



Menlo School US English

Senior Elective Student Perspectives - 2017

The comments below were taken from student surveys. Please keep the ratings score in context, for example, Sophomores might consider a class or assignment as more rigorous than a Senior.

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Keeping It Real Fake	Instructor: Jessie Brugos
<i>What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:</i>	
Students get to explore writing with different styles.	
The readings in this class can be hard but when you talk about them in class and find the meaning, it makes the books more enjoyable.	
<i>I would recommend this course to students that...</i>	
Enjoy reading fiction related to identity and race.	
Want to see what life is like from another perspective.	
<i>I would NOT recommend this course to students that...</i>	

Like to think inwardly and connect what they are reading to their own life.
Don't want to do the reading at night, it may be a lot but the books were great.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

Writing memoirs, experimenting with styles.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.5

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.5

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Contemporary Global Literature (H)

Instructor: **Wilson Taylor**

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

This course will teach you about the cultures of the world without even traveling.

There are a lot more discussions about the global idea of diversity and how prevalent it is in literature, so be prepared to talk.

This course is a great way to open your mind to the many different experiences that literature provides.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Love reading and learning about contemporary current events.

Love to discuss interesting concepts about global literature and follow the plots of some strange books

Like to read books and see things from different perspectives

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Don't like reading novels.

Don't enjoy enriching themselves in other cultures/ways of life

Are not curious about the world

Expect the teacher to baby you through the essay writing process; you need to be able to individually pace yourself.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

I became a much better writer and feel like more of a global citizen.

"The Danger of a Single Story"

Great books if interested in immigrant experiences.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
4

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.5

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Fiction Writing

Instructor: Whitney Newton

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

On top of the writing, we also do a lot of reading in order to learn more about different writing styles and techniques.

You will have to present your short story to the class

The course is much more reading based rather than writing based, at least up until the first month right.

It's short story focused, not book or novel length.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Enjoy writing and reading a lot, and are also comfortable being uncomfortable while reading stories that are sometimes about more mature topics.

Are interested in writing in a new way.

I would recommend this course to students who not only enjoy reading fiction, but who are also willing to be continuously imaginative in their writing. Also, the student should be willing to learn how to properly use grammar, as well as to accept and implement criticism within their writing.

Love fiction and short stories and would like to write something besides essays.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Don't enjoy experimenting with writing or like reading stories with dark themes.

Hate fiction writing.

I would not recommend this course to students who don't enjoy reading and writing fiction— especially if they dislike symbolically-heavy works.

Don't like fiction or creative writing.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

We've read some really "out there" short stories, and at first it was really uncomfortable, but being exposed to those kinds of stories has taught me a lot more about the art of writing. I can now appreciate the skills that it took to create the stories more because any writing that can make you feel strong emotions (good and bad) is an impressive story.

I learned a lot about different writing styles.

I just like the variety of short stories we read.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.6

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.3

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Dystopian Fiction and Film

Instructor: **Cara Plamondon**

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

The course material is extremely absorbing and the texts are books that you would want to read outside of class so the homework doesn't feel like actual work. However, it is easy to get behind in the chapters if you don't prioritize reading.

Students get to engage in class discussions about why dystopian literature is so prevalent for young adults and how its themes can be viewed in our modern world.

You should know that this course really forces you to relate the themes from the novels to your own life. It makes you think about how our society demonstrates characteristics of dystopia.

This class really does have a fun and engaging atmosphere that makes it feel so natural to be learning new material.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Enjoy reading about drastically changed worlds, so extreme that it seems like fiction (and yet there are many crossovers between the "fictional" future world and the world we live in today).

Love watching films and discussing the similarities between the way directors and authors use their medium to create a message.

Like to analyze film and the dystopian genre as a whole, or just want a fun and rigorous english clas.

Are interested in analyzing the way societies function in a fiction sense, and then can apply those ideas to their own life

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Don't enjoy analyzing film and taking a deeper look at social constructs.

Are looking for a class where you just watch movies all day with no analysis or writing.

Don't enjoy personal commentaries. You really need to think about how the themes in the course relate to your own life in this class.

Don't like thinking outside the box.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

Techniques for analyzing film, as well as developing my writing.

I really enjoy when we read a piece of fiction and then watch the film that goes along with it. Doing this helps me to make connections of what the director views as an important aspect of the fiction.

What I really liked about this class was that Ms. Plamondon creates a great comfortable atmosphere for having intellectual and engaging conversations about material we were studying and relating it to our lives.

Definitely as an unartistic person I learned to appreciate and analyze film production. This is definitely a unique aspect of this course, that Menlo students most likely have not been exposed to, with the exception being students who take movie making.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.0

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.0

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**Investigations (Formerly
Contemporary Non-fiction)**

Instructor: Cara Plamondon

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

You learn a ton of analytical skills and learn how to apply that to current world events.

You get to write a capstone paper at the end of the semester that allows you to research and write a paper about a current event of your choice.

The students have the opportunity to write on whatever issues they desire.

Should be interested in analyzing different articles (opinion and news) and analyze what makes each persuasive.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Are interested in how to find truth in a deceptive world.
Enjoy learning about how media and publications angle their stories for effects.
Read the news and like to learn about investigative journalism.
Want to be exposed to a wide range of writing styles.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Prefers fiction writing or a traditional writing course.
Does not enjoy or keep up with current events.
Are not interested in looking at one topic from a variety of perspectives.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

I learned a lot about the process of writing research papers and how to change my writing tone to be more journalistic and less formal.

This course helped me a lot with my conversational tone and my structural writing skills.

The course exposed me to new types of writing, giving me a chance to write satires, social commentaries, and an in-depth research paper (not through the lens of a history course).

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.5

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.5

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The Stories We Tell (formerly The Art Of Storytelling)

Instructor: **Jessie Brugos**

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

Ms. Brugos is really nice and super knowledgeable about the topic of this course because she studied abroad in an African country during college.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Want to expand their knowledge of stories and get different viewpoints on life.
Are interested in learning about different cultures and seeing them in a new light.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Aren't willing to see what other parts of the world have to offer in relation to the stories they tell.

Like to do a lot of close reading and analysis.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

I was able to create my own story and perform it with the help of drum playing, this isn't something you normally do in an english class and I loved it!

We wrote a children's story and performed it and played African drums in the background.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5): 3

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Monsters

Instructor: Wilson Taylor

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

Monsters can be a great class for all avid readers. We've all come across monsters in literature and this class gives you the chance to understand how these monsters relate to certain cultures.

This course offers a new perspective to watching and reading horror/scary/monsters films/books.

Students who enjoy have discussions on topics about monsters and what makes a monster. These conversations are entire class discussions and most students in the class contribute at least once a day.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Likes scary stories and likes to read.

I would recommend this course to students who like to read and enjoy scary films.

Enjoy studying new topics and variations of monsters throughout history.

Who are into more science fiction type works and don't mind putting in a decent amount of reading time every night

Like/love monster movies or stories and want to learn about why they're scary and break down their significance.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Hate scary stories and don't like analyzing books.

Hate analyzing text, don't like scary movies, don't like to read

I would not recommend this course to students who hate reading and hate life.

Do not want to read fiction.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

Reading Beowulf as a class.

I read a lot of books and watched a lot of movies that I normally wouldn't have even come near to.

I learned how to analyze films, which I haven't done before.

I learned how to analyze characters, in an attempt to figure out who really is the monster in a story.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.5

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.5

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Ralph Waldo Emerson

Instructor: Margaret Ramsey

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

You will be responsible for a lot of self assessing of your own relationship to knowledge.

This class will not only give you insight into the works of an amazing writer, but will physically connect you with the world around you. This class teaches you how to observe, reflect, and take action in the world of nature.

This course involves personal writing, not just analysis of Emerson's work!

I would recommend this course to students that...

Love writing, nature and are willing to examine themselves and the world around them on a deeper level.

Haven't had Ms. Ramsey yet as a student and want to dive into one author's work for a while.

Like to contemplate the nature of the universe and their role/duty in it.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Don't like reading or journaling.

Are overly attached to technology, aren't ready to read a different style of text.

Do not have the patience to read and understand dense, complex essays.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

The large amount of journaling was a huge plus.

I really like the time that we have to reflect in class. I.e. going for walks, journaling, etc.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.9

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.1

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Shakespeare

Instructor: Lynn Anderson

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

It's such a fun group; it's basically like a family!

If you haven't had much experience with Shakespeare previously, the reading can initially be daunting. We go over the reading in class, however, so it's possible to take the class even if you find Shakespearean language very difficult to understand.

There is a lot of reading, but it's beautiful and so much fun.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Have enjoyed any Shakespeare they read in the past, or who want to learn more about him. Keep in mind that Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet are all tragedies, so even students who disliked those may find his comedies (like Twelfth Night) interesting.

Are intrigued by discussion and love Shakespeare's language.

Are interested in reading about Shakespeare and connecting it to modern day and their lives.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Don't like dealing with metaphorical language – a lot of the course involves seeing past the literal (or even the obvious). Also, don't take this if you want a course with very easy reading: although the reading isn't that long, it is very poetic and takes a while to understand.

Hate discussion/ don't want to come up with their own topics for essays.
Want to improve their writing skills a lot.
I would honestly recommend this course for everyone--our whole class loved it.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

Loved our weekly sing-alongs.

Going to see Othello at CalShakes was really interesting – they took issues from Shakespearean times and mixed them with modern issues without compromising Shakespeare's story.

The class based discussions were very laid back and helpful, especially when reading Shakespeare where it helps to analyze each scene.

It was really fun acting out scenes in class with props.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.4

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.1

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War Stories

Instructor: Lynn Anderson

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

It's super fun/enjoyable!! The essays are extraordinarily interesting and I love it so much!!

The material covered presents a broad range of messages and depictions of war that allow students to interpret them as they please. Students can gain vastly different interpretations of war from each other through the same course material.

There is a lot of discussion.

The books are extremely powerful. They do include some very detailed descriptions of war, so they may make some people squeamish.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Are intrigued by the implications, effects, and causes for war and discussing them.

Are interested in learning about the war, and like to read.

Like discussing controversial societal structures, such as, war.

I'd recommend it to basically anyone, regardless of their opinion on war.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Do not like learning about war or who don't want to push themselves to learn about it.

Don't like to write a lot as there are lots of assignments and papers due.

Don't want to participate/aren't drawn in by discussions.

Cannot handle violence or gruesome details in the readings.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

The class telling their own family's stories about war.

I really enjoyed being able to choose the topic of our essays as it makes the essay much more fun to write. When teachers assign paper topics, it's hard to be passionate about the paper if you don't really care much about the topic.

I always enjoy the class discussions and hearing from everyone's perspective.

This course is amazing! Everyone should take it. Ms. Anderson is a gem.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.2

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.7

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Wilderness and the American Identity

Instructor: Whitney Newton

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

Fair amount of reading and writing.

In some ways this course is almost run like a history course. The way it traces literature through time to describe man's relationship with nature, means lots of historical sources, and analyzing what people were thinking at a certain time. Also you have to be willing to do research in this course--many of the papers will require outside of class research.

This course is very rigorous, yet extremely interesting to learn about how the perception of wilderness has changed over time.

This class could be in the history department! It's puts environmental literature in the context of American history, chronologically.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Love the outdoors and want to understand nature on a deeper level.

Like or are interested in the outdoors.

Is open to learning about and analyzing different perspectives on wilderness.

Want to learn how literature can both be beautiful *and* affect real-world, national politics and positions.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Have no interest in the outdoors/wilderness or to students who don't enjoy lots of reflective writing.

Don't like research or nonfiction writing.

Is not willing to work hard and stay on top of their work.

Don't like history or nonfiction.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

My highlights from this course were learning about the wilderness through a lens I had not had in the past.

I really enjoyed the capstone paper for the course since it allowed me to really dive into an issue that I feel strongly about and explore it from a number of different perspectives.

I loved when we would have class outside in the woods because it added another dimension to the class when we would be learning about nature while hearing the birds chirp.

I loved learning about how the Bible affects environmental thought in the United States, and the way it has evolved over time.

Other comments:

I really enjoyed this course, but felt that you absolutely get out of it what you put in. The more you "dive in"

so-to-speak the more you will get out of it.

This class was amazing! Some of the pieces we've read are so beautiful, I've gone back to read them. It really made me think about environmentalism, when I hadn't before.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
3.75

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
3.5

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**Freak Character in American Culture
(H)**

Instructor: Margaret Ramsey

What should a student know that's NOT in the course description:

There is a lot of freedom in terms of the discussion topics in class and what people want to focus on in the course, and in their writing.

The course is modeled after college courses, so you have lots of freedom in what you read or write and when you do it. You can focus on whichever aspects of Freaks interests you most.

Be prepared to hear lots of interesting perspectives and write a lot, and know that not everything you write will be perfect.

I would recommend this course to students that...

Love reading provocative and controversial works and discussing social implications of their actions and words.

Like to do more individual work and focus independently on what they think is interesting.

Have a deep fascination with culture, themselves, or the connections between humans in general.

I would NOT recommend this course to students that...

Give up easily, because you may not have the best piece of writing at first, but the course is about development and progress.

Do not like having discussions that may be uncomfortable.

Don't read the assigned book and write all their essays the night before they are due.

Highlights from the course and/or specific skills that I learned:

I learned how to use theory to back up my argument, I perfected my essay writing process, and I learned how to manage my time.

In this class I became a better writer, a better reader, a better person, a better citizen, and all the while I was having a great time.

Our field trip to Last Gasp in San Francisco was incredible! And so was Virgie Tovar's visit. Ms. Ramsey does a great job of bringing in external art pieces/current events. We learned the really powerful skill of writing an academic English essay with few parameters.

Other comments:

This course is so much more than freak culture, and you get to learn so much about our modern day society and about the way we think and understand ourselves and others!

Take. This. Class. Everyone needs it.

Average "Academic Rigor" Rating (1-5):
4.0

Average "Amount of Homework" Rating (1-5):
4.0

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