

English 301: Introduction to the English Major

Fall 2021: Tuesdays and Thursdays

Professor Bryant Mangum (307 Anderson House, 828-1255; bmangum@vcu.edu)

I. Texts (texts available through Virginia Book Company, the VCU Bookstore, and online through vendors such as Amazon):

(A) *The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*, ed. Ann Charters. **9th edition**. Boston: Bedford Books/St. Martin's, 2015. (Please try to locate this edition, though if you get an earlier or later edition I will help you with any differences in editions.)

(B) There will be a final reading or two that I will upload to Canvas

(C) The poems that we will read will be available online through Canvas.

II. Course Description and Objectives

English 301 is an introduction to the kind of analytical reading and writing you will be expected to do as an English major. For some of you who are well into your major the course will be a review of sorts in that you will be sharpening skills that you have already learned, perhaps even reading works that you have already read. I hope, however, that you will all encounter in this course many texts that you will find exciting to read, reread, discuss, and write about. We will consider works from various genres.

Our strategy will be this: in the first half of the semester we will focus on the short story with the idea that you will become an expert of sorts on this genre. The short story, of course, has its own history and its particular conventions, and we will concentrate on these in the first part of the course. Many of the skills and much of the vocabulary that you develop in studying short fiction, however, will be transferable to other forms of prose, such as the novel and the essay; ultimately, even to poetry and other forms of verbal and non-verbal communication as well. The general objective of the course, therefore, is to help you become a more careful and more sensitive reader of literature and to provide strategies that will enable you effectively to communicate in essay form your observations about texts you have read.

The specific components of the course that we will use to accomplish this general objective are as follows:

A. Close reading and discussion through Canvas and Zoom sessions of approximately twenty short stories, assorted poems, and additional essays, some that are related specifically to particular works and some that are not;

B. A study of the history and development of various genres, with particular focus on the history of the short story and its conventions and on basic elements of fiction such as plot, character, setting, point of view, style and voice, symbolism and allegory, and theme (all discussed in the Charters anthology);

C. A review of strategies that can be used in writing essays about literature, among them explication, analysis, comparison and contrast, other perspectives. We will discuss each of these in class, but the Charters anthology also has discussion of each strategy.

III. Assignments and Requirements

A. Paper # 1: “Analysis”: “An analysis of a story is the result of the process of separating it into its parts in order to study the whole.... While explication deals with a specific section of the text, analysis can range further, discussing details throughout the narrative that are related to your thesis.” **12.5 points**

B. Paper #2: “Analysis” of specific formal concerns such as point of view. We will discuss the specific formal matters that you may consider in writing this paper. **12.5 points**

C. Paper #3: This “paper” will actually be a test intended to have you bring the close reading and analytical skills you have been developing to bear on what will approximate a test like ones you will likely encounter (or that you have encountered). We will discuss this in detail a week or so before the test, and I will give you samples of the kinds of things to expect. There will be factual questions about details related to the works we have read, but you will be asked to interpret and analyze the texts to be included on the test. **12.5 points**

D. Paper #4: Integrating Outside Critical Sources. For this paper you will choose one work from a number of them that we will be reading, locate three scholarly sources that you will read and include in your bibliography, and write a thesis-support paper of 3-5 pages in which you use ONE of these articles as a springboard into your paper. **12.5 points**

E. Papers #5 and #6: Analyzing Two or More Works (counted as two paper grades)
Three Alternatives: Choose 1, 2, or 3: 1. Find two stories from our text which are either comparable or are so strikingly different that they warrant contrasting
2. Select what you consider a dominant theme (or dominant themes)
3. Locate a critical essay (or book chapter) that deals with one of the works we have read and discussed. (Full description of this paper is in a separate file. It is the paper due on the day scheduled for the final examination.) **25 points**

F. Canvas Postings (two types): These will provide the sources of our Zoom session (synchronous) and ongoing exchange of ideas through Canvas and other “asynchronous” class components.

(1) During the semester I will post 20 or more questions related to specific aspects of the works we are reading. You will choose among these and add posts of approximately 100 words. See separate file under Assignments tab for the way these are counted for your grade. **10 points**

(2) Required posts: Some of the posts (one or more per week) will be marked REQUIRED. Typically the “required” posts will provide the focus for our Zoom discussions. See the separate file under the Assignments for the way these posts are calculated into your grade. **10 points**

G. Occasional short responses to prompts I’ll upload for you to respond to by email. **5 points**

Each of your papers will be weighted 12.5 points (#5 and #6 are actually one longer paper and thus count double). The total count for the papers is 75% of your grade. For the remaining 25% the count is split between Regular Canvas posts (10 points), Required Canvas posts (10 points), and Response to prompts (5 points). Here are the numerical grades represented by the letter

grades: A 95; A- 90; B+ 88; B 85; B- 80; C+ 78; C 75; C- 70; D+ 68; D 65; D- 60; F 0-59; A-/B+ and B+/A- 89; B+/B 87; B/B+ 86; B/B- 83; C+/B- and B-/C+ 79, etc.

IV. VCU Honor System: "Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education." This class will be conducted in strict adherence to VCU's Honor System policies. In essence, you should not use another student's work. You should not falsely present source material as your own. Whenever you use material from another source, you must credit this source clearly, whether you are quoting directly, summarizing, or paraphrasing. Conscious and uncorrected acts of plagiarism (either from another student's work or from an academic source) will result in a failing course grade. In other words, respect the work of others and in no way present it as your own. If you have additional questions about academic integrity and plagiarism consult the following web address: http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf

V. Students with Disabilities: "Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to providing students with disabilities equal opportunities to benefit from all programs, services and activities offered." Students with disabilities should identify to the instructor at the beginning of the course the services that they will need.

VI. A Note on Computers: Much of the work in this course will depend on regular use of Canvas and on email sent to and from your VCU email address. I will use **your VCU email address** for communication with you and will expect you to check it between each of our classes. The same is true for Canvas: I will post announcements there and you should check it between each of our classes. You will be able to access all of the course materials by going to <http://canvas.vcu.edu> (which will give login instructions) and to our course website: <http://bryantmangum.net/> This course website is a supplement to Canvas, and will have additional information not available on Canvas, so plan to be able to toggle back and forth between the two sites.

VIII. Additional Information Regarding VCU Policies: Further information about the policies referred to above and about relevant additional VCU policies can be found on our Canvas course site or at the following web address: <http://www.provost.vcu.edu/syllabi.html>

IX. Miscellaneous:

My office is 307 Anderson House (913 W. Franklin). The telephone number is 828-1255. I will post official office hours during which I will reliably be available for email, telephone, or Zoom conferences on Canvas and our course website, but if you need to see me at times other than those posted please feel free to set up a time during which we can make contact. There is a voice mail on my telephone, **but** you are more likely to reach me quickly if you email me. I check email often and usually reply promptly. My e-mail address is bmangum@vcu.edu. The address for my university web page is <http://www.people.vcu.edu/~bmangum>. The URL for our course website is <http://bryantmangum.net/>