Course Description

In 2010, the decennial census showed that 81 percent of Americans lived in urban environments and that urban populations had grown by 12 percent from the 2000 census. These numbers are part of a consistent trend in urban growth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and they attest to the powerful allure of city life for most Americans. This course examines our relationship to “the city” and “the urban”—two concepts gaining considerable purchase in contemporary discourse—as a means of deconstructing the real and imagined spaces of everyday life. Using the “urban novel” as its focus, students will examine their relationship to the urban spaces that exist in their imaginations and in their everyday lives. Each of the texts over the course of the semester deals with a major American metropolis, and students will apply spatial theory to expose the political dimensions of urban space, both in the primary texts and in the material world. The course is structured spatially and temporally: students will travel from turn-of-the-century New York to postmetropolitan Los Angeles of the present day, moving through several major American cities along the way. By the end of the semester, students will have developed a rich understanding of how cities have grown over the course of the century and will be equipped to interrogate the political dimensions of this growth. Developing this critical lens will help students to confront American urban literatures in more sophisticated ways.

Required Texts

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*
Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious, New York*
Steven Millhauser, *Martin Dressler*
Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*
Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came with Them*
Richard Wright, *Native Son*

Course Grading

The course will be structured on a 1000-point scale. The scores you receive on your assignments, exams, blackboard postings, and participation will be totaled at the end of the
semester, and your final grade will be calculated based on this score. The points will be distributed as follows:

- Writing Assignment #1: 200 points
- Writing Assignment #2: 350 points
- Blackboard Postings: 200 points (50 points each)
- Participation: 100 points
- Dérive Writing Assignment: 100 points
- Dérive Presentation: 50 points

Participation will be calculated based on class attendance and participation in class discussions. Students will be expected to bring their text to class every day, having read the assignment due for that day.

Course Objectives

1. To examine the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts by reading texts by authors from a range of cultures and nationalities.
2. To explore the distinctive characteristics of the urban novel.
3. To understand and utilize spatial theory to analyze urban literatures.
4. To develop analytic skills by close reading, class discussion, and writing.
5. To use writing as a tool for learning.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete ENGL 4340 will be able to:

1. Recognize the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts;
2. Respond critically to literary works.
3. Discuss spatial theory and urban literatures in sophisticated ways.

Class Policies

Academic Honesty: I will follow the university’s policy on academic honesty. Plagiarism, which is “the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work” is only one form of academic dishonesty, which also includes falsification (the intentional alteration of information), fabrication (the intentional invention of information), multiple submissions (using the same material for two separate assignments or courses without permission from the instructors), and abuse of academic materials (the intentional destruction of resource materials). Sometimes students commit unintentional plagiarism (not citing sources properly, for example) because they are unaware of the standards that apply. Therefore, if you have questions or doubts about what constitutes a breach of integrity or a violation of policies, it is important that you consult with me.

Grade Appeal Process: As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading,
may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Website at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Policy on class attendance:** Students are allowed a maximum of four (4) absences. All absences count equally, irrespective of the cause, and students who exceed four absences will be penalized one letter grade on their final grade for every absence over the limit.

- **Note:** Students who participate in university-sanctioned activities should meet with me during the first week of classes.

**If I am absent:** If I need to cancel class because my car broke down, or if I am ill, etc., I will try to get someone to post a sign. I also will try to email you all before class. However, if you come to class and I am not here by the time 15 minutes has elapsed (from when class is to start), please assume that class is cancelled.

**Late Writing Projects:** All papers are due at the beginning of class. Students submitting their papers after this time will lose one letter grade for every class period that the paper is late. Absence is no excuse for a late assignment. If you are unable to attend class, make arrangements to have your paper submitted by a friend or simply turn the paper in early.

**All writing for this class must be written for this class:** Reusing a paper you wrote for another class or back in high school constitutes academic dishonesty.

**Resources**

1. **Writing Center:** The Writing Center of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi provides free help for students at any stage of the writing process. Writing Center consultants are trained to work with writers one-on-one to help them find ideas, organize their thoughts, cite sources, and succeed at all aspects of the writing task. The Writing Center works closely with faculty across campus to understand the writing projects they assign and to help students meet the expectations of those assignments. The Writing Center is located in the Center for Academic Student Achievement in CASA 112 (formerly Glasscock Center). Both drop-in and scheduled appointments are available. For more information see http://casa.tamucc.edu/wc.php.

2. **Students with Disabilities and Veterans:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an
accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in CCH 116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance.

3. **Academic Advising:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

**Procedures for Posting to Blackboard**

For those of you new to this system, Blackboard is an interactive forum that facilitates communication in the form of discussion boards, course documents, email, etc. For this class, I will post our writing assignment sheets, supplemental course readings, and any other items of interest to our course page. As noted above, you will be expected to contribute a minimum of four times to the discussion board, which I facilitate and monitor throughout the semester. Your posting should contain between 200 and 400 words and should critically engage the texts, following the prompt I set up for each posting. I want you to cite the text as often as possible—at least twice in each posting—in order to support your claims. Postings will not be accepted after 8 p.m. on the day indicated.

**Blackboard 9.1:** To log into Blackboard, go to: [http://bb9.tamucc.edu](http://bb9.tamucc.edu). You must have a NET ID (also known as an Active Directory account) to log in. For instructions on how to get this account and more information about using Blackboard, go to: [http://distance-education.tamucc.edu/student_resources.html](http://distance-education.tamucc.edu/student_resources.html). If you need additional help at any time to access, download, or print course materials on Blackboard, please contact the Island Online (IOL) Help Desk by telephone at (361) 825-2825 or by email at iolsupport@tamucc.edu.

**Reminder to English Majors**

As part of the English undergraduate capstone course (ENGL 4351), all English majors are required to submit a portfolio of writings in different discourse genres that they have completed for their college classes. To help you prepare for this assignment, you should **keep a copy** of all essays, research papers, literary analyses, creative and report writing, etc., so that you will have an ample selection from which to choose when the portfolio comes due.

**Writing Assignments**
The course will feature two critical-analysis papers, a series of Blackboard Discussion postings, and an interactive “Dérive.” Each assignment is explained below:

- **Critical- Analyses:** Over the course of the semester, students will write two papers that synthesize the theoretical positions we've studied and apply them to the films and literature on the syllabus, revealing the ways that these texts reflect and move beyond existing debates on spatiality, trauma, and politics. Although I will offer
prompts to move students in fruitful directions, I am open to topics that extend outside of the material covered in class, as long as they address the theory and the literature in productive ways. The first paper will be 6-8 pages, and the final paper will be 10-12 pages in length.

- Blackboard Discussions: Students will be required to post four reading responses on Blackboard over the course of the semester. The postings will engage the readings and offer insights on how the theory both complements our readings of the texts and advances our understanding of the spaces we inhabit. In each case, I will post an initial prompt, and each subsequent posting will pose a question for further discussion. This interactive process encourages students to move the discussion in productive directions and allows them to control the substance of the debate.

- Dérive: Midway through the semester, students, in groups of three, will participate in a “dérive,” a creative mapping of urban space that attempts to understand the political contours of the city in ways that go beyond conventional representations of space. Outside of class, students will spend several hours walking the streets of Downtown Corpus Christi, attentive to the political forces that define this urban space. Students will produce dérive maps that offer new and creative ways of understanding the city, and they will present their findings in class, accompanied by a three-page written analysis of their experience.

Course Calendar (subject to change)

Unit One—Turn of the Century New York: The Urban Fantasy

Week 1: (September 5)
  Thursday
  Introduction
  Syllabus Overview

Week 2: (September 10, 12)
  Tuesday
  Rem Koolhaas, Delirious, New York (9-159)
  Thursday
  Rem Koolhaas, Delirious, New York (160-Finish)

Week 3: (September 17, 19)
  Tuesday
  Steven Millhauser, Martin Dressler (1-129)
  Thursday
  Steven Millhauser, Martin Dressler (130-209)
Week 4: (September 24, 26)
Tuesday
Steven Millhauser, *Martin Dressler* (209-Finish)
Blackboard Posting #1 DUE
Thursday
Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City”
Michel de Certeau, “Spatial Stories”
*Koyaanisqatsi* (dir. Godfrey Reggio)

**Unit Two—The Politics of Urban Space**

Week 5: (October 1, 3)
Tuesday
Michel de Certeau, “Making Do’: Uses and Tactics”
*Koyaanisqatsi* (dir. Godfrey Reggio) cont.
Thursday
Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 1)
CLASS WILL BE HELD ONLINE
Blackboard Posting #2 DUE

Week 6: (October 8, 10)
Tuesday
Edward Soja, “Writing the City Spatially” (Blackboard)
Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” (Blackboard)
Thursday
Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 2)

Week 7: (October 15, 17)
Tuesday
Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 3)
Thursday
Urbanized (dir. Gary Hustwit)
WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

**Unit Three—The City as Playground**

Week 8: (October 22, 24)
Tuesday
Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive” Available at:
[http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.dérive.htm](http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.dérive.htm)
Mikhail Bakhtin, selections from *Rabelais and His World* (Blackboard)
Thursday
John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (Chapters 1-3)
Week 9: (October 29, 31)
  Tuesday
  John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (Chapters 4-8)
  Thursday
  John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (Chapters 9-10)

Week 10: (November 5, 7)
  Tuesday
  John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (Chapter 11-Finish)
  Thursday
  **DERIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT AND PRESENTATION DUE**

**Unit Three—The Postmetropolis**

Week 11: (November 12, 14)
  Tuesday
  Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations” (Blackboard)
  Lieven de Cauter, “The Capsular City” (Blackboard)
  Thursday
  Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1-79)
  Edward Soja, “Taking Los Angeles Apart: Towards a Postmodern Geography”
  (Blackboard)

Week 12: (November 19, 21)
  Tuesday
  Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (79-Finish)
  David Harvey, “Postmodernism in the City: Architecture and Urban Design”
  (Blackboard)
  **Blackboard Posting #3 DUE**

  Thursday
  Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came with Them* (1-98)

Week 13: (November 26, 28)
  Tuesday
  Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came with Them* (99-199)

  Thursday (THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS)

Week 14: (December 3, 5)
  Tuesday
  Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came with Them* (200-Finish)
  **Blackboard Posting #4 DUE**
  Thursday
  *Safe* (dir. Todd Haynes)
Week 15: (December 10)
  Tuesday
    **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE**
    Last Day of Class