

**ENGL 4335: Senior Seminar**  
**The New Southern Noir**  
**TR, 10:50 a.m. to 12:05 p.m., Irby Hall 313**  
**Spring 2023**

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Office location: Irby Hall 317I

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### **Introduction**

Since it coalesced in the early 20th century, American noir largely has been an urban, coastal, and Northern phenomenon. Typically, the genre has been claustrophobically homosocial and racially homogeneous, too, producing texts in which white men use first-person narration to write about white men for a reader assumed to be a white man. Against this unlikely backdrop, one of the most intriguing developments in 21st-century American culture is playing out: the blossoming of a new Southern, and typically rural, multimedia noir. Challenges to myriad boundaries animate today's Southern noir, to include innovations in how we think about genre, geography, gender, race, ethnicity, and nation. Our course begins by centering itself in classic American noir, before we dive deeply into this emergent 21<sup>st</sup> century Southern noir. Writers we will examine include John Brandon, whose first novel, *Arkansas* (2008), recently was adapted into a major feature-length film. Brandon will visit our course to talk with students during his time on the UCA campus as an Artist in Residence in March. We also will read Raymond Chandler, Charles Portis, Jesmyn Ward, and Daniel Woodrell.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

This course fulfills English majors' UCA upper-division core capstone (Z) requirement. As an upper-division, seminar-style course, the class aims to help student better:

- employ close-reading strategies to analyze literary texts and films effectively, as well as scholarship responding to those texts and films.
- place texts in their cultural contexts, particularly with respect to the changing shape of the contemporary American South, its aesthetics, and its residents.
- articulate your interpretations of texts alongside those of your instructor and peers.
- write creative, sophisticated, structurally sound analyses of literature and film.
- arrive at your own understanding of the value of imaginative texts as means of uncovering truths and forging community.

### **COVID-19 Protocols**

#### *Masks*

For Spring 2023, there are no masking requirements in place at UCA. The university is following CDC recommendations, however, and may require masking, should a spike in local COVID-19 infections necessitate it. If that happens, our course would follow suit.

#### *Vaccinations*

The most important issue, relevant to COVID-19 and our course, involves vaccinations. The only

way you can effectively prevent yourself and your loved ones from becoming dangerously ill from, or dying of, COVID-19 is to get vaccinated against the disease. The vaccines are safe, effective, affordable, and readily available. Their rapid development, testing, and distribution is one of the great scientific and political achievements in American history. If you have not already done so, please get vaccinated.

### *“Pivoting” Online*

In the event that central Arkansas experiences such a severe spike in COVID-19 rates that UCA shifts to fully online instruction, our course will continue forward. We would pivot from in-person to online-synchronous instruction, and use Zoom for our online meetings. Since we already will be using Blackboard for much assignment distribution and collection, as well as grading, I do not anticipate interruptions where those issues are concerned. The key thing to note here is that you are responsible for holding open our class times on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 10:50 a.m. to 12:05 p.m., regardless of whether our course meets in-person or online.

### *Technology Requirements*

Each student in this class must possess a laptop or tablet that enables him or her to attend synchronous Zoom meetings. Each student also must have access to WiFi each Tuesday and Thursday, from 10:50 a.m. to 12:05 p.m., for the same reasons. There are several [WiFi hotspots on UCA's campus](#). You can learn the specific technological requirements UCA places on students [here](#).

### **Course Requirements and Assessment:**

I will base your grade in this course on the work you complete relevant to the following assignments:

25% **Formative Assessments**: You will complete frequent short writing assignments, inside and outside of class, during the term. Collectively, these assignments will total your formative-assessment grade. Think of FAs as chances to generate and get feedback on ideas that you later may develop into longer-form responses. *As such, feel welcomed to incorporate revised writing from an FA into a short essay or your final paper.*

35% **Short Essays**: This spring, you will write two short essays of roughly 1,500 to 2,000 words. These essays will be analyses of our primary course texts. The short essays also will require that you incorporate secondary source material we engage in class. For the short essays, you will need to make an argument that outlines how and to what purpose the texts you explore manifest a key theme that sheds light on our discussions of noir's changing shape. By doing so effectively, you will show your growing sophistication as a scholar of literature. *Note: just as is true of FA assignments, writing you complete for a short essay can be incorporated into your final paper.*

10% **Précis and Annotated Bibliography**: In advance of your completion of the final portfolio (see below), you will prepare a précis and annotated bibliography relevant to the portfolio's final-paper component. Your précis will consist of a 500-word explanation and defense of your plan for the final paper. Think of this document like an extended abstract, to which you wed to an outline of your argument and your plan for handling the logistics related to a major writing

assignment. Likewise, think of this document's reader as a peculiarly skeptical and nitpicky interlocutor. For the annotated bibliography, you will need to offer 250- to 500-word summaries of five peer-reviewed sources, material from which you plan to incorporate into your final paper.

30% Final Portfolio: Our course culminates with your submission of a portfolio on the day of the final exam. This portfolio must include your final paper, which is to be a research paper of no less than 3,000 words that showcases your skills in literary analysis. Your paper will need to advance a compelling argument about how we can read one or more of our primary course texts in a new way that enlarges our understanding of American noir. The paper will need to actively engage no fewer than five peer-reviewed secondary sources, too.

In addition, your final portfolio must include the following four components: (1) a paper from a lower-level English course you completed at UCA, which typically means one of our 2000-level surveys of American or British literature; (2) a paper you completed in an upper-level English course; (3) a self-assessment form relevant to each of these papers; and (4) a 500-word reflection on your growth during your time at UCA as a reader, writer, and critical thinker.

The course's grading scale functions as follows:

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| 100-90 | A |
| 89-80  | B |
| 79-70  | C |
| 69-60  | D |
| ≤59    | F |

### **Required Texts:**

You are required to have consistent access to the texts listed below and to bring those texts with you to class when we are slated to discuss them. All the novels should be available in the UCA Bookstore, should you wish to purchase them there.

#### *Novels:*

John Brandon, *Arkansas* (2008)  
Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939)  
Charles Portis, *True Grit* (1968)  
Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (2011)  
Daniel Woodrell, *Winter's Bone* (2006)

#### *Film:*

Joel and Ethan Coen, *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

### **Suggested Texts**

You are not required to purchase or review the texts listed below. However, you are more than welcome to do so and almost certainly will find that they enhance your understanding of American noir. These are the texts I would assign if we had many more weeks together to spend exploring the new Southern noir.

Should you choose to engage any of these suggested texts, you are more than welcome to write

about them when crafting short essays or the final paper.

*Novels, Memoir, and Stories*

James Dickey, *Deliverance* (1970)

Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (2012)

Gillian Flynn, *Sharp Objects* (2006)

Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Good Country People"

Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (2005)

Donald Ray Pollock, *The Devil All the Time* (2011)

Donald Ray Pollock, *Knockemstiff* (2008)

Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reaped* (2013)

Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)

*Films*

John Boorman, *Deliverance* (1972)

Joel and Ethan Coen, *Burn After Reading* (2008)

Joel and Ethan Coen, *True Grit* (2010)

Clark Duke, *Arkansas* (2020)

David Fincher, *Gone Girl* (2014)

Debra Granik, *Winter's Bone* (2010)

Henry Hathaway, *True Grit* (1969)

Howard Hawks, *The Big Sleep* (1946)

Jeff Nicholas, *Mud* (2012)

Michael Winner, *The Big Sleep* (1978)

*Prestige Television*

Nic Pizzolatto, *True Detective*, Season 1 (HBO, 2014)

Jean-Marc Vallée, *Sharp Objects* (HBO, 2018)

**Attendance Policy**

Please make every effort to attend all class sessions and to participate actively in each one. You are afforded two absences in this course before your grade will suffer. For each absence beyond two, your grade will drop half a letter. I may waive penalties for absences beyond two, if you present a compelling, documented reason for missing class (e.g., physician-confirmed illness).

**Late Assignments**

I will accept assignments up to three days late under the following condition: for each day the assignment is late, your grade drops a full letter. Weekends count as two days.

**Recording class**

No student is permitted to record our class sessions. We will discuss challenging topics all semester, and every member of our community must feel welcomed to take intellectual risks. Recording conversations mitigates against exactly that possibility.

**Academic Dishonesty**

I am required to report any act of academic dishonesty on the part of a student in this course.

UCA's penalties for academic dishonesty range from the receipt of a zero on an assignment to an "F" in the course to suspension or expulsion from the university. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, colluding, cheating on an exam or a quiz, and the submission of work you completed for a different course (e.g., "double dipping"). Once a student has committed academic dishonesty, I do not offer him or her a chance to revise or make-up that work. You can read UCA's full Academic Integrity Policy, which arrives as UCA Board Policy 709, [here](#).

If you find yourself struggling to complete an assignment on time, contact me to ask for an extension. I fully realize that writing does not always come together as quickly or as neatly as we would hope, and also that you have more going on in your lives than only our course. If you ask me for an extension in advance of a due date—especially if you are asking me for the first time—I am overwhelmingly likely to say "yes" and offer you my help. I deeply want to see each of you succeed. However, if you panic and plagiarize or "double dip" on a paper, I am highly likely to catch you and thereby have to report you.

### **Title IX Disclosure**

If a student discloses an act of sexual harassment, discrimination, assault, or other sexual misconduct to a faculty member (as it relates to "student-on-student" or "employee-on-student"), the faculty member is encouraged to report the act to the Title IX coordinator, deputy coordinator, or employee with the authority to institute corrective measures on behalf of the University. An investigation of a formal complaint of Title IX Sexual Harassment will only be initiated when the Complainant (individual who suffers actual harm from the violation of the Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy) or the Title IX Coordinator signs a complaint. For further information, please visit: <https://uca.edu/titleix/>.

*\*Disclosure of sexual misconduct by a third party who is not a student and/or employee is also encouraged if the misconduct occurs when the third party is a participant in a university-sponsored program, event, or activity.*

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS) at (501) 450-3613.

### **Building Emergency Plan**

An Emergency Procedures Summary (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS and Building Emergency Plan (BEP) documents for most buildings on campus are available at <https://uca.edu/go/bep-library>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he or she spends time for classes or other purposes.

### **Course Content, Civil Discourse, and Student Engagement**

Good English courses expose students to texts that treat difficult issues, because it is through the examination of challenging literature that we grow as readers, writers, professionals, and citizens. American literature generally, and Southern American literature specifically, offer us unique windows onto not only the United States' history of realizing incredible hopes, but also its legacies of racism, misogyny, classism, religious and anti-religious bigotry, ideological

sectarianism, and more. Sometimes our texts will challenge those ills in inspiring ways. At other times, our texts will be purveyors of those ills. Many times, our texts will simultaneously challenge and participate in affronts to human dignity. Much as is true of American history, the ethics of American literature, and the specific literatures of the American South, are complicated.

As a student in a university literature course, you must anticipate being challenged intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and morally. You must be ready to move through emotional reactions to texts, arriving at reasoned analyses and at all times responding to texts, your fellow students, and me with civility. Never will a student be required to “like” or “agree with” a course text. However, students will be required to fully engage each text, which means analyzing the text on its own terms—working to understand fully the text’s worldview, its historical and cultural moment, and its aesthetic commitments—before advancing a value judgment about that text.

You can learn more about how UCA English faculty select topics and texts for our courses at [Philosophy of Text and Topic Selection — English \(uca.edu\)](#).

## Course Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for our class. Note that readings are due on the day they appear. The same is true of writing assignments.

### WEEK 0: Getting Acquainted

R January 12 Introductions, syllabus, review elements of fiction

### WEEK 1: Noir's Origins

T January 17 Elements of fiction (con't)

R January 19 What makes noir "noir"?  
**Read** Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1<sup>st</sup> half)

### WEEK 2: Noir's Origins (con't)

T January 24 What makes noir "noir"? (con't)  
**Read** Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (2<sup>nd</sup> half)

R January 26 What makes noir "noir" (con't)  
**Read** Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" (Bb)

### WEEK 3: Noir in Context

T January 31 Noir and a modernizing America  
**Read** McCann, selection from *Gumshoe America* (Bb)

R February 2 Noir as pop modernism  
**Read** Jameson, "On Raymond Chandler" (Bb); and Burrows, "Noir's Private 'I'" (Bb)

### WEEK 4: Noir in Context (con't)

T February 7 Reading noir with intersectional lenses  
**Read** Abbott, selection from *The Street Was Mine* (Bb)

R February 9 *Arkansas* and the new Southern noir  
**Read** Brandon, *Arkansas* (1<sup>st</sup> third)

### WEEK 5: Introductions to the new Southern noir

T February 14 *Arkansas* (con't)  
**Read** Brandon, *Arkansas*, (middle third)

R February 16 *Arkansas* (con't)  
**Read** finish Brandon, *Arkansas*

### WEEK 6: Writing workshop

T February 21 Paper 1 peer review

R February 23 Optional check-in day

**\*\*\*\* SHORT ESSAY 1 DUE on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 26 \*\*\*\***

WEEK 7: John Brandon's Artist in Residency period at UCA

T February 28 Digest Paper 1 and prepare for Brandon's visit

R March 2 John Brandon visits our class

WEEK 8: Southern noir and the boundaries of genre and geography

T March 7 *True Grit*  
**Read** Portis, *True Grit*

R March 9 *True Grit* (con't)

WEEK 9: Southern noir and the boundaries of genre and geography

T March 14 Watch Coen Brothers, *No Country for Old Men*

R March 16 Watch Coen Brothers, *No Country for Old Men*

WEEK 10: No classes—Spring Break

WEEK 11: Southern noir and the bildungsroman

T March 28 *Winter's Bone*  
**Read** Woodrell, *Winter's Bone* (1<sup>st</sup> half)

R March 30 *Winter's Bone*  
**Read** finish Woodrell, *Winter's Bone*

WEEK 12: Southern Noir and the bildungsroman (con't)

T April 4 *Winter's Bone*

R April 6 Paper 2 peer review

**\*\*\*\* SHORT ESSAY 2 DUE on Blackboard by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, April 9 \*\*\*\***

WEEK 13: Southern noir at its most radical

T April 11 *Salvage the Bones*  
**Read** Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (1-57)

R April 13 *Salvage the Bones*  
**Read** Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (58-107)

WEEK 14: Southern noir at its most radical (con't)

T April 18 *Salvage the Bones*  
**Read** Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (108-176)



R April 20 *Salvage the Bones*  
**Read** Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (178-end)

WEEK 15: Preparing final portfolios

T April 25 Workshop on final portfolios

R April 27 Workshop on final portfolios

**\*\*\*\*\* FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE on Blackboard by 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 4 \*\*\*\*\***