

First-Year Seminar 005: "Decisions and Revisions"

Fall 2019

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Office Hours:

- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:00 pm
- Wednesdays, 11:00 am-noon (by appointment only)

Required Texts

University Bookstore

- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. (978-0618871711)
- Beckett, Samuel. *Krapp's Last Tape*. (978-0802144416)
- Hamid, Mohsin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. (978-1594632334)

Blackboard Documents Menu

- Chekhov, Anton. "The Lady with the Pet Dog." (trans. Ivy Litvinov)
- _____. "The Lady with the Dog." (trans. Avrahm Yarmolinsky)
- Laymon, Kiese. "You Are the Second Person."
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "The Lady with the Pet Dog."
- Orlean, Susan. "Orchid Fever."

Online Resource

- Egoyan, Atom, dir. *Krapp's Last Tape* (video) by Samuel Beckett:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znASL1ZwKPQ>

Course Overview

In this course, we will examine how a variety of "texts"—including novels, short stories, movies, music video, drama, and student writing—engage in adaptation, revision, recycling, and re-envisioning. In some cases, the works we encounter will present individuals in situations that bring them through repetitions and variations. Others, like *Krapp's Last Tape*, feature characters obsessively reliving (and revising) their own memories of the past. Some—including Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*—"recycle" popular forms, in this case, self-help literature. Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* uses visual depiction to recall and retell difficult episodes from the author's youth, allowing her and her audience to come to terms with a partly factual, partly fictionalized past. And Joyce Carol Oates's short story retells one of the most famous stories of Russian literature from a different point of view.

Lars von Trier's film collaboration with Jorgen Leth titled *The Five Obstructions* (1967/2003) will structure our progress through these explorations and experiments. It consists of a short film and five re-makes and will serve as the inspiration for the main essay assignments of the course. These assignments will invite participants in the course to engage in their own experiments with revising, adapting, and re-envisioning their work from multiple perspectives.

Goals

Students successfully completing this course will improve their academic competence in the following ways. They will...

- ...become more effective speakers and participants in class discussions.
- ...become more competent critical, analytical readers.
- ...more attuned to the nuances of writing and to the ways in which context, purpose, and genre affect the standards to which their writing aspires.
- ...better able to contend with factors that affect the reliability of information they discover through research and to link researched discovery with literary and cultural representation.
- ...be able to situate their learning in the context of institutional (i.e. academic, school-related) expectations and of their long-term goals.
- ...develop the habits of mind and the self-discipline essential to success in college and beyond.

From Surviving to Thriving

One ongoing aim of our First-Year Seminar will be to foster participants' transformation from "survival mode" to thriving at Drake University. Almost every day, we will make time for "The Freshman Fifteen," a fifteen-minute conversation at the beginning of each class where we can address questions and topics essential to first-year students' becoming more at home with the independent, self-reliant context of a residential, four-year University. As your professor, I will initiate some discussions on topics such as advising, declaring majors, conflict resolution, locating appropriate support services and resources, life in Des Moines, and the like. But more frequently, I will ask you to bring your own questions and concerns to the table.

Lower-Division Elective Credit in English

This course will fulfill lower-division elective credit toward the English or Writing major and minor. If you declare (or have already declared) an English or Writing major or minor, please speak with your academic advisor about how this course can advance your progress through the program.

Course Activities

Teamwork and Collaboration: Throughout the semester, you will be asked to contribute to the learning environment of the classroom by sharing your insights, asking questions, and taking part in small-group and plenary discussions.

Graded Discussions: As the course progresses, we will practice the art of collaborative, productive interaction, culminating in four graded discussions. In the early weeks of the course, we will establish the criteria by which these discussions will be graded and the various roles individuals might play in these discussions. Everyone in the class receives the same score for graded discussions.

Writing: You'll do two kinds of writing in this class:

- Six discussion briefs. These 350-to-500-word discussion briefs are designed to foster critical thinking about issues and topics we'll discuss in class. Discussion briefs are graded on completion and timeliness: Only those completed according to the guidelines and turned in on time will receive full credit. You must be present for the discussion for which these briefs are assigned to receive full credit. Prompts for these discussion briefs appear in the schedule of readings and assignments, below. Discussion briefs must be submitted using our online Blackboard Discussion forum by

noon the day before the first day of class in the week for which they're assigned, unless otherwise noted.

- Six somewhat more formal “essays” of varying length, along with a rough draft of the first one. These assignments ask you to experiment with different perspectives on, and approaches to, same basic topic: the “perfect” student? You will adjust your take on this question with each essay you write and work within a different set of parameters and expectations with each iteration of the essay. Throughout the course, we will be using the term “essay” in it’s original, etymological sense, from the French word *assai*: An attempt, assay, or experiment. These essays will be graded according to the degree to which they fulfill pre-announced criteria. Their value is based on the degree of difficulty they present.

Campus/Community Engagement: Throughout the semester, you will earn credit for engaging in various kinds of community or campus activities, including volunteering, attending events, participating in co-curricular activities, and the like. Only those activities that are not credit-bearing can “count” for this form of engagement. You will provide documentation substantiating your participation in the activities you wish to claim for credit in this class. The engagement rubric is available on Blackboard.

Quizzes: You will take a 5-question, multiple-choice quiz over *every reading assignment* in this course; quizzes may also include questions about material discussed during previous class sessions. These quizzes are meant to evaluate how carefully and completely you have done the reading. Students who carefully read assigned work in advance will have no difficulty with these quizzes. Those who do not read assigned work, or read it hurriedly or carelessly, however, will.

Grading

A total of 1,000 points is available in this class, with individual assignments worth varying fractions of that total. Accordingly, students in this class do not earn “grades” on individual assignments; they earn “points” toward a final grade. Following is a breakdown of points-per-assignment or required activity:

Quizzes (Individual values depend on total number)	250 points
Draft 1	20 points
Essay 1	30 points
Essay 2	50 points
Essay 3	75 points
Essay 4	85 points
Essay 5	40 points
Essay 6	100 points
Engagement	50 points
Discussion Briefs (6 @ 30 points each)	180 points
Graded Discussions (3 @ 40 points each)	120 points
TOTAL	1,000 points

Final letter grades correlate to 100-point increments: 900-1,000=A; 800-899=B; 700-799=C; and so on. Grade modifiers (+/-) represent the degree to which you have consistently contributed to class discussions, with *minus* representing little to no participation beyond graded discussions.

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as you can to ask about how to accommodate your absence. This policy applies equally to all students, including, for instance, those who miss class because of school-sanctioned functions or responsibilities or for a religious observance. If you miss class—for whatever reason—you alone are responsible for the learning you missed out on.

Except in extraordinary circumstances, three or more absences will have an (increasingly) negative effect on your final grade. If you believe your absences are due to extraordinary circumstances, and that you should be allowed to make up work after the fact of an absence, please contact me.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another person's writing or thinking as if it were your own—that is, without citing it and quoting material used verbatim. Anyone who *intentionally or repeatedly* plagiarizes in this class will face severe and immediate sanctions, including grade penalties and referral to disciplinary authorities.

Adaptation, by contrast, is the use of pre-existing material in a way that reworks and reconceives it in order, ultimately, to create an original work; successful adaptation always acknowledges its source material and always reimagines it in original ways. Since we will be working with adaptation in this class, we will continuously ask about the ethics of adaptation throughout the semester.

If you feel so pressed for time, so stressed out by the work you have to do, or so lost for words or ideas that you are tempted to plagiarize, make an appointment to talk with me instead—earlier rather than later—about your situation so that, together, we can ensure that you are able to do your best work in this class, but only your best work.

Email and Office Hours

- The best way to contact me is in person, before, during, or after class, or during office hours. You'll get immediate results that way. Failing that, email is the best form of communication for making an appointment for office hours or asking ever so brief a question.
- If you have a question about my expectations, about the work you're doing, or about your performance in the class—all of which are likely to require a conversation—please plan to meet me during my office hours or immediately after class.
- When you email me—or, indeed, any professor—be sure to indicate what class you're in, to use your Drake email address, and to provide some context for your question.
- In your emails to me, you may address me as "Craig" or "Professor Owens" (I'm comfortable with both). Please do not begin your email without a direct address, or with an interjection (such as "Hey—" or "Yo!") or an imperative ("Listen, dude:").
- The subject line of the email address should concisely indicate the reason for your email (which means that, if you're replying to an email from me, you'll need to enter a new subject line).
- Please use your Drake email address to send emails pertaining to this course.
- You're welcome to just drop in during my office hours. However, I highly recommend making an appointment, either right after class or by email, in advance, to ensure your

preferred time slot is available. Also, because I am sometimes required to attend meetings elsewhere during my office hours, emailing in advance will ensure that I will, in fact, be available during a particular time.

Laptops and Other Technology

- Please do not use laptops computers in class unless I specifically ask you to do so. I encourage you to print out the texts for each class (double sided, reduced size to fit as much on one sheet of paper as possible); alternately, you may use tablet-style computers, such as an iPad, or your phone, to access electronic readings during class, as long as they remain flat on the desk in front of you.
- If I begin to suspect that participants are using their electronica for purposes unrelated to our class, we will revert to an entirely 20th-century student-technology paradigm. In any case, you must have access to assigned readings during class time.
- Please keep your phone silent during class. If you are expecting an urgent phone call, set your phone to vibrate and quietly excuse yourself from class to take the call.
- Have a pen or pencil and a notebook available for taking notes.

Sensitive Topics

In this class, you may find some views expressed by in the works we read surprising, shocking, offensive, or even disturbing. For instance, more than one reading directly contends with racial and ethnic stereotypes. In others, self-harm, violence, and sexual assault appear. Please be aware that the fact a character in a work says or does something we may find deeply troubling does not constitute an endorsement of such speech or behavior, either by the author or by me.

When we do discuss these issues, we will do so without exacerbating the negative effects they can lead to. Accordingly, we will avoid repeating in our discussion the more deeply offensive terms applied to racial and ethnic minorities; women; non-heterosexual people; gender-nonconforming people; and other marginalized groups—even though the works we read may use them. At the same time, we will recognize that norms and sensitivities are multiple, complex, and ever-changing, and so we will forgive well-intentioned errors any of us may make as we contend with challenges around these sensitivities.

Etiquette and Academic Freedom

You are free to hold whatever opinions you choose. However, you should express only those that are germane to our course content and goals during class-time. Please be prepared to explain the validity of your opinions and interpretations. It is possible that your opinion on a relevant topic may prove distasteful or even offensive to others; I ask that you take that possibility into account and that you weigh your words carefully as you express your point of view. But please do not “censor” yourself if you have something relevant and insightful to add to the conversation. If it appears to me that the views you express or the manner in which you express them are impeding the academic aims of this class, I will let you know.

I realize, of course, that many of you have relationships with one another outside of class. I appreciate the role friendship and personal acquaintance play in determining in-class dynamics. Accordingly, I invite you to maintain those personal relationships in class, to the extent that they do not interrupt class. However, please do not let your personal acquaintance with your classmates get in the way of our collective learning.

Special Accommodation

If a physical, mental, intellectual or emotional impairment makes necessary accommodations not already in place for this course (including the arrangement or meeting place of the class or the format of exams, for example), please contact Michelle Laughlin, Coordinator of Student Disability Services, at extension 1835. I'm confident that we can make arrangements that answer your particular learning needs. I cannot, however, offer accommodations for students who have not worked through the office of Student Disability Services.

Nondiscrimination and Access

Drake University hosts a number resources for contending with matters related to harassment, discrimination, and accessibility. By visiting the Nondiscrimination and Accessibility webpage (<http://www.drake.edu/nondiscrimination-accessibility/>), you can learn about support services available for those who have encountered harassment, discrimination, sexual violence or assault, and other barriers to educational opportunity and success. In addition to contact information for Student Disability Services (see "Special Accommodation," above), visitors to the Nondiscrimination and Accessibility webpage can learn about Title IX and Diversity and Inclusion resources.

Sexual Assault, Harrassment, and Discrimination

My office is a "brave space" for reporting and confronting issues of this kind. If you feel you have been the target of discriminatory practices; sexual or gender-based harassment, assault, and/or violence; or behavior motivated by sexism and racism, you are welcome to come to me: I can listen to you, advise you about resources available to you, and help you navigate them. I am committed to being an understanding, sympathetic, and supportive listener and, if you want, advisor.

But you should also know that as an employee of Drake, I am legally required to pass along any report I receive to Drake's Title IX coordinator; I cannot, therefore, promise complete confidentiality. There are individuals on campus to whom you can speak in confidence; if you'd like to know more about those, the webpage above may help, or you can send me a quick email or stop by to ask (I don't have to share reports of students who just want to know how to access resources).

That said, no one is going force you to take steps you're not ready, willing, and able to take in response to such experiences. The decision as to whether to file a complaint or grievance, to press charges, and to inform individuals beyond Drake of your particular experience is yours to make, assuming you are 18 years old or older.

Finally, I will not assume, just because you choose to write about assault or trauma, that you're necessarily "disclosing" an experience to me. What happens in your writing occupies the realm of the quasi-fictive utterance and, to the extent that you choose to write about incidents that in other contexts may be "reportable," we will treat them as rhetorical choices, not personal revelations.

Other Course Policies

The following policies and procedures by and large amplify guidelines already implicit in the syllabus. If you have any questions about these policies, please do not hesitate to ask.

- If you must eat in class, do so discretely. That is, don't eat in a way that impairs your ability or the ability of your classmates to consult texts, take notes, and participate in discussion. Also, do not bring particularly odoriferous, noisy, dangerous (think *soup*), or complicated (think *chopsticks*) food to class. Absolutely no bananas. The ideal food for eating in class, I have found, is the Cucumber Roll: noiseless, odorless, bite-sized, and tasty, these morsels have the advantage of satisfying hunger without annoying those nearby. Note: Some classrooms have been designated "No Food" zones; if we find ourselves in such a classroom, only water will be allowed in the room.
- Drinking beverages is fine, as long as you don't: spill them; slurp; make noise with the straw or container. Coffee, in particular, is always allowed. But don't hurt anyone with it. (See note above)
- Please do not touch, fondle, strike, pinch, hit, stroke, or make out with any classmate or otherwise disport with a classmate's possessions, body, or parts thereof.
- Please do not groom yourself in class. "Grooming" in this context refers to any of the following activities, or activities related to them: adjusting one's hair; applying salve, lotion, balm, or sunscreen to one's skin; applying makeup; dressing or undressing; the paring of fingernails or toenails, or the removal of dead or calloused skin from around them the pulling out of and fidgeting with hair, including hairs of the head, of the brows, of the lashes, of the ears, of the nose, or of any other area of the body; brushing or flossing teeth; exfoliation of any kind; applying hand sanitizer or hand cleanser, except in the case that some event has occurred to soil one's hands during class; the buttoning, unbuttoning, tucking in, untucking, straightening, adjusting, rolling up, rolling down, loosening, tightening, buckling, unbuckling, untying, removing, or donning of any item of clothing. Please do not exude of any infected or noxious vapors (including the smell of smoke or body odor). Avoid picking of the nose or ears (particularly with the assistance of a key, a pen-cap, a pencil, or any other semi-sharp object). Outerwear should be taken off and put back on before and after class, respectively. Exceptions: Shoes come untied may be retied discretely; flies left unzipped or unbuttoned by accident may be zipped or buttoned, if discretely ignoring said fly is impossible; if one becomes unexpectedly over-warm or over-cold, the removal or addition of a layer of clothing, quickly and discretely done, is allowed. The blowing of noses, in the case of colds or allergies, and the wiping of eyes, in the case of extreme sadness or hilarity, are acceptable, so long as they are carried out discretely. Please ensure that your breath is fresh-smelling.
- Please do not read the newspaper or magazines, browse the web, or complete work for other courses during class-time.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Notes:

- The following schedule lists readings and assignments on a week-by-week basis.
- Except for Discussion Briefs, all assigned work is due on the first day of class in any given week unless specifically indicated otherwise below.
- Unless otherwise noted, discussion Briefs are to be uploaded to our Blackboard Discussion Board by noon on the day before the first day of class in the week they are assigned (usually Monday).
- Deadlines for the six essays in our main writing sequence are **highlighted in green** throughout. (When you print out the schedule, use the Black and White setting to save money).
- This schedule is subject to change with advanced notice. Sometimes these changes will be announced in class only—another reason why it's important to attend every class.

Welcome Week: Saturday, August 24

FYS Pizza Dinner ☞ Introductions ☞ “Who Wore it Best?” ☞ Blackboard

Week 1: August 27 & 29

Course Policies and Procedures ☞ Participation Guidelines ☞ In-Class Viewing: Jorgen Leth’s *The Perfect Human* ☞ Discuss Essay 1: “The Perfect Student”

Week 2: September 3 & 5

Read: Anton Chekhov’s “Lady with the Pet Dog” (both translations: Litvinov and Yarmolinsky—Blackboard) ☞ **Discussion Brief #1:**

- Choose a phrase or sentence from one of the two translations of Chekhov’s story that differs significantly from the analogous sentence or phrase from the other translation (or is included in one and excluded from another).
- Type both sentences at the top of your post, and indicate the translation and page number from which you’re quoting each.
- Then, in about 350 words, explain what you think is significant about the difference between the way the two translators chose to render the phrases or sentences you chose.
- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday.

☞ Next Monday is the last day to drop a class without receiving a mark of “W” on your transcript.

Week 3: September 10 & 12

Read: Joyce Carol Oates’s “Lady with the Pet Dog” (Blackboard) ☞ **Write Discussion Brief #2:**

- Choose a brief passage (from 1 to 3 sentences) from Oates’s story that you think demonstrates an important difference between her version of this story and Chekhov’s.
- Type that sentence at the top of the page, including the page #.
- Then, in about 350 words, explain what you think is significant about the difference between the two stories represented by the passage you chose.
- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday.

☞ **“The Perfect Student” (Draft): Please remember to bring two hard copies of your rough draft to class to class on Thursday**

Week 4: September 17 & 19

Read: Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (chapters 1-6) 🌀 In-Class Viewing: Leth and Lars von Trier: "Obstruction #1" and *The Perfect Human—Cuba* 🌀 Discuss Essay 2: "The Perfect Student: Displaced"

Week 5: September 24 & 26

Read: Hamid's *Filthy Rich* (chapters 7-12) 🌀 **Discussion Brief #3:**

- Choose an image, event, or cultural reference from this week's reading that strikes you as both *foreign* and *essential* to understanding the cultural context of the story.
- Quote the sentence or passage in which this reference or image appears at the top of your page, and indicate the page number from which it comes.
- Then, in about 350 words, explain what you see as its significance to your over-all understanding of the novel.
- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday

🌀 **Upload Essay #1 to our Blackboard online "Assignments" menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by noon on Sunday, September 29.**

Week 6: October 1 & October 3

Read: Hamid's *Filthy Rich* (chapters 7-12)

Week 7: October 8 & 10

Read: Kiese Laymon's essay "You are the Second Person" (Blackboard) 🌀 In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier's "Obstruction #2" and *The Perfect Human—Bombay* (Wednesday) 🌀 Discuss Essay #3: "The Perfect Human: Derailed" 🌀 **Upload Essay #2 to our Blackboard "Assignments" menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by Sunday, October 13.**

Week 8: October 15 & 17

No Class on Monday (Fall Break) 🌀 Read: Susan Orlean's "Orchid Fever" 🌀 In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier's "Obstruction #3" and *The Perfect Human: Complete Freedom*. 🌀 Discuss Essay #4: "The Perfect Student: Free"

Week 9: October 22 & 24

Information Literacy Day in Cowles Library (Tuesday or Thursday—To Be Determined) 🌀 View (on your own) Charlie Kaufman's film *Adaptation* 🌀 Next Monday, is the last day to drop a class without extenuating circumstances 🌀 **Upload Essay #3 to our Blackboard "Assignments" menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by noon on Sunday, October 27.**

Week 10: October 29 & 31

Discussion Brief #4:

- Identify two brief passages (a couple sentences at most)—one from Kaufman's *Adaptation* and one from Orlean's "Orchid Fever"—that you think capture the obsessional tendency of each text's central figure.
- Quote and cite the passages at the top of your discussion brief.
- Then, in in 500 words explain why you think these passages create a vivid sense of the figures' obsession.

- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday.

Week 11: November 5 & 7

🌀 Read: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (First Half) 🌀

🌀 In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier's "Obstruction #4" and *The Perfect Human: Cartoon*
 Discuss "Essay" #5: "The Perfect Student: Visualized" 🌀 Upload **Essay #4** to our Blackboard
 "Assignments" menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by noon pm on
 Sunday, November 10.

Week 12: November 12

Read: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (Second Half) 🌀 **Discussion Brief #5:**

- Select a page from this week's reading on which you believe an image either
 - a.) adds significantly to the meaning of the text or
 - b.) detracts/distracts from the meaning of the text.
- Indicate the page number, and explain, in about 350 words, why you think the image(s) on that page have the effect they do.
- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday.

🌀 No Class on Thursday. 🌀 Use this time and the weekend to finalize your "Essay" 5 🌀
 Post **Essay #5** as an attachment to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on
 Monday, November 20.

Week 13: November 21 & 23

Blackboard "Presentations" of and Reactions to "Essay" #5

Week 14: November 26

In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier's "Obstruction #5" and "The Perfect Human: Ventriloquist"
 🌀 Discuss Essay #6: "The Perfect Student: Evaluation" 🌀 No Class on Thursday (Thanksgiving)

Week 15: December 3 & 5

Read: Samuel Beckett's play "Krapp's Last Tape" 🌀 View (on your own) Atom Egoyan's film of
 Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* starring John Hurt (2001):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znASL1ZwKPO> 🌀 **Discussion Brief #6:**

- Identify one significant interpretive choice Egoyan or Hurt has made in the film version of *Krapp's Last Tape*.
- Then, in about 350 words, describe that choice and explain the significance of its effect on how we might interpret the play.
- Post your response to the appropriate Blackboard discussion forum by noon on Monday.

🌀 End-of-Semester Business

Finals Week

Upload **Essay #6** to our Blackboard "Assignments" menu (in standard document
 format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by 5 pm on Wednesday, December 11.