

University of Nevada, Reno
Fall 2007

English 300.001--Nevada in Literature
A General Capstone Course
MWF 11:00-11:50, FH 108

Professor: Cheryll Glotfelty
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Office Hours: MW 4-5, and by appointment

WebCampus

Course materials, including assignments, will be posted to WebCampus (CE6). I may occasionally contact you by email via your university email address on the Class Roster. If you normally use another account, you must set your university account to forward messages to your active account.

Introduction

This general capstone course introduces you to a wealth of fascinating literature about Nevada, placing it in the context of Nevada history, geography, and culture. As we read, we will explore a variety of concerns: What does it mean to possess a “sense of place,” and how do you get one if you don’t have it? How is Nevada portrayed in literature? Who are the major Nevada authors? How have different groups responded to Nevada’s landscape? How is Nevada’s literary history tied to its economic and political history? Is Las Vegas another planet? Is rural Nevada really the “Other” Nevada? Do insiders and outsiders write and read Nevada literature differently? Does the literature of a state create an identity for it? Will reading about Nevada change the way you experience the state? Films, guest speakers, and possible field trips complement the readings.

Goals

- To ponder “sense of place”
- To learn about Nevada’s literary history and major authors
- To broaden knowledge and appreciation of Nevada through literature
- To sharpen critical reading and writing skills
- To perfect the art of intelligent “book talk”
- To develop a taste for regional literature
- To cultivate the next generation of Nevada writers (you!)

Capstone Features

As a capstone course—one of two culminating courses in the core curriculum—this course has distinctive characteristics and expectations. First, this course will ask you to bring to bear knowledge that you’ve gained in other courses to inform our exploration of Nevada and its literature. Second, this course is multi-disciplinary, including not only literature, but also history, natural history, films, field trips, and guest speakers. It will be our collective challenge to integrate these perspectives into a broadly focused understanding of Nevada. Third, the course includes an ethical dimension as we consider the relationship between how a place is represented and how it is treated, a particularly hot issue for Nevada, given the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste dump plan. Fourth, this course promotes critical thinking, challenging you to question stereotypes of Nevada, to scrutinize the language we use to refer to place, and even to rethink your own assumptions about what it means to reside in Nevada. Finally, the course includes a rigorous writing component, featuring a variety of assignments that range from creative writing, to informal reading responses, to biographical profiles and book reviews, to critical essays.

Texts

*Frank Bergon, *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*
 Robert Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land*
 nila northSun, *Love at Gunpoint*
 Susan Palwick, *The Necessary Beggar*
 Ann Ronald and Stephen Trimble, *Earthtones: A Nevada Album*
 Wilbur S. Shepperson, ed., *East of Eden, West of Zion: Essays on Nevada*
 Mark Twain, *Roughing It*
 Willy Vlautin, *The Motel Life*
 Sarah Winnemucca, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*

* This book is out of print. You must order it online. Try amazon.com, alibris.com, abebooks.com, or powells.com. Two copies of this book are on 12-hour reserve in Getchell Library. Washoe County Library has copies for checkout (<http://www.washoe.lib.nv.us/>). Get it soon!

Grading

30% Quizzes and Cogitations
 15% Creative Paper: Personal essay, creative prose, or poetry about Nevada
 20% Nevada Authors Paper: Online Article on the life and work of a Nevada author
 15% Midterm
 15% Final exam
 5% Participation (includes presentation of Creative Paper or Nevada Authors Paper)

Participation, Presentation, Attendance, and Late Papers

- This class aims for excellent discussion. Participation will be evaluated as follows: 5 = excellent contributions to class discussions, 4 = good contributions, 3 = fine contributions, 2 = occasional contributions, 1 = respectful listening.
- You are expected to give an Oral Presentation of your Creative or Nevada Authors paper. Failure to do so will result in a participation score of 0.
- Attendance matters. Perfect attendance will raise your final course grade by a step (ex. "B" becomes "B+"). 1-4 absences has no effect on your final grade. More than four absences lowers your grade, the more absences the lower the grade. 3 tardies = 1 absence.
- Papers must be ready at the beginning of the class period in which they are due. Late papers receive a reduced grade.

Disabilities, Tragedies, and Trips

If you have a disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations. I will be happy to work with you. Similarly, if you have a death in the family or other tragedy this semester, please tell me, and we will work out a plan. If you are on a sports team or have another legitimate reason to miss class, let me know in advance (and in writing) so we can make arrangements.

Quizzes, Cogitations, and Extra Credit

A discussion class only works well when everyone has done the reading attentively. I have found that classes are much better when I create an incentive for students to do the reading on time. Accordingly, 30% of your grade will be based on your performance on reading quizzes and cogitations (response papers). Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class; missed quizzes may not be made up.

Cogitations will be assigned in advance, and will normally be one side of one page, typed, double-spaced. Unless otherwise announced, each cogitation will be worth a maximum of three points: 3 = good job, 2 = acceptable job, 1 = weak. Cogitations are due at the beginning of class. One point will be deducted for late cogitations. I prefer cogitations to be typed but will accept neatly hand-written ones on occasion. I will announce Extra Credit opportunities from time to time.

Creative Paper: Personal Essay, Creative Prose, or Poetry about Nevada

I would like to encourage you to submit your work to the James MacMillan writing contest, which awards \$500 for "the best poetry or prose about the state of Nevada." The deadline for submissions is in March 2008, and the winner will be announced at the end of Spring semester. The first paper in this class will constitute your submission to this contest. I will encourage you to write creative nonfiction (a personal essay) or a short story, and we will have a series of writing exercises and workshops leading up to your finished paper. You may submit poetry, but class exercises will center on prose. As you work on your paper, you, as a writer, will gain a special insight into the course readings as you will have faced many of the challenges that our authors confronted.

The Creative Paper should be typed, double-spaced. Your paper should be suitable for anonymous submission, which means that you should have a title page that provides a title and lists your name, your contact information, and the date. Somewhere on the title page should be the words, "Submission to the James MacMillan Writing Contest." The title of your paper should be retyped on the first page, but your name should not appear anywhere except the title page. Pages should be numbered in the upper right hand corner. This paper should be at least 1,500 words, but it may be substantially longer if necessary to do justice to your idea. We'll be talking more about this paper in the first weeks of the semester to clear up any questions you may have.

Nevada Authors Paper: Online Article on the Life and Work of a Nevada Author

One of the goals of this course is to familiarize you with Nevada authors. Yet we cannot hope to read works by all the many fine Nevada authors this semester. Accordingly, you will be introduced to additional Nevada authors and their major works through student reports as we collaboratively develop a Nevada Authors website.

This assignment asks you to select a Nevada author, research that author's life, read at least one of his or her books, and write a general introduction to this author, accompanied by your review of the book you read. After the biographical section, the review section of your article will explain what the book was about and provide your evaluation of its strengths, weaknesses, and significance. Your online article will contain a bibliography that lists the sources you used. In addition, you should provide a "Suggestions for Further Reading" section that lists major primary and secondary works by or about the author. Your article may also contain links to other relevant websites.

We'll be adding to an existing Nevada Authors website (<http://www.scsr.nevada.edu/~glotfelt/nvauthors.html>). Thus, your article should be typed, single-spaced, and you should submit it both electronically and in hard copy. It should be 2,000-2,400 words, including the bibliography. Ideally, your paper will include a photograph of your author and perhaps an illustration, if appropriate (these should be scanned). You may work with a partner on this assignment if you'd like; you'll both receive the same grade. Additional guidelines will be discussed in class.

Exams

There will be a take-home midterm and final, consisting of several short essays in response to selected questions. Throughout the semester you will have input into formulating appropriate exam questions. These questions will be designed to help you synthesize and reflect upon the readings and the

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issues we raise in class. Here's an example of the kind of question likely to appear on the exam:
"Compare the narrative strategies of Robert Laxalt (in *Sweet Promised Land*) and Willy Vlautin (in *The Motel Life*) as they portray the relationship between children and their parents. Use examples from the texts to support your answer." Exams should be typed, double-spaced, with pages numbered.

Films

Films are required texts for this class and will be shown as noted on the schedule.

Projection Room = Room 5, Getchell Library

Instruction Room - Room 3, Getchell Library

All films are on reserve in the Multimedia Center in the basement of Getchell Library and may be watched in the library. Most films are also available at Blockbuster or Hollywood Video.

Tentative Schedule (subject to change)**Sense of Place**

- M 8/27 Introduction
 W 8/29 "From the Editors" (a handout)
 F 8/31 "Introduction: Toward Century's End"; "Sense of Place in the Great Basin" (in Shepperson)

Wild Nevada

- M 9/3 Holiday. Labor Day
 W 9/5 Ronald, *Earthtones*
 F 9/7 Ronald, *Earthtones*

The "Other" Nevada

- M 9/10 Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land*
 W 9/12 Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land*
 F 9/14 Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land*

Down and Out in the Biggest Little City

- M 9/17 Vlautin, *The Motel Life*
 W 9/19 film: *Nevada: A History of the Silver State* (V02350; meet in Projection Room--Getchell 5)
 F 9/21 Vlautin, *The Motel Life*

New Nevada Authors--aka You

- M 9/24 Draft of Creative Paper due
 W 9/26 Creative Paper workshop
 F 9/28 Creative Paper due
Presentations

Past and Future Worlds: The Black Rock Desert and Reno

- M 10/1 Shepperson, *East of Eden, West of Zion*
 W 10/3 film: *The Misfits* (DVD 0069, 125 min.)
 Show times: 10/3 Projection Room 11:00-1:30,
 10/4 Instruction Room 6:30-9:00 p.m., or on your own
 F 10/5 discuss *The Misfits*
 M 10/8 Palwick, *The Necessary Beggar*
 W 10/10 Palwick, *The Necessary Beggar*
 F 10/12 Palwick, *The Necessary Beggar*

Las Vegas Film Festival

- M 10/15 film: *Las Vegas* (V08457; meet in Projection Room); midterms handed out
 W 10/17 film: *Viva Las Vegas* (on reserve: VO 7250, 85 min.)
 Show times: 10/17 Projection Room 11:00-12:30,
 10/18 Instruction Room 7:30-9:00 p.m., or on your own
 F 10/19 film: *Casino* (on reserve: DVD 1519, 3 hours)
 Show times: 10/19 Projection Room 11:00-2:00, and 2:00-5:00 or on your own
 M 10/22 Shepperson, *East of Eden, West of Zion*; discuss films
 W 10/24 midterms due
Presentations
 F 10/26 Holiday. Nevada Day

Nuclear Nevada

- M 10/29 Bergon, *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*
 W 10/31 Bergon, *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*
 F 11/2 Bergon, *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S*

The Silver Frontier

- M 11/5 Twain, *Roughing It*
 W 11/7 Twain, *Roughing It*; Shepperson, *East of Eden, West of Zion*
 F 11/9 Presentations

Native Nevadans, Then and Now

- M 11/12 Holiday. Veterans' Day.
 W 11/14 Draft of Nevada Authors paper due to Editing Group
 Presentations
 F 11/16 Editing Groups return drafts; Winnemucca, *Life Among the Piutes*
 M 11/19 Nevada Authors paper due; Winnemucca, *Life Among the Piutes*
 W 11/21 Winnemucca, *Life Among the Piutes*
 F 11/23 Holiday. Thanksgiving.

- M 11/26 northSun, *Love at Gunpoint*
 W 11/28 northSun, *Love at Gunpoint*
 F 11/30 Presentations

- M 12/3 Presentations
 W 12/5 Presentations
 F 12/7 Presentations

M 12/10 Conclusion; final exam handed out

Final Exam: Monday, December 17, 9:45-11:45 a.m.