

ENG H525: HONORS SEMINAR
SPRING 2021
TRUE CRIME

Class meets: T/TH 9:45-11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on Zoom

Credits: 4

Credit Hour Definition: www.suffolk.edu/syllabus

Instructor: Amy Monticello

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Office: 8th Floor Tremont, Rm. 8048

Office phone: 617-305-8273

Office Hours: M 2:00-3:00 p.m. by appointment. All office hours will be held on Zoom.

Prerequisites: WRIT 102 or WRIT 103

Course Modality (Online): Students not required to be on campus; instructor delivers course meetings 100% virtually. Instruction may be delivered asynchronously, synchronously, or with a combination of asynchronous and synchronous meetings.

Catalog description: Honors seminar that fulfills Group I of the English major.

EXPANDED DESCRIPTION

This year's Honors Seminar will be themed around true crime literature. True crime has been wildly popular in American reading habits since Truman Capote released *In Cold Blood*. Many readers are insatiable for the genre, which has undergone significant evolution and diversification since Capote. Today, the forms, authors, and approaches to true crime vary as widely as crime itself.

Why study true crime literature (including podcasts and documentaries)? As evidenced by the popularity of nonfiction books like Michelle McNamara's *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* and the podcast *Serial*, successful true crime texts may pull us in with the deviant, lurid, or outlandish, but endure through their ability to situate crime within various social and historical contexts, and examine it through lenses of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, regionalism, religion, and more. True crime is forever interested in the effects of crime on all of us, and the specific effects of crime on particular places and groups.

In this course, we will analyze how popular contemporary true crime texts locate the more universally human stories within specific incidents of crime (some infamous and some obscure). We are also interested in how our course texts elucidate and represent the roles of their stakeholders—the victims, perpetrators, investigators, communities, and narrators that populate the page. The texts we study this semester will also explore different types of crime—yes, murder and other violent crimes, but also white collar crime. Lastly, our texts will provide opportunities to consider the perspectives from which true crime is told—from those involved in a crime, to those who report it, to those who join the investigative process and search for justice.

I acknowledge that some of our course texts contain difficult subject matter, and may activate stressful responses. Please understand that I have chosen each text in this class to serve a particular purpose in our examination of the genre, and that you are not required to like our course texts even as I ask you to engage with them. If you are struggling with a text, please reach out and speak with me so we can discuss options. I will do my best to honor your comfort level wherever possible.

Your assignments in this course will include a mix of analysis, research, and creative writing wherein student interests will help drive major projects. I'm excited to see how you enter the critical conversations of this genre and how you might attempt to write true crime of your own!

An important note: Our class will be meeting online this semester, but we will hold all class meetings synchronously unless otherwise stated on the daily schedule or announced by the instructor. All students are expected to attend the synchronous class meetings on Zoom. If you anticipate or encounter circumstances that will prevent your live attendance, you must let me know immediately.

TEXTBOOKS/REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Michelle McNamara's *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*
- Mark Bowden's *Finders, Keepers: The Story of Joey Coyle*
- Alex Marzano-Lesnevich's *The Fact of a Body*
- David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon*
- Sheelah Kolhatkar's *Black Edge: Inside Information, Dirty Money, and the Quest to Bring Down the Most Wanted Man on Wall Street*

—Additional materials on Blackboard.

GRADING

94-100 = A	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+
90-93 = A-	84-86 = B	73-76 = C
	80-83 = B-	70-72 = C-
67-69 = D+	<60 = F	
64-66 = D		
60-63 = D-		

I will post grades on Blackboard. Please consider the online gradebook as a courtesy to you, subject to errors given various upgrades and shifts in the software. I reserve the right to make gradebook corrections to keep it consistent with the syllabus so that your grade reflects true

performance, not software or user error. If you see something that doesn't make sense, please alert me. Thanks for your help.

Late work policy: If you miss an assignment and wish to turn it in late, please consult with me as soon as possible (preferably ahead of the due date). I accept late work on a case-by-case basis.

ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Leading: 10%

Students sign up to lead reading discussion once during the semester. I expect each student to prepare about 25 minutes of material that invite the class to participate in an analytical conversation about craft, ethics, or other relevant topics, and to complete writing activities designed to assist with major projects. *Students may lead discussion more than once for extra credit as appropriate.*

Narrator Analysis: 15%

Students will prepare a short PowerPoint or Prezi presentation that studies the positionality of the narrator in two of our course texts to the crimes explored.

Comparative Analysis: 20%

Students will choose from a list of options on the assignment prompt that pair different course texts with questions about their authorial decisions.

Research Proposal: 15%

Students will devise a proposal for their capstone true crime project.

Capstone Project: 20%

Students will choose from a list of options that combine research, analysis, and creative writing. Projects may take several forms, from written essays, to podcasts, to videos and other forms. Will include a reflective component.

Honors Symposium Project: 10%

Students will adapt their capstone projects into a presentation for the Spring 2021 Honors Symposium. These presentations will describe students' research and literary analysis.

Participation: 10%

There are many ways to demonstrate engagement with our class materials, and I will work to give a wide variety of opportunities to participate for students of all learning styles and personalities. At its most basic, good participation means coming to class regularly and on time, having read the material assigned for the day, active listening, completing in-class writing and

other activities when assigned, and respectful, observant, challenging engagement with both published work and the work of our peers. Beyond that, I invite every student to contribute to our class dialogue, whether by speaking or chatting on Zoom during class and in small group work, posting responses on Blackboard, developing creative communities with your classmates, or even slipping me a question or comment via email to address in class (anonymously, if you prefer). If anything hinders your ability to participate, please speak with me and we'll discuss options.

Assignment/Activity	Engagement Estimated	Engagement Hours
Course Readings/Texts	1000 pages at 10 min/page	100
Discussion Leading	2 hours prep	2
Narrator Analysis	8 hours	8
Comparative Analysis	10 hours	10
Research Proposal	8 hours	8
Class Attendance	3 hours X 15 weeks	45
Capstone Project	15 hours	15
Symposium Presentation	5 hours	5

Total: 192 engagement hours

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	ASSESSMENTS
Upon successful completion of this course, students will know/understand:	Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:	How the student will be assessed on these learning objectives:
<i>The literary techniques, rhetorical approaches, and structures of popular true crime literature from the 20th-century to today</i>	<i>Read true crime from the perspective of a writer and literary critic</i> <i>Identify and analyze specific writing techniques to evaluate the rhetorical effect of an author's decisions on readers.</i>	<i>Narrator Analysis</i> <i>Comparative Analysis</i> <i>Discussion Leading</i> <i>Research Proposal</i> <i>Capstone Project</i>

<p><i>True crime as a literature of activism and advocacy</i></p>	<p><i>Identify the ways in which true crime texts offer representation to historically marginalized identities</i></p> <p><i>Analyze how true crime situates incidences within particular cultural and historical contexts</i></p> <p><i>Write about specific crimes in order to illuminate their social effects</i></p>	<p><i>Narrator Analysis</i></p> <p><i>Comparative Analysis</i></p> <p><i>Discussion Leading</i></p> <p><i>Capstone Project</i></p>
<p><i>The methods of researching crime using databases, news sources, court documents, police records, interviews, and memory</i></p>	<p><i>Define the conversations happening around a specific crime</i></p> <p><i>Situate the crime within its particular cultural and historical moment</i></p> <p><i>Place multiple sources into conversation</i></p>	<p><i>Research Proposal</i></p> <p><i>Capstone Project</i></p>
<p><i>The ethics of writing about true crime</i></p>	<p><i>Write original works of true crime</i></p> <p><i>Protect victims of crime in their writing</i></p> <p><i>Reflect on the significance of a crime on both individuals and communities</i></p>	<p><i>Narrator Analysis</i></p> <p><i>Discussion Leading</i></p> <p><i>Capstone Project</i></p>

University-Wide Policies and Academic Resources

Suffolk University has developed important academic and campus life policies that apply to all students. Some of these policies explain logistics such as credit hour requirements, filing academic grievances, and religious holidays, while others are about larger aspects of campus life, such as academic integrity and sexual misconduct.

We also provide many resources that support academic success and quality of life, such as our Center for Learning and Academic Success, Disability Services, Counseling, Health, and Wellness, Technology Services, and International Student Services. Lastly, Suffolk University has a student handbook that acts as a guide through your rights and responsibilities. These policies, the student handbook, and information regarding student resources (including contact info) can be found by following this link: <https://www.suffolk.edu/syllabus>.

To learn more, explore these webpages:

www.suffolk.edu/student-life

www.suffolk.edu/academics/advising-student-services

www.suffolk.edu/student-life/health-wellness

www.suffolk.edu/student-life/student-services/student-affairs/suffolk-cares

Please don't hesitate to contact me for help in navigating these resources. To learn how to best use your syllabus, please follow this link: www.suffolk.edu/academics/72770.php

Course Policies

ATTENDANCE

Per university policy, I take attendance daily. You may have good reasons for missing class on occasion. Perhaps you are sick or chronically sleep-deprived. Perhaps you fall in love. Perhaps Boston sees a glorious fall day that absolutely must be spent outdoors. **You may have 4 “good reasons” for free.** Please notify me of any necessary absences beforehand if possible.

After 4 absences, **every additional absence will detract 1/3 of a letter grade from your Participation grade.** If you must be absent for a week or more, please contact the Dean of Students Office at (617-573-8239/studentaffairs@suffolk.edu)

We may run into technical difficulties this semester using Zoom, Blackboard, and other digital tools—in fact, let's go ahead and assume we will. In the event:

1. Leave the class meeting and log back in.
2. If that is not possible, check your Suffolk email for a link to a new meeting that I will create so that we can resume class (this may take several minutes, so keep checking).
3. If that link also does not work or Zoom becomes inaccessible, check your Suffolk email for a Blackboard announcement for how our course syllabus will be adjusted to make up for the missed class time and how to prepare for our next class meeting.

We can make arrangements in the event of serious personal or family crises. The most important

thing is to reach out to me—or to someone—if anything is going on. Also reach out if you just get behind and feel overwhelmed, ashamed, and unsure of how you'll get it all done. We can help with that too.

CONTINGENCY PLAN

If I or Suffolk cancel class, such as during severe weather or illness, I will send instructions via Blackboard, including any revised due dates for assignment.

We will not meet on scheduled holidays, which are listed in the daily schedule. However, you are expected to continue your work on current assignments and prepare as indicated in the schedule for our next meeting.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Our ability to learn together depends on our ability to trust one another and feel comfortable in our classroom and digital environments. All students are responsible for taking an active role in their own learning experience, but also in the learning experience of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the success of our class, we will not allow behavior that may silence voices. Unacceptable behavior includes interrupting others, mocking or shallowly dismissing others' ideas/efforts/identities, carrying on conversations separate from class discussion, or deliberately making comments that could be perceived as racially, sexually, culturally, socioeconomically, or in any other way abusive.

However, learning challenges what we thought we knew and will occasionally be uncomfortable, requiring us to reconsider our assumptions, perceptions, and language. We will work together to show kindness and patience during the learning process, cheering each other on as we grow, change, and find our roles and voices.

DIGITAL ETIQUETTE

The world has been made anew due to COVID-19, and so, too, has Suffolk University evolved. This semester, we will be meeting via Zoom and Blackboard, which opens up new facets of class conduct. Here are the guidelines for our online environment. We will also work to come up with more on our own as we get to know each other:

1. Students are prohibited from making their own recording of lectures and classes, unless the recording is an approved disability accommodation in accordance with University policy. Please do not screenshot, either. Basically, respect everyone's privacy. All the time.
2. Class meetings Zoom may be recorded by the instructor. These recordings will not be shared outside our class. The instructor reserves the right to pause a recording should the class be

discussing sensitive information.

3. Conversations among students on Blackboard may be informal, funny, and even irreverent, but must still follow the class conduct rules listed in the previous section.
4. Please turn your video on. You may have reasons on occasion (streaming issues, connectivity, something personal, etc.) to turn your camera off, but otherwise please keep it on. It's vital for me to see facial expressions as part of my teaching.
5. Please mute yourself to cut down on background noise. Whenever you'd like to speak, raise your hand, alert me in the chat, or use Zoom's "raise hand" function.
6. You are invited to engage in the chat whenever you'd like. I highly encourage its use for comments, questions, highlighting passages from our readings, or sharing links.
7. Please keep your phones silent and out of the way as you would in a normal class. Additionally, please shut off audible notifications for social media and email.
8. Please refrain from scrolling other tabs on your browser during class.
9. Fun backgrounds are fine so long as they don't actually obscure your head or get too distracting. I'll let you know if I can't handle the *Game of Thrones* throne!
10. Do consider the lighting on your face. Unless you're going for that Shadowy Figure distinction, you probably want some light on your face.

Please check your email at least twice a day. I am always happy to correspond, and do my absolute best to respond to student emails within 24 hours.

TALK TO ME!

I don't expect anyone in this class to make it through on their own, including me. The best successes I've seen are things people accomplished together. Work with me, write to me, talk with me, even if you don't feel like you're struggling or in need of help. It's amazing what can happen when we're just kicking ideas around. If you have any questions or concerns about anything in this course, please e-mail or see me during office hours. I'd love to chat!

DAILY SCHEDULE

Except for things labeled "in class," all assignments and readings are due by class time on the dates listed. I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule as needed in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to better ensure student learning.

All course dates and times are set for the EDT/EST time zone. The course week begins on a Sunday, and the day ends at 11:59 PM (EDT/EST).

Key: BB= Blackboard

T Jan. 26: First Day of Class!

DUE by 9 pm: Perusing Your Syllabus assignment

Reading: None

In class: Introductions, defining the genre, Amy Butcher's "Women These Days"

TH Jan. 28: What We Talk about When We Talk about Crime

Reading: Melissa Chadburn and Carolyn Kellogg's "Who is Anna March?" (BB) and Narrator Analysis assignment prompt (BB)

In class: Narrator positionality, discussion leader schedule

T Feb. 2: Novelistic True Crime

Reading: Bowden, *Day One* and *Day Two*

In class: Place-centered true crime, characterizing the players

Discussion leader:

TH Feb. 4: Finding the Narrator

Reading: Bowden, *Day Three*, *Day Four*, and *Day Five*

In class: How does an author know what they know?

Discussion leader:

T Feb. 9: True Crime as Journalism

Reading: Bowden, *Day Six*-end

In class: The narrator-reporter

Discussion leader:

TH Feb. 11: True Crime as Memoir

Reading: Marzano-Lesnevich, Part One

In class: Hybridity in true crime, the "I" narrator

Discussion leader:

T Feb. 16: The Empathetic Narrator

Reading: Marzano-Lesnevich, Part Two

In class: The "invested" narrative persona

Discussion leader:

TH Feb. 18: Comparing narrators

Reading: Marzano-Lesnevich, Part Three to pg. 231

In class: Comparing Bowden and Marzano-Lesnevich as narrators

Discussion leader:

T Feb. 23: Finding a Perspective on Violence

Reading: Marzano-Lesnevich, Part Three to end

In class: Whose story is it?

Discussion leader:

TH Feb. 25: Comparative Analysis

DUE by 9 pm: Narrator Analysis

Reading: Clare Swanson's "Morbid Curiosity" (BB) and Comparative Analysis assignment prompt (BB)

In class: Writing activities, true crime podcasts

T March 2: White Collar Crime

Reading: Kolhaktar, Part One and Part Two

In class: Situating crime in context

Discussion leader:

TH March 4: The Historical and Cultural Moment

Reading: Kolhaktar, Part Three

In class: World-building in true crime

Discussion leader:

T March 9: Tropes in True Crime

Reading: Kolhaktar, Part Four-end

In class: Character tropes, familiar plot arcs, and archetypes in true crime

Discussion leader:

TH March 11: The Obsessive Author

Reading: McNamara, to pg. 50

In class: Author-as-sleuth vs. author-as-interviewer

T March 16: Handling Time in True Crime

DUE by 9 pm: Comparative Analysis

Reading: McNamara, pg. 51-122 and Capstone Project assignment prompt (BB)

In class: Woven narratives, scrambling the timeline

Discussion leader:

TH March 18: The Double Story

Reading: McNamara, pg. 123-end of Part 1

In class: The investigative narrative and the narratives of crime within

Discussion leader:

T March 23: Amateur Investigators

Reading: McNamara, Part 2

In class: How the Internet helps us tell new true crime stories

Discussion leader:

TH March 25: Unfinished Opus

Reading: McNamara, Part 3-end

In class: Completing the book with multiple authors, when the story goes on

T March 30: Voyeurism in True Crime

DUE by 9 pm: Research Proposal

Reading: Nadine Friedman's "Pulp Nonfiction" (BB)

In class: Why representation matters

Discussion leader:

TH April 1: Historical True Crime

Reading: Grann, through Ch. 4

In class: Crime as historical artifact

Discussion leader:

T April 6: Whose Stories Get Told

Reading: Grann, through Ch. 10

In class: True crime and social justice

Discussion leader:

TH April 8: How Many Stories Get Told

Reading: Grann, through Ch. 15

In class: Character relationships through an obscured narrator

Discussion leader:

T April 13: Reanimating the Past

Reading: Grann, through Ch. 21

In class: Resurrecting history through detail

Discussion leader:

TH April 15: Return of the "I" Narrator

Reading: Grann, to the end

In class: Using stakeholders to structure

Discussion leader:

T April 20: Studio

Reading: None

In class: Work on Capstone Projects

TH April 22: Studio

Reading: None

In class: Work on Capstone Projects

T April 27: Studio

Reading: None

In class: Work on Capstone Projects and Honors Symposium

TH April 29: Last Day of Class

DUE by 9 pm: Capstone Project

Reading: None

In class: Preparing for symposium further resources, and course evaluations

Honors Symposium: TBD