

**English 8/7702 Contemporary Criticism and Theory**  
**Spring 2024 Monday 5:30-8:30 CRN: 16308/16309**

Professor Theron Britt,

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Office Hours: M 4-5 p.m. and by appointment

**TEXTS**

Vincent Leitch *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* Third Edition

ISBN-13: 978-0393602951

Peter Barry *Beginning Theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*, 4<sup>th</sup>

Edition ISBN-13: 978-1526121790

Note that the syllabus and other materials will be posted on Canvas.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course will explore contemporary questions of criticism and theory. We will begin with an exploration of poststructuralism and examine how this pervasive mode of literary theory has come to structure contemporary literary critical concerns with gender, race, and class. With that as a base, the course will then through a variety of theoretical and literary readings explore both the limitations of poststructuralist criticism and theory and as well the current critical modifications or challenges to it such as posthumanism, ecocriticism, the new materialism, cognitive theory, and actor-network theory.

This course is meant to give you a practical mastery of contemporary approaches to literary criticism and theory that will enable you to enter into current critical debates and thus help you in your other coursework. **No background in literary theory is required.** And depending on your specific career path, this course counts as a theory course, but for some students not in the literature major it can count as a literature course.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of current trends in contemporary literary criticism.
- Have a sophisticated understanding of the backgrounds to and concerns of contemporary literary theory
- Understand the practical application of literary theory to specific literary texts
- Have a critical understanding of how to use contemporary literary criticism as part of a scholarly paper about a literary work
- Understand and use the conventions of scholarly research and citation
- Produce a substantial seminar paper that demonstrates knowledge of contemporary criticism and theory

**GRADES:** Grades will be figured on a **1,000-point system**. There will be **ten weekly response paper assignments** focused on that week's reading (roughly two pages each, typed, double-spaced, **500 points total**). In addition to the response papers, students will develop their own specific interests via **a substantial seminar paper on a literary or theoretical topic** of their own choosing that engages with an aspect of literary or cultural theory covered in the course (**300 points**). And, in conjunction with their seminar paper assignment, all students **will give a class**