

READING LAS VEGAS

ENG223 Fall 2011



ENG 223: Themes in Literature Courtney Danforth

Course Description: Themes and ideas significant in literature. May be repeated for a maximum six credits. Prerequisite: Satisfactory completion of ENG 101 or permission of Department Chair or Instructor.

Meeting times: This is a 3 credit course meeting from 29 August 2011 to 13 December 2011. As a 3 credit course, students are expected to allocate 145 hours to the course, an average of 11 hours each week. It is up to each student to plan a suitable weekly schedule that meets the demands of the course. Students are able to work ahead of the planned schedule insofar as they are able and our learning community will allow.

Instructor information: Courtney Danforth, best reached during this course via the email function inside of ANGEL. Please call me "Courtney."

Course objectives/learning outcomes:

- Use critical reading and writing skills to engage and analyze literary texts.
- Demonstrate the ability to connect and contextualize literary works.
- Demonstrate an awareness that literature reflects the diversity of human experience through universal themes.

Students' rights and responsibilities for CSN: <http://www.csn.edu/pages/660.asp>

Disabilities: Please read the CSN Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) statement and consult the CSN Disability Resource Center at <http://www.csn.edu/pages/2566.asp>. Your instructor is committed to providing the accommodations to which you are entitled.



Grades: There are 900 points available in the course. The grading scale is as follows:

861-900 points: A	615-655 points: C
820-860 points: A-	574-614 points: C-
779-819 points: B+	533-573 points: D+
738-778 points: B	492-532 points: D
697-737 points: B-	451-491 points: D-
656-696 points: C+	0-450 points: F

Policies on late assignments and/or makeup work: Late assignments are not accepted and makeup work is not offered except for extraordinary circumstances.



Required texts:

1. *Casino*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Robert DeNiro, Sharon Stone, Joe Pesci. Universal, 1995. DVD.
2. D'Agata, John. *About a Mountain*. NY: Norton, 2010. (9780393339017)
3. Logsdon, Richard, Todd Moffett and Tina D. Eliopoulos, eds. *In the Shadow of the Strip: Las Vegas stories*. Reno: UNP, 2003. (0874175496)
4. O'Brien, John. *Leaving Las Vegas*. NY: Grove, 1995. (9780802134455)
5. O'Brien, Matthew. *My Week at the Blue Angel*. Las Vegas: Huntington, 2010. (1935396412)
6. Thompson, Hunter S.. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: a savage journey to the heart of the American Dream*. NY: Vintage, 1998. (9780679785897)
7. Wolfe, Tom. "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! too noisy!) Las Vegas!!!!!" *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1965. (9780312429126) [provided as PDF]

Recommended texts:

1. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Dir. Terry Gilliam. Perf. Johnny Depp, Benicio Del Toro. Rhino, 1998. DVD.
2. *Leaving Las Vegas*. Dir. Mike Figgis. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Elisabeth Shue. MGM, 1995. DVD.
3. Pileggi, Nicholas. *Casino: love and honor in Las Vegas*. NY: Pocket, 2011.

Attendance Policy: Students are expected to check in to the course at least once each day, Monday-Thursday.

CSN Academic Integrity Policy: <http://www.csn.edu/pages/904.asp>

Instructor Academic Integrity Policy: All violations will be reported to the campus administration. In-course consequences range from failure of the assignment to failure of the course. As long as you are disciplined in your research, reading, and record-keeping, and clearly indicate all responsibilities and sources, you should be fine. However, it can be confusing to know what qualifies as plagiarism and how to avoid it. Make sure you know what you're doing. For help, see: http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_plagiarism_faq.html.

Withdrawal Policy: You must withdraw yourself by 4 November to get a W on your transcript. If you do not, I will record the grade you earn.

Course Schedule

This syllabus is subject to change as deemed appropriate by the instructor with advance notification.

29 August-1 September

- Read Syllabus and contents of "Orientation" folder (under "Course Content"); look at the textbooks and poke around in ANGEL to make sure you know how everything works.
- Take Orientation Quiz
- Choose a theme and post Theme Definition

5-8 September

- Post Reply to TWO Theme Definitions
- Read Wolfe (PDF available in ANGEL)
- Post Wolfe Theme Report

12-15 September

- Post Wolfe Peer Reply
- Read Logsdon (pages 1-73)
- Post Logsdon 1 Theme Report

19-22 September

- Post Logsdon 1 Peer Reply
- Read Logsdon (page 75 to end)
- Post Logsdon 2 Theme Report

26-29 September

- Post Logsdon 2 Peer Reply
- Read D'Agata (pages 1-106)
- Post D'Agata 1 Theme Report

3-6 October

- Post D'Agata 1 Peer Reply
- Read D'Agata (page 107 to end)
- Post D'Agata 2 Theme Report

10-13 October

- Post D'Agata 2 Peer Reply
- Read Thompson (pages 1-102)
- Post Thompson 1 Theme Report

17-20 October

- Post Thompson 1 Peer Reply
- Read Thompson (page 103 to end)
- Post Thompson 2 Theme Report
- Watch *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (RECOMMENDED: Gilliam, 1998 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120669/>)

24-27 October

- Post Thompson 2 Peer Reply
- Watch Casino
- Post Casino Theme Report

31 October-3 November

- Post Casino Peer Reply
- Read John O'Brien (pages 1-100)
- Post John O'Brien 1 Theme Report

7-10 November

- Post John O'Brien 1 Peer Reply
- Read John O'Brien (pages 101 to end)
- Post John O'Brien 2 Theme Report
- Watch *Leaving Las Vegas* (RECOMMENDED: Figgis, 1995 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113627/>)

14-17 November

- Post John O'Brien 2 Peer Reply
- Read Matt O'Brien (pages 1-120)
- Post Matt O'Brien 1 Theme Report

21-24 November

- Post Matt O'Brien 1 Peer Reply
- Read Matt O'Brien (pages 121 to end)
- Post Matt O'Brien 2 Theme Report
- Outline final paper
- Post Thesis for final paper

28 November-1 December

- Post Matt O'Brien 2 Peer Reply
- Post Thesis Peer Reply
- Draft Final Paper

5-8 December

- Post Final Paper Draft
- Post TWO Final Paper Peer Reviews

12-13 December

- Submit Final Paper

NOTE: All assignments are due by 11:30pm (pacific time) on their indicated due dates. At deadline, their links in ANGEL will disappear and you will no longer be able to access the dropboxes or submit your work. Please plan ahead.

Assignments

Orientation Quiz: After reading the syllabus thoroughly, investigating your textbooks, and getting to know the course site in ANGEL, this quiz will help to make sure you understand how the course will progress. You will have two hours to complete the 20 question quiz and are free to use any resources you have available (“open book”). You may take this quiz at any time during the first week of the course. The purpose of this assignment is for you to get familiar with resources, tools, protocols, and expectations for the course.

- The Orientation Quiz is worth 25 points towards your course grade.
- Due: 11:30pm, 1 September

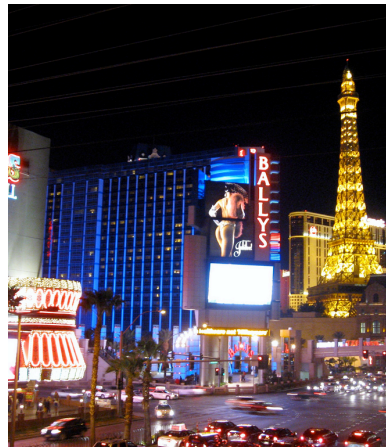
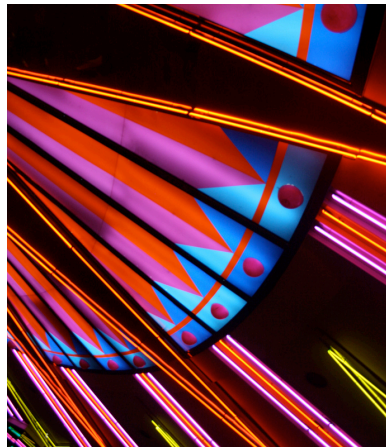
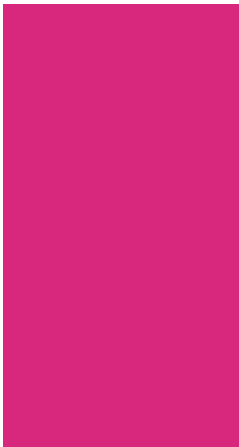
Theme Definition: Vegas is a strongly representational place—even people who have never been here about what Vegas is and how it works. These ideas appear as literary themes in the texts we will study in this course. Choose a theme from the list (available under “Orientation” on the “Course Content” tab in ANGEL). You’ll trace this theme all semester, in every text we examine. Before we get started on reading, though, it’s important to understand the theme you’ve chosen. Find at least four different definitions of your theme in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference sources. Quote the definitions and cite each accurately using MLA style (for help citing, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>). Discuss specific parts of each definition and how you expect to address that theme in the course. For example, if your theme is “celebration,” then you might say that Vegas has the reputation as an international party destination and you see at least five pre-wedding parties come into the restaurant where you work each week. If you’re already familiar with any of the course texts, you can mention any relevant sections, and if you can think of another Vegas-related text (a movie, a historical event, a book/poem/tv show...), you can discuss that too. Look up some synonyms and antonyms for your theme in a thesaurus. Use all your research and discussion to develop a working definition of

your theme and construct a 1000 word essay defining your chosen theme. Post your essay in the forum, using your theme as the title for your post (e.g. “Celebration”).

- The Theme Definition is worth 100 points towards your course grade.
- For help, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> (MLA Citation).
- Due: 11:30pm, 1 September

Theme Definition Peer Reply: This course constitutes a learning community—we will each be examining a different theme, but our texts and subject (Las Vegas) are the same. Read through some of the posted essays (on themes that are related to yours or that interest you) and post a 250 word reply to at least two (please try to make sure that everyone gets at least one reply). In your reply, introduce yourself and say what you know and/or love about Vegas. Tell your classmate what you thought worked well in his/her essay. If the author screwed something up, show him/her how to fix it. Give the author a couple of new ideas that s/he may not have thought of. You can quote and cite a definition from a new source if you can’t think of anything else. Write the kind of reply that you would like to receive on your own work, remembering that nobody wants to feel slammed by criticism, nobody wants to read pointless platitudes, and nobody wants dumb advice. You should post your review as a followup “Reply” to your classmate’s original posting of his/her essay. The purposes of this assignment are for you to get familiar with the discussion board functions of ANGEL, to establish relationships in the community that is this course, and to insure that you understand the theme you’ve chosen to work on all semester.

- The Theme Definition Peer Replies (two are required) are worth 10 points each towards your course grade.
- For help, see: <http://daphne.palomar.edu/jtagg/thinkpeerrev.htm> (Peer Review).
- Due: 11:30pm, 8 September



Assignments, con't

Theme Reports: There are twelve theme reports due throughout the semester (one due most weeks). These reports serve to keep you on track with the reading schedule, help you work incrementally towards your final paper, and are an opportunity to practice citation skills and discuss the readings with your classmates. For your convenience, there is a template posted as "Theme Report Template" in "Orientation" under "Course Content".

Each theme report is designed to build into your final paper. If you do an excellent job on the theme reports, you'll only need to write an introduction and conclusion, select the strongest examples of evidence (quotations) and group them intelligently, and do some editing, and you'll have your final paper done in a few hours. If you miss some of the theme reports, or do them poorly, you won't have the work already done when it's time to do the paper, and creating the paper is likely to be a frustrating and time-consuming process. You can give yourself the very best chance of success by committing to the incremental design of these assignments. Set yourself up for success!

Although there is plenty of evidence for each of the themes throughout the course readings, the evidence will not be consistently available in each title. In other words, there may be 42 examples of "greed" in *About a Mountain*, but only three in *In the Shadow of the Strip*. That's okay--try not to get frustrated and just plan to catch the groove again with the next reading. Some texts will be easier to "mine" for evidence than others.

For each theme report, you will research, write, and post a 500 word report of evidence related to your theme from the texts. For example, if your theme is "celebration", during the week we begin *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, you might quote the opening passages about the suitcase full of drugs. You must quote the passages accurately and correctly punctuated, and cite each passage using MLA format.

Each quotation should be followed by a sentence or two of explanation for how the quotation speaks to your theme. So, if you're looking at celebration in *Fear and Loathing*, then you might say that, while the plethora of drugs Raoul Duke and Dr.

Gonzo represent a likely near fatal cocktail, they intend to use them to enhance their trip and celebrate their vacation from LA. Sometimes the themes will be obvious and sometimes you'll need to stretch and argue to find enough to write about. Stretching and arguing is fine (as long as you do it well)!

Each quotation and explanation should also include a sentence or two that connects the specific example to another specific example from another assigned text, an unassigned text (we are not reading ALL of Vegas lit, so you can bring in another text with which you're familiar), or a personal anecdote. For example, if you've quoted and explained Thompson's opening paragraph about the trunk full of drugs, you could relate this to Alan dosing Doug, Phil, and Stu with Rohypnol (accidentally, instead of Ecstasy) in an effort to give them the best bachelor party ever in *The Hangover*--both are attempts, however misguided, to enhance celebration using mind-altering chemicals, in the body of Vegas literature.

The purposes of these reports are to keep you on track with the reading schedule, help you work incrementally towards your final paper, practice citation skills, and discuss the readings with your classmates.

- Each of these 12 Theme Reports is worth 20 points towards your course grade.
- Wolfe: 8 September
- Logsdon 1: 15 September
- Logsdon 2: 22 September
- D'Agata 1: 29 September
- D'Agata 2: 6 October
- Thompson 1: 13 October
- Thompson 2: 20 October
- Casino: 27 October
- John O'Brien 1: 3 November
- John O'Brien 2: 10 November
- Matt O'Brien 1: 17 November
- Matt O'Brien 2: 24 November

Theme Report Peer Replies:

This course constitutes a learning community--we will each be examining a different theme, but our texts and subject (Las Vegas) are the same. Read through some of the posted theme reports (on themes that are related to yours or that interest you) and post a 100 word reply to one. Please try to make sure that everyone gets at least one reply. In your reply, tell your classmate what



you thought worked well in his/her essay. If the author screwed something up, show him/her how to fix it. Give the author a couple of new ideas that s/he may not have thought of. Peer review includes both support and suggestion. Nobody wants to read a giant list of everything they did wrong and nobody wants to read an entire paragraph that just says, "I liked it" in fourteen different ways. Don't waste anyone's time. Write the kinds of peer reviews that would most help you as an author. As you respond to a classmate's work, you should take the opportunity to reflect on your own understanding of the texts and your theme, and your ability to write with and about literature. You should post your review as a followup "Reply" to your classmate's original posting of his/her essay. The purposes of this assignment are for you to evaluate and critique your classmates' reading and writing, review the assigned texts, and share ideas with your peers.

- Each Theme Definition Peer Reply is worth 10 points each towards your course grade.
- For help, see: <http://daphne.palomar.edu/jtagg/thinkpeerrev.htm> (Peer Review).
- Wolfe: 15 September
- Logsdon 1: 22 September
- Logsdon 2: 29 September
- D'Agata 1: 6 October
- D'Agata 2: 13 October
- Thompson 1: 20 October
- Thompson 2: 27 October
- Casino: 3 November
- John O'Brien 1: 10 November
- John O'Brien 2: 17 November
- Matt O'Brien 1: 24 November
- Matt O'Brien 2: 1 December

Assignments, con't

Thesis: Your final paper must be an ARGUMENT! Arguments require controversy, point of view, claims, evidence, proof, and attention to audience. They are not reports. You probably learned this mode of writing in English 101 or 102, but it won't hurt to brush up and make sure you're doing it properly. Read through this link (<http://tinyurl.com/3sxneeb>) to refresh your understanding of argumentative writing.

Read back through your Theme Reports and draw some conclusions about your theme across all the texts. For example, if your theme is "celebration," you might realize that every instance of celebration you located in the texts results in suffering, and you might see that every celebration involves biochemical manipulation, but none of them involves physical movement such as dancing. Once you've identified some conclusions, figure out what it all means. What difference does it make if Vegas celebrations cause suffering? Is that true for celebrations in other places? Who cares if there's no dancing in Vegas celebrations? What does that mean? If you can answer such questions, then you've got your argument, you've got your paper, and you're getting close to getting your A. Try to make an outline for your paper.

Can you express your argument in a single, complex, controversial, and compelling sentence? You'll need to in order to earn the highest marks on your final paper. Post your thesis in the forum so your classmates can read and critique it. They'll post replies that should help you write the best and strongest thesis you can for your final paper.

- The Thesis is worth 10 points towards your course grade.
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3sxneeb> (Argument).
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/5erybh> (Thesis).
- Due: 24 November

Thesis Peer Replies: This course constitutes a learning community--we will each be examining a different theme, but our texts and subject (Las Vegas) are the same. Read through some of the posted theses and post a 100 word reply to each of three. Please try to make sure that everyone gets at least two replies. In your reply, tell your classmate what you thought worked well in his/her thesis. If the author screwed something up, show him/her how to fix it. Give the author a couple of new ideas that s/he may not have thought of. Peer review includes both support and suggestion. Nobody wants to read a giant list of everything they did wrong and nobody wants to read an entire paragraph that just says, "I liked it" in fourteen different ways. Don't waste anyone's time. Write the kinds of peer reviews that would most help you as an author. As you respond to a classmate's work, you should take the opportunity to reflect on your own understanding of the texts and your theme, and your ability to write with and about literature. You should post your review as a followup "Reply" to your classmate's original posting of his/her essay. The purposes of this assignment are for you to evaluate and critique your classmates' reading and writing, review the assigned texts, and share ideas with your peers.

- Each Thesis Peer Reply is worth 10 points each towards your course grade.
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3vd5nf3> (Peer Review).
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3sxneeb> (Argument).
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/5erybh>(Thesis).

Final Paper: Vegas is a strongly representational place. Even people who have never been here have ideas about what Vegas is and how it works. These ideas appear as literary themes in the texts we'll be studying in the course and, by the end of the course, you have become an expert on (at least) one thematic aspect of Vegas culture.

Each theme report you wrote was designed to build into your final paper. If you did an excellent job on the theme reports, you'll only need to write an introduction and conclusion, select the strongest examples of evidence (quotations) and group them intelligently, and do some editing, and you'll have your final paper done in a few hours. If you missed some of the theme reports, or did them poorly, you won't have the work already done when it's time to do the paper, and creating the paper is likely to be a frustrating and time-consuming process.

Although there is plenty of evidence for each of the themes throughout the course readings, the evidence will not be consistently available in each title. In other words, there may be 42 examples of "greed" in *About a Mountain*, but only three in *In the Shadow of the Strip*. That's okay--you do not need to cite every course text in your final paper, though you should demonstrate mastery of your theme and facility with most of the course texts.

Read back through your Theme Reports and draw some conclusions about your theme across all the texts. For example, if your theme is "celebration," you might realize that every instance of celebration you located in the texts results in suffering, and you might see that every celebration involves biochemical manipulation, but none of them involves physical movement such as dancing. Once you've identified some conclusions, figure out what it all means. What difference does it make if Vegas celebrations cause suffering? Is that true for celebrations in other places? Who cares if there's no dancing in Vegas celebrations? What does that mean? If you can answer such questions, then you've got your argument, you've got your paper, and you're getting close to getting your A. Your final paper must be an ARGUMENT! Arguments require controversy, point of view, claims, evidence, proof, and attention to audience. They are not reports.

- Your 1500-2000 word Final Paper is worth 200 points each towards your course grade (the Draft is worth 15 points).
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3sxneeb> (Argument).
- For help, see: <http://tinyurl.com/5erybh>(Thesis.)
- Draft Due: 8 December (*NOTE: the earlier you post your draft, the more likely you are to receive multiple helpful peer replies in time to use their advice to polish your essay before submitting it for a grade)

Assignments, con't

Final Paper Peer Replies: This course constitutes a learning community. Although each student has examined a different theme, our texts and subject (Las Vegas) are the same. Read through some of the posted drafts and post a 250 word reply to at least two. Please try to make sure that everyone gets at least one reply. In your reply, tell your classmate what you thought worked well in his/her essay. If the author screwed something up, show him/her how to fix it. Give the author a couple of new ideas that s/he may not have thought of. Peer review includes both support and suggestion. Nobody wants to read a giant list of everything they did wrong and nobody wants to read an entire paragraph that just says, "I liked it" in fourteen different ways. Don't waste anyone's time. Write the kinds of peer reviews that would most help you as an author. As you respond to a classmate's work, you should take the opportunity to reflect on your own understanding of the texts and your theme, and your ability to write with and about literature. You should post your review as a followup "Reply" to your classmate's original posting of his/her essay. The purposes of this assignment are for you to evaluate and critique your classmates' reading and writing, review the assigned texts, and share ideas with your peers.

- Each of two peer replies is worth 20 points towards your final grade.
- For help, see: <http://daphne.palomar.edu/jtagg/thinkpeerrev.htm> (Peer Review).
- Due: 8 December (* Note: this is the same due date as the drafts--you're encouraged to post your drafts early so your classmates have time to provide good feedback on your paper)

Final Paper: After reading through the feedback you received from classmates on your final paper draft, consider whether the advice was helpful. Revise your paper as necessary to work towards the highest grade you can earn.

- Your Final Paper is worth 200 points each towards your course grade.
- For help, see: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/05/> (Revision)
- Due: 13 December

