Introduction to Graduate Study in Literacy

This course introduces graduate students to the field of literacy studies. It emphasizes interdisciplinary research and scholarship that explores definitions of literacy and its uses across historical and cultural contexts. As such, it is relevant for graduate students in the humanities, social sciences, education, public policy, and related fields.

The study and understanding of literacy has changed dramatically in recent decades. Although the term *literacy* is widespread and often unquestioned as to its importance, literacy in actual use emerges as a much more complicated, mediated, and context-dependent subject than previously appreciated. Writing and reading now are seen as pluralistic cultural practices whose forms, functions, and influences take shape as part of larger social, political, historical, material, and ideological contexts. Literacy studies thus require new, interdisciplinary, comparative, and critical approaches to conceptualization, theories, analysis, and interpretation. This course examines these currents as they take shape, and seeks to understand how a field of study is created among the disciplines of linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and history, among others.

Toward that end, our topics include: ”great debates” over literacy, its uses, impacts, and meanings; theories of literacy; histories of literacy; literacy and literacies; reading and writing and beyond; ethnographies of literacy in everyday life; academic and school literacies; literacy and language; literacy and schooling; literacy and social order—class, race, gender, ethnicity, generation, and geography; literacy and collective and individual action; recent research; research design and methodologies. Readings include the work of scholars across the humanities and social sciences. These readings are starting points not definitive statements on literacy.

The course has a number of goals:

- Developing new understandings of literacy and literacies, their importance in history and contemporary society, culture, polity, and economies
- Probing the nature of literacy in theory and practice, with respect to definitions, conceptualization, contextual understanding, and complex relationships
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and interpretations, and practicing analysis and critical evaluation from a number of perspectives
- Developing advanced 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
- Comparing and evaluating different approaches, conceptualizations, theories, methods, and sources that relate to the study and understanding of literacy in its many contexts
English 6750 fulfills a requirement for the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization (GIS) in Literacy Studies. Contact Susan Hanson, program coordinator for the GIS in Literacy Studies, or go to literacystudies@osu.edu for additional information.

Required Texts

Books: Background and Overview

Books: Case Studies and Ethnographies

Other Readings Available on Carmen

Requirements

1. **Regular reading, attendance, and participation** in seminar discussion. Attendance is expected and taken into account in evaluation. The success of this seminar depends on everyone’s full participation. As participants, we must read the assigned material with care. I expect you to read all the material assigned for each week’s discussion. So plan ahead. Think about useful questions and issues for discussion. **Even if you are not leading discussion, come with questions and/or issues you want to discuss.**

2. Each week one or more students (depending on the size of the group) will draft and circulate **questions for discussion** in advance of that day’s class meeting. **Questions must be posted on Carmen by 6:00 pm on Wednesday of each week.** The student(s) responsible for circulating discussion questions each week is also responsible for **leading the seminar session** that day. Pick a seminar session after September 17th.

Leadership of one seminar session. One student (or two) is responsible for leading each seminar. The most important task of this assignment is to present questions and perspectives on the major topics and issues of that week, and on the reading specifically, that will generate good discussion. Think about how you will fuel lively discussion. Questions and activities should be
made available on Carmen to all seminar participants prior to class, no later than 6:00 p.m. on the
day before the discussion.

Suggestions: choose particularly important passages in the works for analysis, and spend some
time on their explication. (Better yet, include them in your Carmen posting, along with
discussion questions.) Choose key ideas and terms for elucidation, or focus on the questions the
work asks, its answers, and its relation to larger issues or themes, including previous weeks’
work. Collect some reviews (if we’re discussing a book) from academic journals and serious
publications for nonspecialists and organize discussion around the assessment of these
evaluations. Remember that the goal is not especially to find out what is wrong with the work,
although that may be important, but to understand its significance and contribution to large
issues and questions. Think of ways of identifying themes and issues that include specific
readings but may also look back to earlier weeks or look ahead to future weeks and topics.
Depending on class size, the plan for the session might include breaking into small groups with
specific tasks for part of the time. Seminar leaders are not expected to be responsible for the
entire session; generally, seminar leaders will use the first half of class, but may use more, if
discussion warrants it.

3. Preparation for class includes writing two four-page commentary papers (no longer than 4
pages, double-spaced) offering critical perspectives and raising questions about the assigned
reading in a particular week. One commentary will be on the class session for which you lead
discussion. Select any class session from week two to week fifteen for the second commentary.
These commentaries should not summarize the material. Rather, the papers should present your
reaction to the readings: what strikes you as particularly interesting, important, outrageous,
thought-provoking or worth thinking or talking about. These short papers should include
questions the readings raise for you and/or questions you wish to raise about the material. Those
questions as well as your comments will help you to prepare for seminar sessions. I will not give
formal grades until the second commentary is turned in. I will ask you to post at least one of
your commentaries (of your choosing) on the class Carmen site. Commentaries are due during
the week in which that topic/reading is discussed. That means the commentary must be turned
in no later than the Friday (6 p.m.) of that week. None will be accepted late.

4. A Publishable Book Review. Choose a book-length study of literacy that has been published
within the last three years. Read it thoroughly and write a review that you can/will submit to an
appropriate journal. Read through book reviews in two or three journals to get a sense of the
genre. For those of you seeking a first publication, book reviews are nice starting points.
Due: Oct. 22nd Draft and Peer Review
Due: Oct. 29th Final Draft

5. Compose a critical essay (print or digital) that focuses on an issue or question from our
readings and/or discussions that has peaked your interest. Things to think about: what makes
this issue/question worthy of further interrogation? Who are the stakeholders and what is at
stake? Why are you interested in pursuing this question? What perspective and/or insight do
you bring to this issue? In what direction do you see this issue/question proceeding?
You should place this issue within the current scholarly conversation in literacy studies. Examine scholars’ distinct approaches to and methods for studying the issue/question. Decide on the appropriate methodological and disciplinary approach to answer your question. For example, will you take a historical approach and examine archival material? Does your question suggest an ethnographic perspective? This final essay, if print, should be 12-15 pages.

Due: Oct. 22nd  One-page project description
Due: Dec. 3rd  Draft and Peer Response
Due: Dec. 14th  Final Version


**Requirements for S/U students:** 1) Lead one seminar discussion (and prepare questions); 2) compose and post one commentary on that discussion; 3) write a review; 4) keep up with all reading and attend all class sessions.

**Turning in assignments**
All work that is turned in for evaluation or grading should be double-spaced (unless otherwise noted), 12 point font, in a legible type face. Follow any specific assignment requirements. Use footnotes and endnotes as necessary and use them appropriately according to the style guide of your basic field (APA, MLA, Chicago Manual of Style, etc.). Your writing should be gender neutral as well as clear and concise. If you have a problem, see me, if at all possible, in advance of due dates.

**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, focused on primary classroom activity, and participating. It also includes polite and respectful expression of agreement or disagreement. Please silence all telephones, beepers, electronic devices, etc.

**Academic Honesty**
Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University’s Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University’s Code of Student Conduct (and this syllabus) may constitute “Academic Misconduct.” The Ohio State University’s Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: “Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.” Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of
unauthorized materials during an examination. Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include: The Committee on Academic Misconduct web pages (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc).

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: consultation with any writing assignment in any stage; one-on-one face-to-face tutorials; one-on-one online tutorials via an Internet Messenger-like system (no ads or downloads); membership in a graduate writing group; online appointment scheduling. Visit cswt.osu.edu or call 688-4291 to make an appointment.

Disabilities Services
The Office for Disabilities Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Please inform me and contact the ODS at 292-3307 if you have a documented disability.

Daily Syllabus

*Available on Carmen

Week 1
Aug. 27
Literacy as an Interdisciplinary Field of Study; Definitions
David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language, Ch.1-6.

Week 2
Sept. 3
Definitions of Literacy
*Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in Literacy in Traditional Societies, 27-68. See also Goody’s Introduction.

Week 3
Sept. 10
Literacy, History, and Myth
David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language, chs 7.8
*Harvey Graff, “Introduction,” and “Literacy, Myths, and Legacies: Lessons from the History of Literacy” in Graff

Technologies, Impacts and Influences of Literacy
Ong,”Writing as a Technology that Restructures Thought,” in Cushman, et al, ch.1.
David Olson, “Writing and the Mind” in Cushman et al, Ch. 6
Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, “Unpackaging Literacy,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 7

**Week 4**

**Literacy, Language, and Writing**

**Sept. 17**

David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, Ch. 9-12

James Paul Gee, “Literacy, Discourse and Linguistics: Introduction and What is Literacy?” in Cushman et al, Ch. 30


**Week 5**

**Literacy, Culture, and Community, Ethnography; New Literacy Studies**

**Sept. 24**

John Szwed, “The Ethnography of Literacy,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 24


**Week 6**

**Oct. 1**

*Brian Street,” Introduction,” *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*

* Stephen Reeder and Karen Reed Wikeland, “Literacy Development and Ethnicity: An Alaskan Example” in Street, ch.7

*Collins and Blot, *Literacy and Literacies*, chapters 1-3

David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, Ch. 14

**Week 7**

**Oct. 8**


Anne Ruggles Gere, “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extra Curriculum of Composition,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 16

Kynard, “’Before I’ll Be a slave, I’ll Be Buried in My Grave’: Black Student Protest as Discursive Challenge and Social Turn in Nineteenth-and Twentieth – Century Literacies” in *Vernacular Literacies* (Project Muse through OSU)


**Week 8**

**Oct. 15**

Fall Break—No Class

**Week 9**

**Oct. 22**

Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*

*Kirk Branch, “Introduction” and “Educational Literacy Practice and the World in Which We Need to Live,” in Kirk Branch’s *Eyes on the Ought to Be: What We Teach When We Teach About Literacy.*

Due: Draft of Book Review (peer response)
Due: One Page Description of Final Project

Week 10
Oct. 29
Wan, Amy. *Producing Good Citizens: Literacy Training in Anxious Times*  

Due: Final Draft of Book Review

Week 11
Nov. 5
Blommaert, *Grassroots Literacy: Writing, Identity and Voice in Central Africa.*

Week 12
Nov. 12
*Stuart Selber, “Reimagining Computer Literacy” and “Critical Literacy: Computers as Cultural Artifacts, Students as Informed Questioner of Technology” in Selber’s* *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age.*  

Week 13
Nov. 19
Marcia Farr, “*En Los Dos Idiomas: Literacy Practices Among Chicago Mexicanos,*” in Cushman et al, ch. 27.  
Meyers, *Del Otro Lado: Literacy and Migration across the U.S.-Mexico Border.*

Week 14
Nov. 26
NO CLASS-Thanksgiving

Week 15
Dec. 3
Due: Drafts of Final Paper and Peer Response  
Oral Presentations (we will discuss format in class)  
Course Evaluations  
Final thoughts

Finals Week
Dec. 14
Due: Final Project (no later than 2 p.m. in dropbox)

Supplemental Readings


