

# Literature and Cultures of the American West

**English 364**  
**American Studies 300**

**Fall 2009**

**Phillip A. Snyder**

4179 JFSB  
422-2487 (office), 423-3321 (home)  
[phillip\\_snyder@byu.edu](mailto:phillip_snyder@byu.edu)  
Office Hours: T/Th 2-3  
(and by appointment)

**Rachel Y. Redfern**

(Graduate Student Teaching Assistant)  
3004 JKB  
422-4704  
[tigerhorse\\_86@yahoo.com](mailto:tigerhorse_86@yahoo.com)  
Office Hours: M/W/F 10:00-10:50  
(and by appointment)

## Course Overview

For the first time in BYU history (cue drum roll, please), we're cross-listing English 364 and AS 300 and teaching them together as one course. Because our approach to Western American literature tends to take an American Studies approach, with plenty of attention to historical and cultural contexts as well as some field trip experience, this approach should work out just fine.

We'll be discussing Western American literature and culture from a contemporary perspective with a particular emphasis on the historical and literary construction of the American West. Of course, late 20<sup>th</sup>-century western American literature is far too diverse and expansive for us to comprehend it all in this course. Nevertheless, we've got some interesting pairs of representative texts that will help us address many of the issues contemporary Western American literature addresses in its unique manner: identity, colonialism, relationships, politics, wilderness, ethnicity, race, nature, memory, ethics, language, and so forth. We'll look at representative texts from cowboy culture, Western autobiography, Utah environmentalism, and Native American culture. We'll do four field trips with

an optional, extra credit field trip thrown in. You'll also have a chance to pursue your own research interests with your semester project.

## Course Learning Outcomes

In pursuing our study this semester, especially in our reading and writing assignments, we expect to achieve the learning objectives listed below.

- \* Increased understanding and appreciation of contemporary Western American literature, including the many issues it addresses and the various cultural contexts out of which it comes.
- \* Increased understanding and appreciation of our Western heritage and contemporary Western culture.
- \* Improved skills in reading, textual analysis of various genres, research, oral presentation, interpersonal communication, and personal essay writing.
- \* Increased capacity for scholarly and creative work.
- \* Increased confidence in self as a developing scholar and ethical human being.
- \* Increased understanding and appreciation of classmates and the university community.

Focusing on these learning outcomes as we go through the semester will help us achieve them.

## Course Texts

Please get your text books as soon as possible and start your reading. Try to do some annotations as you go to keep track of your impressions.

*Last Buckaroo* by Mackey Hedges

*All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy

*Riding the White Horse Home* by Teresa Jordan

*The Meadow* by James Galvin

*Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey

*Refuge* by Terry Tempest Williams

*Fools Crow* by James Welch

*Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko

You'll fill out a reading log entry at the end of our discussion of every text indicating what percentage of the text you completed. We'll mark you off our records as we go. You should plan on reading every text completely.

## Course Requirements

- Quizzes (200 points)
- Field Trip Journal (100 points)
- Semester Project Proposal (100 points)
- Semester Project (200 points)
- Project Rough Draft (50 points)
- Oral Report and Handout (50 points)
- Attendance/Participation (100 points)

**Quizzes** (200 points, 25 points each). We'll begin our discussion of each text with a quiz to encourage you to have finished reading it carefully, so be sure to be prompt on quiz days. We'll collect them after five minutes or so. The quizzes will include both objective (10 points) and short essay (15 points and written outside of class based on a prompt), but they won't be tricky. We want to reward good, consistent effort, so the quizzes together are worth as much as the semester project.

**Field Trip Journal** (100 points). You'll complete a 1200-word entry for each of our four field trips in which you'll analyze the significance of our activities in the context of Western culture. These entries should reflect your powers of observation as well as your ability as a reflective undergraduate scholar and, thus, should do much more than merely summarize our activities.

**Semester Project Proposal** (100 points). You'll complete a proposal for your semester project that we must approve before you begin work on it in earnest. You should begin thinking about this project right now and start doing some preliminary research. We'll provide more details on the form of this proposal later in the semester.

**Semester Project** (200 points). This project will be the main assignment for the course, so you should begin work on it immediately. It must focus on a Western Studies topic and include some original and library research. Our class will be the project's secondary audience, so select a different primary audience and prepare the project accordingly. If your family has a western heritage, I suggest you consider doing some sort of family history or folklore project and prepare it for your family. Many other projects are possible as well. Past students have done conference papers on a variety of topics, western cook books, training manuals for training horses, paintings, essay collections, videos, and so forth. You're also free to do a more traditional literary or cultural paper. Remember that most projects are far more difficult and time-consuming than a traditional paper.

**Project Rough Draft** (50 points, 25 for Workshop and 25 for Individual Conference). You'll be required to have a complete rough draft for our draft workshop in class and for our individual

conferences outside of class. These projects should go through multiple drafts, so that the final draft will be polished and complete.

**Oral Report and Handout on Project** (50 points, 25 for Report and 25 for Handout). Instead of a formal final exam, we'll present short (7-8 minutes) oral reports on semester projects supplemented by a good double-sided handout during the final exam period.

**Attendance/Participation (100 points).** We expect you to be in class every day prepared for our activities unless you're ill or have some other unavoidable conflict. We'll pass around the roll every day, but it's your responsibility to mark it. Once we mark you absent on the roll, you're absent, even if you came to class late and simply forgot to mark the roll.

If you're ill, please stay home and work on your recovery. We'll miss you, of course, but not your germs. You should contact us by email before or on the day you're absent to get an excused absence. Don't just mention an impending absence to us as we're likely to forget about it. Make sure we've got a written record. Only work lost through excused absences may be made up.

We'll follow recent BYU policy on the H1N1 flu virus. You should have received a letter from the university on this matter. Let's do everything we can to stay healthy and trust the flu won't hamper our work this semester. However, we'll also be ready to make changes in schedules or policies or whatever.

You'll lose 10 of your 50 attendance points for every excused absence and 20 for every unexcused absence. We'll assign you up to 50 participation points based on our subjective judgment of your engagement in the class. More than 6 absences may result in your failing the course. In the unfortunate event of a lengthy illness, we'll negotiate an individual attendance policy.

You may make up lost attendance points or gain extra-credit participation points by attending any course-related activity and then writing up a short 300-word review your experience. Please clear these activities with us in advance. You may do a maximum of three make-up or extra credit assignments. All attendance make-up reports must be turned in before the Thanksgiving holiday.

We have no patience with students who attend class haphazardly, so if you have a habit of missing class, please drop this course now and save us all lots of trouble and frustration.

## Course Rules

**Due Dates.** All your assignments are due at the beginning of class. Please don't miss class to finish an assignment because that's just compounding one mistake with another one. We don't accept late work (except in real emergencies) unless you make arrangements with me in advance.

If you turn in an assignment late without prior permission, we'll return it to you ungraded. We have to assess a late penalty for late work to be fair to the other students who get their work done on

time. The late penalty is usually about 10% per day, but that's negotiable depending on the reason for your lateness.

Your assignments (except the proposal and probably the project) should be prepared according to proper MLA format (7th edition) using no cover sheet or folder of any kind. The proposal should be done in memo format. See the Writing Center (4026 JKB) or the MLA website for help with MLA format or other writing issues. We'll assess a 10% penalty for improperly formatted assignments.

Contact us immediately whenever you anticipate having problems completing your work on time or whenever you have any concerns about the class. While we readily understand problems, we have a difficult time understanding irresponsibility. We're really just asking you to be responsible.

**Grades.** To shift our attention somewhat from grades, I use a point system according to the following scale: 100=A, 95=A-, 90=B+, 85=B, 80=B-, 75=C+, 70=C, 65=C-, 60=D+, 55=D, 50=D-, 25=F. Doing well in the class depends on accumulating points. Every point counts. Give every assignment, from quizzes to the conference paper, the respect it deserves.

We calculate final grades on a modified curve (that always goes down and never up) based on the above point breakdown and the performance of the rest of the class. If you do your work consistently, it's fairly easy to get a B from us. A, A-, and B+ grades are much harder to achieve.

Grading is a subjective, but not an arbitrary, exercise. We do our best to evaluate your work in the context of the class and expect to assess your work as excellent, good, mediocre, or whatever in terms of what one would expect of a university junior in English, not in terms of what a graduate student would do.

We try to keep my opinions of your work separate from our opinion of you as a human being. We don't, for example, categorize you as a "B" student, a brilliant mind, a flake, or whatever. We also don't keep track of how you're doing in class as if you were a stock on the market, going up or down every day. We'll give you a grade only once in the course of the semester—at the end. This approach helps keep us honest about final grades. We like to reward steady, consistent work done well throughout the semester.

Please wait a day or two after receiving back an assignment before confronting us with your case for deserving a higher grade. Consider our comments. Then write out a paragraph detailing your argument for our having misread or poorly evaluated your work. We're perfectly willing to reevaluate it.

What we'd really love to discuss with you, however, is how we can help you improve your performance. That's what matters most.

## Course Instructors

**Snyder.** I define myself broadly as sort of a postmodernist, with an interest in feminism, multiculturalism, and ethics. I was more-than-happily married to my wife Lu Ann for over 25 years until her death in January 2000 of colon-to-liver cancer. I married a wonderful woman, Delys, in February 2002. We live in the idyllic community of Salem.

Delys has five children: Cristie Charles, a BYU MA in English married to Steven and mother of Samuel (8) and Benjamin (6) and William (2) and Abraham (3 months) currently living in Baltimore while Steven does a post-doc in bio-mechanical engineering at Johns Hopkins; Kathryn Cowles, a first-year assistant professor in creative writing at Ohio Northern University, partnered with Geoff Babbitt, ABD in poetry at the U of U; Robert, a BYU English graduate, husband of the former Erin Hartigan, another BYU English graduate, and father of Emily (6 months) working in Washington, D.C. as an instructional designer; and Steven, a BYU student majoring in media music and preparing for medical school, married to the former Brooke Masterson, a BYU dance major.

I'm the father of three: Kathleen, a BYU graduate temporarily retired from teaching English and coaching cross-country and track at Redondo Union High in So Cal, who's married to Alex Spjute, a hot-shot corporate downtown LA lawyer, and the mother of almost two-year-old Hamilton and expecting again in February; Travis, a triathlete/entrepreneur and BYU graduate in American Studies, who's married to the former Heidi Ghent, MS graduate in Exercise Science at BYU and mother of their sons, almost 5-year-old Luke and 1-year-old Miles; and Jackson, a BYU student majoring in English and French Studies who also works in at Macys at University Mall. I'm also joint owner of an outside cat (Willa) and one dog (Lucy, the border collie), sole owner of a sorrel quarter-horse (J.D.), Carolina alum, flyfisherman, Angels fan, cowboy wannabe, life-long democrat, avid hiker, theater-goer, and good Mormon boy, among other things.

**Redfern.** I am currently a master's student in the BYU English MA program with an emphasis in Contemporary American and British literature, and I've also done some research in Women's Victorian British Literature and Diaspora studies. In terms of personal interests I love to try new things, which includes snowboarding and recently bungee jumping the highest bridge in the world. I love traveling and have spent a lot of time in Europe and recently returned from a summer program in South Africa. It's my goal to someday travel to every continent.

## Course Ethics

You never have to agree with us or with anyone else; however, you should be ready to discuss your point of view with me and the class. We're after dialogue, not silence; individual expression, not group conformation; energy, not boredom. We'll address all issues from the foundation of faith and testimony. As Phil's former colleague Cecilia Konchar Farr writes:

I never purposefully undermine the Church or what I believe to be the inspired authority of its leaders. I am Mormon to my very core. I believe in Jesus Christ with a perfect brightness

of hope. For me, no logic of my intellectual being can undermine or do justice to the power of the statement: "I believe."

We'll create a safe atmosphere in which we can share our ideas. To foster this atmosphere we must all be committed to an ethical policy of face-to-face discussion. In the event of an offense, we'll follow the counsel of the scriptures—first trying to reconcile ourselves with one another before going to the next higher authority, who happens to be the department ombudsman, Bruce Young. In short, let's try working things out before writing letters to President Samuelson or the Board of Trustees. If you're uncomfortable with this policy, perhaps you should choose a different course.

We should also warn you that some of the texts we'll be studying may use language, include passages, and explore issues that may be very upsetting to some of you. We don't believe that any of these texts will harm their readers; on the contrary, these are wonderful texts dealing with the crucial issues that writers simply have had to address, and we must engage them also—sometimes as very resisting readers. We don't have to approve of everything that goes on in everything we read to have a productive reading experience. However, we urge you to exercise self-censorship and to skim or to stop reading if you are so inclined.

If you are extremely sensitive to such language, passages, or issues, you may want to drop the course and add another course better suited to your needs or sensibilities. We certainly don't want you to have a bad experience with the course or to compromise your personal standards. At the same time, we must set up a course that does justice to contemporary Western American literature, a literature which addresses the very same issues that we find in literature from any period, but addresses them in a manner that is much more explicit than you may be used to. In short, make sure you're up to studying contemporary literature if you choose to stay with the course.

In evaluating your work, we'll try my best to be scrupulously fair. We see ourselves as mentors to each of you and take that responsibility seriously. We want this course to be excellent and a wonderful experience for you in improving your scholarship.

## **The BYU Policies**

These statements come from Academic Vice-President John S. Tanner, a friend and colleague of Phil's, by the way.

**Honor Code.** It is a violation of the Honor Code for a student to represent someone else's work as their own. Also, as a condition of attending BYU, you affirmed that you would help others obey the Honor Code. We view violations of the Honor code with extreme seriousness. It is a department policy that those who cheat on examinations or plagiarize the work of another are given a failing grade for the course. [I should also note that I will ask you to turn yourself into the Honor Code Office should you cheat or plagiarize.]

Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for yourself and others and ensures an effective learning and working

environment. It is the university's expectation, and my own expectation in class, that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. Please call the Honor Code Office at 422-2847 if you have questions about those standards.

**Students With Disabilities.** Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the UAC. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D-282 ASB.

**Preventing Sexual Harassment.** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

### Course Outline

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
<b>Introduction to Western Studies</b>			
T 1 Sep	Introductions and Semester Projects	Course Materials	Info Sheet
Th 3 Sep	Western Myth/Reality	Handout	_____
T 8 Sep	American Literary History	Handout	_____
Th 10 Sep	Contemporary Western Culture	Handout	_____

(Please use these first two weeks of class to read Hedges and McCarthy. Get started immediately and stay a unit ahead in your reading!)



<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
<b>Cowboy Culture: Hedges and McCarthy</b>			
T 15 Sep	<i>Last Buckaroo</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #1
Th 17 Sep	Field Trip #1 to Salem, Utah (9:30-11:50 a.m.)		Notes
T 22 Sep	<i>Last Buckaroo</i> 2	Review	Reading Log
Th 24 Sep	Field Trip #2 to Salem, Utah (9:30-11:50 a.m.)		Notes
T 29 Sep	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #2
Th 1 Oct	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> 2	Review	Reading Log

(We'll also take our third field trip, a day trip to Moab and Arches National Park, on Saturday, 17 October. We'll leave from BYU at 5:00 a.m. and return by 9:00 that night.)

### **Western Autobiography: Jordan and Galvin**

T 6 Oct	<i>Riding the White Horse Home</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #3
Th 8 Oct	<i>Riding the White Horse Home</i> 2	Review	Reading Log
T 13 Oct	<i>The Meadow</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #4
Th 15 Oct	<i>The Meadow</i> 2	Review	Reading Log
T 20 Oct	Semester Projects	Review	Proposal
Th 22 Oct	Field Trip #4 to Museum of Peoples and Cultures (9:30-11:50 a.m.)		Notes

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
-------------	-------------------	--------------------	---------------------

### Utah Environmentalism: Abbey and Williams

T 27 Oct	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #5
Th 29 Oct	<i>Desert Solitaire</i> 2	Review	Reading Log

(For an extra credit journal entry, attend Heber City's Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Buckaroo Fair which takes place from 3-8 November. Check it out on the web at [hebercitycowboypoetry.org](http://hebercitycowboypoetry.org))

T 3 Nov	<i>Refuge</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #6
Th 5 Nov	<i>Refuge</i> 2	Review	Journal Reading Log

### Native American Culture: Welch and Silko

T 10 Nov	<i>Fools Crow</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #7
Th 12 Nov	<i>Fool's Crow</i> 2	Review	Reading Log
T 17 Nov	<i>Storyteller</i> 1	Entire Text	Quiz #8
Th 19 Nov	<i>Storyteller</i> 2	Review	Make-ups Reading Log

T 24 Nov	Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class Meeting		
----------	--	--	--

Th 26 Nov	Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class Meeting		
-----------	--	--	--

### Semester Projects

T 1 Dec	Rough Draft Workshop	Review	Project Drafts Critiques
Th 3 Dec	Individual Conferences: No Class Meeting		
T 8 Dec	Individual Conferences: No Class Meeting		

<u>Date</u>	<u>Discussion</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
Th 10 Dec	Oral Reports and Final Business		Final Project Evaluations
M 14 Dec	Final Examination: 7-10 a.m.		

(The final will be short oral reports on projects with a double-sided handout.)