

J. Wingard
ENGL 4396
Fall 2012

Discovering Houston: Writing and Locating Ourselves and Our City

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to help students develop advanced research and writing skills by allowing them to develop their own research questions and/or sites of inquiry about a place – Houston. I have chosen the city and its outlying areas, as the focal point of the course because UH students have daily relationships with the city, its freeways, and its culture. They will therefore be able to find interesting and viable subjects for research and analysis from their own experiences and contacts with and within the city. Furthermore, students' connection to the city will allow for an exploration of how research and writing (either critical, creative or electronic) are deeply connected to our personal understandings and memories of places.

The course will be taught as a community literacy course wherein the students will be asked to not only find areas of inquiry within Houston, but also understand how those areas of inquiry affect the lives of particular communities within Houston. Although this course will not require service hours spent outside of class, it will ask students to contextualize their inquiries and research within networks of communities present in Houston today. Because this is a different model than the traditional "service learning model," we will spend time in class discussing the ethics of community engagement, as well as reflecting on the place of particular communities within Houston writ large. It is goal of this course that the students begin to understand the complex connections between power and politics, as well as community need within the city. Therefore, it will not be enough to produce inquiries and projects on a Houston based topic, students will also need to reflect and think critically about how particular communities are located within the narratives told about Houston as a city.

Course Materials

Required Texts:

- Mathieu, Paul. *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*. Boynton/Cook, 2005.
- Reichert Powell, Douglas. *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*. Raliegh, NC: U North Carolina P, 2007.
- Rice, Jeff. *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the Age of the Network*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Scardino, Barrie et. al. *Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston*. U of Texas P, 2003.
- Theis, David, ed. *Literary Houston*. Texas Christian UP, 2010. ISBN 9780875654195

Recommended Texts:

- Los Angeles Conservatory. *Curating the City*. < <http://www.curatingthecity.org/>>.
- *Writing and C/Siting Houston*. Website.
- Dennis, Jana. *Palmyra Street*. The Neighborhood Story Project, New Orleans.

Major Course Assignments

- *Discovering Houston's Identity Paper* – The focus of this paper is to map out a context of Houston that you are considering exploring this term. This paper is broad and should allow you to grapple with some of the images and locales we will be discussing in the course. It will be your job to find a way to narrow down the framework for your research in this course, and this paper is the initial steps in doing just that.
- *Method, Form and Function Group Presentation* – In this presentation, you will work with a few of your peers to read, research, and present one of the recommended texts of the course. I will assign you one of the texts, and you will need to become experts on the method(s) and form(s) of the text and how they function to produce a multi-genre researched text about place. In each presentation, along with a strong discussion of the formal elements, you will also need to discuss the political and locationally specific elements each text addresses.
- *Research Proposal/Material Context(s) Paper* – This paper is the rationale and discussion of your methods, form, and context for your final research project. You should be as specific as possible in explaining what you are researching; what methods you are using to research and why; and what your final form will be and why feel it is the best means for representing the research you have done on Houston. Additionally, you will need to contextualize your site of research, being sure to discuss the affects your research may or may not provide to the area in which it is situated.
- *Final Research Project and Presentation* – Your final research project will be the execution of the text you describe in your Research Proposal. The last week of the course, you will do a formal presentation of your research, methods, and form for the class.