

Spring 2018 | English 4346

The American Western



Co-taught by Professors Scraba and Miles
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:20 to 12:45

Catalog Course Description:

Detailed study of selected cultural ideas as they reflect on and are reflected by American literature. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 hours credit with change in course content.

Extended Course Description:

This course traces the genesis and evolution of the American Western from its colonial roots to its twenty-first century revisions. Through the exploration of fictional and quasi-fictional texts, we will examine how the project of Westward Expansion was reflected in and influenced by literature. By closely attending to representational and narrative strategies of 19th- and 20th-century novels, travel narratives, and films, we will learn how the imperative of expanding America “from sea to shining sea” – referred to in the 19th century as “Manifest Destiny” – has been justified, celebrated, and interrogated by texts who track its progress. We will also study the emergence and codification of genre: we will explore how a new type of literary work comes into existence by adapting older forms, and we will consider how the implicit rules of this new genre become established. In this study, we will pay particular attention to how writers on Westward Expansion construct class, race, and gender categories. Throughout the course, we will focus on how interpretations of Westward Expansion have been crucial in creating an American national identity.

Students will be asked to read deeply, view actively, write carefully, and speak energetically to create a community of scholars engaged in a critique of the meaning and importance of the Western. Attendance is mandatory; participation requisite. Progress will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, oral presentations, and written assignments, as well as two exams.

Course Objectives:

At the conclusion of this course the successful student should be able to:

- Recognize and discuss the formal aspects that define the Western as a genre.
- Trace the evolution of the Western in American literature from its colonial antecedents to its twenty-first century revisions.
- Speak confidently about how the Western relates to the larger sweep of American literature and history.
- Write with clarity, persuasion, and polish about literature and the social forces that affect it.