

Honors 116
Spring 2018
Haley Hall 102
TR 1:20-2:50 PM

Dr. Robert Volpicelli
robertvolpicelli@rmc.edu
Office: Haley 13
Office Hours: T 3:30 – 5:00;
F 2:00 – 3:30

Road Trip! Going Places in American Literature



Jack Kerouac, on the road.

Course Description:

Road trips are an American experience, and road-trip narratives are an enduring cultural form that speaks to the American desire to journey outward. The most concentrated versions of this narrative perhaps belong to the mid-twentieth century, a time period defined by the expansion of automobile culture as well as a counter-cultural desire to break away from the mainstream. Yet this literary form—stories of setting out, on the road—has a long history that stretches back (at least) to the American settlement and exploration of the frontier. What's more, it is a narrative structure capable of taking us into the future as a vehicle for exploring our hopes and fears about the uncertain road ahead.

Examining the road trip thus provides an inroad into the American imagination itself. Taking up a variety of texts from different periods and genres, this course explores the road trip as a central cultural metaphor that reflects issues of personal development, national identity, and technological modernization. Students in this course will analyze these concepts through their writing; they will also undertake a digital humanities project in which they map one of the narratives on our syllabus. Through these assignments, they will learn to ask new questions about a place that seemingly exists both everywhere at once and nowhere in particular: the American road.

Required Texts:

- Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Penguin, 978-0140283297)
- Joan Didion, *The White Album* (FSG, 978-0374532079)
- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Vintage, 978-0679785879)
- Zora Neal Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Harper, 978-0061350191)
- Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Vintage, 978-0307387899)
- other texts and recordings made available on Canvas.

Major Course Requirements:

- regular reading and exceptional in-class participation
- two major close-reading essays
- digital mapping project/presentation

Important Course Policies:

Attendance: I expect you to come to every class unless your absence is necessary. Each student is allowed three absences per semester (note that I make no distinctions between “excused” and “unexcused” absences). For every class you miss after your third absence, I will deduct 20% from your participation grade. For every class you miss after your fifth absence, I will begin directly lowering your final grade by one level (“B-” becomes “C+”). I reserve the right to fail students for what I deem to be excessive absences beyond this point.

Class Preparation: Students need to be in class on time and prepared to participate. If a student is late to class three times, I will count this as an absence; more late arrivals will result in more absences. Being prepared also means having your reading with you. I will warn you if I see that you do not have the assigned reading; if you come to class without the reading again, I will mark you absent. Additionally, I will only warn you once about the improper use of cellphones or computers; if you continue to use these devices during class time, I will mark you absent.

Assignments: You will receive a more detailed description of each assignment when it is time to begin working on it. Always use a standard font (like Times New Roman), and make sure your assignments are double-spaced and stapled. All late papers will receive a deduction of one third of a letter grade per day. Extensions will not be granted on the due date, or after the date has already passed. If you foresee a problem with handing in an assignment on time, please come see me well in advance. Failure to hand in a final paper/project on the assigned date will result in a grade of “0” for that work.

Academic Integrity: Violations of the college’s academic integrity policy will result in serious consequences, most likely in the form of academic sanctions. Making use of another person’s writing or ideas without the proper attribution constitutes plagiarism and will be treated as such. If you ever have a question about proper citation or your responsibilities as a student, please come talk to me in advance. You can refer to the Randolph-Macon College Code of Academic Integrity in the R-MC Student Handbook, which is also available online through the Registrar’s website.

Course Evaluation:

Participation: 15%

Essays: 50% (25% each)

Digital Mapping Project: 35% (25% project; 10% reflection)

Additional Resources:

The Writing Center is available for students who want extra feedback; it provides free, one-on-one conferences with trained tutors. The center is located on the first floor of the library, and you can make appointments online: <http://www.rmc.edu/academics/academic-support>.

Students with disabilities will be fully accommodated in this course. Please let me know right away if you have a need that I can help address. If you have a disability that requires additional accommodation, the Office for Disability Support Services (Higgins Academic Center) can help you register and provide you with other resources.

My Office Hours are a designated time for you to come by and talk about your writing and other coursework. I encourage you to make use of this resource, as I can often provide more detailed feedback in person than I can in written comments on your drafts.

Reading Schedule:

Schedule is subject to alterations. All readings and assignments are **due** on the date scheduled below.

I. *The Long Way Out*

T 2/13: Course Introduction – “On the Road”

R 2/15: Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, up to page 45

T 2/20: Kerouac, *On the Road*, up to page 113

R 2/22: Kerouac, *On the Road*, up to page 167; digital mapping conversation with Dr. Julie McCormick Weng

T 2/27: Kerouac, *On the Road*, 235

R 3/1: Kerouac, *On the Road*, to finish

T 3/6: Joan Didion, *The White Album*, 1-47, 59-66

R 3/8: Didion, *The White Album* 79-85, 96-105, 133-152

T 3/13: Didion, *The White Album*, 153 to finish

II. *Traveling vs. Tripping*

R 3/15: Detour: Bob Dylan, *Highway 61* (links to recordings and lyrics on Canvas); **essay #1 due**

T 3/20: Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, up to page 60

R 3/22: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, up to page 100

T 3/27: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, 160

R 3/29: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, to finish

***** M 4/2 – F 4/6: Spring Break *****

III. *Migrations*

T 4/10: Zora Neal Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, up to page 60;

R 4/12: Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* up to page 100

T 4/17: Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* up to page 160; **digital mapping work plan and bibliography due**

R 4/19: Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to finish

T 4/24: Detour: Muriel Rukeyser, *U.S. 1* (excerpts available on Canvas)

V. *The End of the Road*

R 4/26: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, up to page 60

T 5/1: McCarthy, *The Road*, up to page 140

R 5/3: McCarthy, *The Road*, up to page 200

T 5/8: McCarthy, *The Road*, to finish

R 5/10: Detour #3: Film screening; **essay #2 due**

T 5/15: Film, continued

R 5/17: Website Showcase

***** M 5/21 – F 5/25 – Final Exams*****

Project reflection due - Tuesday, May 22, at 2:00 PM (hard copy, delivered to my office)