The Contemporary Academic Novel

English 403
T 1:30-4:15 p.m.
EC 312

Judy Gill
EC 410
Ext. 1291
Office hours: MW 10-11:30 a.m.
Th 1:30-3 p.m & by appt.

In *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, Elaine Showalter writes that “[t]he best academic novels experiment and play with the genre of fiction itself, comment on contemporary issues, satirize professional stereotypes and educational trends, and convey the pain of intellectuals called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance” (4). In this seminar, we will explore these, and other, aspects of seven contemporary academic novels. We will begin by reading Showalter’s book, which gives us a brief history and assessment of the British and American tradition from the 1950s to the present. We will then explore the major thematic concerns and aesthetic dimensions of the novels, individually and in comparison with one another, from various critical perspectives. We will not, however, attempt Morris Zapp’s overly ambitious plan to “examine the novels [of Jane Austen] from every conceivable angle—historical, biographical, rhetorical, mythical, structural, Freudian, Jungian, Marxist, existentialist, Christian, allegorical, ethical, phenomenological, archetypal, you name it” (David Lodge, *Small World* 28-29).

**Required Texts:**

- Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*
- Michael Chabon, *Wonder Boys*
- J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*
- James Hynes, *The Lecturer’s Tale*
- David Lodge, *Nice Work*
- Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*
- Richard Russo, *Straight Man*
- Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*

**Recommended Texts:**

- Jonathon Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*

**Course Expectations and Requirements:**

You are expected to attend every class and to participate actively, and intelligently, in class discussion; quality, not quantity, counts. For each primary text, two students will serve as discussion leaders. While discussion leaders should not prepare and deliver formal presentations, they must come to class with topics and questions to be addressed and with a bibliography of secondary sources on their author/novel.
You will produce 20-25 pages of finished writing. The first paper, 10-12 pages in length, will ask you to explore a topic of interest to you in Wonder Boys, Straight Man, or The Lecturer’s Tale. The second paper, also 10-12 pages in length, will ask you to focus on a topic of interest to you in one or more of the last four novels we will read. You may include secondary sources in your first paper—biographical, contextual, critical—but the focus should be on careful, close reading. You must incorporate secondary sources in your second paper. The amount and nature of secondary material will vary from novel to novel; you will discover that much has been published about Disgrace (69 entries in the MLA Bibliography) whereas little has been published about The Lecturer’s Tale (2 entries). For the second paper, you may write about one of the last four novels and another campus novel that we do not read in class. The second novel may be one discussed in Showalter’s book or on a list I will distribute.

The other written assignment for the course will be a 300-500 word prospectus for your 404 paper, with a working bibliography. You may modify your prospectus and bibliography over winter break; the final prospectus will be due at the beginning of spring semester.

All papers must be word-processed, follow MLA guidelines for format, quotation, citation, and documentation; you must use Times New Roman 12. You are expected to know and abide by the college’s policy on academic honesty; if you have any questions about using sources (quotation, paraphrase, summary, citation format, etc.), please come to me and/or consult the MLA Handbook. MLA guidelines can be found online at the following websites:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html
http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_e08_o.html

We will not workshop drafts of papers in 403, but I encourage you to exchange drafts outside of class and to go to the Writing Center (you may request an appointment with a tutor who is an upper-level English major, including Meredith, Chris, Kitt, or Kaitlin (unless you are working on the same topic). I am also happy to discuss proposed topics and/or thesis statements, critical approaches, introductory paragraphs, or outlines.

You must complete all the requirements in order to pass the course. Repeated tardiness or absenteeism will result in a lowering of your final grade. Late work will not be accepted unless accompanied by a medical excuse.

In compliance with the Dickinson College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be recommended for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester (except for unusual circumstances) so that appropriate arrangements can be made.
Students are required to register with Academic Resource Services in the Advising Office located on the first floor of Biddle House (contact ext. 1080 or waybranj@dickinson.edu) to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

**Grading:**

Final grades will be based on the following percentages:

- Participation: 20%
- Paper #1: 30%
- Paper #2: 40%
- Prospectus: 10%

**Schedule:**

- **Tuesday, August 27**  
  Introduction to seminar (and workshop)  
  *Faculty Towers*

- **Tuesday, September 3**  
  *Wonder Boys*  
  Discussion leaders: Spencer and Anita

- **Tuesday, September 11**  
  *Straight Man*  
  Discussion leaders: Xander and Shardae

- **Tuesday, September 18**  
  *The Lecturer’s Tale*  
  Discussion leaders: Regina and Gill

- **Tuesday, September 25**  
  Workshop on finding/using sources  
  We will meet with Chris Bombaro in the library’s Information Commons Classroom

- **Tuesday, October 2**  
  *Disgrace*  
  Discussion leaders: Lauren and Meredith

- **Tuesday, October 9**  
  *Disgrace*

**Thursday, October 11: Paper #1 due in my office by 4 p.m.**

- **Tuesday, October 16**  
  Fall Pause

- **Tuesday, October 23**  
  *The Human Stain*  
  Discussion leaders: Chris and Kitt

- **Tuesday, October 30**  
  *The Human Stain*
Tuesday, November 6  
*Nice Work*
Discussion leaders: Hassan and Kaitlin

Tuesday, November 13  
*The Secret History*
Discussion leaders: Luke and James

Tuesday, November 20  
*The Secret History*

Tuesday, November 27  
No class: individual conferences on final paper & 404 prospectus

Tuesday, December 4  
Wrap-up and course evaluation

**404 prospectuses (prospecti?) due in class**

**Friday, December 14: Paper #2 due in my office by 4 p.m.**