

University of South Carolina | College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policies

**EDHE 600 (Special Topics)**  
**Higher Education in Popular Culture**  
Spring Semester 2022

**Instructor: Christian K. Anderson, Ph.D.**  
**Teaching Assistant: Erin H. York, MFA**

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Meeting Time:	Thurs. 1:10 – 4:00 p.m.	Classroom:	274-O Wardlaw College

**Course Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to how higher education is portrayed in popular culture— fiction, film, TV, music, theatre, comic books, video games—and analyze what these images mean.

What do these representations of campus life and culture mean to the study of higher education? How accurate are fictional portrayals of colleges, universities, faculty, and students? (And what does it mean if they are accurate—or not?) What can we learn about other areas of study in higher education—organization, administration, finance, student development, professorial roles, and so on—through these depictions?

Of course, we will also have fun looking (and laughing) at these depictions of higher education. Students will have the opportunity to produce creative work such as those studied in the course.

**Course Requirements and Expectations**

- You are expected to practice the highest possible standards of academic integrity. Any deviation from this expectation will result in a minimum academic penalty of failing the assignment, and will result in additional disciplinary measures. This includes improper citation of sources, using another student's work, and any other form of academic misrepresentation. The first tenet of the Carolinian Creed is, “I will practice personal and academic integrity.”
- Students are expected to attend, participate fully in discussions, and submit work on time. All students, whether attending for credit or as an audit, must register for the course.
- Please refer to the University’s Academic Calendars at <http://registrar.sc.edu/> for deadlines and other important University-wide dates.

## **Grading**

You will be graded based on your performance on the required assignments and class participation based on the following scale: A (90-100%), B+ (85-89%), B (80-84%), C+ (76-79%), C (70-75%), D (<70%).

## **Accommodations**

The Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) empowers students to manage challenges and limitations imposed by disabilities. In order to receive reasonable accommodations from the instructor, you must be registered with the Center (Close-Hipp, Suite 102, 803-777-6142, <http://www.sa.sc.edu/sds/>).

## **Required Texts**

Required texts are available at libraries and bookstores:

Reynolds, Pauline J. *Representing "U": Popular Culture, Media, and Higher Education*. ASHE Higher Education Report, 40:4. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014.

*Beyond the Mapped Stars* by Rosalyn Eves

*The Cheese Monkeys: A Novel in Two Semesters* by Chip Kidd

*Real Life* by Brandon Taylor

*Dear Committee Members* by Julie Schumacher

*Stoner* by John Williams

Short stories are available on Blackboard.

Films will be viewed in class and do not need to be purchased.

## **Supplementary Readings**

Conklin, John E. *Campus Life in the Movies: A Critical Survey from the Silent Era to the Present*. McFarland & Company: Jefferson, NC, 2008. (On Reserve)

Kramer, John E. *The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004. (On Reserve)

Tobolowsky, Barbara F. and Pauline Reynolds (Eds.), *Anti-Intellectual Representations of American Colleges and Universities: Fictional Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. (Available Electronically)

Additional course readings are available on Blackboard.

## **Course Assignments**

**1. Higher Education in Popular Media:** For class on 1/20 bring three examples of where higher education is mentioned in some way in popular culture in a place that is *not* a campus-focused novel, movie, TV show, etc. (e.g., a short passage in a novel, a passing reference in a TV show or movie). Take one of them and create do one of the following:

**Option A – Mini Essay:** Write an explanation and critique of the item. What is the creator trying to convey with the passing reference to higher education? How does it fit into the larger work? How does it connect to other such examples? How might you explore this further in a longer essay? Limit yourself to one page (not including references, if you use them).

**Option B – Mini Creative Work:** Write a one-page creative work using that reference. Write its backstory, develop the scene or passage further, or create something else with it. This can take any form (an extension of the original piece or something different): prose, screenplay, poetry, you name it.

10% of your grade.

**2. Class Participation:** All students are expected to actively participate on a regular basis. (Missing more than 10% of the classes drops your grade.)

20% of your grade (undergraduates); 10% (graduate students).

**3. Discussion Leader (Graduate Students Only):** Half of your participation grade will be determined by your thoughtful leadership of a class discussion for one of the novels or films, utilizing the original work along with secondary readings (available on Blackboard). You are expected to show that you are able to critically assess and analyze sources *about* higher education in popular fiction. You may supplement the listed readings with additional items (examples of popular culture, additional critiques, articles, et cetera). No formal presentation is expected, but rather you are to help enhance the conversation for your particular week.

10% of your grade (graduate students).

**4. Book or Film Review:** Choose an example of academic fiction or film, published or produced in the past 10 years, and write a review of 1,000—1,500 words. Write your review as if you were writing it for the *New York Times Book Review* (for novels) or *Variety* (for film reviews) or a similar publication (meaning, an audience beyond just other academics). Be sure to include in your review a discussion of what the book or film tells a general audience about higher education. If possible, identify how this book or film is

different from or similar to academic fiction/films from previous eras. Lists of novels and films are available on Blackboard. Submit your title on the shared document on Blackboard; no two students will review the same book or film. Consult with the instructor if you would like to review something other than a novel or film. Reviews are due anytime during the semester (no later than 4/7) and will be discussed briefly each class when they are turned in.

20% of your grade.

**5. Writing Project:** There are two options for the final writing project. You will be expected to present a short summary of your project on the last day of class, and is due on 4/21 when they will be discussed in class. You should indicate the nature and topic of your project early in the term to the instructor.

**Option A – Essay:** Write an essay (10–15 pages of text), in which you discuss some aspect of higher education as represented in popular culture. To assist you in finding a topic and developing your essay, a bibliography of literature on academic fiction and (non-exhaustive) lists of academic fiction and films are available on Blackboard. Your essay should be focused around a key theme or question. (Correctly and consistently use a reference system—APA, *Chicago*, or MLA—in the paper.)

Examples of the type of essay you write could include:

- Examination of the portrayal of a certain academic discipline, administrative position, type of institution, or type of student in fiction and/or film or other media
- Analysis of how a certain institution or institutional type is portrayed in popular culture
- Comparison of academic novels or films in two different periods in history
- Critical review of the literature on criticism of academic fiction or film
- Comparison of an academic novel and its film counterpart—or, a comparison of academe in films vs. novels (focusing on students, professors, staff, or administrators, etc.)
- Analysis of issues of gender, race, class, or other issue in higher education as portrayed in popular culture

**Option B – Creative Work:** The most likely output of this assignment would be a short story or short screenplay, but other options can be explored with the instructor. Whatever the final product is, it should center in a significant way around students, staff, administrators, or professors in a campus setting. You would likely need at around 15 – 20 pages to write a fully developed short story or short screenplay. Your story will be graded on how well it exemplifies the issues that college professors, staff, administrators, or students might face.

50% of your grade.

## Tentative Schedule

Subject to change. Supplemental readings are available on the class website.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics, Assigned Materials</b>
1/13	<p><b>Course Overview; Introduction to Higher Education in Fiction and Film; Introduction to Creative Writing</b></p> <p>Short Stories: “Strawberry Spring” by Stephen King and “Professors” by Tom Whalen</p> <p>TV: “The Pirate Solution” from <i>The Big Bang Theory</i></p>
1/20	<p><b>Why We Read Academic Fiction and View Academic Films; Why We Write It</b></p> <p>Short Story: “Landfill” by Joyce Carol Oates</p> <p>TV: “Reconcilable Differences” (Pilot) from <i>A Different World</i></p> <p>Anderson, Christian K., and John R. Thelin. “Campus Life Revealed: Tracking Down the Rich Resources of American Collegiate Fiction.” <i>Journal of Higher Education</i> 80, no. 1 (2009): 106-113.</p> <p>Reynolds, Pauline J. Chapters 1 &amp; 2. In <i>Representing “U”: Popular Culture, Media, and Higher Education</i>, 1-20. ASHE Higher Education Report. Jossey-Bass, 2014.</p> <p>DUE: Assignment #1</p>
1/27	<p><b>Students: Getting to College – Admission and the Freshman Year</b></p> <p><i>Beyond the Mapped Stars</i> by Rosalyn Eves</p> <p>Discussion Leader: _____</p> <p>Guest (via zoom): Rosalyn Eves</p>
2/3	<p><b>Students: Getting to College – Admission and the Freshman Year (Continued)</b></p> <p><i>Accepted</i> (2006)</p>
2/10	<p><b>Students: The Collegiate Experience</b></p> <p><i>The Cheese Monkeys: A Novel in Two Semesters</i> by Chip Kidd</p>

2/17	<p><b>Students: The Collegiate Experience</b></p> <p><i>Animal House</i> (1978)</p>
2/24	<p><b>Graduate Students</b></p> <p><i>Real Life</i> by Brandon Taylor Discussion Leader: _____</p>
3/3	<p><b>Race on Campus</b></p> <p><i>Dear White People</i> (2014)</p>
3/10	<p><b>Spring Break – No Class</b> (Maybe watch <i>Girl Happy</i> starring Elvis or some other spring break movie!)</p>
3/17	<p><b>Faculty: Professors at Work</b></p> <p><i>Dear Committee Members</i> by Julie Schumacher Discussion Leader: _____</p>
3/24	<p><b>Faculty: At Work and Home</b></p> <p><i>The Mirror Has Two Faces</i> (1996) Discussion Leader: _____</p> <p><i>A Serious Man</i> (2009) Discussion Leader: _____</p> <p>Schoeman, F.K. and Christian K. Anderson (2021). "Funny Professors, Serious Lessons: An Analysis of the Image of Jews as Academics in Film." <i>Jewish Film &amp; New Media: An International Journal</i>, 8 (No. 2), 153-85.</p>
3/31	<p><b>Community Colleges in Popular Culture</b></p> <p>Short Story: "Shiloh" by Bobbie Ann Mason</p>
4/7	<p><b>The Life Cycle of an Academic</b></p> <p><i>Stoner</i> by John Williams Discussion Leader: _____</p>

4/14	<b>Writing Day / Asynchronous Day</b>  Blackboard Discussion
4/21	<b>The Meaning of Higher Education or: Why we Read Academic Fiction and View Academic Films; Why We Write It</b>  “The Cowboy” from <i>Little America</i>  Due: Final Paper or Creative Work