English 5349.001: “American Literatures Along the Border”

Class Meeting Time: T 7:00-9:30  
Classroom: OCR 222  
Instructor: Kevin Concannon  
Office: FC 262  
Office Hours: T 1-3, TH: 10-11 and by appointment  
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Fall 2013

Course Description:
During a recent presidential address to the American Studies Association, Shelley Fisher Fishkin asked, “What does it mean to be ‘included’ in or ‘excluded’ from the nation?” This class will take this question as a starting point, examining the power of the nation to marginalize by constructing borders. We will also be interested in how individual or community movement across borders complicates the contours of the nation. Our interest will be comparative in examining the varied construction of national spaces, moving beyond the geographic representation of the border to explore the different “figurative” divisions of race, ethnicity and class that help to determine belonging within the United States.

We will explore texts from a variety of genres, including novels, short stories, and essays that represent a hemispheric understanding of US literature. In this course, we will spend time looking to define what is meant by the/a border, and the ways in which movement back and forth across borders is overdetermined by race and gender. In this way we will explore the United States and the Americas within a transnational context in the hope to understand in what ways labels such “included” and “excluded” can be conceived as synonymous.

Course Requirements:
Attendance and Class Participation (10 points): You can miss one class without penalty; for every subsequent class you miss, five points will be deducted from your grade.

Presentation/Facilitation (15 points). You will be responsible for facilitating one class discussion over the course of the semester. Your responsibilities will include: 1) Presenting to the class the historical and cultural context of your chosen text. 2) Examining specific parts of the text in an effort to explain its deeper meaning and to develop your overall approach to the text. 3) Connecting the text to other works that we have discussed in class or to outside texts (be they examples from other literary texts, films, videos etc). 4) Developing questions to prompt class discussion. 5) Responding to comments made in class.

You should not see the presentations as exhaustive in scope, but rather they should be seen as a means of developing ideas (and suggested approaches) that we as a class can explore further during the rest of the semester. Please feel free to meet with me before your presentation.

Short Argumentative Essays (15 points). There will be three short essays that will be due this semester. Each essay will be worth five points and should be seen as an opportunity to examine in some detail a question or point of interest you have with the assigned reading. The essays should not just reflect class discussion, but can use class discussion as a jumping off point. Be careful to choose an idea about which you can create an argument, rather than only a description (2 pages).

Take-Home Midterm (20 points). This midterm will be modeled on the MA exam. However, you will only be required to respond to one of the two questions and you will have the full five days to answer the question (in the MA exam you will have to answer two questions, one from each chosen track). I will post the exam on Blackboard on Thursday, October 17th and it must be returned on October 21st by noon. Your response should be approximately eight pages in length.
Final Project (40 points): Your final project should be 10-15 pages in length. Your essay should follow the MLA format as well as draw upon and evaluate secondary sources. Your project must explore how the border is represented in American literature (defined broadly), and can develop in more depth one of the shorter essays you have written over the semester. Similar to your presentation, your final project should provide examples of close textual readings as well as an understanding of the larger historical and social context. Your essay should show connections between secondary and primary sources as well as underscore possible tensions between these different sources.

Grades:
90-100: A
80-89: B
70-79: C
60-69: D
59 and below: F

Required Texts:
Alvarez, Julia. How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents
Garcia, Cristina. Monkey Hunting
Islas, Arturo. Migrant Souls
Kushner, Rachel. Telex from Cuba
Mohr, Nicholasa. In Nueva York
Urrea, Luis. Across the Wire
Verdecchia, Guillermo. Citizen Suárez

Student Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of literary terms, concepts, periods and critical approaches.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate presentation skills and the ability to lead class discussion.
3. Students will be able to write critically and creatively in order to explore literature.
4. Students will be able to analyze literature within a larger social, historical and cultural context.
5. Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of MLA citation.

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 Web site 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.

Notice to Students with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in CCH 116, at 825-5816. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible.
Course Outline:
Tuesday, September 10: History and Definitions: Introductions; Review of Syllabus; Mary Pat Brady, “Border” (in Keywords for American Cultural Studies), José David Saldívar, “The Dialectics of our America,” Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” and Thomas King “Borders”

Tuesday, September 17: History and Definitions (con’t): Leo R. Chavez, “The Latino Threat Narrative,” Benjamin Sáenz “In the Borderlands of Chicano Identity, There are Only Fragments” and Leslie Marmon Silko, “The Border Patrol State.” Start reading Across the Wire


Tuesday, October 1: Cultural Citizenship: William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, “Constructing Cultural Citizenship” and Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism.” Start reading Migrant Souls


Tuesday, October 15: Transnational Americas: Read Randolph Bourne’s “Trans-national America” and Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s “The Transnational Turn in American Studies.” Begin reading Monkey Hunting.

October 17: Midterm Exam will be posted at noon.
October 21: Midterm due at noon via email. Late midterms will not be graded.

Tuesday, October 22: Transnational Americas: Finish reading Monkey Hunting

Tuesday, October 29: Hemispheric America: Caroline Levander “Essays Beyond the Nation.” Start reading In Nueva York


Tuesday, November 26: Begin reading Telex From Cuba

Tuesday, December 3: Continue reading Telex From Cuba

Tuesday, December 10: Finish reading Telex From Cuba. Research Project due.