

## English 285

### SPECIAL TOPICS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE- GOTHIC, HORROR AND WEIRD FICTION

#### **BULLETIN INFORMATION**

ENGL 285 – Special Topics in American Literature-Gothic, Horror and Weird Fiction (3 credit hours)

#### **Course Description:**

Special topics in American literature exemplifying persistent themes of American culture.

#### **SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

This DED version of ENGL 285 is designed for students in USC's Palmetto College, the distributed-learning-based degree program for students on the regional campuses and throughout the state. All students in Palmetto College degree programs constitute a potential audience for ENGL 285, since sophomore-level English classes are traditionally a popular way to earn required AIU (Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding) credit, and all Palmetto College degrees require at least three hours in AIU.

Palmetto College has experienced 50% growth over the past five years (210 students in the core degrees in 2010; 310 students in 2015), and in the spring of 2016 alone 65 new students were admitted to the BLS/BOL programs. This number represents about 1/5 of the current total for both online and traditional (around 310), suggesting that Palmetto College is poised for more growth to its online student population.

While it is true, historically, that some ENGL courses in Palmetto College have had low enrollments, as Palmetto College's enrollments continue to grow, ENGL courses will likewise enjoy higher enrollments. The relatively high number of ENGL faculty teaching in Palmetto College means that ENGL would be the preferred AIU option for the foreseeable future.

An online version of ENGL 285 would make the class available to students around the state who currently lack the ability to take USC classes due to finances, location, or family or work commitments. Since online AIU options are currently rare among Palmetto College course offerings, offering ENGL 285 online would satisfy a growing need.

Distributed learning delivery is well-suited to ENGL 285, a non-majors course that typically contains a significant amount of student discussion and interaction. The online modality offers several powerful, mutually-reinforcing methods of student interaction: discussion boards (analogous to in-class conversations), blogs (analogous to response papers), and sharing and critiquing of draft material by students, plus collaboration tools like chats, wikis, and virtual classrooms.

In the typical online course, students shape their initial understanding of, and questions about, course material on discussion boards. They then refine these conversations with each other and the instructor into blog posts or other short writing assignments that are posted for commentary and review by their classmates. Finally, on larger projects such as papers and presentations, students may either collaborate or share work in progress in a variety of media: traditional academic analyses and essays, multi-media presentations, videos, etc.

The unusual transparency of the online learning environment, where students publicly shape both their ideas and thought processes and the academic products resulting from those ideas, leads to class discussion that is thoughtful and that encourages reflection, as well as empowering students who typically refrain from participating in traditional discussion-based classes. Since ENGL 285 is a non-majors course, and since non-majors often experience a certain amount of trepidation about studying literature, or in many cases have not previously learned good interpretive habits for approaching literary texts, the collaborative, mutually-reinforcing distributed learning environment can be an ideal place for such non-majors to successfully engage with literary art.

#### **ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

##### **Upon successful completion of English 285, students will be able to:**

1. Distinguish between the genres of literary, gothic, weird, and horror fiction
2. Discuss the origins and roles of these genres in the history of American literature
3. Explain the influence of these genres on American popular culture
4. Construct cohesive arguments about matters of aesthetic interpretation and narrative structure

#### **SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. Joyce Carol Oates, ed., *American Gothic Tales*. (New York: Plume, 1996). ISBN-13: 978-0452274891
2. Various websites/ film clips / critical writings / articles available via the web and on our Blackboard site. These supplemental readings follow copyright/fair use policies.

#### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. **Discussion Board and Blog (20%)**- We will do much talking on the discussion board (click Discussion Board on Blackboard) and you will find it a good place to ask questions, share your opinions, try out ideas for assignments, and get to know your classmates and professor. When post a question to the discussion board, I will let you know. There won't be one every week. When there is a discussion board question, in addition to posting your own answer to it, you should respond to at least one classmate's answer. Post your answer to my question by Wednesday, and then respond to at least one classmate's answer by Saturday. Check the discussion board regularly. You are responsible for reading all discussion board posts (not just mine), as any post may form the basis for further discussions, tips on completing class projects, or final exam questions. The online

discussions held by you and your classmates are just as much a course text as the assigned book.

2. **Blog-**To help you understand and apply concepts from the course, I ask you to keep a blog (online journal). The blog is available through Blackboard by clicking Class Blog, and only members of our class can access it. The discussion board is the place you will ask questions about the reading and answer short discussion questions, as you would in a face-to-face class discussion. The blog is where you will write the equivalent of short response papers. You won't write one every week; I'll let you know when there's a blog assignment, and it's also in the syllabus. When there is a blog assignment, in addition to posting your own answer to it, you should respond to at least one classmate's blog. Post your blog by Friday, and then respond to at least one classmate's answer by Sunday. Your blog entries should be more substantial than a discussion board post but can be a little less polished than a formal paper. Blog posts should reflect your best effort to think about the week's topic: how it fits into your understanding of the reading, what it says about the genres we're studying, your experiences with and personal reaction to related texts or concepts. A good strategy for blog posts is to begin by making some notes right after you complete the assigned reading/viewing, and then finish the post after you've had a chance to think about the reading or ask questions about it. Do not do outside research unless I specifically ask you to; the blog is to be your work only (you can quote the work you're writing about and any notes or sources I give you in class). The Blog Evaluation Rubric (under Rubrics) explains how blog posts are graded.
3. **Selfie/Bio (10%)**- Assigned as a way for us to introduce ourselves and build community as a class, this assignment asks you to post, to an assigned discussion board, a photograph of yourself and a few biographical details (e.g., your major, your favorite reading/viewing/games, etc.).
4. **Prezi (10%)**- This assignment asks you to use the web-based presentation software Prezi to compare some of the ways the gothic, horror, and weird genres are represented in popular culture. You will be encouraged to examine mass media sources like movies, TV, video games, and popular fiction and music, but also to look at phenomena like Halloween Express stores, the "Judgment House" evangelical Christian take on Halloween, memes shared via social media, etc.
5. **Midterm Exam (10%)** - This short answer and multiple choice test will assess your knowledge of literary history and terminology from the first half of the course.
6. **Weird Memoir (20%)** - This assignment asks you to examine the roles the weird/gothic/horror genres have played in your life by relating one or more personal experiences or interactions. Tell a story or stories, and flesh them out with an introduction and conclusion that puts your experiences in context, comparing them to social norms or trends. Cite at least one story we've read this semester, comparing your experiences to it, either positively or negatively.
7. **Literary Analysis Paper (15%)** - This assignment asks you to discuss the use of generic conventions in two works from the syllabus. By "generic conventions," as you will learn this semester, I mean the defining themes and narrative gestures made by authors in the gothic, horror, and weird genres—the old houses, the visions and hallucinations, the monsters, the

transformations and decay, the unreliable narrators, etc. You might, for example, compare H. P. Lovecraft's depiction of delirium and paranoia in "The Call of Cthulhu" with Sylvia Plath's depiction of dreams and mental illness in "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams." We will go over, as a class, the assignment, how to draft and write the paper, and the conventions of academic writing on literature, so if you've never done this kind of assignment, you will be able to do it with confidence.

8. **Final Exam** (15%) - The final exam will ask you to summarize basic concepts from the course and use them to compare and evaluate various works we have read. The exam may include short answer, identification, and essay questions. You are allowed to use your notes and textbook on the final exam. To ensure the integrity of the exam, it will be offered in a timed format on Blackboard: you may access it only once and must work through to the end in one sitting. Please allot enough time for this three-hour (maximum) exam during exam week. You can take the exam any time during exam week, but for your convenience and sanity, consult your exam schedule for other classes and mark a time on your calendar for your ENGL 285 exam now. The final exam is secured in Blackboard with username and password.

### **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

- Week 1:        Introductions:  
Look at the "Start Here!" module on Blackboard; read syllabus and course policies; read "How to Take Notes on Your Reading."  
Read Josh Dzieza, "Horror Goes Highbrow" (available on Blackboard).  
Read Alison Milbank, "Gothic Fiction Tells Us the Truth About Our Divided Nature" (available on Blackboard).  
Post Selfie/Bio Assignment to the discussion board.  
Create Prezi Account
- Week 2:        What Is Horror Fiction? What about Gothic and Weird Fiction?:  
Watch the Prezi "Introduction to the Gothic Horror Genre" by Melissa Pfeifer. (Linked from our Blackboard site; ignore the book cover assignment at the end; that is for Ms. Pfeifer's students only).  
Make sure you take notes on the concepts in the Prezi.  
Voice over PowerPoint (VOPP) lecture: Major Course Concepts, part 1.  
Voice over PowerPoint (VOPP) lecture: Major Course Concepts, part 1.  
Post your completed media diary to the course blog.  
Reply to at least one other student's blog post.  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question.  
Participate in this week's discussion board.
- Week 3:        Your Experiences with the Horror Genre:  
Read the "Weird Memoir" assignment (available on Blackboard under Assignments).  
Voice over PowerPoint (VOPP) lecture: The Weird Memoir assignment.

Voice over PowerPoint (VOPP) lecture: Putting together a Prezi.  
Read the Prezi assignment "The Horror, the Horror" and watch the sample Prezi.  
Compile notes for your "The Horror, the Horror" Prezi.  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question.  
Participate in this week's discussion board.

Week 4: Why Read Horror and Related Genres?:  
Read excerpt from Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*. (Linked from our Blackboard site.)  
Read Melinda Beck, "Scary Movies and Real-Life Risks" (Linked from our Blackboard site.)  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question.  
Participate in this week's discussion board.  
Post notes for your Prezi as your blog post for this week.

Week 5: The Roots of Modern Horror, Part 1  
Read H. P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (available on Blackboard).  
Read Edgar Allan Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" (linked from our Blackboard site).  
"The Horror, the Horror" Prezi due.  
Post the URL to this week's discussion board, and post any other notes you didn't post last week.  
Comment on at least two classmates' Prezis.  
Start writing your Weird Memoir.

Week 6: Weird Memoir: Peer Feedback  
Discussion board: full draft of your Weird Memoir due Wednesday.  
Read "Guidelines for Peer Feedback" (on Blackboard in the Weird Memoir folder).  
Comment on at least two students' drafts by Saturday.  
Final Draft of Weird Memoir due Sunday.

Week 7: The Roots of Modern Horror, Part 2  
Audio lecture: "The English Gothic in the Nineteenth Century"  
Audio lecture: "The American Gothic in the Nineteenth Century"  
Read Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (in our textbook).  
Read Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (in our textbook).  
Review the basic course concepts presented in lecture 1 and in the "Introduction to the Gothic Horror Genre" Prezi.  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question about the midterm exam.  
Participate in this week's discussion board.

- Week 8: Monsters, part 1:  
Read H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu" (linked from our Blackboard site)  
Read August Derleth, "The Lonely Place" (in our textbook).  
Visit the "H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society" website. Spend time looking at their "Prop Documents," reading about the movies the Society has made, and reading about the Society's other activities.  
Post to the course blog (you will receive the assignment via email).  
Reply to at least one other student's blog post.  
Read Literary Analysis Paper assignment (on Blackboard under Assignments) and post any questions or concerns to the "Literary Analysis Paper" discussion board.  
Look over your notes on your reading/begin taking notes for the Literary Analysis Paper. You may also look ahead to future stories to get some ideas.
- Week 9: Monsters, Part 2:  
Read Ambrose Bierce, "The Damned Thing" (in our textbook).  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question  
Participate in this week's discussion board.  
Take midterm exam (available on Blackboard under Assignments-- make sure you read the instructions carefully!)
- Week 10: Hauntings:  
Read John Cheever, "The Enormous Radio" (in our textbook).  
Read Stephen Millhauser, "In the Penny Arcade" (in our textbook).  
Post to the course blog (you will receive the assignment via email).  
Reply to at least one other student's blog post.  
Post to optional discussion board on the midterm.
- Week 11: Madness and Delirium, part 1:  
Audio lecture: understandings of madness and delirium from the nineteenth century to now, part 1.  
Audio lecture: understandings of madness and delirium from the nineteenth century to now, part 2.  
Read Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat" (in our textbook).  
Read Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (in our textbook).  
Blog post: find and discuss your own examples of representations of madness/delirium in horror media (fiction, TV, movies, video games, etc.).  
Reply to at least one other student's blog post.
- Week 12: Madness and Delirium, part 2  
Audio lecture: Revising the Weird Memoir  
Audio lecture: The Earliest Horror Movies  
Read Harlan Ellison, "Shattered Like a Glass Goblin" (in our textbook).  
Todd van der Werff, "13 Classic Scenes that Explain How Horror Movies Work" (linked from Blackboard).

Discussion board: post your favorite scene from horror media (fiction, TV, movies, video games, etc.).

Participate in this week's discussion board.

Post the two stories you will write about in the Literary Analysis Paper to the "Literary Analysis Paper" discussion board, along with a list of comparisons between the two stories.

- Week 13: Forbidden Knowledge  
Audio lecture: Forbidden Knowledge and Liminal Zones in Horror Fiction, part 1  
Audio lecture: Forbidden Knowledge and Liminal Zones in Horror Fiction, part 2  
Read John Crowley, "Snow" (in our textbook).  
Read Thomas Ligotti, "The Last Feast of Harlequin" (in our textbook).  
Post your answer to this week's discussion board question.  
Respond to at least two classmates' posts.  
Continue working on Literary Analysis Paper.  
Post draft of Literary Analysis Paper to this week's discussion board by Wednesday.  
Comment on two classmates' drafts by Sunday.

- Week 14: Boundaries  
Read Peter Straub, "A Short Guide to the City" (in our textbook).  
Read Stephen King, "The Man in the Black Suit" (linked from our Blackboard site).  
Read Kelly Link, "The Specialist's Hat" (linked from our Blackboard site).  
Post to the course blog.  
Reply to at least one other student's blog post.  
Continue work on Weird Memoir revision.  
Continue working on Paper 2.

- Week 15: Conclusion: What Makes Us Afraid  
Audio lecture: Wrap-up of main ideas in the course  
Audio lecture: Sylvia Plath's "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams."  
Read Sylvia Plath, "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" (in our textbook).  
Two discussion boards this week: 1. reviewing for the final exam (optional) 2. questions about your Weird Memoir rewrite (mandatory)  
Continue revision of Weird Memoir.  
Continue working on Paper 2.

**FINAL EXAM according to university exam schedule**