

## Syllabus for Zombies in Popular Media

### Welcome to Zombies in Popular Media!

In this class, you will conduct an intense, critical analysis of the walking dead, considering cultural implications, symbolism, and critical thought.

Some of the work for this course will occur right here, in Moodle. The syllabus, assignments, and course requirements are posted here. Your readings are posted in each day's entry, and are cross-listed as "resources." You should hold on to the first-day handout so that you can get in contact with Brendan in case you have any questions.



### Introduction

The dead walk the earth, devouring the living. The living cower, or fight back, or turn on one another, or get eaten. Zombies are here.

Why do zombies captivate us? Why do they terrify us? What does our fascination with the living dead tell us about our culture, our society, ourselves? In this course, you will embark on an intense, three week exploration of the history and theory behind one of the most macabre and terrifying tropes in modern horror.

### Course Description

This course explores the history, significance, and representation of the zombie as a figure in horror and fantasy texts. We will pursue an intense schedule, using critical theory to think about zombies as they appear in literature, comics, and films. Our daily readings and discussion will focus on critical evaluation and reflection about the zombie trope, and your final project will ask you to integrate these ideas in a project within your discipline.

### Learning Objectives

- Understand the zombie figure as it has appeared in literary, filmic, and comic texts (among others), from early incarnations in the first half of the 20th century to more recent revisionist texts.
- Improve comprehension and application of critical theory as it pertains to horror texts (such as hermeneutics, postmodern theory, media studies, and critical lenses such as feminism or psychoanalysis).
- Explore how the zombie figure relates, symbolically and critically, to modern culture. Depending on the texts explored, such themes might include capitalism, individuality, the information age, and xenophobia.

### A Warning (or Challenge)

This course will be a rigorous experience. We will meet for 3 hours each morning and have a screening each day in the afternoon. You will have daily reading and response assignments and a presentation on an outside zombie text to produce. In the two months following our course, you will create a final project in your own discipline (along with an artist's statement). While the whole course will certainly be enjoyable, it will also be very rigorous.

## Course Information

Course: Zombies in Popular Media  
 Course no.: 52-2575, Section 01  
 Meetings: Class meetings: M-F, 9:30am-12pm; 12:15pm-3pm  
 Instructor: Brendan Riley, Ph.D.  
 Dept. phone: (312) 344-8817  
 Home: (708) 466-7370\*  
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 Office: English Department, 3rd floor, Room 300-N  
 33 East Congress  
 Institution: Columbia College Chicago  
 600 South Michigan Avenue  
 Chicago, IL 60605-1996

\* Please don't call after 9 p.m.

## Required Texts

Here is the list of books you will need for our course. I have ordered them from the bookstore, but I recommend getting the books from Amazon or another retailer -- it will be cheaper, probably. If you are going to do this, though, PLEASE ORDER THE BOOKS RIGHT AWAY. The course is only three weeks, so we need to have the readings right away at the beginning.

### American Zombie Gothic

Kyle Bishop  
 ISBN-10: 0786448067

### 21st Century Dead

Ed Christopher Golden  
 ISBN:0312605846

### Braaaaiinnss! From Academics to Zombies

Robert Smith?  
 ISBN-10: 0776607707



### Films:

Night of the Living Dead (1968)  
 White Zombie  
 I Walked With a Zombie  
 Carnival of Souls  
 I Eat Your Skin  
 Invasion of the Body Snatchers  
 Dawn of the Dead (1978)  
 Zombi 2  
 My Boyfriend's Back  
 Zombie Honeymoon  
 Day of the Dead  
 Slither  
 Dead Snow  
 Return of the Living Dead  
 Pontypool  
 American Zombie  
 [REC]  
 Fido

## Assignments and Grading

## Grading Scale

Category	Points	Percentage
In-class work and participation	200	20%
Reading responses	300	30%
Presentation	200	20%
Final Project	300	30%
Total	1000	100%

Grade	Score
A	1000 – 930 points
A-	929 – 900 points
B+	899 – 870 points
B	869 – 830 points
B-	829 – 800 points
C+	799 – 770 points
C	769 – 730 points
C-	729 – 700 points
D	699 – 600 points
F	599 or fewer points

### In-class work and participation

Throughout the term, we will engage in a wide variety of in-class activities. Aside from lectures and discussions, we will use break-out groups, short writing assignments, games, and other activities to explore the ideas we're considering. We will also have quizzes on the films we watch in screening. (200 points)



### Reading Responses:

Because many of the readings for this course are challenging, I will provide a set of questions and thinking prompts for you to use with each. You can find these reading prompts by clicking on the appropriate link in the daily section of this Moodle site. After you have completed the reading, you should type up your answers to the response questions I have provided. To get full credit, follow the directions on the reading guide and turn in your response on the Moodle forums. Please type your comments in a word processor and then cut-and-paste them into the forum text box. Each response is worth 15 points. Initial responses are due before class on the due date.

You will also be asked to post comments to generate discussion with your classmates. You must post two comments in each forum for 5 points each. Comments are due within three days of the reading's due date. (300 points)

### Presentation:

You will sign up to read/ watch/ play a zombie novel or game or two zombie films or comics and give a presentation on it/them in the second or third week of class. The details for the presentation are on the presentation assignment page. (200 points, See Appendix 1)

### Final Project:

Your final product for this course will be to propose, develop, and produce a project within your own major based on the ideas, theories, and texts we encountered in this course. You will also be required to produce an artist's statement explaining the project and its relationship to ideas and texts from the course. The details for this project are on the final project assignment page. (300 points, See Appendix 2)

## Course Schedule

Assignment deadlines and daily homework assignments are available on Moodle. Go to <http://moodle.colum.edu/> and log in using your OASIS userid and password. Then follow the links to our course homepage.

## Policies

### Attendance Policy:

Since much of our work is collaborative, it is absolutely necessary that you attend each class. Students who miss more than two classes after the first day will be penalized 75 points for each additional absence.

NOTE: Our course screenings count as class meetings. Even if you have seen these films before, you must watch them again as part of this course. Attendance at screenings is mandatory.

While I do allow for excused absences, such cases are rare and require written proof of absence for each occasion. In the case of excused absences, class work missed is due the class period after the student returns to class.

Events that do not excuse absences:

- Short term illness—if you are not sick enough to require a doctor visit and/or multiple days in bed, your illness will not excuse your absence. This does not mean that you should come to class if you are ill. Such illnesses are the perfect use for your two “freebies.”
- Car / transportation trouble.
- Leaving early/ returning late from holiday or other school breaks.

If you know ahead of time that you will have an excused absence, you must excuse such absences before you miss class. Such absences may include: academic events, scheduled medical procedures, conflicts with other courses. Foreseeable absences will not be excused after the fact. Work due for unexcused or pre-excused absences is due the day you return.

### Turning in work:

All work is due at the beginning of class on the day it is assigned. Hard-copy work done outside class should be typed and printed double-spaced on white, 8.5x11” paper. Work due online is due at the beginning of class.

Computers are fickle beasts. You should have at least two copies of everything you make for this class. Floppy disks are the least reliable medium you could choose to keep your files on. I highly recommend you buy a flash drive; they're inexpensive and pretty darn reliable.

CAVEAT: I accept assignments by email, but you should not assume that I have received an assignment until you receive a confirmation email from me. If I do not receive the email before the assignment is due, late-work penalties will apply. In other words, if you turn in assignments by email, you do so at your own risk. If assignments are due on Moodle you should post them there. Email them to me or print them as a last resort.

If you do not have regular access to a computer, please speak to me after class and we will discuss options for turning in work.

**Tardiness:**

Class starts on time. If you are late, you will miss information and disrupt other students when you arrive. Please be on time. Quizzes are held at the beginning of class. Students who are late may not make up quizzes.

Students who arrive late may also receive fewer "in-class" participation points. Students arriving more than 30 minutes late may be marked absent for the day.

**Late work and makeup assignments:**

Daily assignments will not be accepted late. Students who miss class for un- or pre-excused absences must turn in any daily assignments on the day they return. Students who miss class for excused absences may turn in missed work the class after they return.

Peer Reviews should be given to band-mates on the date due. Students should keep a copy for their records. Peer Reviews turned in after the due date are worth half credit. Peer Reviews turned in after the project due date are worth zero points.

**Extensions:**

For whatever reason, if you discover that you will not be able to meet the project deadline, you may ask for an extension. I do not guarantee that I will grant one, but I usually do. Below are two tips for extension seekers:

- Ask for the extension either in class or by email 48 hours before the project is due. If seek an extension with less time remaining, you probably won't get it.
- Keep up with the "stepping stone" assignments. If I see that you've been working on the project all along, I'm much more lenient.

**Extra Credit:**

As the term progresses, I may offer some extra credit opportunities. Extra credit options will generally be worth 10-20 points each. However, any student may use one extra credit assignment to "cancel out" an unexcused absence. There is no limit to how many extra credit assignments any student may do.

All extra credit is due on the date listed. No extra credit will be accepted late for any reason. Note: my extra credit assignments are usually fun, but more work than the daily assignments for the course.

**Academic Integrity:**

All students are expected to honor their commitment to the Code of Conduct.

The Student Handbook states: "Academic Honesty is a cherished principle in the life of the College community. Students are expected to adhere to this principle by understanding the nature of plagiarism, and by not plagiarizing materials, by refraining from the use of unauthorized aids on tests and examinations, by turning in assignments which are products of their own efforts and research, and by refusing to give or receive information on tests and examinations. Persons who violate these principles of simple honesty risk embarrassment, course failure, or disciplinary action."



In this course, there are several ways students might violate college rules regarding academic integrity:

- Multiple submissions—all the work you do for this course should be original work unless I specifically say otherwise. You should not turn in anything written or used in another course.
- Improper citation—use of someone else's work, ideas, data, or statements without adequately noting where the work comes from.
- Plagiarism—deceptive use of someone else's work, ideas, data, or statements in order to pass such work off as one's own.

Students suspected of violating these policies will meet with the instructor to discuss the matter. If the student has indeed violated the policy, the instructor will impose an appropriate penalty up to and including failure for the course. Students who plagiarize work will receive an F for the course.

I take academic integrity very seriously, and am deeply insulted by cheating. Do not plagiarize work for this class.

**Conduct:**

All students are expected to be familiar with (and follow) the CCC Student Code of Conduct. If you haven't read it, you can download a copy here:

[http://cms.colum.edu/student\\_handbook/policies\\_procedures/student\\_code\\_of\\_conduct/](http://cms.colum.edu/student_handbook/policies_procedures/student_code_of_conduct/)

**Harassment:**

In order to succeed in class, every student has to be willing to be open, honest, and involved. At the same time, we must have respect for one another's ideas, beliefs and statements. Therefore, each student is expected to participate in a reasonable, respectful manner in class--we can disagree and discuss, but we need to do so in a way that is not offensive or uncomfortable. Failure to do this, or disruptive behavior in class, will not be tolerated, and will result in disciplinary action.

**Complaints:**

Complaints about the class and/or grades should be addressed to the instructor, either before/after class, or during office hours (or another scheduled appointment).

**Conway Center Statement**

Students with disabilities are requested to present their Columbia accommodation letters to their instructor at the beginning of the semester so that accommodations can be arranged in a timely manner by the College, the department, or the faculty member as appropriate. Students with disabilities who do not have accommodation letters should visit the office of Services for Students with Disabilities in room 520 of the Congress building (312.344.8134/V or 312.360.0767/TTY). It is incumbent upon the students to know their responsibilities in this regard.

## Other Useful Information

### How to succeed in this course:

Be prepared for class. You should bring your folder with handouts and other class materials every day; you should also bring your course textbooks every day. Don't forget to bring paper and something to write with.

Do your homework. If you look at the grading policies and breakdown, you'll see that a big portion of your grade comes from small assignments and participatory activities rather than the "big" projects. Students who keep up with the daily assignments usually do very well in my classes. (Also, since the daily assignments help prepare you for the big projects, you'll do better on those too.)

Come to class. Each semester I have one or more students drop or fail because they missed too many classes. Make the most of your time here.

Participate actively in the collaborative work. You'll get more from your peers when they are getting more from you.

Don't cheat. Passing off someone else's work as your own is just about the most insulting thing you can do in this course. It does a disservice to your classmates who are working hard and it defeats the purpose of taking this class.

Keep in touch. If you keep in contact with me, we can work together to help you keep up if life gets in the way of your studies. If you drop out of touch for a while, it will be much harder to catch up later.

### Feedback:

Teaching is very important to me. I work hard at it and hearing about your experience helps me grow as an instructor. In the "resources" section of Moodle, you'll find a feedback form you can use to give me input.

Just fill out the form and turn it in to my campus mailbox in the English Department.

Remember that constructive criticism is the most useful kind. If something in the course didn't work for you, please be specific about how it didn't work and what you think might work better.

### Computer skill assumptions and suggestions:

I make frequent use of computers and the internet in my courses. As you already know from this site, all relevant materials are posted online.

The best way to contact me is by email—I usually respond to any email you send within 24 hours. I do accept assignments by email. See the caveats above for more details.

Many aspects of this course will be managed through Moodle. We will cover some aspects of Moodle in class, but you may need to explore it a bit on your own. If you have any questions about how it works, please ask me.

I assume that you know how to use word processors and email. If you find that you are not as computer-savvy as I seem to expect, speak to me about it and we'll work something out.



## Appendix 1 – Presentation Assignment

On the second day of the course, you will sign up to present on a text or set of texts about zombies. These texts are external to the course--your job will be to give your classmates insight into how the text you have read/watched/played adds to our understanding of zombies as they appear in popular media. We will sign up for presentations and propose our topics on Tuesday.

### Assignment:

Present the text(s) you have selected to the class. Use any or all of the various themes and ideas we have discussed thus far to explain how the text you are presenting elaborates our understanding of the zombie in popular media.

### Expectations:

- You may provide a brief plot synopsis, but the goal of the presentation is NOT to relay the plot to the class. The goal is to tell us what the text says about zombies.
- You should draw explicitly on ideas and texts we've discussed or engaged with before. If your text seems to be heavily influenced by the Haitian voodoo zombie, say so and explain why.
- Be entertaining! Bring visual aids, act out a scene from the text, bring music or other aural aids, make up a game. This presentation should be zesty and fun, but informative too.
- Bring a handout about your text. This could include a brief plot synopsis along with your key points. Add your own twist to the presentation. What does your text tell us about zombies that we didn't know? Does it add anything new to the zombie trope? Be sure to bring enough copies for everyone (24 including yourself).

### Nitty Gritty:

- You will have 7-11 minutes to present your text. You should not take less than 7 minutes, and you will be CUT OFF at 12.
- You may present on one novel or story collection, two films, two graphic novels, or one video game.

Your presentation grade will be based on the four presentation expectations above.

Here's a rubric that phrases them differently:

- Plot versus meaning. Did the presenter tell us about the plot and meaning of the zombie text? Did we learn something about zombies from this presentation? 50 points
- Class materials. Did the presenter draw on materials encountered in class? Did we learn how his text connected with the ideas we've already explored? 50 points
- Entertaining. Did the presenter think up creative ways to present her materials? Was the presentation FUN or BORING? 50 points
- Handout. Did the presenter prepare and distribute a handout? Was it a useful addition to the presentation? 50 points.



**Tips for success**

Practice! It's hard to time a presentation to 7-11 minutes without practicing it. Talk through your presentation at least twice. You can do it for yourself in front of a mirror or for your roommate. Be sure to time yourself.

Be prepared! This presentation is a big deal. Act like it.

Be fun! You only have to present once, but you have to watch 19 of them. If they're boring, we'll ALL be bored.

Make your handout a true supplement. Put screenshots or quotes on it. Include things that you won't cover or will just touch on in the presentation. Your handout should provide MORE than your presentation did.

Think about the three major communication channels -- image, sound, speech. Try to hit all of them.

Don't just lecture--come up with a game or an activity to do.

**Schedule**

To be posted after requests have been made.

## Appendix 2 - Final Project

### Schedule

Segment	Due date
Proposal	F 16 Jan
Check in 1	M 2 Feb
Check in 2	M 16 Feb
Rough Draft of Artist's Stmt	M 23 Feb
Final Draft	M 2 Mar

The final project for this course asks you to engage with the notion of the zombie text in your own field or to write a critical analysis essay about a zombie text or zombie texts. While I do not have a specific guideline for each field, I do have “design constraints” that will help you imagine and pursue this project. Please note that everyone in class must produce an artist’s statement to accompany her/his final project.

### Option 1: Project in your field:

Consider the theories, texts, and ideas we have encountered about zombies in this course. Working within your discipline, propose, design, and execute a project that engages with these texts and ideas to produce a profound statement, idea, or expression of the zombie as you understand it and its relationship to popular media. As you work, develop an artist’s statement that explains your choices and motivation explicitly. Your statement should engage with both source texts AND critical texts to give the reader a sense of what shaped your project.

### Expectations:

Your project should draw from a wide range of influences encountered in this course. Ideally, you will not be responding to one zombie text, but several; similarly, several critical ideas and/or themes should influence your endeavor. You must complete each step of the development process as outlined in the class schedule. This includes a project proposal, periodic check ins, a rough draft of your artist's statement, and a presentation (either in person or remotely) of your final project. You must also complete an artist’s statement explaining your project. This statement should be concise and clever, engaging and thorough. You should use the statement to explain which source texts and what ideas influenced your work on your final project.

### Nitty Gritty:

- You must participate in the preparation process for the project on the proposal, the two updates, and artist’s statement rough draft.
- Your artist’s statement must be 1000-1200 words. You may not have fewer than 1000 words, and going over 1200 is frowned upon.
- The scope of your project will be determined in conversation between you and the instructor—as each discipline has different parameters, each project will have a different scope. Keep in mind, though, that this project represents the equivalent of a project produced over half a semester.

**Option 2 - Critical Essay:**

In place of producing an artistic project and artist's statement about zombie texts for your field, you may instead write a critical essay about one or two zombie texts. The critical essay assignment is primarily intended for students whose discipline does not allow space to do the "Project in your field" assignment, though any student may choose this option. Your essay should consider the sources and texts we've encountered in class and engage with one of them to produce a critical reading or interpretation. Alternatively, you may select a zombie text outside of class (pending my approval) as your subject matter.

**Expectations:**

Your critical essay should be a complex, careful analysis of your text. You should use the strategies and tools we've discussed during the term to isolate details and build your argument. Students who choose to include a literature survey in their writing process must, of course, cite carefully any ideas borrowed or quoted, and must produce a valid works cited as well. You must complete each step of the development process as outlined in the class schedule. This includes a project proposal, a project peer discussion, a project peer review, and a final project discussion on the final day of class. You must also complete an artist's statement explaining your project.

**Nitty Gritty:**

- You must participate in the writing process (proposal, rough draft final draft) and turn in all materials to me at appropriate times.
- Your essay must be 2500-3000 words (8-10 pages, not including Works Cited). You are encouraged to obtain illustrative screenshots where possible.
- The scope of your project will be determined in conversation between you and the instructor—as each argument will require different kinds of evidence and different approaches. Keep in mind, though, that this project represents the equivalent of a project produced over half a semester.