

**General Education Course Information Sheet**  
*Please submit this sheet for each proposed course*

Department & Course Number English 98TA  
 Course Title Reading Weather: Los Angeles as Apocalyptic Paradise  
 Indicate if Seminar and/or Writing II course Seminar

1 Check the recommended GE foundation area(s) and subgroups(s) for this course

**Foundations of the Arts and Humanities**

- Literary and Cultural Analysis X
- Philosophic and Linguistic Analysis X
- Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice X

**Foundations of Society and Culture**

- Historical Analysis \_\_\_\_\_
- Social Analysis \_\_\_\_\_

**Foundations of Scientific Inquiry**

- Physical Science \_\_\_\_\_  
*With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more)* \_\_\_\_\_
- Life Science \_\_\_\_\_  
*With Laboratory or Demonstration Component must be 5 units (or more)* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Briefly describe the rationale for assignment to foundation area(s) and subgroup(s) chosen.

As a whole, the course is designed to encourage students to reflect on Los Angeles weather (their own environment) as not only a natural force, but also as a cultural force that is constantly shaping and being shaped by them by way of its various representations literary, linguistic, and visual representations. In addition to analyzing a wide range of literary genres, students will engage with the theoretical texts that inform those genres (philosophic). The course also includes a unit on – and hopefully a fieldtrip to – two weather exhibits (visual and performance art).

3. List faculty member(s) who will serve as instructor (give academic rank):

Sydney Miller (Teaching Fellow), Chris Mott (senior lecturer)

Do you intend to use graduate student instructors (TAs) in this course? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

If yes, please indicate the number of TAs \_\_\_\_\_

4. Indicate when do you anticipate teaching this course:

2016-2017 Fall \_\_\_\_\_ Winter \_\_\_\_\_ Spring \_\_\_\_\_  
 Enrollment \_\_\_\_\_ Enrollment X Enrollment \_\_\_\_\_

5. GE Course Units

Is this an ***existing*** course that has been modified for inclusion in the new GE? Yes \_\_\_ No X

If yes, provide a brief explanation of what has changed. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Present Number of Units: \_\_\_\_\_ Proposed Number of Units: 5

6. Please present concise arguments for the GE principles applicable to this course.

❑ General Knowledge

We are beginning with the most general of topics: the weather. But there is more to the weather than our sensory experience of it. Through close reading, and with an attention to both form and content, this course will facilitate students' understanding of the weather as something that can and has been theorized, not only as a natural science, but also as a site of social and artistic learning.

❑ Integrative Learning

The weather, even specific weather like that of LA, knows no bounds of academic discipline. It is a literary issue, yes, but it is also a scientific issue, a political issue, an anthropological issue. In addition to considering weather's representations across literary genres, students will be asked to produce a mixed-media project reflecting on their own relationship to the Los Angeles climate as a cultural determinant that transcends these boundaries of history, geography, and methodology.

❑ Ethical Implications

This course will provide context for and ask students to consider their role in the current discussions and pressing debates regarding anthropogenic climate and the burden of human responsibility.

❑ Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism is built into any Los Angeles curriculum. Students will read texts that represent and address the city's wide range of ethnicities, classes, and values. The course will also ask students to consider how representations of the city's weather, presumably a neutral force, can reflect and perpetuate the city's inequalities.

❑ Critical Thinking

This course will foster and demand critical thinking in all capacities. Students will be asked to think critically in every class discussion and assignment.

❑ Rhetorical Effectiveness

Based in close reading and literary analysis, and premised on the ways in which the Los Angeles climate has been mythologized through its linguistic representations, this course is, in fact, about the enduring power of effective rhetoric. As they study the techniques that make for effective rhetoric, students will work on their own writing and argumentation.

❑ Problem-solving

In addition to fostering close reading and critical thinking, this course will ask students to consider the larger stakes of our object of inquiry, and to connect ideas in our 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century texts to contemporary environmental concerns.

❑ Library & Information Literacy

This course requires a final paper that includes a research component. To prepare the students for this, the instructor will lead a tutorial introducing the class to the UCLA library system, as well as the wide range of online resources available to them (ie JSTOR, Project Muse, etc.)

**(A) STUDENT CONTACT PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)**

1. Lecture:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)
2. Discussion Section:	<u>    3    </u>	(hours)
3. Labs:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)
4. Experiential (service learning, internships, other):	<u>    1    </u>	(hours)
5. Field Trips:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)

**(A) TOTAL Student Contact Per Week**

**4** (HOURS)

**(B) OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)**

1. General Review & Preparation:	<u>    2    </u>	(hours)
2. Reading	<u>    6    </u>	(hours)
3. Group Projects:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)
4. Preparation for Quizzes & Exams:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)
5. Information Literacy Exercises:	<u>    n/a    </u>	(hours)

6. Written Assignments: 3 (hours)  
7. Research Activity: 1 (hours)

**(B) TOTAL Out-of-class time per week**

**12** (HOURS)

**GRAND TOTAL (A) + (B) must equal at least 15 hours/week**

**15** (HOURS)

## Reading Weather: Los Angeles as Apocalyptic Paradise

**Instructor:** Sydney Miller  
**E-mail:** sydneymiller@ucla.edu  
**Class:** English 98T  
**Office Hours:** TBD

### Course Description

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*“Only a catastrophe gets our attention. We want them, we need them, we depend on them. As long as they happen somewhere else. This is where California comes in. Mud slides, brush fires, coastal erosion, earthquakes, mass killings, et cetera. We can relax and enjoy these disasters because in our hearts we feel that California deserves whatever it gets. Californians invented the concept of life-style. This alone warrants their doom.”* – Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Surely, if there is anything more banal than talking about the weather, it is talking about the weather in Southern California, a presumed season-less Arcadia built on the premise and the promise of perpetual sunshine. Characterized by John Rechy as “the last stop before the sun goes down,” California – and Los Angeles, in particular – is marketed as the one place where the weather should be able to fade seamlessly into the background of our daily lives, and as a result, the one place where things become the most catastrophic when it doesn’t. After all, as DeLillo explains, California has long been accepted as the locus of ecological disaster in our collective consciousness. But what is it about this so-called City of Angels that inspires such discrepant and reductive tropes, which have all but eclipsed the place itself? Is L.A. really an Edenic metropolis on the edge of the world, ever basking in the sunshine? Or is it, on the contrary, a dystopian wasteland under constant siege by earthquakes, winds, fires and floods – the inevitable site of the impending apocalypse? How do we read and reconcile these competing representations, and how do such renderings inform our own individual relationships to the environment that we as Angelinos all share? To what extent have we created this myth of California, and to what extent has it created us?

This course will reconsider the paradoxical nature of the Southern California climate as it has been portrayed in the artistic imagination of the twentieth century. As we trace the narrative of California’s mythic climate from its paradisaic beginnings to its apocalyptic ends, the class will pay special attention to the framing of weather as a causal force – a supposedly neutral agent of chance that can determine not only the mood of a story (à la the pathetic fallacy), but often entire plots. Weather, of course, is everywhere, transcending all boundaries of medium and genre. Accordingly, we will attempt to look at and analyze the weather of Los Angeles in all of its many forms – from fiction to film, from poetry to popular music, from art installation to advertisement, from the critical essays of California’s most reputable residents to the campy appropriations of reality television and made-for-TV movies. Through their engagement with this wide variety of primary and secondary materials, students will learn how to close read, think critically, apply theoretical frameworks, and conduct research – all of which will culminate in a final research paper.

“If this is paradise,” writes Karen Tei Yamashita of Los Angeles, “we’re in trouble.”  
 It is, this class confirms. And we are.

## Reading, Watching, and Listening List\*

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### Fiction:

Boyle, T.C. *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995)  
 Chandler, Raymond. "Red Wind" (1938); *The Big Sleep* (1939)  
 Fante, John. *Ask the Dust* (1939)  
 Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange* (1997)

### Films:

*L.A. Story* (1991)  
*Sharknado* (2013)

### Essays:

Cain, James. "Paradise" (1933)  
 Davis, Mike. "Why L.A. is a Synonym for Disaster" (1998)  
 Didion, Joan. "Los Angeles Notebook" (1965)  
 Erickson, Steve. "Cloudy, Chance of Annihilation" (1997)  
 Fleming, James Rodger. *Fixing the Sky* (excerpt) (2010)  
 Rosen, Jay. "Coming Next: The Weather as a Political Issue" (1989)  
 Sackman, Douglas Cazaux. *Orange Empire* (excerpt) (2005)  
 Warner, Charles Dudley. *Our Italy* (excerpt) (1891)  
 Zoller Seitz, Matt. "Chumming the Waters for the Sharks of Twitter and Facebook" (2013)

### Poetry:

Brautigan, Richard. "It's Raining in Love"  
 Brecht, Bertolt. "California Autumn"; "On Thinking about Hell"  
 Brown, C. "Out in California"  
 Macdonald, Augustin S. "California"  
 Shapiro, Karl. "California Winter"  
 Sill, Edward Rowland. "California Winter"

### Songs:

"California Day" (Starland Vocal Band)  
 "California Dreamin'" (The Mamas & The Papas/Sia)  
 "California Sun" (The Rivieras)  
 "Grey in L.A." (Loudon Wainwright III)  
 "I Hate California" (Jonathan Coulton)  
 "In California" (Neko Case)  
 "It Never Rains in Southern California" (Albert Hammond)  
 "Leaves" (Miguel)  
 "Los Angeles is Burning" (Bad Religion)  
 "No Cities to Love" (Sleater-Kinney)  
 "The Golden State" (City and Colour)  
 "The Only Place" (Best Coast)  
 "Santa Ana Winds" (The Beach Boys)

### Installations:

*The Rain Room* (Hannes Koch & Florian Ortkrass, LACMA)  
*The Weather Project* (Olafur Eliasson, Tate Modern)

\* Essays, poems, and song lyrics available in course reader

## Course Requirements

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- 1) *California Dreamin'* (10%): First popularized by The Mamas & The Papas in 1965, “California Dreamin’” is the quintessential California climate song; it has since been covered by everyone from Sia to Meat Loaf. Choose any two (or more) versions of the song and write a 2-3 page close reading analysis comparing them, paying special attention to tone and mood. How do the variations in the music inflect our reception of the lyrics? How do we qualify the feelings that each provokes, and what can this tell us about the relationship between form and content?
- 2) *Weekly Close Readings* (20%): Each week, you will select a passage, scene, stanza or lyric from the week’s assigned material that strikes you in some way and perform a brief (~2 page) close reading of it, paying particular attention to the specifics of its word choice, style, structure, use of symbols, imagery, figurative language, etc. These are designed not only to provoke your thinking about our texts and prompt class discussion, but also to ensure that you are constantly practicing your writing (and receiving feedback from me on it) throughout the quarter.
- 3) *Autobiographical Weather Project* (20%): The personal weather autobiography is a creative project that asks you to think about yourself in relation to the weather and its function as a physical and/or psychological determinant in your life. This project can take any form (as, we have seen, the weather itself does), contingent upon your individual interests and talents. Some options you may want to consider pursuing: keeping a weather diary; writing a personal essay or poem; composing and performing a song, stand-up comedy routine, or piece of performance art; making a short film, sculpture, painting, or comic strip. All students should consult with me by week 6 (at the very latest) to discuss their chosen approach.
- 4) *Research Paper* (30%): Write a 12-15 page research paper on a topic related to the class. You may focus on either a work from the syllabus or a work of your own choosing (with my approval). You will develop and submit an abstract in Week 9, and turn in your final paper during finals week.
- 5) *Participation* (20%): Class discussion will be the cornerstone of our seminar. I will require active participation from each of you, every week, and as such I will expect that you come to class prepared with questions and observations about the readings.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Commodifying California

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**Texts:** *Our Italy* (excerpt); selection of advertisements from the All-Year Club of Southern California; “California Dreamin’”; “California Sun”; “California Day”; “The Only Place”

**Questions:** What were the specific methods and mechanics of selling the California climate as a tourist destination? How does this history of the co-opting of California’s weather for commercial purposes influence our perception of the fabled California dream? How do the songs convey the feeling and spirit of this dream; moreover, to the extent that they perpetuate the sentiments of the All-Year Club of Southern California, should they be read as art or advertisement?

### Week 2: A Land without Seasons

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**Texts:** “Paradise” (Part I); “It’s Raining in Love”; “California”; “California Winter” (x2); “California Autumn”; “On Thinking About Hell”; “Out in California”; “It Never Rains in Southern California”; “Leaves”; “I Hate California”

**Questions:** “Time” and “weather” are etymologically intertwined (sharing the same French root, *temps*). How do these songs and poems stage that entanglement? How is the relationship between time and weather complicated by the oft-cited observation that California is a place without seasons (i.e. where the passing of time is not legible due to the consistency of the climate)? How is this sense of monotony reflected in the rhythms and structures of the texts, if at all?

### Week 3: Disillusionment and Divine Punishment

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**Texts:** *Ask the Dust*; “Grey in L.A.”; “In California”; “The Golden State”  
**“California Dreaming” assignment due in class**

**Questions:** What is the role of religion in the novel, and how does Fante invoke classic notions of weather as divine intervention – be it punishment or reward? How does the text oscillate in its figuring of the (by now) quintessential southern California sunshine as alternately punishment *and* reward? What is left of the promise of LA once the façade of its fecundity wilts, giving way to a barren desert? How does this relate to the novel’s title?

### Week 4: Prediction, Prophecy, and Parody

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**Texts:** *L.A. Story* (1991); “Coming Next: The Weather as a Political Issue” (Jay Rosen)

**Questions:** Is there something about weathermen and the inexactitude of forecasting that seems to lend itself to comedy and satire? What is the role of predictability in the film (meteorological and otherwise)? Forecasting functions in both a scientific and religious register: how do we reconcile that tension and how does it inform our relationship to the weather? Who do we hold responsible for the weather? How do we read Rosen’s assessment of the innocence of and apolitical nature of the weather through the contemporary lens of anthropogenic climate change?

### Week 5: Climate Control

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**Texts:** *Fixing the Sky* (excerpt); “No Cites to Love”; *The Rain Room* (LACMA); *The Weather Project* (Tate Modern)\*

\*Note: These are art exhibits; we will be watching videos of and reading pieces about the installations, not visiting them.

**Questions:** What are the ethical, political, and aesthetic stakes of attempting to control the climate? To what end do these projects – in which men act as gods – invert traditional notions of causality? How does the geographical context of the exhibits – *The Rain Room* in a city plagued by drought and *The Weather Project* in foggy London – inflect the experience of the encounter?

### Week 6: Killers in the Rain

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**Texts:** *The Big Sleep*; “Red Wind” (excerpt); “Los Angeles Notebook”

**Questions:** According to Elmore Leonard, the first rule of writing is to never open a book with the weather. Are Chandler's texts exceptions to this, or do they merely prove the rule? To what extent can a genre be said to have a certain type of weather? Must it always be raining or eerily windy in a work of noir? And what do we make of the incongruence of this inclement weather with traditional conceptions of a perpetually sunny Los Angeles?

### **Week 7: Aestheticizing the Apocalypse**

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**Texts:** "America's Next Top Model: Natural Beauty" (Cycle 11, Episode 6); "Cloudy, Chance of Annihilation"; Playbuzz personality quiz: "Which Natural Disaster is Your Temper Like?"

#### **Autobiographical Weather Project due in class**

**Questions:** In his essay, Erickson gestures toward the seductive appeal of a looming Los Angeles apocalypse – noting that even Angelinos swoon over the idea of their own extinction. What is it about LA that makes the world want to see it destroyed? And what is the function of desire and/or attraction in relation to untamable nature more broadly? Where do we see the traces of this in the "America's Next Top Model" natural disaster challenge, which not only equates beautiful women with destructiveness, but also attempts to turn destruction itself into an object of beauty?

### **Week 8: Weathering Racial Anxiety**

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**Texts:** *Tortilla Curtain*; "Why L.A. is a Synonym for Disaster"; "Los Angeles is Burning"; "Santa Ana Winds"

**Questions:** Weather is a supposedly neutral force – unraced, unclassed, and ungendered; how does Boyle's employment of the weather take up this notion? To what extent does the text confirm or challenge Davis' assertion that the Los Angeles disaster narrative is "rooted in racial anxiety"? How does Boyle's representation of Los Angeles as a city of immigrants (all here seeking a better life) speak back to the original marketing of California that we saw at the beginning of the quarter?

### **Week 9: Sunshine as Disaster**

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**Texts:** *Tropic of Orange*, *Orange Empire* (excerpt)

#### **Paper abstract due in class**

**Questions:** Yamashita's novel is our second consecutive text to thematize borders; what bearing does this preoccupation with divisive lines (both real and imaginary) have on our understanding of weather as inherently transgressive and universal? How does Yamashita's novel comment upon and erase the border between the two dominant trends in representations of Los Angeles weather? Is *Tropic of Orange* a Los Angeles novel; can such a thing even be said to exist in an increasingly globalized world?

### **Week 10: A Meteorological turned Social Media Phenomenon**

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**Texts:** *Sharknado*; *How Did This Get Made?* Podcast (Episode 67); "Chumming the Waters for the Sharks of Twitter and Facebook"; "Sharknado Takes Twitter by Storm" (<http://mashable.com/2013/07/11/sharknado-tweets/#HB9549GP55q4>)

**Questions:** There is no doubt that *Sharknado* is a ridiculously poorly written and acted work of camp; that being said, might it tell us something useful about the topics that have concerned us throughout the quarter? Can the absurdity of the sharknado as the titular "natural" disaster, for example, illuminate the debate as to how we define nature and the unnatural? What insights can the film's popularity on social media – generating 5,000 tweets per minute – offer into both the long-honored tradition of trivial weather chatter and the current (and very serious) discourse around climate change? And, really, how *did* this get made?

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**Final Paper due on Friday of Finals Week** in the English Department Main Office (Humanities 149)





# New Course Proposal

	<b>English 98TA</b>
	<b>Reading Weather: Los Angeles as Apocalyptic Paradise</b>
<b>Course Number</b>	English 98TA
<b>Title</b>	Reading Weather: Los Angeles as Apocalyptic Paradise
<b>Short Title</b>	LA-APOCALYP PARADIS
<b>Units</b>	Fixed: 5
<b>Grading Basis</b>	Letter grade only
<b>Instructional Format</b>	Seminar - 3 hours per week
<b>TIE Code</b>	SEMT - Seminar (Topical) [T]
<b>GE Requirement</b>	Yes
<b>Major or Minor Requirement</b>	No
<b>Requisites</b>	Enforced: Satisfaction of entry-level Writing requirement. Freshman and sophomores preferred.
<b>Course Description</b>	Exploration of Southern California's fabled weather in narratives of Los Angeles. Will consider broad range of genres in attempt to determine extent to which we have shaped California's climate myth, and extent to which it has shaped us, in turn.
<b>Justification</b>	Part of the series of seminars offered through the Collegium of University Teaching Fellows
<b>Syllabus</b>	File <a href="#">ENGL 98TA Syllabus.pdf</a> was previously uploaded. You may view the file by clicking on the file name.
<b>Supplemental Information</b>	Professor Chris Mott is the faculty mentor for this course.
<b>Grading Structure</b>	Reading Analysis - 10% Weekly Reading - 20% Weather Project - 20% Research Paper - 30% Participation - 20%
<b>Effective Date</b>	Winter 2017
<b>Discontinue Date</b>	Summer 1 2017
<b>Instructor</b>	Name: Sydney Miller Title: Teaching Fellow
<b>Quarters Taught</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Fall <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Winter <input type="checkbox"/> Spring <input type="checkbox"/> Summer
<b>Department</b>	English
<b>Contact</b>	Name: MICHELLE CHEN E-mail: mchen@oid.ucla.edu
<b>Routing Help</b>	

## ROUTING STATUS

**Role:** Registrar's Publications Office

**Status:** Pending Action

**Role:** Registrar's Scheduling Office - Thomson, Douglas N (DTHOMSON@REGISTRAR.UCLA.EDU) - 51441

**Status:** Added to SRS on 8/15/2016 5:21:15 PM

**Changes:** Short Title

**Comments:** No Comments

<b>Role:</b>	FEC School Coordinator - Kikuchi, Myrna Dee Castillo (MKIKUCHI@COLLEGE.UCLA.EDU) - 45040
<b>Status:</b>	Approved on 8/11/2016 3:45:51 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	No Changes Made
<b>Comments:</b>	Routing to Doug Thomson in the Registrar's Office.

<b>Role:</b>	FEC Chair or Designee - Bristow, Joseph E (JBRISTOW@HUMNET.UCLA.EDU) - 54173
<b>Status:</b>	Approved on 7/28/2016 9:04:01 AM
<b>Changes:</b>	No Changes Made
<b>Comments:</b>	Terrific syllabus!

<b>Role:</b>	FEC Chair or Designee - Kikuchi, Myrna Dee Castillo (MKIKUCHI@COLLEGE.UCLA.EDU) - 45040
<b>Status:</b>	Returned for Additional Info on 7/27/2016 4:04:34 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	No Changes Made
<b>Comments:</b>	Routing to Joe Bristow for FEC approval.

<b>Role:</b>	CUTF Coordinator - Chen, Michelle L. (MCHEN@OID.UCLA.EDU) - 53042
<b>Status:</b>	Approved on 7/13/2016 4:02:49 PM
<b>Changes:</b>	No Changes Made
<b>Comments:</b>	on behalf of Professor Kathleen L. Komar, Chair, CUTF Faculty Advisory Committee

<b>Role:</b>	Initiator/Submitter - Chen, Michelle L. (MCHEN@OID.UCLA.EDU) - 53042
<b>Status:</b>	Submitted on 7/13/2016 3:49:06 PM
<b>Comments:</b>	Initiated a New Course Proposal

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