

ENGL 3315: Introduction to Critical Theory Syllabus

The Serviceberry Seminar: Critical Theory and the Gifts of Reciprocity

Location: Central Academic Building 334, Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Days & Times: Mondays & Wednesdays 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM, Spring 2026

Instructor: Adrianna M. Santos, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: M/W 10:00 AM

Catalog Description

Credits: 3 (3-0-0)

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. TSI Restriction(s): Reading, Math, and Writing

Restrictions: Graduate level students may not enroll.

The course design is predicated on a few core principles:

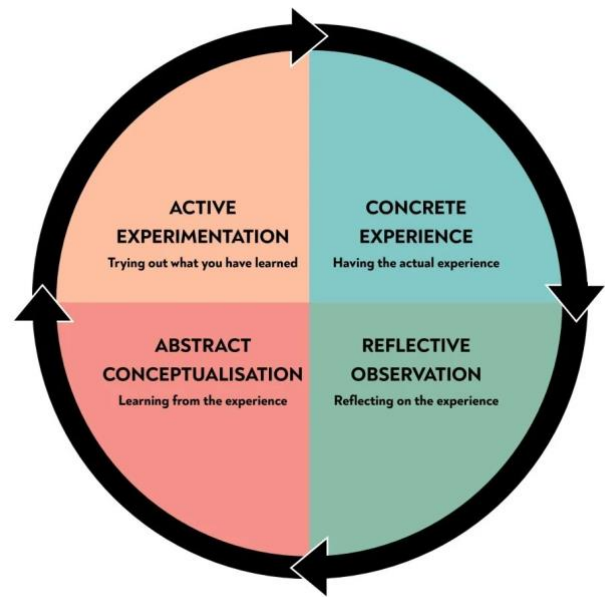
- 1) Theory is not just philosophy, but ideas to be put into practice.
- 2) Critical theory should not be used to distance an educated elite from the general population, but rather to bridge the experience of disparate groups and offer a language for articulating experiences of difference.
- 3) We at TAMUSA recognize that we do not learn in a vacuum; we, as both experienced scholars and students encountering a subject for the first time, are part of something bigger: a scholarly community with responsibilities and obligations to those outside our classroom walls.

Course Description

This syllabus for an introductory course on critical theory, designed for students of Texas A&M University-San Antonio in Spring 2026, incorporates the works of Robin Wall Kimmerer as a running touchstone throughout the semester. Specifically, the course uses *The Serviceberry* as a touchstone to explore the shift from extractive economies to reciprocal gift economies through the lens of Critical Theory. Following the principles of First Nations Pedagogy, we prioritize experiential knowledge—learning through observing, listening, reflecting, and participating.

This section of **ENG 3315: Introduction to Critical Theory** was designed to provide students with an understanding of literary theory that could be implemented and practiced, enabling them to experience what it means to engage with public-facing humanities during a course-long semester on theory while implementing First Nations interpretations of Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT).

Our sessions include seminar discussions of critical theory readings in the classroom, as well as lectures, performances, and site visits with community partners, such as [American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions](#), [the San Antonio Missions](#), and the [S.A. River Found](#), among others.



Objectives

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

- Outline the origins and debates of critical theory.
- Explain the four elements of the First Nations Learning Cycle inspired by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.
- Apply theoretical frameworks to analyze literature, film, and other cultural artifacts in multiple contexts and disciplines.
- Demonstrate, both orally and in writing, a critical understanding of how theory informs our world(s) and discuss the significance and limitations of theory to address real-world problems.

Assignments

- Active participation: Regular attendance and engagement in class discussions
- Reading and viewing responses: Brief, written responses to assigned readings and films
- Reflective writing: Journal entries and field work
- Presentations: Students present on their research or a specific topic to the class
- Final Project (Research paper or community-oriented project): A longer paper, preceded by a proposal and annotated bibliography, or a multi-step community-engaged project