

## Syllabus for FSP 114 – Ways of Seeing the Poor – Spring 2014

Dr. Andrew Crooke

Liberal Learning Program

Mailroom: 109 Green Hall

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(allow 24 hours for reply)

Office Hours: Tuesday/Friday 11:30-12:30  
in Social Science 131 or Atrium

### First Seminar Program Academic Learning Goals

- To introduce students to college-level assignments and college-level expectations;
- To foster students' intellectual curiosity and nurture their personal responsibility;
- To improve students' abilities to think critically about their world, society, and beliefs;
- To encourage a student culture of intellectual engagement outside the classroom;
- To instill students with the concept of a well-rounded education based on a breadth of knowledge that goes beyond their immediate professional or academic field;
- To accomplish the appropriate Liberal Learning domain goals and any interdisciplinary concentration goals for the course; and
- To achieve the deep learning outcomes associated with TCNJ's 4th-credit hour through rigorous educational assignments extending beyond the scheduled meeting time, by way of out-of-class reading and writing that culminate in a progressive research project.

### Course Description

This first seminar addresses the ethical and esthetic dilemmas of giving voice to the poor. We will scrutinize various approaches to the representation of poverty and related experiences of marginalization, exploitation, or disempowerment. Drawn from an array of places, genres, and disciplines, our readings all revolve around the problems of putting impoverishment into words without producing impoverished portrayals. While some of the writers on our syllabus articulate firsthand how it feels to be poor or oppressed, others encounter or imagine their subjects from a position of relative privilege, one likely shared by their readers. Moreover, while some of these writers condemn social injustice or economic inequality and thus advocate for reforms that might alleviate hardships, others just as forcefully insist on a commonplace beauty, dignity, or tenacity that transcends disadvantage. Attentive to cultural, regional, and historical disparities, and to the intersection of class struggle with race and gender politics, we will explore the multifarious face of poverty and eternally fraught debates over how to depict it.

### Course Work

Building on our group discussions of the assigned readings and several individual reflections on the course theme, you will complete three analytical papers, each 3-4 pages, in addition to a 6-8 page research paper. I will supply targeted prompts for your essays and timely feedback during your compositional process, as will your classmates via peer review workshops. Your writing, whether formal or informal, should demonstrate serious engagement with the material at hand, through close textual interpretation and consciousness of connections to larger societal issues or literary concerns. When responding to books that incorporate images for more than illustrative purposes, or that have been paired with film selections, you may contemplate the visual as well as verbal predicaments of representing poverty. Just as its myriad dimensions will be revealed to you through the diverse accounts we examine together, so too your own ways of seeing the poor will be broadened and challenged as you write about this topic from different points of view.

Required Texts (available at the College Bookstore)

William T. Vollmann, *Poor People*, Harper Perennial, ISBN: 978-0060878849

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Beautiful Struggle*, Spiegel & Grau, ISBN: 978-0385527460

Diane Gilliam Fisher, *Kettle Bottom*, Perugia Press, ISBN: 978-0966045970

Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Plume, ISBN: 978-0452273870

John Berger, *From A to X: A Story in Letters*, Verso, ISBN: 978-1844673612

Note: You must acquire these books and bring them to class or else you will be marked absent. *The Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White, is recommended but not required. Supplemental readings will be distributed as handouts or posted as PDFs to the course website. In the latter case—mainly during week two—you are responsible for printing these selections out, reading them ahead of time, and bringing them to class on the days they are assigned. Our schedule may be revised as necessary; any changes will be announced in class or by email.

Essay Preparation

Each formal paper should be typed, double-spaced, in twelve-point font, with one-inch margins. Use MLA format and citation style. Number your pages and insert a header with both your name and my name. Try coming up with a distinctive title, which can often help you to gain direction and maintain focus. Be sure to proofread before printing a clean copy. You do not need a cover page, but please staple your paper.

Late Work

Essays are due at the start of class on the dates specified in the syllabus. Papers handed in after these times will be considered late, which will result in a grade reduction for each day beyond the due date until the paper arrives in my mailbox in 109 Green Hall. The final paper is due there by noon on Tuesday, May 6. Except in emergencies, I do not accept essays via email. Any late informal writings or missed in-class responses (without prior notification) will not receive credit.

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is essential to participation in this or any other course that revolves around class discussion. If you must miss a session, please let me know in advance and arrange to pick up supplemental materials. More than three absences will adversely affect your overall grade, and more than six will result in failure of the course. Arriving late or leaving early can be very disruptive, so two such occurrences equal one absence. Mere attendance, however, is only the beginning of useful participation. In short, you must be in class mentally as well as physically. Always bring the day's assigned reading, a writing implement, and sufficient paper. Stay alert for the entire class period. Please come prepared to listen attentively, to contribute your opinions thoughtfully, to engage in activities with enthusiasm, and to treat your classmates with respect. In order to keep distractions to a minimum, the use of cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices is not permitted for any purpose. Furtive texting, emailing, calling, chatting, browsing, etc., will drastically lower your participation score, since such acts are as disrespectful to your peers as to your instructor. I appreciate your cooperation in helping me to establish a hospitable learning environment for everyone involved in the course.

Resources

Visit me during my office hours or send me an email to discuss your writing and any concerns you may have over grading or other aspects of the course. Please allow at least 24 hours for an

electronic response. If you want additional assistance from individual tutors while revising your papers, contact TCNJ's Tutoring Center, located in Roscoe West Suite 101, 609-771-3325.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a reprehensible academic offense. It occurs when you include in your own written work any material from an outside source without properly citing it, even if only a few words or even if done unintentionally. In class we will talk about how to avoid plagiarism by using proper quotation and paraphrase. The minimum penalty for plagiarism is a grade of zero on the specific assignment. I will also report such instances of dishonesty to the Office of Academic Affairs, which will note the infraction on your permanent record and determine whether more serious consequences—failure of the course or expulsion from the College—are warranted. Please familiarize yourself with TCNJ's academic integrity policy.

### Assessment

Three Analytical Papers: 15 points each (45 points total)

One Progressive Paper: 25 points

Informal Responses: 15 points

Participation: 15 points

Points will be converted into letter grades, modified by pluses and minuses. When evaluating your papers, I will consider how well you are: formulating a thesis, organizing your argument, displaying originality, deploying textual evidence with accurate summary, meeting stylistic and grammatical standards, and finding and using sources.

Class Schedule (Readings should be done before class on the dates indicated below.)

#### *Week One*

T 1/21: introductions; expectations; selected poems by William Carlos Williams (handouts)

F 1/24: photographs by Paul Strand, Lewis Hine, Margaret Bourke-White, and Walker Evans; overview of photo-textual books on poverty, including *How the Other Half Lives*, *You Have Seen Their Faces*, *An American Exodus*, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, *A Way of Seeing*, *One Time, One Place*, and *Still Hungry in America* (in-class)

#### *Week Two*

T 1/28: selections from *The People of the Abyss* and *Down and Out in Paris and London* (PDFs)

F 1/31: selections from *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (PDFs)

#### *Week Three*

T 2/4: *Poor People*, xi-79

F 2/7: *Poor People*, 80-162

#### *Week Four*

T 2/11: *Poor People*, 163-236

F 2/14: *Poor People*, 237-294

#### *Week Five*

T 2/18: photographs from *Poor People*; **first paper due**

F 2/21: *The Beautiful Struggle*, 1-63

*Week Six*

T 2/25: *The Beautiful Struggle*, 64-150; foreword to *Manchild in the Promised Land* (handout)

F 2/28: *The Beautiful Struggle*, 151-223; selected poems (handout)

*Week Seven*

T 3/4: *Kettle Bottom*, 1-42; images from *New Deal Photographs of West Virginia*

F 3/7: *Kettle Bottom*, 43-85; **proposal for final paper due**

*Week Eight*

T 3/11: No Class, Spring Break

F 3/14: No Class, Spring Break

*Week Nine*

T 3/18: screening of *Harlan County USA*; song by Pete Seeger, "Mrs. Clara Sullivan's Letter"

F 3/21: screening of *Harlan County USA*; **second paper due**

*Week Ten*

T 3/25: *Under the Feet of Jesus*, 1-46

F 3/28: No Class, Professor Away

*Week Eleven*

T 4/1: *Under the Feet of Jesus*, 47-130

F 4/4: *Under the Feet of Jesus*, 131-180; selections from *The Elements of San Joaquin* (handout)

*Week Twelve*

T 4/8: *From A to X*, 1-76

F 4/11: *From A to X*, 77-138

*Week Thirteen*

T 4/15: *From A to X*, 139-197

F 4/18: film clips from *From I to J*; John Berger, essays from *Hold Everything Dear* (handout); Jean Mohr, pictures from *After the Last Sky* and *Side by Side or Face to Face: Israelis and Palestinians: 50 Years of Photography* (in-class)

*Week Fourteen*

T 4/22: Berger, "The Value of Money" and "Correspondence with Subcomandante Marcos" (handouts); photo-textual collaborations between Berger and Mohr; **third paper due**

F 4/25: stories by Sherman Alexie and poems by James Welch (handouts)

*Week Fifteen*

T 4/29: bring rough draft of final paper for peer review workshop; reflection on course (in-class)

F 5/2: no class, extended office hours in our classroom from 8:30-12:30

*Exam Period*

T 5/6: **final paper due by noon in 109 Green Hall**