

English 391ml: Multilingualism and Literacy in Western Massachusetts

Course Description

This course explores literacy in the lives of adult language and literacy learners in the communities surrounding UMass. Grounded in the field of Literacy Studies, an area of English Studies that examines the practice of community-based, non-academic writing, the course connects “school” literacies to the “everyday” literacies that impact all of our lives. Beyond exploring what “literacy” and “multilingualism” mean in our current moment, we will examine the following questions:

- Why is literacy understood to be important and why does that understanding persist?
- How is literacy in English the same or different as literacy in multiple languages?
- How do people come to be praised or condemned for their literacy practices?
- How does a diversifying society define literacy as effective, creative, or failing?

Community Engagement

This class is a unique opportunity to participate in a community-university collaboration on literacy and language learning. The course is a designated “Service-Learning” course and is endorsed by the office of Civic Engagement and Service-Learning at UMass. In the second half of the semester, our class will partner with the International Language Institute in Northampton (ILI), which supports the language learning of community members, immigrants and refugees, professionals, international students, and scholars. This work will happen in two ways: 1) supporting ILI students through tutoring and mentoring, and 2) writing curricular, logistical, or creative materials for the organization. The course fulfills a service-learning requirement for the UMass interdisciplinary Certificate in Civic Engagement & Public Service (CEPS).

Learning Goals

English 391 aims to be useful, providing writing support for ILI and community experience for UMass students. But it also aims to be important, complicating commonplace assumptions about literacy, applying such complications locally, and helping all of those involved develop more nuanced understandings of literacy’s impact on local communities:

- Students understand how literacy impacts individuals and communities; students understand how community learning can shape that understanding.
- Students participate in the reality of literacy learning outside the classroom.
- Community members and students connect to each other’s life experiences through literacy.
- All participants connect literacy as skill with literacy as cultural, economic, and political force, demonstrating knowledge of the root causes of literacy’s problems and promises.

Course Texts

Buying into English: Language and Investment in the New Capitalist World by Catherine Prendergast

Illegal Alphabets and Adult Bilingualism: Latino Migrants Crossing the Linguistic Border by Tomás Mario Kalmar

American by Paper: How Documents Matter in Immigrant Literacy by Kate Vieira
Writing and Community Action: A Service Learning Rhetoric by Tom Deans
From the Community, to the Community: A Guidebook for Participatory Literacy Training by Elsa Auerbach

Course Assignments

1. Literacy Analysis (1000 words)

An analysis of literacy beliefs. The goal of this paper is to critically examine how scholarly understandings of literacy are or aren't compatible with everyday understandings of literacy. Choosing one of three analytic options—analysis of literacy beliefs in immigration news, in your family, or online—you will explain what you think the consequences are of how literacy is understood beyond our classroom.

2. Connection Paper (1250 words)

An analysis of literacy theory in practice. As we explore several theories of multilingual literacy—the standard language myth, language subordination, rhetorical attunement, buying into English—this paper asks you to consider these concepts in light of your experiences creating materials for or working with multilingual writers. The goal of this paper is to “connect” theory to practice, critically examining how scholarly understandings of multilingual literacy play out in action.

3. ILI Engagement and Materials (variable length)

Around mid-semester, you will begin dedicating two hours per week to the International Language Institute (ILI) in Northampton. Depending on the ILI project you participate in, you will craft a text for use by the ILI. These written projects may include an international homestay guidebook, curriculum for a driving course, materials for tutoring, or website copy.

4. Reflection Notebook (8 entries)

About once per week, you will be writing ungraded reflective analyses and responses to community experiences in a Reflection Notebook kept on Moodle. Notebook entries should be 250-300 words and are due at midnight the night before they appear on the syllabus. These notebook entries are the generative writing for your papers as well as a log of your service experiences that will serve as data for your literacy philosophy.

5. Literacy Philosophy (1000 words)

Drawing from your reading, thinking, reflection notebook, and papers from the entire semester, you'll write a reflective literacy philosophy that illustrates where you now find yourself among the competing social and academic understandings of literacy explored in the course.

Grading	Literacy Analysis	20%
----------------	-------------------	-----

Connection Paper	20%
Literacy Philosophy	20%
ILI Engagement and Materials	15%
Reflection Notebook	15%
Reading, Participation, Workshops	10%

Course Calendar *

Week 1	T	Introduction to course and to one another
	Th	Discuss Brandt Due: Notebook 1
Week 2	T	Discuss Freire, Gee, Scribner, Deans “What is Literacy”
	Th	Discuss Kalmar prologue and chp. 1 Due: Notebook 2
Week 3	T	Discuss Kalmar chps. 2, 3
	Th	Discuss Kalmar chp. 4 and epilogue Due: Notebook 3
Week 4	T	Discuss Vieira chp. 1
	Th	Discuss Vieira chps. 2, 3 Due: Notebook 4
Week 5	T	Discuss Vieira chp. 4 Class visit from ILI
	Th	Writing workshop Due: Literacy Analysis Draft
Week 6	Th	Discuss Lam & Rosario-Ramos Due: Final Literacy Analysis

Week 7	T	Discuss Morton
	Th	Class visit to ILI Discuss Perry; Mitchell
Week 8	T	Discuss Lippi-Green Due: Notebook 5
	Th	ILI work begins
Week 9	T	Discuss Lorimer Leonard
	Th	ILI work Read Prendergast intro and chp. 1
Week 10	T	Discuss Prendergast chps. 3 and 4 Due: Notebook 6
	Th	ILI work Due: Connection Paper Draft in conferences with Rebecca
Week 11	T	Due: Final Connection Paper Discuss Prendergast chp. 5
	Th	ILI work
Week 12	T	Discuss Marko (et al.) Due: Notebook 7
	Th	ILI work
Week 13	T	Discuss Auerbach (et al.) Due: Notebook 8

	Th	Last ILI work day
Week 14	T	Course wrap-up Due: Literacy Philosophy
	Th	Due: ILI Materials

* Note on assigned reading: When multiple articles or chapters of a book are assigned for discussion, (author 1) splits these chapters up among small groups. Groups read different chapters and are responsible for teaching what they read to their classmates. In this way, we get a sense of the entire book or topic without undergraduates having to move in order through every chapter.