

HSS 404-062 and HSS 404-042: Representing the Mind

Hybrid: each Monday (042) and Wednesday (062),
1-2:20 & asynchronous work

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1. Course Description

This class investigates how recent books and films depict the workings of human minds. How have artists represented their own thought processes and emotions? How do they depict what they might not have experienced—like memory degeneration, or a hallucination? How does their work reflect or resist their culture's views of mental disorders, those subject to inaccurate and frequently negative portrayals? We will explore works that take up these questions and others.

Like other sections of HSS 404, this course focuses on close reading and critical writing, asking you to continue to become a sharp, imaginative observer and effective communicator. You will reflect on poems, fiction, essays, and movies, making claims about how the content and form in each work connect, and about how each artist depicts minds in action.

2. Course Goals

- Describe and analyze films and texts in detail, through “close reading”
- Understand basic cinematographic techniques: discuss how such techniques affect meaning, and why a director might choose one approach over others for a given film or shot
- Understand basic literary techniques—how writers choose their words and make their sentences—and how those techniques affect meaning
- Make conscious decisions about writing style, to become more effective communicators
- Recognize the contributions of literature and film to human emotional and intellectual life

3. Prerequisites

ENGL 102 with a C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite.

4. What you have to buy

No text required for purchase, but you will need to rent several films.

5. Warnings!

Quite a few of the works assigned are disturbing, depressing, or controversial. There are sexual references, strong language, some violence, and reference to mental disorders that someone close to

you may be dealing with. In discussions, think about your classmates; respect for one another should be a consideration at all times. You are always welcome to talk with me further about any text before or after class.

6. Assignments

midterm essay	Weds., Mar. 12	10%
plan for the final essay	Friday, Apr. 11	5%
final exam	Weds., Apr. 30	15%
final essay	Friday, May 9	15%
forum posts	throughout semester	10%
in-class writing	throughout semester	10%
in-class participation	throughout semester	20%
presentation	sign up for a day [here]	15%

The links above will have guidelines for each assignment. See also the section on attendance, below.

7. Grading and Revising

Work will be evaluated according to the university's grading scale. If you are concerned about a grade, contact me as soon as possible. Waiting until the end of the semester means there will be no way to improve the grade.

A = 100-90 (superior) B = 86-80 (very good) C = 76-70 (acceptable) F = 59-0 (inadequate)
B+ = 89-87 (excellent) C+ = 79-77 (good) D = 69-60 (minimum)

If you want to improve a grade you got on a formal assignment, you can revise and resubmit it any time before the last meeting of this class. Before resubmitting, you need to meet at least once with someone at the Writing Center: bring them the assignment, your work, and my feedback, and ask them to tell me you went. After that meeting and after you've done all the revising you think the essay needs, email me the new essay, along with a short note describing what you changed and why, and I'll average out your original grade and revised grade.

If you want me to read an early draft of any assignment, we need to meet to discuss the work (in person, by Zoom, or by phone), at least 48 hours before it's due. But if at the last minute you have specific questions (for instance about a particular sentence or paragraph), please do email me and I'll answer as quickly as possible.

8. Attendance Policy

Fairly consistent attendance is necessary to do reasonably well in the class: I use class to assess performance, and classes give you the tools and practice you need to do well in the written work. If you have a lot of unexcused absences, do your best to make up for it by being as engaged as possible when you do come. See me early in the semester if you have any concerns about attendance or participation.

If you have an absence that NJIT can “excuse” (illness, family emergency, jury duty, a university event, etc.), please [ask the Dean of Students to review the request](#). They keep your personal information confidential and can email all your professors at once.

As to other absences, missing up to miss two classes -- not including the final exam or your presentation, for which you need a DOS note -- for will not affect your participation grade: at the end of the semester, I will remove the two lowest grades for in-class writing and for participation (so don't panic if you have a zero or two). Additional unexcused absences will gradually bring your participation and in-class writing grades down.

According to university policy, students who expect to miss classes or exams because of religious observance must send their instructors, by the end of the second week of classes, a written list of dates that will be missed.

9. Submitting Work

For any the essays, please make a .doc file; include your name and an interesting title. Use 1-inch margins and double-space. No need for hard copies; Canvas has submission links.

For in-class writing, I'll usually give you paper and collect it at the end of class, but you might be asked to send me something in a Google Form from time to time.

10. Late Work

Extensions are handled on a case-by-case basis: often it's possible, but it depends on the assignment. If we're discussing a given work in class that day, you're asked to submit your own rough notes/draft beforehand, to show that you did start thinking about your essay early. Without an extension or a note from the DOS, the grade of late work will go down by three points per day (e.g., from an 85 to an 82), until it hits a grade of 60. I do accept late work until the last day of classes, and as long as the work is clear about what helped you, it is literally always better to turn in work late than not at all. I will not give late work the same amount of feedback given work sent on time.

With presentations, sign up for a slot that works for you, as soon as you can. Changing days without a note from the DOS will result in a reduced grade for that assignment. No-shows without a note from the DOS will get a zero, though depending on our schedule you can make it up and I will average out the two grades.

11. Academic Integrity

Please read [NJIT's statement on academic integrity](#), with attention to the section on plagiarism.

When I encounter work that for any reason seems (a) as if it may be using other people's work (including AI work) and (b) is not clear about that use, NJIT requires me to send it to the DOS, so that their office can look into what happened. To avoid this, make sure you understand the following:

- This class is meant to help you become a stronger reader and writer; to do that you need to practice. The class will give you all the tools you need; you don't need other sources.
- What counts as plagiarism varies between fields; the standards for biology are different from those for a literature or film class. For this class—where your work is graded partly on how you're communicating your ideas—you need to be explicit and detailed about places where another writer helped you in any way. To evaluate your work, I need to understand where it is coming from.
- If anything you're writing uses an idea or language (even a few words!) of any other person, make that use clear to your reader (or audience, in the case of the presentation). *In the essay itself, right at the moment you use any idea or wording, you need to signal the particular use. And if you borrow somebody's wording, put it in quotation marks.* Here is a very short overview of the main problem I see, [accidental plagiarism](#).
- When in doubt, be clearer than you think you need to be.
- Don't use generative AI (like ChatGPT). It almost always makes your writing less clear, more boring, and more pretentious. And while doing so, it also [does a number on the environment](#).
- I strongly discourage people from using writing assistants like Grammarly, but if you decide to use one, 1) submit both the pre-Grammarly version and your final version, and 2) use only the features related to grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Don't use the features related to tone or vocabulary.
- To sum up: Please write these essays on your own, but as per above, if you make the decision to get outside help in any way, spell out that use. If you're worried about some aspect of your writing, get in touch with me.

12. Accessibility/Accommodations

If you think you may have any difficulties related to the format or materials of this course, or if you would like to discuss any accommodations that might be helpful, please contact me at the start of the semester. If you have a documented disability, or if you think you might have a disability, you should also be in touch with [OARS](#) (Office of Accessibility Resources and Services) to discuss requesting official accommodations.

13. The Writing Center

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute remote or in-person appointments with writing tutors, who can help with planning, structuring, or refining essays. You can make an appointment [here](#). When you go, please bring any rubrics/handouts, so the consultant can see how you'll be graded. And please ask the writing tutor to fill out a Writing Center report and send it to me, so that I know you are going and give you credit for making that effort.

14. If You Have Problems

If you find that you are dealing with a serious, life- and coursework-affecting problem, please do not just stop coming to class. Let both me and the DOS know, right away; the people in their office do want to help. Because of NJIT and HSS department policies, having the DOS involved may give me more flexibility in helping you with deadlines, etc.

15. Draft Schedule

This schedule is tentative and will change. Any Canvas announcements or emails take precedence over what's here. As of 12/31, all links work--but please let me know right away if one isn't working for you.

Week 1. Start

- Wed. Jan. 22. Syllabus, Chekhov.

Week 2. Dreams and Daydreams

- Weds., Jan. 29. Thurber, Keaton.

Week 3. Analyzing Films and People

- Weds., Feb. 5. Hitchcock, Corrigan.

Week 4. Emotional Realism

- Weds., Feb. 12. Ray, Bordwell

Week 5. Prose and Diagnoses

- Weds., Feb. 19. Wang, Davis, Sacks.

Week 6. Institutions

- Weds., Feb. 26: Forman, Lowell, Wang.

Week. 7. Complex Mental States in Poetry

- Weds., Mar. 5: Komunyakaa, Hayes, Parker.

Week 8. Fear, Grief, Depression, Trauma

- Weds., Mar. 12: Essay 1 due; discuss Žbanić and Hemon in class.

Mon., Mar. 17-Mar. 21: Break

Week 9. Insight and Anosognosia

- Wednesday, Mar. 26: Wray, Lowell, Ramachandran.

Week 10. Therapy

- Weds., April 2: *Sopranos*, Wallace, Davis.

Week 11. Intersubjectivity

- Weds., Apr. 9: Jenkins and potentially short poems.
- Friday, April 11: Plan for final essay due.

Week 12. Social media and minds

- Weds., Apr. 18. Burnham, Lockwood.

Week 13. Animation and Interiority

- Weds., Apr. 25: Hertzfeldt, Kon.

Week 14. TBD. Documentary?

- Weds., Apr. 30: potentially [*Prisoner of Consciousness*](#) and Sacks, "[The Lost Mariner](#)."

Week 15. End

- Weds., May 7. Final exam, in class.
- Fri., May 9: Final essay due at end of night, on Canvas.