**ENGLISH 220:**

**Literature of American Minorities**

“If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.” -Audre Lorde

**THE PURPOSE OF THIS SYLLABUS**

Welcome to English 220! This syllabus contains all the vital information about this course—what you’ll be learning, what will be expected of you, and what you can expect from me. In short, it states what is required of both of us during the term. This is a valuable document, so please refer to it often. **The better you know the syllabus, the better the chance that you’ll do well in the course!**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

* Name: Matt Usner
* Email: [matt.usner@linnbenton.edu](mailto:matt.usner@linnbenton.edu)
* Phone: (971) 208-7175 (call or text; I’ll respond between 9:00 AM-5:00 PM)
* Virtual Office Hours: I’m happy to schedule a Zoom meeting with you at any point during the term if you have questions or concerns; just call, text, or email me to set up a time. Use this Zoom link to access our meeting: <https://linnbenton.zoom.us/my/mattusner>

**VIRTUAL MEETING TIMES VIA ZOOM**

* Wednesdays 11:00 AM to 11:50 AM via [Zoom](https://zoom.us/). **Use this link to access our virtual meetings:** [**https://linnbenton.zoom.us/my/mattusner**](https://linnbenton.zoom.us/my/mattusner)**.** If you’ve never used Zoom, start [here](https://zoom.us/download). Please have it downloaded and ready to go before our first virtual meeting.

**COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITE**

ENG 220 features a selection of works by writers from ethnic minority cultures within the United States. The works of these cultures generally have not been well-represented in traditional literature courses, and the views from these cultures often are in contrast to the more familiar representations of mainstream literature. These works reflect historical and cultural examples of discrimination and difference across the society. This course will explore how humans have dealt with this discrimination and how these cultures enrich the patterns of the American experience despite their experiences as minorities. College-level reading and writing skills (i.e., successful completion of WR 121), as well as completion of a college-level introduction to fiction class (i.e., ENG 104) are **strongly recommended** for success in this course.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

The 3 novels listed below are required for this class. Each has been ordered at the campus bookstore, but of course you are free to acquire copies from anywhere, including libraries and used bookstores. Refer to the course calendar at the end of this syllabus to see when you will need each book. In addition to these novels, there will also be some online readings required.

* *The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui
* *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett
* *There There* by Tommy Orange

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

In this literature course, we’ll read and study contemporary fiction selections from American minority writers. We’ll examine not only the narrative elements of these works—plot, character, setting, and so on—but also the thematic statements they make about the “real” world in which we live. We’ll explore their representations of difference, power, and discrimination and their implications for individual and collective identities for minorities in contemporary American society.

The heart of this course will be **reading and discussion**. As such, be prepared for a fairly substantial amount of reading, typically in the range of 80-100 pages a week (more for the graphic novel we’ll be reading). Even though the course will be conducted online, it will still be discussion-based in both spirit and practice. Our online discussion forums will give you the opportunity to express your ideas and engage with those of your peers, as will our required Zoom sessions (more details about these below).

Literature, like all forms of creative expression, is a lively art, and we’re obligated to treat it with lively attitudes in class. I promise to make this class as engaging as I can, but if you aren't interested in reading fiction—and thinking critically and openly while doing so—then this course may not be a good fit for you. I certainly hope it is though! **Note:** Some of our reading selections may contain offensive language and depictions of sexual and/or violent acts.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students who complete this course will be able to:

* Critically read, analyze, and interpret the literature of American minority writers.
* Explain how difference is socially constructed.
* Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination.
* Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.
* Identify and analyze complex practices, values, and beliefs, and culturally and historically defined meanings of difference.

**THE PURPOSE OF DPD COURSES**

This course fulfills the Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) requirement for LBCC’s Associate of Science programs and for OSU’s Baccalaureate Core. The DPD requirement engages students in the intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. The unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the United States and in other countries is sustained through a variety of individual beliefs and institutional practices. These beliefs and practices have tended to obscure the origins and operations of social discrimination such that this unequal power distribution is often viewed as the natural order. Examination of DPD course material will enhance meaningful democratic participation in our diverse university community and our increasingly multicultural U.S. society.

**ONLINE LEARNING WITH MOODLE**

The majority of this course is conducted via our Moodle site. All course content will be posted there, and this is where you will be submitting your assignments. Course content will be organized into weekly sections. Each week’s section will be made available at **9:00 AM on the Friday before the upcoming week**. So for example, the Week 2 materials will be available starting at 9:00 AM on Friday of Week 1. I always encourage you to start your weekly work as early as you can, but be aware that this isn’t a self-paced course where you can work ahead and finish the term early. If you are new to Moodle, I suggest taking a look at the college’s [*Current eLearning Students*](https://www.linnbenton.edu/staff-resources/college-services/information-services/services/elearning/current-elearning-students.php) page. You can also contact the Student Help Desk at 541-917-4630 or [student.helpdesk@linnbenton.edu](mailto:student.helpdesk@linnbenton.edu).

Because online learning requires a high level of independence and self-motivation, students who lack time management skills and self-motivation typically don’t fare well in this course. You give yourself the best chance to do well in the course by being proactive: logging-in to our course site frequently, reading online instructions carefully, paying close attention to the course calendar, and contacting me well ahead of time when you have questions, not a few hours before an assignment is due. Students who are not earning a passing grade at midterm and/or are not actively pursuing the course (i.e., many missed assignments, infrequent log-ins, etc.), may want to consider withdrawing (see more information about this below in the “Last Day to Withdraw” section).

Because this is a fully online course, you need to be comfortable with basic computer skills and have frequent access (ideally daily access) to a computer and the internet. You’re in good shape if you know how to navigate a web browser, post to a discussion forum, send and receive email, open PDFs, use Zoom, and use a text-editor such as Google Docs or Microsoft Word. **The college does not recommend using your phone as your sole computer device for online classes.** You may wish to review [the college’s minimum and standard recommendations for student technology equipment](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Iaq1NSAxhVj0knQNQZEcKQBJMKMGp8y4rM2CQ_zEHQE/edit?usp=sharing) for more information.

**REQUIRED ZOOM SESSIONS ON WEDNESDAYS 11:00-11:50 AM**

Our class has required Zoom sessions each Wednesday from 11:00 to 11:50 AM. (The link to access these sessions is in the “Virtual Meeting Times Via Zoom” section above and will also be posted on Moodle.) These short weekly sessions are opportunities to dialogue about our class readings, ask questions about assignments, and have some real-time presence with our class community. **Your attendance and participation at these sessions is required and will constitute a portion of your final grade**. I will log-on at approximately 10:50 A.M each Wednesday. Please join by no later than 11:00 AM. I would really appreciate if we all have our cameras on-this really helps build community--but I will not be requiring it. We see each other only once a week for 50 minutes; let’s make that time together as valuable as possible!

**COMMUNICATING WITH ME**

Aside from our weekly Zoom meetings, my main communication tool with you is **email** so it’s **essential that you check** [**your LBCC account**](http://www.linnbenton.edu/roadrunner-mail) **at least once daily.** In addition to having useful reminders for upcoming tasks, my emails will also often provide valuable course content that complements the current assignment we are working on. **Checking email frequently and reading my messages carefully is your best way to stay current in the class!** I have a 24-hour turnaround when replying to emails Monday through Friday, although I typically reply much sooner than that. On weekends, I typically do not check email. When you have questions about an assignment, do not until a few hours before it is due to email me. Instead, be working on the course content early, and allow yourself time for questions--and time for me to answer those questions. I’m also happy to videoconference with you; just email me to schedule a time.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

| * ***Week 1 Assignments (25 points = 7% of final grade):*** There will be 2 Moodle assignments during our first week. For the first, you will introduce yourself in a discussion forum and begin exploring some broad ideas about reading fiction; **this first one will be worth 10 points**. In the second assignment, you will work in small groups in a forum to exchange ideas about defining the key works that appear in our course title: “literature,” “American,” and “minorities.” **This second one will be worth 15 points. Both of these Week 1 assignments will count as your attendance for the first week of the term.** If you don’t complete them on time, and have not contacted me up to that time, you will be marked as a “no-show” for the class and will lose your spot on the roster. * ***9 Reading Responses (10 points each = 80 points = 21% of final grade):*** Starting in Week 2, you will be writing short, informal reading responses for each of our weekly readings. These will be due on Tuesday of each week. I make these due early in the week to encourage you to start your weekly reading early. These informal responses are opportunities for you to react to our readings, pose questions about them, make connections to other readings, and reflect on their meanings. **There will be 9 weekly reading responses, but only your 8 highest scores will count, which means you are free to skip one with no negative effect on your grade. Each will be worth 10 points.** * ***9 Discussion Forums (120 points = 32% of final grade):*** Also starting in Week 2, there will be a group discussion on selected aspects of the week’s reading. These discussions are designed so that you can interact with a small group of your classmates while doing a “deeper dive” on some aspects of our readings. In addition to posting your response to your chosen question, you will also need to read and reply to at least one of your classmates’ posts--and sometimes my posts as well. This activity is designed to work in much the same way as a face-to-face class discussion, but of course your writing will be a bit more thought-out and organized than it might be in a spoken conversation. **Each discussion will be worth 15 points**: 10 points for your initial post and 5 points for your reply. **There will be 9 forums, but only your 8 highest scores will count, which means you are free to skip one with no negative effect on your grade. Your response to your chosen discussion question will be due by Thursday of each week; replies to your classmates will be due anytime between Friday and Sunday.** This ensures that you interact with the forum at least twice a week. **You can earn one extra credit point if your response to your discussion question is posted by Wednesday.** Note that missed discussion forums cannot be made up. * ***Project (100 points = 27% of final grade):*** This assignment will take the place of a final exam, so think of it as a capstone project. It will present you with a few different options, such as writing a researched literary analysis, constructing a visual presentation, or doing an individual creative project. The goal will be to dig deeper into the issues raised by our readings. A project proposal will be required near midterm. **The project will be due on Tuesday of finals week (Week 11)**. * ***10 Weekly Zoom Sessions (5 points each x 10 = 50 points = 13% of final grade):*** As you know, we will be having required Zoom sessions each **Wednesday from 11:00-11:50 AM**. We’ll be using these sessions primarily to share reactions to our readings and to discuss class assignments, but we’ll also be doing short assignments during these sessions as well. Be prepared to be an active participant. |
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**GRADING**

You can earn up to **375 points** in this course:

| **ASSIGNMENTS** | **POINTS** | **% OF FINAL GRADE** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2 Week 1 Assignments | 10 + 15 = 25 points | 7% |
| 9 Weekly Reading Responses (8 highest scores count) | 8 x 10 points each = 80 | 21% |
| 9 Weekly Discussion Forums (8 highest scores count) | 8 x 15 points each = 120 | 32% |
| Project | 100 | 27% |
| 10 Weekly Zoom Sessions | 10 x 5 points each = 50 | 13% |
| **POINT TOTAL** | **375** | **100%** |

Your final grade will be determined by the following point breakdown:

| **GRADE** | **TOTAL POINTS** | **DESCRIPTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | 375 to 336 points (89.6% and up) | Passing work that is excellent |
| **B** | 335 to 299 points (89.3% to 79.7%) | Passing work that is good |
| **C** | 298 to 261 points (79.4% to 69.6%) | Passing work that is adequate |
| **D** | 260 to 224 points (69.3% to 59.7%) | Non-passing work that is inadequate |
| **F** | 223 and below (59.4% and below) | Non-passing work that is fundamentally lacking |

**IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES AND CAMPUS RESOURCES**

* **No-Show Policy:** Students may be **dropped from the class** if they do not complete the first week’s assignments and attend the first Zoom session.
* **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:** Presenting someone else’s ideas in writing as if they are your own is plagiarism, and it is a serious academic offense. **Any plagiarized elements in your writing will result in, at minimum, a zero for the assignment and, at maximum, automatic course failure.** If you ever borrow information from an outside source to put in an essay, you must cite it properly. If you’re not sure how to do this, please ask me for help before submitting your assignment. Once you submit an assignment, the policy mentioned above will be enforced. I strongly suggest that you review [the college’s administrative rule on academic integrity and honesty](https://www.linnbenton.edu/about-lbcc/administration/policies/board-policies-and-administrative-rules/7000-series-student-services/ar-7030-02.php).
* **LBCC Student Email:** You are responsible for all communication sent to [your student email](http://www.linnbenton.edu/roadrunner-mail), so be sure that you are checking it frequently.
* **The LBCC Writing Center:** [The LBCC Writing Center](https://www.linnbenton.edu/student-services/library-tutoring-testing/learning-center/writing-support/index.php) (WH-200) is a fantastic free resource for students interested in improving their writing skills.
* **The LBCC Library:** [The LBCC library](http://library.linnbenton.edu/home) is located on the first floor of Willamette Hall.
* **Center for Accessibility Resources (CFAR):** LBCC is committed to inclusiveness and equal access to higher education. If you have approved accommodations through [the Center for Accessibility Resources (CFAR)](http://linnbenton.edu/cfar) and would like to use your accommodations in this class, please talk to your instructor as soon as possible to discuss your needs. If you believe you may need accommodations but are not yet registered with CFAR, please contact them for steps on how to apply.
* **Non-Discrimination Policy:** Everyone in the LBCC community has the right to think, learn, and work together in an environment of respect, tolerance, and goodwill, and we will honor that in our class.
* **Title IX Reporting Policy:** If you or another student are the victim of any form of sexual misconduct (including dating/domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment), or any form of gender discrimination, LBCC can assist you. You can [report](https://linnbenton-advocate.symplicity.com/public_report/index.php/pid073717?) a violation of our [sexual misconduct policy](https://www.linnbenton.edu/about-lbcc/departments-and-contacts/report-an-issue/harassment-and-misconduct.php) directly to our Title IX Coordinator. You may also report the issue to a faculty member, who is required to notify the Coordinator, or you may make an appointment to speak confidentially to our Advising and Career Center by calling 541-917-4780.
* **Basic Needs:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the [Roadrunner Resource Center](http://www.linnbenton.edu/RRC).
* **Last Day to Withdraw:** Each term, the Friday that concludes Week 7 is the last day for students to withdraw from a course. If you are still enrolled after this point, you must receive a grade. Be aware that withdrawing from a course can impact your financial aid, so be sure to contact the [Financial Aid Office](https://www.linnbenton.edu/tuition-and-admission/financial-aid/contact.php) before withdrawing.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

The week-by-week schedule below contains all course topics and assignment due dates; follow it carefully!

| **DATE** | **ZOOM SESSIONS**  <https://linnbenton.zoom.us/my/mattusner> | **READINGS** | **MOODLE ASSIGNMENTS** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***WEEK 1***  Mon 9/27 to Sun 10/3 | Wednesday, 9/29 11:00-11:50 AM | None | • Wk 1 Introduction Forum due Tue  • Wk 1 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 1 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 2***  Mon 10/4 to Sun 10/10 | Wednesday, 10/6 11:00-11:50 AM | *There There* 3-97 (to end of “Calvin Johnson”) | • Wk 2 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 2 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 2 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 3***  Mon 10/11 to Sun 10/17 | Wednesday, 10/13 11:00-11:50 AM | *There There* 98-196 (to end of “Daniel Gonzalez”) | • Wk 3 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 3 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 3 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 4***  Mon 10/18 to Sun 10/24 | Wednesday, 10/20 11:00-11:50 AM | *There There* 197-290 (to end) | • Wk 4 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 4 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 4 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 5***  Mon 10/25 to Sun 10/31 | Wednesday, 10/27 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Best We Could Do* up to page 172 (chapters 1-6) | • **Assign Project**  • Wk 5 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 5 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 5 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 6***  Mon 11/1 to Sun 11/7 | Wednesday, 11/3 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Best We Could Do* 173-329 (chapters 7-10) | • Wk 6 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 6 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 6 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 7***  Mon 11/8 to Sun 11/14 | Wednesday, 11/10 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Vanishing Half* 1-77 (to end of ch. 3) | • Wk 7 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 7 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 7 Discussion Replies due Sun  • **Project Proposal due by Sunday** |
| ***WEEK 8***  Mon 11/15 to Sun 11/21 | Wednesday, 11/17 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Vanishing Half* 81-161 (to end of ch. 7) | • Wk 8 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 8 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 8 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 9***  Mon 11/22 to Sun 11/28 | Wednesday, 11/24 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Vanishing Half* 163-261 (to end of ch. 13) | • Wk 9 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 9 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 9 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 10*** Mon 11/29 to Sun 12/5 | Wednesday, 12/1 11:00-11:50 AM | *The Vanishing Half* 265-343 (to end) | • Wk 10 Reading Response due Tue  • Wk 10 Discussion Question due Thur  • Wk 10 Discussion Replies due Sun |
| ***WEEK 11***  Mon 12/6 to Sun 12/12 | None | None | **• Project due by Tuesday, June 7th** |