

Fall 2023

HSS-404 (009-011): Literature Seminar: Representing the Brain

Calista McRae

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Syllabus--HSS 404-009, Fall 23

Time: Canvas posts usually due Sunday 10 PM, in-person meetings on Mondays 10-11:20 AM in FMH 106.

Instructor: Calista McRae

Office hours: Mondays in Cullimore 408, 11:30-12:30; email me to set up a time. I'm happy to meet other weekdays in person or by Zoom, again by appointment: send me an email if you would like to meet.

Email/office phone: mcrae@njit.edu / 973-596-5726

1. Course Description

This class investigates how recent writers and filmmakers have represented the workings of the mind--both their own thoughts and emotions, and the minds of others. How do movies and books capture rambling trains of thought and moments of zoning out? What about dementia, or psychiatric disorders? This course asks you to practice careful observing and effective communicating. You will make claims about how the content and form in each work connect, and about how each artist depicts a human (or sometimes nonhuman) brain in action. You are encouraged to focus on topics and works of interest to you in your final paper, as long as they relate in some way to the course's subject.

2. Course Goals

- Describe and analyze films and texts in detail, through "close reading"
- Understand basic cinematographic techniques: discuss how such techniques affect meaning, and why a director might choose one approach over others for a given film or shot
- Understand basic literary techniques—how writers choose their words and make their sentences—and how those techniques affect meaning
- Make conscious decisions about writing style, to become a more effective communicator
- Recognize the contributions of literature and film to human emotional and intellectual life

3. Prerequisites

HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

4. What you have to buy

Please make a [Newark Public Library digital account](#), so that you can use NPL's [Kanopy](#) (NPL's Kanopy selection isn't the same as NJIT's and has some movies that NJIT doesn't). You will also need to buy or rent a number of movies, but don't buy them far in advance: the syllabus may change. Each should be under \$5 to rent.

5. Warning!

Because of the topic of this course, we will occasionally be reading or watching upsetting works--about dementia, substance use, and mental illness (such as severe depression). There is also strong language, sexual references, and violence. With this material, and in general with the subject of neurological difference, it is important that you consider your classmates; respect for one another should be a consideration at all times. You are welcome to talk with me further about any text outside of class, at any time.

6. Assignments

<u>Optional, ungraded diagnostic essay, due Sunday Sept. 10, 10 PM</u>	--
<u>Short essay: 4-5 double-spaced pages, due Sunday Oct. 1, 10 PM</u>	10%
<u>Five brainstormed ideas for the final essay, due Sunday Oct. 29, 10 PM</u>	5%
<u>Initial statement for the final essay, due Friday, Nov. 10, 10 PM</u>	10%
<u>Proposal for the final essay (500-700 words), due Friday, Nov. 17, 10 PM</u>	10%
<u>Close reading stemming from your final essay, due Friday, Dec. 1, 10 PM</u>	15%
<u>Long final essay: 8-10 double-spaced pages, due Monday, Dec. 18, 10 PM</u>	25%
Class participation (in-person and async discussions)	25%
<i>This class has no exams.</i>	

Each link above takes you to the assignment details. Read the “[guidelines for forum posts](#)” handout for more about participation: above all, strong posts will involve interesting, informed, relevant, detailed, clearly stated insights. You’ll need to post at least once each week by Sunday at 10 PM, but earlier in the weekend or previous week is completely fine. Participation may also include some in-class writing, depending on how the course goes.

7. Grading

Work will be evaluated according to the university’s grading scale. If you are concerned about a grade, contact me as soon as possible. Waiting until the end of the semester means there will be no way to improve the grade. See the section on revising, just below.

A = 100-90 (superior) B = 86-80 (very good) C = 76-70 (acceptable) F = 59-0 (inadequate)

B+ = 89-87 (excellent) C+ = 79-77 (good) D = 69-60 (minimum)

8. Revising

If you are not happy with your grade on a given formal assignment (that is, the first essay or any component of the final essay), you’re welcome to revise and resubmit it any time before the last meeting of this class, December 11. But before resubmitting, you need to make at least one appointment with the Writing Center about the revision; bring them the work, feedback, and rubric. Ask them to tell me you went. After that meeting and after you’ve done all the revising you think the essay needs, email me the new essay, along with a short note describing (in your own words) what you changed and why, and I’ll average out your original grade and revised grade.

If you want me to read an early draft of an essay, we need to meet to discuss the work (in person, by Zoom, or by phone). Schedule this meeting as early as you can, because the days just before papers are due tend to get filled up with meetings. Meetings within two business days of a due date are not possible, and for the final essay, I can't read whole drafts after the last day of class. But if at the last minute you have a specific, local question (for instance about a particular sentence or paragraph), please email me and I’ll answer as quickly as possible.

9. Attendance Policy

You can miss two classes or discussion forums for absolutely any reason, without it affecting your participation grade; there is no need to tell me why you’re skipping. After two missed classes or posts, additional unexcused absences will count. If you have an absence that NJIT might be able to ‘excuse’ (illness, family emergency, jury duty, a university event, etc.), please

[ask the Dean of Students to review the request](#). They keep your personal information confidential and can email all your professors at once.

According to university policy, students who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance must send their instructors, by the end of the second week of classes, a written list of dates that will be missed.

10. **Submitting Work**

For essays, please make a .doc file; include your name and an interesting title. Use 1-inch margins and double-space. You can use MLA or APA or whatever other citation style you prefer, but be consistent and clear. No need for hard copies; there will be submission links on Canvas.

11. **Late Work**

The **discussion posts** cannot be submitted late—you have to keep up for the course to work. If you miss a post, just start getting ready to do a solid post for the next week. With the work for the essays, extensions are usually possible, but require at least 24 hours' notice. Without an extension, the grade of late work will go down by three points per day (e.g., from an 85 to an 82). I do accept late work until the last day of classes, and it is almost always better to turn in work late than not at all. Please back up your writing frequently: save copies in Google Docs or Dropbox, in email, on flash drives, etc.

12. **Academic Integrity (some stern but important notes)**

Here is NJIT's statement on academic integrity:

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:

<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

If I encounter writing that seems (a) as if it uses other people's work and (b) is not clear about that use, whether in a forum post or an essay, I will send it to the DOS for them to decide. More guidelines for this particular course:

- If your work uses the idea or language of any other person—in a paper, forum post, or any other work assigned—make that use clear to your reader by citing clearly and thoroughly. *A Works Cited page at the end isn't enough; in the paper itself, right at the moment you use an idea or quote, you need to signal the particular use. That is, there needs to be a signal right at the end of the sentence that used somebody else's fact or idea or wording. And if you borrow somebody's wording, put it in quotation marks.* Here is a very short overview of the main problem I see in HSS seminars, [accidental plagiarism](#).

-In general, do not use student essays found online as sources, and do not use Shmoop,

Sparknotes, Rapgenius, etc. as sources, because they are frequently terrible. Wikipedia can be a useful start, but you need to track down the original source of whatever useful material you find there. If you do use any of these as sources, again, make your use clear.

-When it comes to citations, do not trust Grammarly (and I strongly recommend never, ever paying for Grammarly; if you want to improve your writing on the level of the sentence, ask me for suggestions and plan to go to the Writing Center as often as possible).

-Lastly: if I encounter text that seems to have sentences generated by an AI, it will also go to the DOS.

13. **Accessibility/Accommodations**

If you think you may have any difficulties related to the format or materials of this course, or if you would like to discuss any accommodations that might be helpful, please contact me at the start of the semester. If you have a documented disability, or if you think you might have a disability, you should also be in touch with [OARS](#) (Office of Accessibility Resources and Services) either to request an official accommodation or to discuss requesting one.

14. **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute remote or in-person appointments with writing tutors, who can help with planning, structuring, or refining essays. You can make an appointment [here](#). When you go, please bring any rubrics/handouts, so the consultant can see how you'll be graded. And please ask the writing tutor to fill out a Writing Center report and send it to me, so that I know you are going and give you credit for making that effort.

15. **Schedule**

Note: The readings and assignments may change; email announcements take precedence over deadlines here.

Week 0: Introductions

Week 1: NOTICING PROSE AND STATES OF MIND

Week 2: A QUICK OVERVIEW OF FILM, AN EVEN QUICKER OVERVIEW OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Week 3: WHAT THE CAMERA DOES

Week 4. ESSAY 1

Week 5: FILM EDITING AND INNER LIVES

Week 6: MAKING ARGUMENTS ABOUT LANGUAGE

Week 7: STARTING THE FINAL ESSAY

Week 8: TBD

For Sunday, Oct. 29: five ideas for final essay, due on Canvas.

Week 9: CHILDREN'S MINDS

Friday, Nov. 10: initial statement due on Canvas.

Week 10: YOUR MIND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Friday, Nov. 17: proposal due, on Canvas.

Week 11: DELUSIONS

Week 12: EPISODIC STORYTELLING

Friday Dec. 1: Close reading for your final essay due.

Week 13: CONTINUING YOUR FINAL ESSAY

Week 14: FINISHING YOUR FINAL ESSAY

Last day to submit revised work and last day for reading full drafts of final essay: 5 PM on Dec. 11. The end of the semester gets very busy: for feedback on a draft submitted in the days just before that point, please be prepared to meet by Zoom or in person.

Final essay due Monday, December 18, 10 PM.

This class has no exams.