

The Great American Cowboy

495

English 495, Fall 2008

Phillip A. Snyder

The Course

Yippy, ti, yi, yo, git along little seniors.
It's your misfortune and none of my own.
Yippy, ti, yi, yo, git along little seniors.
You know 495 will be your new home.

Howdy, Buckaroos and Greenhorns! Welcome to our senior seminar spread, "The Great American Cowboy." Ride fer the brand, and we'll git along fine, jest like biscuits and beans in hog heaven. But if ya got notions of ridin agin the brand, why then ya might jest as well pull your freight, light a shuck, and commence driftin, ridin the grub line like some muley maverick . . . or jest fill yer hands right now if ya got a hankerin fer a boot hill homestead, ya bushwackin, backshootin, brushpoppin, city-slickin, saddle-trampin bunch of academic tenderfeet. . . .

(Whoa, big fella!)

Consarnit, I been kickin up dust round here like some balky Idaho brainstorm, spookin all the hands and the stock. Looks like I need to rein myself in a mite. Reckon I been off my feed too much lately, chomping at the bit with a burr under my saddle. Well, we cain't go on millin round like this, jest a burnin daylight and a driftin along like a tumblin tumbleweed, so we oughter all cowboy up and saddle this here rank 495 course and hope it don't start to sunfishin or crow hoppin on us too bad fore I git a chance to say, "Head 'em up, move 'em out." ("Rollin, rollin, rollin, though their heads are swollen, keep them seniors rollin, rawhide. . . .")

First off, kindly buy these here books and pronto. . . .

(Whoops. Just a second and let me shift out of my cowboy discourse community mode.)

Histories

David Dary's *Cowboy Culture*
Teresa Jordan's *Cowgirls*

Novels

Owen Wister's *The Virginian*
Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*

James Galvin's *Fencing the Sky*

Autobiographies

Teresa Jordan's *Riding the White Horse Home*

Sandra Day O'Connor and H. Alan Day's *Lazy B*

Our purpose this semester will be to deconstruct the 20th-century myth of the great American cowboy, particularly as it displays itself in novels and in autobiographies as represented by the texts listed above. I trust we'll develop a respect and appreciation for cowboy culture while we interrogate it.

First, we'll use Dary's history to get a solid historical perspective on the development of cowboy culture from its Spanish roots until the advent of barbed wire around 1886 and the subsequent loss of open range culture. We'll look at contemporary cowboy culture from a "feminist" perspective through the personal oral histories collected by Jordan. Contemporary ranch culture embodies cowgirl as much as cowboy traditions.

Then we'll look at cowboy life as articulated in fiction (Wister, McCarthy, and Galvin) and in autobiography (Jordan and Day). We'll also do a short unit on cowboy poetry and music and film before we devote the remainder of the semester to projects.

Again, we'll engage various critiques of cowboy culture as we go. I love cowboy culture, but that doesn't mean I'm blind to its many environmentally destructive, politically naive, and phallogocentric elements. We'll speak and write in censure as well as in praise of it, so don't expect a solely worshipful approach.

In addition, we'll take five Thursday field trips early in the semester to immerse you in local cowboy material culture, including horse riding and training, calf roping, saddle making, beef production, outfitting, cooking, and so forth.

We'll also be open to whatever other possibilities may occur as our semester's study progresses.

The Learning Outcomes

- * Enjoy a true capstone experience as you demonstrate all the reading, critical, research, oral, and writing skills you've developed over the course of your major as you fulfill the seminar requirements.
- * Develop a working knowledge of contemporary cowboy culture through history, literature, film, field trips, and material culture.
- * Produce a substantial semester project focusing on cowboy culture that achieves the level of "mastering" according to the English Department's "Rubric for Evaluating Multi-Year Writing Samples" in all five traits.
- * Develop a productive, collegial, and ethical relationship with all seminar participants.

The Requirements

- Semester Project** (400 points)
- Semester Project Proposal** (100 points)
- Film and Book Reviews** (100 points each, 200 points total)
- Field Trip Journal** (100 points)
- Attendance & Participation** (100 points)
- Final Exam** (Pass/Fail)

Semester Project. These projects should focus on some aspect of cowboy culture but should not merely review the texts we're studying or simply reiterate the points that we make in class. You should strive to make an original contribution to the scholarship on cowboy culture as informed by your research and insight in addition to seminar discussion. I'll meet with you individually to discuss your ideas for your project.

Your project proposal must be approved by me. I suggest that those of you with a ranching heritage consider doing a folklore or oral history collection. Scholarly papers should be suitable for conference submission (10-12 pages), but you may also prepare your project in a multimedia format with a different audience in mind. All projects must have a significant research and writing component.

Begin your topic selection and research immediately. Project drafts will be due well before the end of the semester for my review in an individual conference, so you'll have lots of time for revision. Project points will be distributed as follows: Rough Draft (100 points); Final Draft (250 points); 10-minute Oral Report with handout (50 points).

Semester Project Proposal. The purpose of your proposal is to convince me that you have a worthwhile project, that you have done the necessary preliminary research, that you have a solid organization, and that you are capable of completing a quality project on time.

Film and Book Reviews. These will focus on a popular western film and book each with a cowboy theme. I will provide you a sign-up list of various titles, but you may do a film or a book not on the list with my approval. These reviews (1200 words) should follow conventional review format including an introductory overview of basic plot and characters followed by an analysis of the issues you see as crucial to the film or text as reflective of cowboy culture.

Field Trip Journal. You should make an entry for each of our five field trips. I'll give you extra credit for attending and reporting on Heber's Cowboy Poetry Festival. These entries should do more than simply summarize what we did on the field trip; rather, they should provide an insightful analysis of what you learned about cowboy culture from your experience.

On field trip Thursdays we'll meet at a convenient spot at 11:00 a.m. with our two BYU vans and head south to Salem and Spanish Fork. We'll have you back to campus by 1:15 p.m., so you won't be late for your next class. However, for the field trip to Deseret Meat on 9 October, we'll meet at 5:30 a.m. to arrive in Spanish Fork at 6:00 a.m. We'll be back at BYU for 8:00 a.m. classes. We won't meet in class later that day.

Attendance & Participation. Please contact me via email whenever you are absent. Only work lost through excused absences may be made up. More than six absences may result in your failing the course. I have no patience with students who attend class haphazardly. I expect you to be in class every day prepared to participate in class discussions. Good attendance and participation will improve your final grade, while poor attendance and participation will hurt it.

Final Exam. We'll negotiate the form of the final exam near the end of the semester.

The 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. I don't accept late work (except in real emergencies) unless you make arrangements with us in advance.

If you turn in an assignment late without prior permission, I'll return it to you ungraded. I 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 possibly the project) should be prepared according to proper MLA format (6th 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. I'll assess a 10% penalty for improperly formatted assignments.

Contact me immediately whenever you anticipate having problems completing your work on time or whenever you have any concerns about the class. While I readily understand problems, I have a difficult time understanding irresponsibility. I'm 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 semester project, the respect it deserves.

I 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 me. A, A-, and B+ grades are much harder to achieve.

Grading is a subjective, but not an arbitrary, exercise. I do my 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 senior in English, not in terms of what a graduate student would do.

I try to keep my opinions of your work separate from my opinion of you as a human being. I don't, for example, categorize you as a "B" student, a brilliant mind, a flake, or whatever. I 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.

I'll give you a grade only once in the course of the semester—at the end. This approach helps keep me honest about final grades. I like to reward steady, consistent work done well throughout the semester.

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

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

Course Ethics

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 with her youngest daughter, Marissa, a senior council member in the first graduating class at Salem Hills High.

Delys has four other children: Cristie Charles, a BYU MA in English married to Steven and mother of Samuel (7) and Benjamin (5) and William (18 months) currently living in Baltimore while Steven does a post-doc bio-mechanical engineering at Johns Hopkins; Kathryn Cowles, a PhD candidate in creative writing/poetry at the U of U who just published her first collection of poetry; Robert, a BYU English graduate and husband of the former Erin Hartigan, another BYU English graduate, who's working for a "government agency" in Washington, D.C.; and Steven, a BYU student majoring in media music, who just married the former Brooke Masterson in the Salt Lake Temple.

I'm the father of three: Kathleen, a BYU graduate teaching English (of course) and coaching cross-country and track part-time at Redondo Union High in Redondo Beach, CA, who's married to Alex Spjute, a hot-shot corporate lawyer, and the mother of 8-month-old Hamilton; 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 4-year-old Luke and 5-month-old Miles; and Jackson, a BYU student majoring in English and French Studies who also works in the men's department at Maceys. 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.

You never have to agree with me 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 my friend and 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. Bruce Young is the department ombudsman.

In evaluating your work, I'll try my best to be scrupulously fair. I see myself as a mentor to each of you and take that responsibility seriously. I want this seminar to be excellent and a wonderful experience for you in improving your scholarship. In your semester-end evaluation, I trust you'll do the same and be fair with me and the course.

The BYU Policies

These statements come from Academic Vice-President John S. Tanner, a friend and colleague of mine, 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.

The Schedule

We will pursue our study of the Great American Cowboy according to the schedule that follows. Please keep up with your assignments even if we happen to get behind with our discussions.

<p>Phillip A. Snyder 422-2487 (office) 423-3321 (home)</p>	<p>Office Hours: M/W/F 2-3 3162 JFSB</p>
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Please leave me alone on Tuesdays and Thursdays, as these are my research and writing days, unless some emergency arises.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
History: <i>Cowboy Culture and Cowgirls</i>			
T 2 Sep	Introductions	Handout <i>Western Horseman</i>	Information Sheet
Th 4 Sep	Field Trip: Snyder Spread	Dary 3-87	_____
T 9 Sep	Cowboy Culture 1	Dary 88-226	Project Topic
Th 11 Sep	Jewish American Literature Conference: No Class Meeting		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
T 16 Sep	Cowboy Culture 2	Dary 227-338	Review Sign-Up
Th 18 Sep	Field Trip: Keetch Place	Jordan xii-xxxix, 1-28	_____

T	23 Sep	Cowgirl Culture 1	Jordan 29-124	Journal Sample
Th	25 Sep	Field Trip: Lyman Ranch	Jordan 125-86	_____
T	30 Sep	Cowgirl Culture 2	Jordan 187-281	Project Proposal

Novel: *The Virginian*, *All the Pretty Horses*, and *Fencing the Sky*

Th	2 Oct	Field Trip: Western Unlimited	Wister vii-xx, 1-147	_____
T	7 Oct	<i>The Virginian</i>	Wister 148-434	_____
Th	9 Oct	Field Trip: Deseret Meat (5:30 a.m.)	McCarthy 3-151	_____
T	14 Oct	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i>	McCarthy 153-302	_____
Th	16 Oct	<i>Fencing the Sky</i>	Galvin 3-79	Book Review
T	21 Oct	<i>Fencing the Sky</i>	Galvin 79-258	_____

Autobiography: *Riding the White Horse Home* and *Lazy B*

Th	23 Oct	<i>Riding the White Horse . . .</i>	Jordan 3-72	Field Trip Journal
T	28 Oct	<i>Riding the White Horse . . .</i>	Jordan 73-209	_____
Th	30 Oct	<i>Lazy B</i>	O'Connor vii-xi, 5-81	Film Review
T	4 Nov	<i>Lazy B</i>	O'Connor 82-318	_____

Poetry, Music, and Film

Th	6 Nov	Cowboy Poetry	Handout	_____
T	11 Nov	Cowboy Music	Handout	_____
	<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Material Due</u>
Th	13 Nov	Cowboy Film	Handout	Conference and Oral Report Lottery

Seminar Projects

T 18 Nov	Individual Conferences: No Class Meeting		Project Drafts
Th 20 Nov	Individual Conferences: No Class Meeting		Project Drafts
T 25 Nov	Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class Meeting		
Th 27 Nov	Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class Meeting		
T 2 Dec	Oral Reports	Review	Handout
Th 4 Dec	Oral Reports	Review	Handout
T 9 Dec	Oral Reports	Review	Handout
Th 11 Dec	Oral Reports	Review	Handout Final Project

Final Examination: Thursday, 18 December 7-10:00 a.m.

University policy stipulates that I cannot make special arrangements for your taking the final at any other time unless you have more than three exams scheduled in one day or have a conflict with another exam.