

ENGLISH 3315: Introduction to Critical Theory

Thursdays 9:30-10:45am (hybrid--we only meet once a week)
CAB 337

DR. LIZBETT TINOCO (SHE/HER)



ltinoco@tamusa.edu: I'll respond within 24 hours M-F between 9am and 5pm



Office hours: Thursdays from 11am-1pm in Classroom Hall 314D



Online office hours by appointment. Email me to set up meeting via Zoom

WELCOME TO ENGLISH 3351!

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces students to concepts, traditions, and debates in critical theory, and provides experience in the application of critical theory in English studies as a discipline. Prerequisite(s): ENGL 2370. TSI Restriction(s): Reading, Writing, and Math

ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION:

This course explores critical theory as a diverse body of thought that seeks both to understand the world and to transform it. Beginning with the emergence of Critical Theory from the Frankfurt School, we will examine how critical theory has developed across historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts, with particular attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. Students will engage with critical theory as a set of lenses for questioning assumptions, examining systems of power, and understanding complex social and cultural issues. Through both the study and application of theory, students will explore how critical frameworks can reshape our understanding of the world and open possibilities for meaningful action and change.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the foundations of Critical Theory

- Identify and explain key concepts in Critical Theory, including the relationships among knowledge, power, culture, and language.
- Analyze literary, cultural, and archival texts using concepts and frameworks drawn from Critical Theory.
- Reflect on how Critical Theory can inform individual and collective understandings of knowledge, power, and social change.
- Apply Critical Theory frameworks to contemporary cultural and social issues and/or texts.

CONTACTING DR. TINOCO



E-MAIL: ltinoco@tamusa.edu. I typically respond within 24 hours and during the hours of 9am and 5pm, though it may take me longer over the weekends as I try not to do work-related things on Saturdays and Sundays. Please take this response time into account when reaching out—it's difficult for me to help if you contact me the night before something is due.



ZOOM: I am available to chat via Zoom by appointment throughout the week. To schedule a time to meet with me outside office hours, please email me.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS HYBRID COURSE



IN-PERSON MEETINGS: This is a hybrid course. The class will meet in person every week on Thursdays from 9:30am-10:45am. Since this is a hybrid course, you will have additional work from home for the course. This means you will have to schedule group work outside of our class meeting.



HOMEWORK: There is typically homework (readings, discussion boards, weekly journals, major assignments, etc.) due every week. It's important to check our class Bb site frequently so that you don't miss assignment due dates.



WORK LOAD: You can expect to spend roughly 6-8 hours a week on this class (give or take).

It might take some time to adjust to the readings for this course, so below are my tips for staying on track with this course:

- Set a consistent time each week to sit down and focus solely on this class (and put it on your calendar!). Establishing a reading and writing routine will help you stay organized.
- Complete work on a weekly basis when it's due. Check each weekly module in Blackboard to help you check in and stay on track.
- If you find yourself falling behind, reach out to me! I'm happy to work with you individually to get you caught up and strategize for how we can get you successfully across the finish line!



ANNOUNCEMENTS: I will be in contact with you via email and Blackboard with any announcements or reminders. Please check to make sure your preferred email is linked to your Jagwire account.

REQUIRED MATERIALS



Regular access to a computer, internet, your Blackboard account, and A&M-SA email.



Time. This course requires a significant commitment to spending time to complete the readings, so be flexible and take note of how long it takes you to complete tasks and plan accordingly.



A commitment to writing as a process. This means you'll be drafting, giving/receiving feedback, and revising based on the feedback you receive.



An open mind and willingness to collaborate with peers in class.



Readings will be provided as PDFs through Blackboard or linked in the calendar.

COURSE POLICIES



ATTENDANCE: Attendance is a critical component of this course and is required for successful completion. I invite you to communicate with me if you're facing a persistent issue that is affecting your ability to stay on track. I'm here to help and will work with you to come up with a plan tailored to your needs.



PARTICIPATION: Participation will be measured in a number of ways--weekly discussion posts, peer revisions, labor journals, and meeting with me. I take note of who has done the readings and activities, is actively listening, offers thoughtful questions, interacts with classmates and me respectfully, etc. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your engagement during the course of the semester through weekly labor journals which will help me understand what you need in order to participate and complete work successfully.



LATE WORK: If you anticipate not being able to complete an assignment on time, please reach out and let me know what is going on before the deadline. I will work with you to come up with a reasonable extension. Make sure you read the labor contract policies on ignored and late work.



COMMUNITY MEMBER: The most important rule: be a generous and kind colleague. This involves engaging with one another respectfully and collegially. This doesn't mean we have to always agree, but we should strive to interact with kindness and understanding. Please keep an open mind when engaging with your peers.

You should also be a generous reader. The readings you'll encounter in this class might be difficult. If you have a negative reaction to a text, couch your criticism in what it is about the idea, theory, or issue that sparked your reaction. We're covering a lot of topics, so please keep an open mind to our readings!



ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: The assumption is that your work is original and generated for ENG 3315 during the Fall semester of 2026. However, writing can often rely on collaboration with your peers. In some situations, it can often *feel* like you're plagiarizing when in fact, you're not. There are many types of plagiarism—some more obvious than others, but there are subtle forms you may not be aware of. A good rule of thumb to live by: if you're not sure you're violating these rules, talk to me about it *before* turning in the work in question. To familiarize yourself with the details of A&M-SA's Academic Dishonesty policy and examples of/penalties for instances of academic dishonesty, visit <https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/documents/student-handbook.pdf>



Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)/ChatGPT: I expect you to generate your own content/writing this semester. However, there are situations and contexts within our course where you may use generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools to support your work as a writer. For example, GAI technologies such as ChatGPT can work well as a starting point for written assignments, assisting you with brainstorming, outlining, generating ideas, and collecting basic information about a topic/idea. Note that the emphasis here is on “support.” GAI programs have been shown to provide biased information, to circulate misinformation, and to generate writing that is, at best, “meh.” For these reasons, I discourage you from using GAI technology to generate content for you. If you have reason to use GAI to generate content with you, then I ask that you consult with me before doing so. You should acknowledge the GAI program you have used, and you should identify which portions of the text you submit were produced by GAI. Using GAI content without your professor’s permission and/or without proper attribution qualifies as plagiarism.



COLLEGE IS HARD: Balancing your classes, job, personal life, and everything else in-between is incredibly difficult, even under ideal circumstances.

An important part of being healthy and happy is prioritizing the activities that address your human needs, including taking breaks to rest, relax, and do the activities that bring you joy. Whether it’s taking a walk, drawing, playing a video game, or talking on the phone with a friend, schedule these things into your calendar. They are necessary parts of your success. And if you’re ever feeling overwhelmed by this class, please reach out to me.

PROJECTS & LABOR CONTRACT

Detailed project guidelines will be distributed to you as we encounter each assignment throughout the semester (and all project guidelines can always be found in Blackboard). Please note that this course uses labor-based grading contracts as the method of assessment. The details of the labor contracts and associated expectations will be discussed in class. Final grades will be determined based on the successful completion of the agreed-upon labor contract.

Project 1: Critical Theory Podcast
Project 2: Critical Theory in Practice
Other assignments: Active reading notes, discussion posts, weekly labor journals, final course reflection, and in-class activities

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY RESOURCES



FOOD:

General's Food Store:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/mays/students/generals-store.html>

Texas SNAP:

<https://yourtexasbenefits.hhsc.texas.gov/programs/snap>

SA Food Bank:

<https://safoodbank.org>

SA Food Pantries:

https://www.foodpantries.org/ci/tx-san_antonio



HOUSING & SLEEP SPACES:

SA Fair Housing:

<https://www.sanantonio.gov/nhsd/programs/fairhousing>

SA Shelters:

<https://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org/cgi-bin/id/city.cgi?city=san%20antonio&state=TX>



MENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY:

Student Counseling Center:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/student-resources/support/student-counseling-center/index.html>

Safety Walk Escort Program:

Call (210) 784-1900

SA Metro Health:

<https://www.sanantonio.gov/HEALTH>

ABOUT DR. TINOCO: WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME



I am about to start my 9th year at A&M-SA. I was born and raised in California. I love watching sports, especially college football and basketball. I also enjoy spending time with my dog, Belle. I have a PhD in Rhetoric & Composition from the University of Texas at El Paso. My dissertation (the final book-length writing project you do as a PhD student) was on writing program administration at community colleges. Currently, I'm working on an edited collection on feedback and linguistic justice. Here at A&M-SA, I teach courses in rhetoric and writing studies, and I'm the Director of First-Year Composition.

Please know I will be a fierce advocate for your success here at A&M-SA. You can always feel welcomed to come to me with questions or for academic/professional advice—if I don't know the answer, I can figure out where to find it!

A NOTE ON THE READINGS FOR THIS COURSE:

You may find some of the readings in this course challenging at times, both in terms of their style and their content—and that is completely okay! Critical theory often asks us to read in unfamiliar ways, and it is normal not to understand everything (or even much of a reading) the first time through. These texts are sometimes intentionally written to raise questions, complicate ideas, and open possibilities rather than provide clear or definitive answers.

As you work through the readings, I encourage you to approach them with curiosity and patience. You are not expected to have everything figured out before coming to class. Instead, try some of the following reading practices:

- **Experiment with how you read.** Challenge yourself to move beyond the expectation that a reading should take you neatly from point A to point B. Skim the reading, return to the main ideas and key passages, reread difficult sections, and give yourself time to sit with ideas that may not make sense right away.
- **Form a reading group.** Talk through the readings with your classmates. Sometimes a conversation can help you see an idea, question, or connection that you may not have noticed on your own.
- **Explain what you've read to someone outside the course.** Try describing a key idea, question, or passage to a friend, family member, or colleague who is not taking the course. Explaining an unfamiliar concept in your own words can be a powerful way to deepen your understanding.

Most importantly, **give yourself permission to struggle with these texts.** Struggling with a difficult reading is not a sign that you are doing something wrong—it is an important part of learning to read and think critically. We will work through these ideas together in class, and you will have opportunities to ask questions, share interpretations, and learn from one another.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week	Readings to Complete	Assignments due
Week 1 August 24-August 30 Introduction to Course & Introduction to Critical Theory	Thursday: ● Introduction to Course ● "Introduction," from Jennifer Rich's <i>An Introduction to Critical Theory</i> ● bell hooks, "Critical Thinking" ● "Lois Tyson, "Everything you wanted to know about critical theory but were afraid to ask" found in <i>Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide</i> (pages 1-10)	● Grading Contract

Week 2 August 31-September 6 Origins of Critical Theory	Thursday: • Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" • Horkheimer & Adorno, "The Culture Industry" • Introduce Critical Theory Podcast Assignment	• Discussion post due before class • Active reading notes due before class • Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 3 September 7-September 13 Origins of Critical Theory	Thursday: • Hegel, Dialectics • "Archeology and the History of Ideas," Michel Foucault • Group Work on Critical Theory Podcast out of class	• Discussion post due before class • Active reading notes due before class • Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 4 September 14-September 20 Knowledge, Power, and Discourse	Thursday: • "Panopticism," Foucault • "Docile Bodies," Foucault	• Discussion post due before class • Active reading notes due before class • Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 5 September 21-September 27 Authors, Texts, and Meaning	Thursday: • Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" • Foucault "What is an Author" • Jacques Derrida "Structure, Sign, and Play"	• Discussion post due before class • Active reading notes due before class • Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 6 September 28-October 4 Psychoanalysis	Thursday: • Sigmund Freud from "The Interpretation of Dreams" • Jacques Lacan "The Mirror Stage"	• Discussion post due before class • Active reading notes due before class • Weekly labor journal due on Sunday • Proposal for Critical Theory Podcast due
Week 7	Thursday:	• Work on Critical Theory

October 5-October 11 Critical Theory Podcast	Group Work on Critical Theory Podcast out of class	Podcast Assignment Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 8 October 12-October 18 Ideology and Social Capital	Thursday: - Louis Althusser “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” - Pierre Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital”	- Discussion post due before class - Active reading notes due before class - Work on Critical Theory Podcast Assignment - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 9 October 19-October 25 Postcolonial and Decolonial Critical Theory	Thursday: - Edward Said, “Orientalism” - Paulo Freire, Chapter 1 and 2 of Pedagogy of the Oppressed	- Discussion post due before class - Active reading notes due before class - Peer Revision for Critical Theory Podcast - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 10 October 26-November 1 Critical Race Theory	Thursday: - Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic “CRT: Introduction” - Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” - Tara J. Yosso “Whose culture has capital?”	- Discussion post due before class - Active reading notes due before class - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday - Critical Theory Podcast due
Week 11 November 2-November 8 LatCrit	Thursday: - Gloria Anzaldua, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” - Amelia Mesa Bains, “Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo” - Introduce Critical Theory in Practice Assignment	- Discussion post due before class - Active reading notes due before class - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 12 November 9-November 15	Thursday: - bell hooks, “Feminism is for everyone” - Sara Ahmed, “Setting the”	- Discussion post due before class - Active reading notes due before class

FemCrit	Table - Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"	- Work on Critical Theory in Practice Assignment - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 13 November 16-November 22 Critical Theory in Practice	Thursday: Work on Critical Theory in Practice Assignment in class	- Work on Critical Theory in Practice Assignment - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 14 November 23-November 29 Critical Theory in Practice	Thursday: Work on Critical Theory in Practice Assignment in class	Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 15 November 30-December 6 Critical Theory in Practice	Thursday: Final project peer revision	- Bring draft of Critical Theory in Practice to class - Weekly labor journal due on Sunday
Week 16 December 7-December 11 Finals Week	Thursday: Final Project Showcase	Final Project Due Final reflection due

*subject to change--I will notify you of any changes