

Teaching guide for new faculty: University of Pittsburgh English Department

You will find a range of helpful resources for English department faculty on our website.

You should also feel free to reach out to Chair, Don Bialostosky, or to one of the Program Directors or Teaching Mentors for guidance about student expectations, local mores, range of students' prior knowledge, and more:

- For Composition: Jean Carr (Director)
- For Writing: Peter Trachtenberg (Director) and Jeff Oaks (Teaching Mentor)
- For Film: Neepa Majumdar (Director, Fall), Mark Lynn Anderson (Director, Spring)
- For Literature: Hannah Johnson (Director, Fall), Gayle Rogers (Director, Spring)

1. Course design

- There are several elements with specific boilerplate language that all syllabi in the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences must contain. See Appendix A below or click here for [more information](#).
- Schedule at least one hour of weekly office hours for each course you are teaching (if you are teaching two classes, schedule at least two hours per week). Departmental staff will ask for your office hours at the beginning of each semester; please respond in a timely way. Office hours should only be cancelled in case of emergency.
- In planning Fall term syllabi, please note the existence of Pitt's unusual "Fall Break" in mid-October (no classes Monday, Monday classes meet Tuesday, Tuesday classes cancelled). For date of Fall Break and other important deadlines and holidays, see [Extended Academic Calendars](#).
- Copies of syllabi are kept electronically for all courses. Send one copy to the curriculum coordinator, Chelsea Chaump (ChelseaChaump@pitt.edu) and one copy to your program's assistant at the beginning of each term. We are in the process of creating an online repository of syllabi that will be available soon.
- See Appendix B for program-specific suggestions about student workloads and teaching observations.
- For further teaching support resources, including workshops and individual consultations, see Pitt's [University Center for Teaching and Learning](#) (formerly CIDDE).

2. The implicit contract: our side

You will find that the majority of Pitt students are willing to treat each course as a shared space of professionalism and engagement, as long as they know that you are doing likewise. The following components of your side of that contract are particularly salient to students:

- At the beginning of term, provide a syllabus that lists specific readings and assignment dates for the entire semester. It is important to respect students' schedules and adhere to the syllabus except in unusual circumstances.
- Start and end class on time.

- Return graded assignments promptly. Papers or exams should be graded and returned no later than two weeks after submission. Professional and personal respect for students' work, as well as privacy laws (and concerns about college paper selling services), warrant that instructors return papers in person, either during class or office hours. Please do not leave stacks of student papers outside in the halls (they may well be taken by others).
- Do not cancel classes lightly. Aim for no more than one class cancellation per course per semester.

A. Planned travel

1. If you know in advance you will need to miss one class due to conference or other professional travel, you may arrange the course calendar in advance so that there is no course activity on that day.
2. If you know in advance that you will need to miss 2-3 class sessions due to conference or other professional travel, you should arrange for an appropriate substitute or provide appropriate out of class work (or electronic communication) and timely notice to your students.
3. If you need to undertake conference or other travel that will take you out of the classroom for 4 or more class sessions, please discuss this with your program director before the semester begins.

B. Emergency cancellations

1. If you have to cancel class on an emergency basis, in addition to letting students know please let the staff in the front office know as well.
2. If family or medical crises turn out to necessitate more than one absence, your Program Director can arrange for a long-term substitute.
3. Should you need to miss your office hours, please inform your currently-enrolled students as soon as possible and also ask a colleague or one of the department staff to place a note on your office door.

3. Resources for Helping Distressed Students

- If you are concerned about a student's emotional well-being or mental health, contact the [University Counseling Center](#) (412-648-7930). They can help you recognize your responsibilities and limits and develop a plan. You may also suggest the counseling center to students who appear distressed.
- If a student tells you they have a disability and they need special help, you should ask them to go to [Disability Services](#) (412-648-7890). Once the disability is documented, Disability Services will provide guidelines for helping the particular student. If you suspect that a student may have a disability but has not talked to you about it, consult someone at disability services about the best way to proceed before directly confronting the student.
- If a student is behaving in an inappropriate manner that you believe may require disciplinary action, you should contact **Student Conduct (contact person: Barbara Ruprecht, bar50@pitt.edu, 412-648-7910)**. Keep in mind, you will usually need to confront the student about their behavior issues and give them the chance to rectify them before a conduct report is filed (conduct reports can result in formal punishment by the school).

- If you suspect a student has committed plagiarism, consult the English Department's [Plagiarism Policies and Procedures](#). If you have a plagiarism problem with a student that you're not able to resolve on your own, contact the English Department's **Academic Integrity Officer Tom McWhorter**, thmcw@pitt.edu, 412-624-1737.
- If you believe you have experienced some form of sexual harassment or want further information, you may contact the English Department's sexual harassment officers, Julian Gill-Peterson or Ellen Smith, or the [Office of Affirmative Action, Diversity and Inclusion](#) (412-648-7860).
- Specific details about Pitt's policies and procedures concerning sexual harassment and discrimination can be found on the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#)'s website.
- If a student is behaving in a way that you feel is threatening to you, themselves or to another student, or if the student seems to be in the throes of a pressing mental health emergency, you should call **Campus Police. Emergency: 412-524-2121. Non-emergency: 412-624-4040.** They are trained in dealing with mental health issues.
- Click here for more [detailed advice about helping distressed students](#).

4. Academic Support for Students

- Located on the third floor of the O'Hara Student Center, the [Writing Center](#) offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for undergraduate and graduate students who want help with their writing.
- Academic support is also available from the [Academic Resources Center](#), located on the ground floor of the Gardner Steel Conference Center. In addition to peer tutoring, workshops, and consultations, the ARC provides programs to assist underrepresented students.

5. ESL Students

- You may have students in your classes for whom English is not the first language. There are approximately 800 international undergraduates enrolled at the Oakland campus. It is important to work out ways of helping your non-native speakers carry out the work of the course. Most of the accommodations (making sure assignments are written out, giving some advance preparation for and ways of breaking down a difficult text, working closely on particular kinds of sentence issues and on the reading of complex passages) are actually good for all students. Above all, don't let the appearance of ESL-related errors distract you from also paying attention to these students' ideas, content, arguments, and critical positions. Marylou Gramm is an excellent resource for advice about accommodations for ESL students. She has put together this helpful [tipsheet for working with ESL students](#).

6. Useful reminders

- You can check your course descriptions, meeting times, and enrollment caps at <http://www.courses.as.pitt.edu>.
- You are responsible for ordering your own books from the [University Store](#). The head of text book orders there is John Burns, jburns@bc.pitt.edu (412-648-1455).

- Requests for physical and electronic course reserves must be placed through the library one month before the term starts to guarantee all will be ready at the start of the semester. Click here for the [book reserve form](#) or [e-reserves form](#).
- Located in Hillman Library, Stark Media Services houses film, video, and audio collections that are available to faculty and students. You can request that a film be placed on [reserve](#) for students in your class to view in the Stark Media Services. You can also [check out a film](#) to show in a class.
- Hillman Library also offers eight-hour [rentals of equipment](#) including laptops, iPads, cables and headphones to all faculty, students, and staff.
- Our Curriculum Coordinator, Chelsea Chaump, will ask you for your course requests several months in advance of the start of each semester. Reply by the deadline she gives you. We make every effort to ensure that people get to teach courses they want to teach, but flexibility and communication are essential.
- Once you have been assigned your courses for a given term, you may choose to write a specific course description that advertises your section of each course. See current course descriptions at courses.as.pitt.edu.
- If you need audio-visual capacities in your classroom, please indicate that in your course preferences. If the assigned room has no AV or insufficient technologies for your purposes, please contact the Curriculum Coordinator about submitting a request for a room change. These cannot be guaranteed—space is very limited on campus, and ongoing construction projects make it even more limited—but they are possible through the Registrar’s office.
- New course proposals must be approved by the program’s curriculum committee 11 months in advance of the start of the semester in which you seek to teach them. If you are seeking Gen Ed credit designation, proposals must also be submitted to the school-wide Undergraduate Council. Submit your course proposal to the appropriate program director; it will then go to the curriculum committee of the program and, after passing that round, to the department’s executive committee for approval.

Appendix A: Required elements for syllabi

- A. Course Description
- B. Course Requirements
 - 1. Required texts and other materials
 - 2. Weekly assignments
 - 3. Papers/projects (number, type, length, and deadlines)
 - 4. Exams (number, type, and dates)

Please note: Students need to be evaluated in a substantial fashion before the deadline for Monitored Withdrawal, usually by the end of the ninth week of the term.

- C. Grading Policy:
 - 1. Relative weight of each requirement
 - 2. Policy on late work and make-ups

- D. Attendance Policy

- E. **The following statement from Disability Resources and Services must be in the syllabus:**
"If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout."

- F. **Academic Integrity Policy on cheating/plagiarism must be in the syllabus.** There is a prepared statement on the A&S website: "Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, from the February 1974 Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz or exam will be imposed. View the complete policy at www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html."

- G. **The E-mail Communication Policy must be included in the syllabus.** *Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu>, log into your account, click on **Edit Forwarding Addresses**, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html.)*

- H. **Turnitin:** Faculty who plan to use the *Turnitin* service to evaluate student papers for potential plagiarism must include the following statement in the course syllabus. Faculty using this service are encouraged to accommodate students who wish to use pseudonyms to protect their privacy. *Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com page service is subject to the Usage Policy and Privacy Pledge posted on the Turnitin.com site.*
- I. It's completely up to you whether you'd like to institute a "no screens" policy, but if you do, make sure it's written explicitly into the syllabus and discussed with students at the start of the semester. Be aware that students with documented disabilities may need to use laptops or tablets.
- J. **Office Hours:** The posting of office hours on the office door is University policy, and the responsibility of the faculty member as a courtesy and convenience to students. (Source: www.pitt.edu/~provost/ch3_off_hrs.htm). In addition, according to the *Academic Integrity Guidelines*, under *I. Faculty Obligations, Point 2*, faculty are "To be available at reasonable times for appointments with students, and to keep such appointments."

Appendix B: Student workloads and teaching observations by program

For the Writing Program:

A. Student workloads:

- Bear in mind that students often take five or more courses. Young writers will likely be glad to be reading contemporary writing, but may need some significant help learning how to read in a way that is nuanced, sensitive, and alert to issues of craft and structure. They may seem dismissive of anything that is difficult or requires historical context, so be prepared to provide some background for complicated work. Be prepared to help them work through the parts that they find difficult—slowing down where necessary, inventing writing prompts perhaps, or asking them to work on a problem in small groups. They may not have time to work through these issues except for in class. You might want to, at the beginning of the class, substitute discussions of important concepts or vocabulary for workshopping.
- In introductory level courses (numbered ENGWR 0400, 0520, 0530, or 0610), students should expect to do up to 30 pages of reading each week.
- In introductory level courses, there should be no more than four or five major writing assignments in total, including papers and exams. If all assignments are papers, a total word count of no more than 4,000 words (12 double-spaced pages) for the semester is reasonable. There should be built into your schedule time for revision and discussion of revision strategies.
- Capstone courses might include about 40-50 pages of reading a week.
- It is expected that NF and F students should complete a ms. of 10,000 words, submitted in 1,000-word installments. Ideally this should be a single coherent essay, novella, or reported piece, but students may also submit two shorter pieces with instructor approval. The final submission must be revised at least once, as evidenced by the submission of earlier drafts. In nonfiction capstone courses, all students are required to conduct some kind of independent research, e.g. interviews, readings of primary sources, and library or archival work. Research must be cited, using AP or MLA format.
- Capstone courses in poetry should include readings of 20 to 40 pages a week. Poetry students should complete a ms. of 40 pages of poetry, with significant space given over to revision.
- Of course, particular readings or particular writing assignments may be either very time intensive or less so, in ways that word counts and page numbers cannot capture. Use your judgment, keeping in mind that many of our most experienced faculty have concluded that more manageable loads bring more participation and more learning.
- Students get confused and frustrated if readings listed as “required” in the syllabus are neither explicitly referenced in lecture, nor explored in discussion, nor required for a written assignment or exam. Such readings may be better labeled “recommended.”

B. Teaching Mentorship and Observations

- If you are teaching creative writing for the first time, at least three weeks before start of each of your first two terms, you should send your draft syllabi to Jeff Oaks at oaks@pitt.edu for comments and suggestions.

Written by Jeff Oaks.

For the Film Studies Program:

The Film Studies Program has more in-depth guidelines for instructors teaching Film courses.

A. Student workloads for SC: Film:

- This course is primarily a *writing* class. Students should do some sort of writing every week (response papers, Discussion Board posts, first drafts, revised papers) and at least two papers should be formally revised. Writing assignments might be creative and/or analytical: the review, shot descriptions, close reading of scenes, character analysis, reverse screenplay writing, etc.
- We encourage at least one digital media assignment (audio essays, video mash-ups, visual essays, creating comics assignments, etc.). Some instructors ask students to remix an existing short film, create short films, or create a video essay.
- Typically, instructors schedule between 4-6 films for SC: Film. We do not recommend teaching more than 6 full length films in this course. Screenings must take place outside of class, and instructors regularly bring in clips for class discussion.
- Rather than assigning an Introduction to Film textbook, reading assignments should model the types of writing students will produce (reviews, personally reflective essays inspired by films, thematically centered essays, etc.). It is important to incorporate work with quotation and, sources, etc. into the instruction of writing.
- Many instructors also assign a writing handbook for this course.

B. Student workloads for Introduction to Film:

- Introduction to Film is a lower level General Education course designed for students from all majors and levels of study. Unlike *Film Analysis*, which focuses on the formal and technical aspects of cinema, this course offers students a broad introduction to the medium of film. Issues explored might include: the process of contemporary film production and distribution; the nature of basic film forms; selected approaches to film criticism; the role of cinema within culture and nation; comparisons between film and other media.
- Instructors are encouraged to assign an introductory film appreciation textbook for this course. While an occasional article is acceptable, we recommend only between 2-5 pieces that are appropriate for an introductory level. These can include excerpts from longer works, director interviews, or journalistic pieces on industrial and/or theoretical concepts.
- Introduction to Film combines lecture and discussion in a format that aims both for information dissemination and student interaction.
- Students are given multiple assignments, including shorter assignments (quizzes, group presentations, film journals, short papers, discussion board posts, blogs, video essays, and exams) and one required longer paper due at the end of the semester.

C. Teaching Mentorship and Observations

- All first time instructors of SC: Film are observed once in the Fall semester, ideally before Thanksgiving.

Written by: Dana Och

For the Literature Program:

Curricular level

The Literature program's course levels are carefully chosen to ensure that certain kinds of work are achieved and that students have a consistent experience across curriculum levels even when not taking the same courses. However, the Literature program is committed to teaching core skills of close, attentive reading, individual critical engagement, and literary research practices at all levels.

Concentrations

Please visit and familiarize yourself with the structure of the Literature major and where your specific courses fit within it: <http://www.englishlit.pitt.edu/undergraduate/major-requirements> Each track contains different emphases in content and skills, all while maintaining the core principles of the major articulated above.

Below are descriptions of the general characteristics of curricular levels. For more information about specific courses, contact:

Amy Murray Twyning, Assistant Literature Program Director, murraytwyning@gmail.com

Hannah Johnson, Literature Program Co-Director, hrjohn@gmail.com

Gayle Rogers, Literature Program Co-Director, grogers@pitt.edu

Note on W (Writing-Emphasis¹) courses:

Please check your course listing in PeopleSoft to verify whether or not it has a "W" attached to it. A W is only assigned to a course after it is reviewed and approved by the dean's office. Faculty and program directors cannot simply add or subtract a W from a course, either. It is vital that you take care in managing W or non-W listings because many students will be taking a W course specifically to fulfill a requirement in their undergraduate education career.

ENGLIT 0300

ENGLIT 0300 courses introduce students to the field of literary studies. They are also Writing-emphasis, or "W" courses². Therefore, these courses should include substantial attention to the craft of college composition along with the fundamental skills of close or attentive reading and of reading in context.

ENGLIT 0500

ENGLIT 0500 courses are generally introductions to disciplinary work or to a field of study. These courses should teach students the fundamental skills of close or attentive reading and of techniques

¹ The Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Writing-intensive requirement: "W-Courses are designed to teach writing within a discipline through writing assignments that are distributed across the entire term. Students should produce at least 20-24 pages of written work; a significant portion of this work should be substantially revised in response to instructor feedback and class discussion."

<http://www.as.pitt.edu/fac/teaching/general-requirements> These requirements apply to any W course regardless of level.

² There are rare exceptions to this rule; however, it is highly unlikely that any instructor will be assigned a 300-level course that is *not* meant to be taught as a W-intensive without direct communication from the Literature program administration.

particular to the discipline or field to which they belong. Some 0500 courses may also be Writing-emphasis, or “W” courses³.

ENGLIT 0600

ENGLIT 0600 courses are usually genre- or concentration-focused courses that introduce to students key texts and concepts of their respective fields. Generally, they are 35-students courses and not Writing-intensive.

ENGLIT 1000

ENGLIT 1000 courses are upper-level courses that conduct advanced study in a particular historical period, national or global literature, or literary tradition. Generally, they are 35-students courses and not Writing-intensive.

MAJOR SEMINARS

ENGLIT 1900, Project Seminar

The project seminar is a course in which students shape and pursue unique, individual or collaborative research projects to give greater depth and breadth to their study of the particular course topic and to contribute original scholarship. Students will learn and practice a variety of research methodologies, including those of digital humanism and those of more traditional literary study. Among the wide range of work done in the class, students: learn how to define an area of study, develop projects of different scope, conduct primary and secondary research in depth, use different presentation forms and platforms, and enrich their understanding of texts and meaning through deep and extensive study of their cultural contexts.

ENGLIT 1910, Senior Seminar (Capstone)

The capstone course for the English major, this seminar offers students the opportunity to study a particular author or critically relevant topic in depth with the kind of attention to detail and to historical and critical contexts practiced by advanced literary critics. The breadth of the readings gives students sufficient expertise in the area of study while the format of the class allows students to frame original research projects. The research and communication skills that students have acquired in the Major are put into play in the seminar as students, in class, present their own ideas in relation to others. The course should culminate in a substantial, high quality essay that advances an original thesis and demonstrates original research.

Teaching Mentorship and Observations

Those who are teaching literature at Pitt for the first time should send their tentative syllabi to Geoff Glover (gjglover@pitt.edu) at least three weeks before start of each of the first two terms. They will also meet with Geoff over the course of the year and schedule observations with him.

Diversity and Pedagogy in Lower Division Literature Courses

The breadth of study requirement for the Literature major and the broader diversity and non-Western requirements of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences are consonant with the longstanding core tenets and foci of Pitt’s English department, including the Literature faculty. The kinds of limiting

³ There are rare exceptions to this rule; however, it is highly unlikely that any instructor will be assigned a 500-level course that is *not* meant to be taught as a W-intensive without direct communication from the Literature program administration.

assumptions about originality, innovation, chronology, and influence that structured the traditional English major in the United States were challenged by our own colleagues decades ago. For that reason and others, even courses on traditional periods and figures in our department are given to faculty and instructors as blank slates, and neither the Literature program nor the department micro-manages or polices syllabi. Rather, we trust our instructors and faculty to be creative and flexible in fostering learning environments in which students think critically about the topic at hand, whether it's race or genre. Our students collectively bring to the classroom a multiplicity of experiences, and we believe we can both draw upon and extend that multiplicity in the texts we teach.

The Literature program aims to provide support and potential starting points for colleagues--especially those teaching in the lower division--who seek to do more than pay token attention to matters of diversity in the classroom. As the Literature major continues to add more courses that focus centrally on texts by minority, marginalized, non-Western, and other configurations of authors, the opportunities to expose early-career undergraduates substantively to such texts only becomes magnified. Whether it's something like starting a course on post-Civil War American literature with Octavia Butler's *Kindred* or guiding minority students on self-designed research projects that explore and contest the canon, many opportunities exist. Furthermore, for our minority students, representation in course content empowers their experiences at Pitt and encourages more students of color to enter graduate study in English. As we help prepare our students for whatever paths they next choose--in civic life, in courses of study, in professional experience--we aim to augment their abilities to discuss some of today's most pressing issues, especially those pertaining to racial, ethnic, and gender identities. In doing so, we hope to help them question the assumptions that many of them arrive with, such as the one in which we study minority or "global" authors in order to become better and more enlightened, more employable persons.

Example:

From the course "Masterpieces of the Renaissance," by Will Rhodes

Instructors of medieval and early modern literature have a great opportunity to structure course content around questions of diversity, showing the longer history of issues that are often only explicitly addressed in courses on modern and contemporary culture. Foregrounding these questions invites more creativity in course design than the usual chronological survey, and ties these earlier texts into a broader program of study that our majors might follow. For example, teaching Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* can provide students with a deeper historical perspective on the construction of race that can enrich their experience as they take courses in modern and contemporary literature. Focusing on diversity in medieval and early modern courses also provides a chance to break the linear chronology that defines literary periodization, and that often makes pre-modern texts seem encased in amber. Breaking this pattern means that a seminar could discuss, for example, the ongoing influence of Shakespeare on modern literature by pairing *The Tempest* with Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, or *Othello* with Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*. Diversity is often not addressed in early literature classes, which is a missed opportunity to teach the historical contingency of ideas about identity, difference, nation, and race. Luckily, however, there are many texts that ask for interpretation along these lines, from *Beowulf*, to Chaucer's "The Prioress's Tale" to Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*.

Written by: Amy Murray Twynning