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
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. 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 Tuesday of each week.** The student responsible for circulating discussion questions each week is also responsible for leading the seminar session that day. Pick a seminar session after January 16th.

2. Preparation for class includes writing two **3-4 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 2 to week 9 for the second commentary. Please do not wait to the end of the quarter to turn in the second paper. In addition, each student should come to all sessions prepared and with questions. Papers are due at the class at which that topic is discussed. None will be accepted late.

3. **Annotated bibliography of 8-10 items** (at least one item should be book-length, and seek a balance between current and foundational sources) on a literacy-related topic or theme of your choice.

   **Due:** March 27

4. Compose a **critical essay (print or digital)** that focuses on an issue or question from our readings and/or discussion 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. You may use your annotated bibliography in preparation for this assignment. This final essay, if print, should be 12-15 pages.

Due: March 6 One page description
Due: April 17 Draft and Peer Response
Due: April 25 Final Version


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

**Assigned reading.** 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 (and bring) useful questions and issues for discussion.

**Leadership of one seminar session.** One student 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, photocopy them, 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 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.
Commentary papers. Students should write at least two four-page papers commenting on the week’s reading. 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. To receive credit for the seminar, you must turn them in on time. I will ask you to post at least one of your commentaries (of your choosing) on the class Carmen site.

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 page or word limits and meet deadlines. Follow any specific assignment requirements (formatting or endnotes or references, for example). 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 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. 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. Please ensure that you include references when quoting or using ideas from the work of others. 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-on-one tutorials; one-on-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. Please inform me and contact the ODS at 292-3307 if you have a documented disability.

Daily Syllabus

*Available on Carmen

Week 1
Jan. 9  Literacy as an Interdisciplinary Field of Study; Definitions
* Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, 27-68. See also Goody’s Introduction.

Week 2
Jan. 16 Definitions of Literacy

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

Week 3
Jan. 23 Technologies, Impacts and Influences of Literacy
Ong,”Writing as a Technology that Restructures Thought,” in Cushman, et al, ch.1.

Jan. 23 Dennis Baron, “From Pencils to Pixels” in Cushman et al, Ch. 4
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
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<th>Week</th>
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| Week 5 | Feb. 6 | Literacy, Culture, and Community, Ethnography; New Literacy Studies | John Szwed, “The Ethnography of Literacy,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 24.  
| Week 6 | Feb. 13 | * | *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*, chapter 1-3 |
Marcia Farr, “*En Los Dos Idiomas:* Literacy Practices Among Chicago Mexicanos,” in Cushman et al, ch. 27.  
*Amy Shuman,* “Collaborative Writing: Appropriating Power or Reproducing Authority?” in Street, Ch. 10.  
Anne Ruggles Gere, “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extra Curriculum of Composition,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 16. |
| Week 8 | Feb. 27 | Adult Literacy | Susan L. Lytle, “Living Literacy: Rethinking Development,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 22.  
Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jungeblut, Lynn Jenkins, and Andrew Kolstad, “Adult Literacy in America,” in Cushman et al, Ch. 37.  
*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*.

**Week 9**  
**March 6**  
Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*  
**Due: One Page Description of Final Project**

**Spring Break March 11-15**

**Week 10**  
**March 20**  
Hamilton, *Politics and the Representation of Literacy*

**Week 11**  
**March 27**  
Daniell and Mortensen, *Women and Literacy* (introduction and selected chapters)  
**Due: Annotated Bibliography**

**Week 12**  
**April 3**  
*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*.  
*Selle, “Introduction” in Selle’s *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*.  

**Week 13**  
**April 10**  
Bayhnam and Prinsloo, *The Future of Literacy Studies* (selected chapters)

**Week 14**  
**April 17**  
**Due: Drafts of Final Paper and Peer Response**  
Oral Presentations  
Course Evaluations  
Final thoughts

**Finals Week**  
**April 25**  
**Due: Final Project (no later than 2 p.m. in dropbox)**

**Supplemental Readings**


