of Latinx literature and culture and other related terms and concepts.
- Contextualize the emergence and evolution of U.S. Latinx literature in terms of the historical, economic, and political conditions that have influenced its development.
- Articulate critical reflections and arguments about the works and topics studied.
- Recognize the significance and contribution of Latinx literature as part of a variety of literary traditions and appreciate how the issues and themes raised by Latinx creators express broader concerns and questions that relate to contemporary societies and the human world at large.
- Develop their research skills in the field of Digital Humanities.

III. Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate through discussion and writing an understanding and appropriate use of terms and concepts such as Latino, *latinidad*, Hispanic, or Chicano.
- Characterize and discuss major authors, themes, narratives strategies, and literary and artistic tropes that are the core of Latinx symbolic production.
- Illustrate and examine differences and similarities among the literary production of different groups of U.S. Latinx. Recognize how different elements such as national origin, skin color, gender, or sexuality shape the intersectional experiences and tensions of Latinx in the U.S. and inform the aesthetic discourses of different groups.
- Produce argumentative analysis and interpretations of the works studied.
- Develop writing skills through academic writing assignments using a process approach.
- Produce an interdisciplinary research project in the field of Digital Humanities.

Writing Goals

This is a writing course. In terms of writing, the students will:

- Develop writing skills through academic writing assignments applying a process approach.
- Elaborate argumentative analysis and interpretations of the works studied.
- Incorporate bibliographical analysis as part of their assignments.
- Use academic writing conventions.

IV. Required Texts

- *Bless Me Ultima*. Rudolfo Anaya
- *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Gloria Anzaldúa
- *The House on Mango Street*. Sandra Cisneros
- *Dreaming in Cuban*. Cristina García
- *Down These Mean Streets*. Piri Thomas
- *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Junot Díaz
- *We the Animals*. Justin Torres.

All other required readings will be available on Moodle. Films will be on reserve at McCabe or at the Language Resource Center.

*** Important Note:** Although this course will be taught in English and all readings will be in English, many of the primary texts include Spanish words and expressions. It is highly recommended to use—as much as needed—a good Spanish-English dictionary. If there are Spanish words and/or expressions that you do not understand it is your responsibility to look up the meaning before coming to class. Class sessions will not be used to do translation work. You can find a useful multilingual online dictionary in

V. Suggested Reference Materials

The following materials are at McCabe Library's general reserve.

- Stavans, Ilan. *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.
- Gutiérrez, David. *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004.
- González, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Viking, 2000. Print.

VI. Academic Requirements

- 1) **Attendance and Work Ethics:** Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend every class, be punctual, actively engage with class material—whether reading, researching, or watching—and reflect on assigned topics before class. For a full grade (and for a successful class), students should attend and participate in every class meeting in ways that demonstrate careful preparation, well-informed reflection, and that advance an understanding of the topic.
Two absences will be excused. More than 3 unexcused absences will affect your final grade. After a total of 6 unjustified absences (3 weeks of class), the instructor maintains the right to withdraw and/or fail any student. No exceptions will be made.
- 2) **Participation:** During normal class sessions, the professor might introduce the topics through a short lecture to supplement or clarify the assigned readings, but will not provide a simple repetition of the texts or ready-made answers. Most sessions will revolve around group discussions. Students are expected to actively engage with the material and contribute to the sessions with regular questions, commentary, reflections, and general participation.
- 3) **This is a reading intensive course.** Achieving a solid grade in this course (B or higher) should require roughly 15 to 17 hours of work per week (2 ½ hours in class, 8 hours reading and watching the assigned materials; 5 to 7 hours working on assignments).
- 4) **This is a writing intensive course.** Overall, students will produce more than twenty pages of analytic writing during the semester. For some of the assignments students will implement the “writing as a process” method, which involves writing, revising, correcting, and re-writing several versions of the text. Students will write a first draft of each assignment, meet with a Writing Associate (WA) to discuss it, revise the document after that meeting, and then turn in a final version. Meeting with the WA and revising and improving your writing are essential to your final grade. All written assignments must follow the MLA format (including the “draft”). Please, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (8th edition). <http://www.mla.org/style>. For more writing resources you can always go the Writing Center.
- 5) **Writing assignments** are due at the beginning of class or at the time stated by the professor. You will submit an additional copy via Moodle for archival purposes. Assignments turned in after the deadline will suffer a 3% reduction in their grade each day that they are late. For example, if you have a final grade of 87 (B+), but you turn in the paper four days late, a total of 10.44 points will be deducted from 87. Your grade then will be 77 (C+).

VII. Evaluation

Participation	20%
Essays (3)	30%
Oral presentations	10%
Journaling	15%
Research Project	25%

One hundred points are correlated to letter grades following this system:

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F 59-0
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66	
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62	

Participation (20%)

You will receive three participation grades via Moodle. This component takes into account a number of variables, including but not limited to:

- Active and informed participation through comments, questions, analysis, etc.
- Coming to class having done the readings to contribute to class discussions
- Your cooperation in group and pair work
- Your respect and attitude toward the class and your peers
- Your attendance (physical and mental) and punctuality

Oral presentations (10%)

Each student will be responsible to present to the class one of the journal articles in the syllabus. This presentation must demonstrate a critical, engaged reading of the article. The goal of this assignment is to familiarize yourself with the genre of academic writing and to enrich our discussions of the literary texts.

Essays (30%)

Students will write three argumentative essays (3-4 pages long) based on questions or topics presented by the professor. For these assignments students will work with a Writing Associate in order to revise and improve their writing. Students must present to the professor the final version along with previous drafts and revisions. All essays must follow the MLA style. More details about the essays will be posted on Moodle.

Journaling (15%)

Students will reflect on the DH Research Workshop on the course blog. These reflections will also be included in their personal portfolio in the course webpage. More information will be posted on Moodle and discussed in class.

Research Project (25%)

Through the Digital Humanities Research Workshop Students will work on a semester-long research project on the topic “Contemporary Latinx Digital Media” that will explore and analyze different aspects related to the representation of Latino/as in digital media. Each student will produce a digital scholarly research product as the final project of the course. More information will be posted on Moodle and discussed in class.

VIII. Academic Integrity And Plagiarism

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the Swarthmore College Student Handbook and its guidelines on Academic Honesty. Note that faculty guidelines require faculty to send cases of suspected plagiarism and cheating on exams to the College's Judiciary Committee (CJC), where suspension is likely and expulsion possible. In addition, the instructor has the automatic policy that any student whom he considers, on the basis of evidence available to him, to have engaged in plagiarism or cheating in any individually assigned work (i.e., in this course, exams and written reports) will automatically receive No Credit for the course.

IX. Accommodations Statement

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113) to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, they will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact them as soon as possible. For details about

the accommodations process, [visit the Student Disability Service Website](#) at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service>. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Student Disability Services.

X. Course Schedule

May change to accommodate guest presenters and student needs. All the assigned materials must be read before class. Materials might be added during the semester based on students' needs, interests and requests. Materials not included in the list of Required Texts will be posted on Moodle.

Week 1	Introduction
M. 09/04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction to the course. Overview of the semester. - Introduction to the “Contemporary Latinx Digital Media” Research Workshop
W. 09/06	<p>Defining Latinx</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flores, Juan. “The Latino Imaginary: Dimensions of community and identity.” <i>From Bomba to Hip-hop Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity</i>. New York: Columbia UP, 2000, 191-203. - Caminero-Santangelo, Marta. “Who are we.” <i>On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity</i>. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. 1-35. https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/574468 <p>Optional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schrrón del Río, María and Alan Aja. “The Case for ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality Is Not a Choice.” <i>Latino Rebels</i>. December 5, 2015. http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/12/05/the-case-for-latinx-why-intersectionality-is-not-a-choice/ - Sagster, Catherine. “Latinx and Mx: The X Factor.” <i>OxfordWords Blog</i>. https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2016/07/latinx-and-mx/
Week 2	Historical Precursors
M. 09/11	<p>Session 1: DH Research Workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction to Digital Humanities. Visit of Roberto Vargas (Humanities Library) - Introduction to the Project - Brainstorming about Latinx representations in digital media - Choose one article on Latino/as in the media and summarize its main points (Moodle) <p>Homework for next session: Do preliminary research. Compile information and bibliography, make lists.</p>
W. 09/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - José Martí. “Our America” - Jesús Colón. “A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches,” “The Two United States.”
Week 3	Chicano Nation
M. 09/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Luis Leal. “In search of Aztlán” - Rudolfo Anaya, <i>Bless Me Ultima</i>.
W. 09/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rudolfo Anaya, <i>Bless Me Ultima</i>.
Week 4	
M. 09/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sandra Cisneros. <i>The House on Mango Street</i>.

Karafilis, Maria. "Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the Bildungsroman in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter, 1998), pp. 63-78.

Essay #1 due (version 1)

W. 09/27 - Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. (Selections)

Week 5

- M. 10/02 - Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera*.
 - Ramsdell, Lea. "Language and Identity Politics: The Linguistic Autobiographies of Latinos in the United States." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 166-176.
 - Guillermo Gómez Peña. "Documented/Undocumented" and "Terreno peligroso / Danger Zone: Cultural Relations Between Chicanos and Mexicans at the End of the Century." Frank Bonilla (Ed.) *Borderless Borders U.S. Latinos, Latin Americans, and the Paradox of Interdependence*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998, 131-137.
 - Sample of works and performances by Guillermo Gómez Peña.
- W. 10/04 - **Session 2: DH Research Workshop**
- o Bring research results about Latinx Contemporary Digital Media.
 - o Compilation of results: web sites, media production, online magazines, social media, etc.
 - o Compilation of salient themes that are worth exploring. Start categorizing.
- **Homework:** Start thinking about your research topic. What would you like to work with? What topics would you like to explore. Focus your subsequent research on that topic.

Essay #1 due (version 2)

Week 6 The Cuban Diaspora

- M. 10/09 - Reinaldo Arenas. "Mariel" "Mona"
 - Film *Before Night Falls*. Julian Schnabel (2000)
- W. 10/11 - Achy Obejas. *We Came All the Way from Cuba so You Could Dress Like This?* (Selection).
 - Larry La Fountain-Stokes. "Gay shame, Latina-and Latino-style: A Critique of White Queer Performativity." Hames García, Michael and Ernesto Javier Martínez (Eds.). *Gay Latino Studies. A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 55-80.

Week 7 Fall Break

Week 8

- M. 10/23 - Cristina García. *Dreaming in Cuban*.
 W. 10/25 - Cristina García. *Dreaming in Cuban*.
 - Presentation of articles
- Vásquez, Mary S. "Cuba as Text and Context in Cristina García's 'Dreaming in Cuban.'" *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1995, pp. 22-27. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25745250.
- López, Kimberly S. "Women on the Verge of a Revolution: Madness and Resistance in Cristina García's 'Dreaming in Cuban.'" *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 22, no. 1/2, 1996, pp. 33-49. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23021171.

Week 9

- M. 10/30 - **Session 3 DH Research Workshop**
- o Define your research topic.

- Discuss concepts related to the topic.
- Discuss bibliography related to that topic.
- Define a research question.
- **Homework:** Plan your research, find evidence, and refine the project. Start working.

Essay #2 due (version 1)

W. 11/01 **Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans**

- Selection of Nuyoricans Poets (Miguel Algarín, Miguel Piñero, Sandra María Esteves, Tato Laviera).
- Film *Piñero*. León Ichaso (2001)
- Flores, Juan “Qué assimilated, brother, yo soy asimilao.” *Divided Borders. Essays on Puerto Rican Identities*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 182-198.

Week 10

- M. 11/06
- Piri Thomas. *Down These Mean Streets*.
 - Sánchez González, Lisa. “The Boricua Novel: Civil Rights and ‘New School’ Nuyoricans Narratives.” *American Literary History* 13.2 (2001): 243-264.

Essay #2 due (version 2)

- W. 11/08
- Piri Thomas. *Down These Mean Streets*.
 - Caminero-Santangelo, Marta. “Puerto Rican Negro”: Defining Race in Piri Thomas’s “Down These Mean Streets.” *MELUS* 29.2 (2004): 205-226.

Week 11 New Latinx Identities: Off the Hyphen?

- M. 11/13
- **Session 4 DH Research Workshop**
 - Keep working on your projects. Peer-review of analysis of evidence, examples.
 -
- W. 11/15
- Junot Díaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.
 - Junot Díaz and Hilton Als <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLhpASeC9JI>

Week 12

- M. 11/20
- Junot Díaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.
 - José David Saldívar. “Conjectures on “Americanness” and Junot Díaz’s “Fukú Americanus” in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.” *The Global South* 5. 1 (2011): 120-136.
- W. 11/22 **Thanksgiving Break**

Week 13

- M. 11/27
- Justin Torres. *We the Animals*.

Essay #3 due (version 1)

- W. 11/29
- Justin Torres. *We the Animals*.

Week 14

- M. 12/04
- **Session 5 DH Research Workshop**
 - Peer review and discussion of final projects.

Essay #3 due (version 2)

- W. 12/06
- Uploading final projects

Week 15

- M. 12/11
- LAST DAY OF CLASSES. Presentation of final projects

Finals: Dec. 15-23

