“Professing Teacherhood: Reading Culture, Reading Teachers”

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THE COURSE DESCRIPTION:
From Socrates to “Sir,” divergent ideologies present in art and culture reflect our continued grappling with the teaching profession. Though tanned celebrities in PSA’s laud educators, stagnant teacher salaries, the promise of yearly furlough days, and plummeting funding rarely reflect such sunny sentiments. Administrators encourage instructors to instill leadership qualities in pupils but frequently balk when they take the lead and demand change. Principals cede authority over children to teachers, yet these professionals possess little agency in increasingly Draconian political frameworks. Conversely, state lawmakers across the United States vote to grant teachers and principals more authority by arming them with guns but will not support clear action that would allow these trained academicians to craft curricula to fortify students’ critical thinking skills. And veteran master teachers can struggle to balance the frustrations of administrative tasks with the joy that comes from interacting with
students. Often, their ennui is contagious, passed to pre-service teachers under their tutelage who may receive an overly-negative portrait of the job. And perhaps worst of all: we mandate innovation but back the establishment of rigid frameworks of standardization that can only obliquely reflect student learning and growth.

We possess polarizing suppositions about what professors and teachers can and do teach, all the while listening to pundits claim that instructors deploy insidious agendas while acting in loco parentis. Teachers at all levels are read and reread, judged on appearance, sexual orientation, representation of “appropriate” gender roles, race, and socioeconomic background. At the same time, they are trained to instruct students not to evaluate based on these selfsame qualities. Such contradictions and assumptions open a formidable gap between what the culture says about teaching and what the culture does to, for, and with teachers. As arbiters of culture, as analytical students, or as teachers always already in training, we must ponder in this persistently liminal space.

Seminarians will contemplate the image of teachers extant in representative films, prose pieces, and dramatic works. We will investigate ways in which various significations work to enforce cultural inscriptions, perpetuate vocational myths, problematize and revise dominate teacher narratives, or reveal emergent truths about the changing topography of the profession.

THE COURSE WORK:
Required Texts (in the order we will study them):

- Freedom Writers*, directed by Richard LaGravenese
- Up the Down Staircase, by Bel Kaufman
- To Sir, With Love, directed by James Clavell
- Moo, by Jane Smiley
- Proof, by David Auburn
- W; t, by Margaret Edson
- The Runaway Bunny, by Margaret Wise Brown
- Oleanna, by David Mamet
- Boy Toy, by Barry Lyga
- Half Nelson, directed by Ryan Fleck
- Chalk, directed by Mike Akel

*Each of the assigned class films is on four-hour, in-library reserve. All are available from Netflix and are also available in the University Bookstore for purchase.
Major Assignments:

- One discussion-generating teaching presentation on assigned primary and secondary material (20%)
- Two 3-4 page Response Papers (15% and 20% respectively)
- One 8-10 page conference-style paper on a teacher-centered text of your choice (30%)
- Collegial, active seminar participation (15%)

Detailed Description of Major Assignments:

Discussion-Generating Presentation on Assigned Primary and Secondary Material:

Each student will sign up for and create a discussion-generating presentation on primary and secondary materials assigned for a particular class day. During each thirty-minute presentation, students should focus not on what the material is about—we will all have read or viewed it—but rather on how the secondary material interprets the primary material and on how/why/whether the material fits in with course objectives, challenges common perceptions, creates ineradicable images, or raises salient points for our analysis. Students need not do extra research on their texts, though they may if they wish. To reach these goals, students should strive to do the following in their presentations:

- **Provide** a concise synopsis of the assigned or chosen article and primary material, isolating the central argument for our consideration and/or quoting particular passages of import;
- **Explain** his/her own well-informed opinion of the secondary author’s argument as it relates to the text at hand—here, I would expect that the presenter engage the argument, seek to support it further, or even refute it during discussion;
- **Develop** at least three complex, analytical questions for our consideration and discussion—preferably, these will be questions that ask us to further develop the secondary material’s argument or, conversely, to discuss new ideas arising from the secondary material;
- **Connect**, when applicable, the presentation’s content to earlier discussions, or contemporary issues we have discussed; and
- **Craft** a handout on which all aforementioned material and Works Cited appear so that your peers can follow along and then have a “take away” document for later study.

Most of the time, presentations will occur at the beginning of class and should always serve as catalysts for our group discussion. Students will sign up for presentations during the first week of classes. Students can expect a brief, written response and grade within five days of their presentation.
Response Papers:
Twice during the semester, students will choose class texts already analyzed or in
the process of discussion and write thesis-driven Response Papers on a specific aspect
they choose. Because these are shorter prose pieces, students should strive to narrow
down their arguments to one, central idea. Arguments should then be supported by
specific evidence from primary materials and/or suggested secondary materials found
on Docutek or presented during class. Students may meet face-to-face with the
professor to discuss ideas or drafts.

Scholarly Project:
Each student will choose a single text focused on our course theme—a film, non-
fiction piece, volume of poetry, or work of prose—and examine carefully the portrayal
of the educational system, students, and/or teachers in that text. Students will perform
scholarly research of their text and theorize, create, and support a major argument in
an 8-10 page essay plus Works Cited page(s). Students may not choose texts assigned
for the class but should seek out others which interest them. As with Response Papers,
students may meet with the professor to discuss ideas and/or to review a draft in
progress.

Collegial, Active Seminar Participation:
Graduate seminars require consistent, active participation from students. Such
participation depends upon attentiveness to all class readings while out of class and
devotion to each other’s ideas while in class. The workload in a summer semester
graduate seminar is intense; therefore, each student must commit to completing
reading and coming to class prepared to discuss ideas with peers and professor.
Whenever humanly possible, I have made certain to assign larger reading and/or
writing tasks from R to T; that way, you will have five days to complete longer pieces of
required work.

THE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:
Attendance:
Summer courses present challenges, for we must cover in eight weeks what we
would cover in sixteen, and graduate courses during the summer present further
challenges, as the workload is intensive. For these reasons, missing more than two of
our fifteen class meetings will be detrimental to your performance and grade. Any
student who misses more than two class periods cannot pass the course and should
drop if those absences occur before the mid-term drop date.

Americans with Disabilities Act and Accommodations:
Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Disability Services to
receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations
are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please notify your instructor in writing by the end of the second full week of class and include a copy of your Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Disability Services. Students are entitled to accommodations if they deliver the SAR to the instructor no later than the end of the second full week of class.

Any student who has a special need for which accommodations should be made should inform me by the end of the first week of this summer course. We will then set up a conference to discuss the specifics of the official paperwork you have from the appropriate department.

UWG Email Policy:

University of West Georgia students are provided a MyUWG e-mail account. The University considers this account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. The purpose of the official use of the student e-mail account is to provide an effective means of communicating important university related information to UWG students in a timely manner. It is the student’s responsibility to check his or her email.

I also ask that you utilize your West Georgia e-mail when communicating with me electronically. Remember, too, that FERPA law prevents me from discussing grades online or over the phone.

Credit Hour Policy:

The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

University of West Georgia Honor Code and Course Plagiarism Policy:

At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at
West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West Georgia students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing.

The Department of English defines plagiarism as “taking personal credit for the words and ideas of others as they are presented in electronic, print, and verbal sources.” The Department expects that students will accurately credit sources in all assignments. Plagiarism is grounds for failing this course.

Classroom Decorum:
Please turn off all electronic communication devices before entering our classroom. These devices are inappropriate in the classroom setting. If you must have access to such communication, please be sure that the device is set to signal you silently.

As for classroom etiquette, I expect passionate intensity during our discussions about the course material. I am here as a guide, not a lecturer, and your full attention, participation, and allowance for a multitude of voices are a must.

Website:
All information for this course can be found on my website: http://www.westga.edu/~ainsenga/ The class resource page and syllabus linked on my webpage offer guidelines for the course and pertinent readings. Check these pages often.

Required Format:
All coursework must be MLA documented and formatted. If you need a refresher on this documentation system, please examine the MLA link from Purdue’s OWL, or feel free to come see me.

THE DAILY SYLLABUS:
Note: You will find virtually all supplemental article titles assigned below on Docutek, UWG’s free electronic Course Reserve system. I provide easy directions to access Docutek below. Please print out assigned readings, read and annotate, and bring them to class for discussion on the appropriate syllabus days.

Directions to get into Docutek:
1. Go to http://www.westga.edu/~library/
2. Click on “Course Reserves” underneath “Find Information.”
3. Click on “Electronic Reserves and Reserves Pages.”
4. Enter the information requested (course number—6385—or instructor name—Insenga).
5. Click on course number for the appropriate semester (ENGL 6385, summer 2013).
6. Enter password (“read”).
7. Click “accept.”
8. Look at the list, find, and click on the assigned title.
9. The password for each article is also “read,” and some articles may also require the current Galileo password because of copyright laws. Follow site directions to get the Galileo password if you do not already have it.
10. Print out, read, and annotate the article(s).

○ **June 4**

Course Introduction: Cultural Assumptions, Critical Apparatuses
Taylor Mali: “What Teachers Make”
Sign up for presentations

- For next class:
  - Read "Imaging Teachers: In Fact and in the Mass Media" by Alicia Reyes and Diana Rios, found on Docutek
  - Read each of the links under the following subheadings on the class resource page, each of which will aid you as we work to analyze films as texts: “Suggestions for Successful Film Annotation” and “Various Resources for Analyzing and Writing about Film”
  - View and annotate Freedom Writers (remember, you can buy or get this film on four-hour in-library reserve)

○ **June 6**

Discuss Freedom Writers
Finish signing up for presentations

- For next class:
  - Read Up the Down Staircase, pages TBA
  - Read "The Cumulative Cultural Text of Teacher" by Sandra Weber, found on Docutek
o **June 11**
Discuss *Up the Down Staircase*
- **For next class:**
  - Finish *Up the Down Staircase*
  - Read "Elegy Written in an English Classroom" by Bel Kaufman, found on Docutek
  - I suggest beginning to work on your Response Paper

o **June 13**
Presentation One
Discuss *Up the Down Staircase*
- **For next class:**
  - View *To Sir, With Love*
  - Read "Taking Lulu Seriously: What We Can Learn from *To Sir, with Love*" by Roger Shouse, found on Docutek
  - Read *Moo*, pages 3-169
  - Continue to work on Response Paper One

o **June 18**
Presentation Two
Discuss *To Sir, With Love*
- **For next class:**
  - Read *Moo*, pages 169-254
  - Read "It’s a Small World, After All: Assessing the Contemporary Campus Novel" by Robert Scott and "Moo: An Anatomy of the Academy" by Gilbert Porter, both found on Docutek
  - Finish Response Paper One

o **June 20**
Turn in Response Paper One
Discuss *Moo*
- **For next class:**
Finish Moo

- **June 25**
  Presentation Three
  Discuss Moo
  - For next class:
    - Read *Proof*
    - Now is a great time to begin thinking ahead to the text you will write about for your final project

- **June 27**
  Discuss *Proof.*
  - For next class:
    - Read *Wit* and *The Runaway Bunny*
    - Read “Unwitting Redemption in Margaret Edson’s Wit” by Margaret Greene Eads, found on Docutek
    - Begin work on Response Paper Two

- **July 2**
  Presentation Four
  Discuss *Wit* and *The Runaway Bunny*
  - For next class (July 9):
    - Read *Oleanna*
    - Read “Framing the Classroom: Pedagogy, Power, Oleanna” by Stanton Garner and “Resistance and Authority: Film as a Tool to Train Teachers” by Donna Dunbar-Odom, found on Docutek
    - Finish Response Paper Two
    - Read *Boy Toy*, pages 3-80

- **July 4: No regular class or office hours—Independence Day holiday**
- **July 9**
  
  Turn in Response Paper Two  
  Presentation Five  
  Discuss Oleanna
  
  - For next class:
    
    - Read Boy Toy, pages 81-168

- **July 11**
  
  Discuss Boy Toy
  
  - For next class:
    
    - Finish Boy Toy
    - You should be deep into research and drafting your Final Project

- **July 16**
  
  Presentation Six  
  Discuss Boy Toy
  
  - For next class:
    
    - View Half Nelson
    - Read “History is Skunk” by Ryan Gilbey, found on Docutek
    - Study the website entitled “Dialectics for Kids: Dialectics Defined Since 1999,” linked on the class resource page
    - Continue work on your Final Project

- **July 18**
  
  Course Evaluations  
  Presentation Seven  
  Discuss Half Nelson
  
  - For next class:
    
    - View Chalk
    - Read “Themes in Sixty Years of Teachers on Film: Fast Times, Dangerous Minds, Stand on Me” by Barbara Beyerbach, found on Docutek
- Work on your Final Project

  - **July 23**

    Presentation Eight
    Discuss Chalk
    - July 25th at 5 p.m.: final project due via e-mail attachment