

Sophister Module Description Template 2021-22

Full Name: The American Essay in the American Century

Short Name: US Essay US Century

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Philip Coleman, philip.coleman@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: HT

Year: SS

Module Content:

This Senior Sophister module provides an opportunity to consider the development of the non-fiction essay as a major genre in US American literature from the first decade of the twentieth century to the present time. Considering the essay's development through a number of major cultural movements and moments, from Modernism to the New Sincerity, the Great War to the Cold War, and beyond, the module will consider the ways that essays have been used to respond to issues and events, but it will also look closely at the ways that the form has been handled by some of the most important writers of the twentieth and twenty-first century.

Module Aims:

By paying close attention to the works of several important practitioners of the form from the early 1900s to the present – including Mark Twain, H.L. Mencken, Zora Neale Hurston, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Susan Sontag, Joan Didion, David Foster Wallace, Eula Biss and others – the module provides a comprehensive overview of the US American essay's development during the twentieth century. A particular emphasis will be placed on formal questions, but consideration will also be given to the essay's place in particular periods and with regard to certain social and cultural movements. The overarching aim of the module, in other words, is to explore both the aesthetic and the ideological work attempted and accomplished by US American essayists throughout the long twentieth century.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module a student should be able to:

- Identify some of the key figures, and some the most important works, in the development of the essay in the United States from the early 1900s to the present;

- Show an understanding of the literary, cultural, and political contexts in which the essay developed as a major literary form in the United States from the early 1900s to the present;
- Demonstrate awareness of the importance of the essay in the development of US American literary and political culture from the early 1900s to the present;
- Employ a highly-developed range of interpretive strategies using appropriate critical vocabulary in discussing the prescribed texts;
- Examine and explain the critical and cultural contexts related to the development of the essay in the United States from early 1900s to the present;
- Use high-level transferrable skills of analytical and writing techniques in relation to chosen topics studied in the module.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 2
- Name/Type of Component(s): Essay 1 and Essay 2
- Word Count of Component(s): 2,500 words and 3,500 words
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 40% and 60%

Preliminary Reading List:

Much of the material to be discussed on the module is contained in Joyce Carol Oates, ed. *The Best American Essays of the Century* (2000). Student intending to take the module should acquire a copy of this and begin reading it before the module begins. Further recommendations can be made on request.

Please note:

- **Curricular information is subject to change.**
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**