English/Comparative Studies 585.01

Literacy Studies

This is a foundational course for undergraduate students interested in engaging in further studies in literacy. For English majors and those in allied fields, the course provides an exploration of reading and writing, viewed both traditionally and contemporarily. Not only is this valuable for majors in English, this is also very useful for pre-education students and majors across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, for whom a good grounding in the foundations of literacy studies will promote a better sense of the basics of their own and other disciplines, a critical understanding of a very important subject that is too often misunderstood, and clarification of public policy questions.

Literacy, it has long been said, underlies and is part and parcel of modern society and civilization. Although that simple generalization has long influenced thinking, policy-making, and school building, it no longer has that power. Reading and writing, along with other literacies, are most often seen as cultural practices whose forms, functions, and influences take their shape and play their influence as part of larger contexts: social, cultural, political, economic, historical, material and ideological. The complexities of literacy as used by people in their daily lives take on greater importance as approaches, theories, and research focus more closely on the uses, abuses, and meanings of distinct literacies. Contemporary research and writing as a result is more often interdisciplinary across the humanities, social sciences, and biological sciences with English, linguistics, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and cognitive studies among the most active points of exchange and debate. So, too, are the relationships between literacy and both individual and collective actions, in school, work, recreational, and other settings.

The course introduces students to many of the major authors and critical writings in the field. Readings will include Shirley Brice Heath, Jack Goody, Ruth Finnegan, Kathleen Gough, Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, , Brian Street, Harvey Graff, Anne Dyson, Deborah Brandt, Elizabeth McHenry, Mike Rose, among others.

Major topics include the “great debates” over literacy (orality v. literacy, writing v. print, illiteracy v. literacy/development/civilization/culture/progress); theories and expectations relating to literacy; individual and social foundations of literacy; literacy as reading and/or writing; literacy and cognition; literacy, schools, and families; multiple literacies, ethnographies of literacy, literacy and social action, uses and meanings of literacy.

The course has a number of goals:
• learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and interpretations, and practicing analysis and critical evaluation
• developing and practicing skills in written and oral expression
• engaging in an interdisciplinary conversation about literacy studies, including critical approaches to literacy/ies followed in different disciplines and professions
• developing new understandings of literacy’s many and complicated roles and connections in the development of modern societies, cultures, polities, and economies
• comparing and evaluating different approaches, conceptualizations, theories, methods, and sources that relate to the study and understanding of literacy in its many contexts

Books
Harvey J. Graff, The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City. Transaction, 1987 (1979) (0887388841)
Anne Haas Dyson, The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write: Popular Literacies in Childhood and School Cultures. Teachers College Press, 2003 (0807742805)

There are also a number of articles on library electronic reserve.

In addition to readings indicated above, films may include
“The Wild Child”
“Children and Schools in Nineteenth-Century Canada”
“My Brilliant Career”
“High School”

Requirements
1. Regular reading, attendance, and participation in discussions. Attendance and participation are expected and taken into account in evaluation.
2. Writing weekly questions for discussion by working groups and sometimes the entire class. Questions should be based on that week’s reading, and can include connections to earlier weeks. They help you prepare for class sessions. Each student will turn in questions for at least four of the first eight weeks.
3. Essay 1. The readings in Weeks 1-4 take a variety of positions on the issues of the power, impact, influence, and consequences of literacy. In a brief essay of no more than 3 pages, compare and contrast at least 2 or 3 arguments and present your critical evaluation of them. Which seem to be the clearest and most persuasive? Why?
   Due week 4 or 5
4. Essay 2. Choose one: Write a critical review of one of the course texts by Dyson or Graff. Focus on the “approaches” to literacy taken by the author you choose: questions, conceptualization, theory, sources, method, nature and persuasiveness of interpretation, importance of conclusions, and the like. What are the book’s strengths? Limitations? No more than 4-5 pages.
   OR
Define “literacy in context,” drawing specifically from course readings (of your own choice): No more than 4-5 pages. Critical review of the ways in which researchers develop specific contexts
to study literacy and to assess its importance, impact, influences, etc.—in theory, in conceptualization, in sources, in research design, in material reality, in comparisons, in imagination—and its importance in terms of their own research

**Due week 8 or 9**

5. Group research and presentation assignment: uses of literacy in everyday life and/or representations of literacy in popular culture and cultural criticism. Students are encouraged to examine literature, film, popular and other cultural materials: presentation to class in final weeks of the quarter and submission of an outline, bibliography, and evaluation of other group members. Use some of the approaches, questions, methods that you find in the course readings.

**Presentations during Weeks 9-10; written work due at time of presentation.**

**Grades**

1 & 2. 25%

3. 25%

4. 35%

5. 15%

**Group project: studying contemporary literacy**

Working with members of your group, select one of several possible approaches to or modes of research on literacy. The choices are designed to take you, in part, outside the library or study and to provide an intellectual experience that is more “active” (for lack of another term). Consider these possibilities: 1) *an ethnographic study of peoples’ uses and practices of literacy*, aimed at testing, comparing, or clarifying some general ideas or hypotheses in the field of study; 2) *a study of the portrayals and representations of reading and writing*, and readers and writers in literature, films, visual arts, popular and other cultures; 3) *a more traditional library-based research project*

Each group will define a topic and propose an approach to it. Course materials will help with this—use them for help with approaches, conceptual matters, research design, theory, sources, comparisons, etc.. Brief research proposals will be circulated (with a copy to the instructor) by the middle of the quarter, with brief presentations to the class for comments and questions. We may schedule sessions with the Library or the Digital Union. During the final two weeks, fuller presentations will be made, with written outlines and bibliographies due at time of presentations or Week 10. There will be an opportunity to evaluate group members’ contributions.

**Assigned reading.**

An upper-level discussion course is pointless, and painful, unless the participants have read the assigned material with care. I expect you to read the material assigned for each week's discussion. Copies of some readings are available on electronic reserve via the Library. Plan ahead as necessary. I encourage you to think about useful questions for discussion, or issues that occur to you after each class meeting.

**Roles of learning groups**

Groups will discuss readings and assignments; generate questions for class discussion; report back to the class; brainstorm, plan and conduct a research project; share sources and other “finds” with classmates; prepare final presentations and written reports. Some class time will be available for project work.
Each student is expected to contribute actively to the work of his or her group. Attendance and preparation count. At the end of the semester, you will have an opportunity to evaluate the members of your group.

Turning in assignments
All work that is turned in for evaluation or grading should be typed, usually double-spaced, with margins of 1-1½ inches on all sides; printed in 12 point font, in a legible typeface. Be sure that your printer ribbon or toner allows you to produce clear copies. Follow page or word limits and meet deadlines. Follow any specific assignment requirements (formatting or endnotes or bibliography, for example). Use footnotes and endnotes as necessary and use them appropriately according to the style guide of your basic field. Your writing should be gender neutral as well as clear and to the point. If you have a problem, see me, if at all possible, in advance of due dates. Unacceptable work will be returned, ungraded, to you. Submitting work late without excuse will result in lowered grades.

Civility
Mutual respect and cooperation, during the time we spend together each week and the time you work on group assignments, are the basis for successful conduct of this course. The class is a learning community that depends on respect, cooperation, and communication among all of us. This includes coming to class on time, prepared for each day’s work: reading and assignments complete, focusing on primary classroom activity, and participating. It also includes polite and respectful expression of agreement or disagreement—with support for your point of view and arguments—with other students and with the professor. It does not include arriving late or leaving early, or behavior or talking that distracts other students. Please turn off all telephones, beepers, electronic devices, etc.

Academic Honesty
Scholastic honesty is expected and required. It is a major part of university life, and contributes to the value of your university degree. All work submitted for this class must be your own. Copying or representing the work of anyone else (in print or from another student) is plagiarism and cheating. This includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. This is unacceptable in this class and also prohibited by the University. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, must be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. For information on plagiarism, see http://cstw.osu.edu/ especially http://cstw.osu.edu/writing_center/handouts/index.htm.

Writing Center
All members of the OSU community are invited to discuss their writing with a trained consultant at the Writing Center. The Center offers the following free services: Help with any assignment; One-to-one tutorials; One-to-one online tutorials via an Internet Messenger-like system (no ads or downloads); Online appointment scheduling. Visit www.cstw.org or call 688-4291 to make an appointment.

Disabilities Services
The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307
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Syllabus

For background, if needed: David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language (Blackwell, 1993), Chs.1-3 on reserve

Sept. 21  Week 1  First Things: Setting the Scope and the Terms
*Ruth Finnegan, “Literacy versus Non-Literacy: The Great Divide,” in Modes of Thought, ed. Robin Horton and Finnegan. (Faber and Faber, 1973), 112-144

Sept. 26, 28  Week 2  Literacy’s Impacts and Influences

“The Wild Child” (85)

Oct. 3, 5  Week 3 & Oct. 10, 12  Week 4  Teaching Literacy, Learning Literacy, & Literacy Myths
*Deborah Brandt, “Changing Literacy,” Teachers College Record, 105 (2003), 245-260

“Children and Schools in Nineteenth-Century Canada”

Week 4 or 5 1st essay due Oct. 12, 17, or 19
Oct. 17, 19   **Week 5**   **Texts and Readings**
*Barbara Sicherman, “Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women’s Reading in Late-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Reading in America*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (JHUP, 1989), 201-225
*Jan Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies,” *Daedalus* 113 (Summer 1984), 49-73

Oct. 24, 26   **Week 6**   **Literacy, Popular Culture, Race, & Gender**
Anne Haas Dyson, *The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write: Popular Literacies in Childhood and School Cultures* (Teachers College Press, 2003)

“My Brilliant Career” (101) [or Week 5]

Oct. 31, Nov. 2   **Week 7**   **Orality & Literacy; Work & Literacy**
**Read at least 3 articles**

Nov. 7, 9   **Week 8**   **“Winners” & “Losers” & Futures**
*Mike Rose, “In Search of a Fresh Language of Schooling,” *Education Week*, Sept. 7, 2005

“High School” (75)

**Week 8 2nd essay due by Nov. 9 or 14**

Nov. 14, 16   **Week 9**   **National Literacy Campaigns/Group reports I**
*Robert Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, “National Literacy Campaigns,” in *National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, ed. Arnove and Graff (Plenum, 1987), 1-28 and, if possible, one case study chapter from *National Literacy Campaigns*


Nov. 21, 28, 30  Week 10  Group reports II

*Group report due: outline, bibliography, evaluation due at time of presentation or no later than Nov. 30*