

## Passing and Self-Making in American Literature

ENGL 3300.001 Spring 2017 Syllabus  
Tues.-Thurs. 2:00 - 3:20 p.m. Preston 206  
Prof. Neill Matheson  
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### Course Description:

This course explores narratives of impersonation and racial passing, featuring people who cross social boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, or gender, disguising or abandoning their original identity to seek a better life. American self-fashioning has often been celebrated as evidence of a society defined by freedom and opportunity, open to enterprising individuals who make their own way in the world, pursuing self-interest. But the democratic promise of social mobility embodied in the self-made American individual is shadowed by more negatively valued ideas about self-invention, involving “bad subjects” who refuse to stay in their proper place or play by the established rules, who succeed through guile, charm, or deception. Examining the stories of imposters, tricksters, con men and artful women, we will consider why some forms of social mobility are devalued, even stigmatized, while others are privileged as fundamentally American.

We will also read some historical accounts of boundary-crossers and impersonators, such as the white scientist Clarence King, who lived a “double life” as the married black Pullman porter James Todd. In addition to course readings, we will watch several films.

### Course texts:

Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask* (William Morrow)  
Charles Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars* (Penguin)  
William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (Dover)  
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography* (Dover)  
Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Norton)  
Mat Johnson, *Incognegro* (Vertigo)  
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin)

Films: *Imitation of Life* (1959; dir. Douglas Sirk)  
*Boys Don't Cry* (1999; dir. Kimberly Peirce)  
*Gattaca* (1997; dir. Andrew Niccol)  
*The Imposter* (2012; dir. Bart Layton)

Note: Films will not be shown in class, so you will need to purchase or rent them. They must be viewed before the class in which they are discussed. All of these films are available for rental through Netflix and Amazon. They may also be available online elsewhere. You can also purchase them from Amazon or another vendor.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Two papers (4-6 and 8-12 pages). Papers must be submitted through Blackboard.
2. Midterm.
3. Final exam.
4. Reading quizzes. Because these quizzes are part of the daily work of the course, a measure of your preparation and participation, make-ups will not be offered if you miss class on the day a quiz is given.
5. Participation in class discussion.

**Note:** All major assignments (i.e., both papers, midterm, and final) must be completed in order to pass the course.

**Course Grade:**

First paper	20%
Second paper	25%
Midterm	20%
Final	25%
Participation (incl. quizzes)	10%

**Attendance, Participation, Preparation:**

Student participation is an extremely important part of this course. The course will primarily be organized around discussion of the readings, rather than lectures; student interests will play a major role in shaping our discussions. I expect you to come to class having carefully read the texts for each day's meeting, prepared with questions, ideas, enthusiasms, or objections. Because this course depends on your full involvement, regular attendance is also essential for its success.

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. However, while UT Arlington does not require instructors to take attendance in their courses, the U.S. Department of Education requires that the University have a mechanism in place to mark when Federal Student Aid recipients "begin attendance in a course." UT Arlington instructors will report when students begin attendance in a course as part of the final grading process. Specifically, when assigning a student a grade of F, faculty report the last date a student attended their class based on evidence such as a test, participation in a class project or presentation, or an engagement online via Blackboard. This date is reported to the Department of Education for federal financial aid recipients.

As the instructor of this section, I have established the following policy: More than three absences will have a significant impact on your grade for the course. More than eight absences may result in failure for the course. Late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive, and a pattern of tardiness will also affect your grade.

**Policy on Electronic Devices:**

Please turn off and put away all cell phones, laptops, iPads, Kindles, and other electronic devices at the start of each class. Such digital devices are of course essential academic tools, but their potential to be distracting can outweigh their value in the classroom. I may make exceptions to this policy for particular class meetings in which we are discussing e-texts.

**UTA Drop Policy:**

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students should be able to:

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course, and identify connections synthetically between these texts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of major themes and issues relevant to course literature, particularly the topic of “passing” and impersonation.
- Demonstrate a complex understanding of the relationship between literary texts and significant historical and cultural contexts, including analyzing the relevance of important historical events or topics to specific works.
- Explain and make use of analytical and theoretical concepts and literary critical terminology covered in the course.
- Express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing.
- Express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and respond substantially and respectfully to the ideas of other students.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students enrolled in all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero. No rewrites are allowed for plagiarized papers.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act:**

UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

**The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364.

**Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS)** [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671.

Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

### **Non-Discrimination Policy:**

*The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit [uta.edu/eos](http://uta.edu/eos).*

### **Title IX Policy:**

The University of Texas at Arlington ("University") is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be

tolerated. *For information regarding Title IX, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX) or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or [jmhood@uta.edu](mailto:jmhood@uta.edu).*

### **Student Feedback Survey:**

At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

### **Final Review Week:**

A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

### **Campus Carry:**

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>

### **Emergency Exit Procedures:**

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located on the building’s first floor. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

### **Student Support Services:**

UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include [tutoring](#), [major-based learning centers](#), developmental education, [advising and mentoring](#), personal counseling, and [federally funded programs](#). For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to

[resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>.

**The IDEAS Center** (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of Central Library) offers **free** tutoring to all students with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor email [IDEAS@uta.edu](mailto:IDEAS@uta.edu) or call (817) 272-6593.

**The English Writing Center (411LIBR):** The Writing Center Offers free tutoring in 20-, 40-, or 60-minute face-to-face and online sessions to all UTA students on any phase of their UTA coursework. Hours are 9 am to 8 pm Mon.-Thurs., 9 am-3 pm Fri. and Noon-6 pm Sat. and Sun. Register and make appointments online at <http://uta.mywconline.com>. Please see [www.uta.edu/owl](http://www.uta.edu/owl) for detailed information on all Writing Center programs and services.

**The Library's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Academic Plaza** offers students a central hub of support services, including IDEAS Center, University Advising Services, Transfer UTA and various college/school advising hours. Services are available during the library's hours of operation. <http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza>

### **Electronic Communication Policy:**

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

I will use your UTA email address for some course handouts and announcements, as well as to contact you individually if necessary. So be sure to check your MavMail account frequently.

### **Course Schedule:**

This schedule is provisional: I may make substitutions in readings or changes in the dates of assignments if necessary.

**Jan. 17** Introduction

**Jan. 19** Henry Louis Gates, "White Like Me: Anatole Broyard"; Bliss Broyard, "Rachel Dolezal isn't alone"

**Jan. 24** Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, Part One

**Jan. 26** William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*

**Jan. 31** Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask*

**Feb. 2** *Behind a Mask*; Fanny Fern, "A Law More Nice than Just"

**Feb. 7** Charles Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*

**Feb. 9** *The House Behind the Cedars*

**Feb. 14** *The House Behind the Cedars*

**Feb. 16** Chesnutt, "The Passing of Grandison"; "What is a White Man?"

**Feb. 21; first paper due**

**Feb. 23** Nella Larsen, *Passing*

**Feb. 28** *Passing*

**Mar. 2** *Imitation of Life* (1959 film)

**Mar. 7** Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black"

**Mar. 9 Midterm**

**March 13-18 Spring Break!**

**Mar. 21** Sandweiss, *Passing Strange* (selections)

**Mar. 23** Jack London, "South of the Slot"

**Mar. 28** Mat Johnson, *Incognegro*

**Mar. 30** Laura Browder, "One Hundred Percent American: How a Slave, a Janitor, and a Former Klansman Escaped Racial Categories by Becoming Indians"

**Mar. 31 Last day to drop classes**

**Apr. 4** *Boys Don't Cry* (film)

**Apr. 6** TBA

**Apr. 11** *Gattaca* (film)

**Apr. 13** Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Apr. 18** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Apr. 20** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Apr. 25** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**Apr. 27** *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**May 2** *The Imposter* (film); David Grann, "The Chameleon"

**May 4** Last class; **final paper due**

**Final exam: Tuesday May 9 2:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.** (in our usual classroom)