

# COMM 5460: Narrative Theory

## Fall 2011

Instructor: Jay Allison  
 Office: GAB 309F  
 Phone: 940.565.2588  
 Office Hours: 10-12 WRF  
 and by appointment  
 Class meets: 2:30-5:20 T  
 GAB 301  
 Email: allison@unt.edu



\*"Daddy, what's gradual school?"

\*"What?"

\*"Gradual school. Mommy says she teaches at gradual school."

\*"Oh gradual school is where you go to school and you gradually find out you don't want to go to school anymore."

### Course Description:

NARRATIVE THEORY has a long and, as you might imagine, storied history (pun completely intended). Although this course will include many of the more recent developments in narrative theory, we begin our exploration with the Greeks, specifically Plato and Aristotle. From that starting point, we will examine the evolution of narrative through the "theory of the novel" to formalist studies of narrative fiction to the structuralists' development of "the science of narrative" (narratology). This examination will include a brief foray into the realm of storytelling on our way to an exploration of narrative as it is conceptualized by phenomenologists. The thinkers influenced by phenomenology will lead us beyond the realm of narrative as an exclusively verbal act to a consideration of narrative structure as the defining characteristic of everyday life. At this point, we will consider communication studies' own Walter Fisher who used both schools of thought in his development of the "Narrative Paradigm," a philosophical view of human communication in which Fisher confounds and obfuscates the work of both the structuralist and the phenomenologists. We will conclude our joint ventures with contemporary theoretical musings on the nature of narrative, after which you will take center stage with the presentation of your class projects.



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## Course Readings:

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### Stories

Carver, Raymond. "Feathers"

Carver, R. "So Much Water So Close to Home" (short)

Carver, R. "So Much Water So Close to Home" (long)

Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily"

Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants"

Mansfield, Katherine. "Miss Brill"

McAfee, Tom. "This is My Living Room"

O'Connor, Flannery. "Good Country People"

Rich, Cynthia. "My Sister's Marriage"

Smith, Lee. "Intensive Care"

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### Other Texts

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Aristotle. (1971). Poetics. In H. Adams (Ed.), *Critical theory since Plato* (pp. 48-66). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Bentley, P. (1967). Use of summary; Use of scene; Art of narrative. In P. Stevick (Ed.), *Theory of the novel* (pp. 47-57). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Booth, W. C. (1967). Distance and point of view: An essay in classification. In P. Stevick (Ed.), *Theory of the novel* (pp. 87-107). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Brandman, M. (Executive producer), Merlis, I. (Producer), & Lapine, J. (Director). (1991). *Into the woods* [Motion picture]. United States: Image Entertainment.

Carr, D. (1986). *Time, narrative, and history* (pp. 1-99). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Chatman, S. (1981). What novels can do that films can't (and vice versa). In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 117-136). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Chatman, S. (1981). Reply to Barbara Herrnstein Smith. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 258-265). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Fisher, W. (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action* (pp. 57-140). Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Forster, E. M. (1967). Flat and round characters. In P. Stevick (Ed.), *Theory of the novel* (pp. 223-231). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Friedman, N. (1967). Forms of the plot. In P. Stevick (Ed.), *Theory of the novel* (pp. 108-137). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Friedman, N. (1967). Point of view in fiction: The development of a critical concept. In P. Stevick (Ed.), *Theory of the novel* (pp. 108-137). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Geiger, D. (1952). A 'dramatic' approach to interpretative analysis. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 38, 189-194.
- Geiger, D. (1973). Poetic realizing as knowing. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59, 311-318.
- Gitlin, M. P., Khouri, C., O'Brien, D., Scot, R. (Producers), & Scott, R. (Director). (1991). *Thelma & Louise* [Motion Picture]. United States: MGM.
- Hardy, B. (1968). Towards a poetics of fiction: An approach through narrative. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 2(1), 5-14.
- Hernardi, P. (1981). On the how, what, and why of narrative. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 197-199). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jahn, M. (2005). *Narratology: A guide to the theory of narrative*. <http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.htm>
- Langellier, K. M., & Peterson, E. E. (2004). *Storytelling in daily life: Performing narrative* (pp. 1-156). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984). The virtues, the unity of a human life, and the concept of a tradition. In *After virtue: A study in moral theory* (pp. 190-209). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). Narrative time. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 165-186). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Plato. (1971). The republic. In H. Adams (Ed.), *Critical theory since Plato* (pp. 19-41). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Smith, B. H. (1981). Afterthoughts on narrative: Narrative versions, narrative theories. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 209-232). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Welleck, R., & Warren, A. (1956). The nature and modes of narrative fiction. In *Theory of literature* (3rd ed., pp. 212-225). New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- White, H. (1981). The value of narrativity in the representation of reality. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 1-23). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wimsatt, W. K., & Beardsley, M. C. (1971). The affective fallacy. In *Critical theory since Plato* (pp. 1022-1031). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Wimsatt, W. K., & Beardsley, M. C. (1971). The intentional fallacy. In *Critical theory since Plato* (pp. 1015-1022). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.



Evaluation			
Grading Scale:		Assignments:	
91-100	A: Exceptional	Discussion Questions/Creative Projects	30%
81-90	B: Solid Work	Literary Analysis	10%
71-80	C: Acceptable	Topic Selection/Annotated Bibliography	10%
61-70	D: Unacceptable	Final Presentations	20%
60 or below	F: Failure	Final Examination	20%
		Participation	10%



### Course Activities:

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**Discussion Questions/Creative Projects:** Over the course of the semester you will be asked either to produce written responses to a series of questions or to engage in some creative activity based on a prompt provided in class. These exercises will be based on the readings or on some other aspect of the class, and will serve as the basis for class discussions. Some of these will be performative, but fear not, we are defining that term broadly. How do you feel about creating a comic strip? Staging a scene? Telling a story?

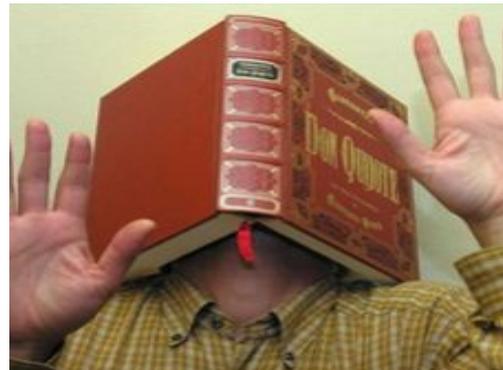
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**Literary Analysis:** You will write a literary analysis of a short story to understand a form of literary narrative analysis that served as the basis of American literary education from the 1940s through the early 1980s. The analysis, which will occur early in the semester, will introduce you to one form of narrative analysis that will serve as the basis for understanding the similarities and differences among the various conceptions of narrative we will discuss this semester.

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You major project for the course will be one of your choosing. Since narrative is ubiquitous, particularly as we are going to define it over the course of the semester, you may take your exploration in any direction you choose. The project may be related to a context (e.g., organizations or an organization), a discipline (e.g., science), an artifact (e.g., video games), a particular form of narrative (e.g., reality television), etc. These are merely examples. I will be happy to talk with you about ideas for the project. I encourage you to explore an area that is of particular interest to you, one that relates to your other coursework or research interests. The project will culminate in a 45 minute (including set-up and strike) final presentation. As there is no paper associated with the project, you need to be certain that the presentation is sharp and tight. To aid your classmates in preparing for the presentation, select readings for distribution the class period prior the presentation. The project is worth 30% of your grade in the course. Therefore, you need to identify your topic relatively early in the semester in order to devote adequate time to preparation. There are two assignments associated with the project:

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**Topic Selection Paper with Annotated Bibliography:** A 5 page paper in which you explain the specific focus of your project accompanied by an annotated bibliography of sources related to the topic. The sources in the bibliography need not all relate directly to narrative. For example, if you are examining narrative framing in reality television, the sources might include articles from media journals related to reality television or to the concept of framing that do not address the phenomenon from a narrative perspective. Your bibliography should contain a minimum of 7 sources.

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**Presentation:** The idea is to share the topic that has served as the basis for your project and to present your conclusions. The texts that you distribute to the class the previous week should prepare us for the presentation. These texts may be entirely theoretical in nature, although it might be more helpful to everyone to distribute a variety of texts, theoretical and practical. For example, you want to examine point of view in first-person shooter video games. If so, distribute the theoretical articles central to the presentation, but you might also consider distributing a text describing the game, the url for a free website

where one might experience that game or a similar game, or any other text (defined broadly) that would help your classmates prepare for the presentation. While a certain amount of your time will be allotted to a direct presentation of information, you should feel free to include discussion and/or a brief activity to help illustrate your conclusions. Be aware, though, that 45 minutes goes rapidly, and your first priority is to communicate the information. Any discussion or activity should help you achieve this goal and should not be mere window dressing. On the afternoon of your presentation, arrive early to set up and to troubleshoot any issues related to the presentation. For example, do not count on showing videos from the Internet. The connection in the classroom is abysmal on good days--if you plan to show videos, download them. At the conclusion of the presentation, you need to be prepared to provide me with a packet of information containing the following information:

- (1) a narrative explanation of your objectives for the presentation;
- (2) an outline of the presentation;
- (3) an explanation of key concepts;
- (4) copies of the texts you distributed as preparation for the presentation;
- (5) any additional materials (e.g., powerpoint slides), exercises, texts that you used in making your presentation; and
- (6) a final bibliography that includes all sources that you used preparing your project.



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**Participation:** I expect you to be prepared for class, which means completing all readings in advance as well as any assignment (discussion questions or creative activity). I also expect you to be an active member of our weekly discussions. This includes asking questions when you don't understand concepts, adding your 2 cents worth regularly, and being an enthusiastic participant in whatever activity might arise.

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### Course Policies

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**Attendance:** As a gradual student, you are expected to attend all class sessions. Absences will be considered valid only if they are officially authorized by the university, if they are acknowledged as a medical necessity by a physician, or if they are for a professional obligation scheduled prior to the semester and cleared in advance. Unauthorized absences will result in a deduction in your final average.



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**Incompletes**

Grades of Incomplete are governed by university policy. A faculty member can award an Incomplete only in cases where students meet these conditions: (1) the student has completed 75% of the work for the semester, and (2) the grade is warranted by a military or medical excuse.

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**Late Work**

One of the most important lessons you can learn in graduate school is time management. To that end, I anticipate that you will submit all work by the deadlines specified. I will accept late work only in circumstances where you have discussed the situation with me in advance and the request is warranted by issues other than time management difficulties.

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**Access**

I cooperate fully with the Office of Disability Accommodation to provide reasonable accommodation to students who require it. Students who wish to self-identify should register with the ODA immediately.

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**Academic Integrity**

All students shall adhere to the Code of Student Conduct outlined in the graduate catalog. Its provisions include the following statements regarding academic dishonesty:

**Cheating.** The willful giving or receiving of information in an unauthorized manner during an examination, illicitly obtaining examination questions in advance, using someone else's work for assignments as if it were your own, or any other dishonest means of attempting to fulfill requirements for a course.

**Plagiarism.** The intentional or unintentional use of another's words or ideas as if they were your own without giving credit to the source, including but not limited to failure to acknowledge direct quotations.

The punishment for academic dishonesty in a graduate seminar depends on the severity of the instance. The minimum sanction is a grade of zero on an assignment; the maximum sanction is failure of the course.

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**Emergency Situations**

In case of university closure due to emergency situations, such as inclement weather or a widespread infections disease (e.g., swine flu), I will communicate with you via the email distribution list that I have already established for the class.

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**Copier Use**

Students conducting research in GAB 301 associated with departmental coursework have access to the printer/copier in the adjacent office. We encourage students to make use of this resource to print sources accessed online or to copy essays from the department's holdings. Students may not use this resource for any other purposes, such as printing course assignments, class notes, scripts, etc. Students who use the copier for uses other than these will lose copying privileges.

<b>Course Evaluation</b>	Course evaluations are conducted online through the Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) program. This semester the evaluation period opens on Monday, November 28, and closes on Friday, December 16. Log onto my.unt.edu to access SETE and complete the course evaluation.
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### **Course Schedule**

What follows is my best guess at what we will be doing in class during any given week. Readings for the seminar will be distributed through Blackboard.

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus should not be considered a binding contract on the part of the instructor. I reserve the right to change any aspect of the course without prior notice.

<b>August 30</b>
<b>September 6</b>
<b>September 13</b>
<b>September 20</b>
<b>September 27</b>
<b>October 4</b>
<b>October 11</b>
<b>October 18</b>
<b>October 25</b>

Course Introduction <i>Into the Woods</i>
The Greeks: Plato and Aristotle Initial Definitions/Narrative as Doing
Theory of the Novel Narrative as Meaning
Anglo-American Narrative Theories at Mid-Century Assign Literary Analysis
Structuralism Narrative as Fictional Structure
Storytelling Narrative as Communication
Structuralism vs. Phenomenology Objectivity/Subjectivity/Being in the World
Phenomenology Narrative as Lived Structure
<i>Thelma &amp; Louise</i> Conceptualizing the Abyss/Life as Mere Sequence

<b>November 1</b>	Walter Fisher and the Narrative Paradigm Narrative as Hopelessly Muddled
<b>November 8</b>	Contemporary Conceptualizations of Narrative Case Studies/Readings TBD
<b>November 15</b>	Contemporary Conceptualizations of Narrative Case Studies/Readings TBD
<b>November 22</b>	Final Presentations Presenters TBD
<b>November 29</b>	Final Presentations Presenters TBD
<b>December 4</b>	Final Presentations Presenters TBD
<b>December 11</b>	Final Examination

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