Graduate Seminar Description:
Thinking, Feeling, and Believing in Early America

The colonial era in North America often is linked with the philosophical optimism and rationalism of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment. It is connected equally often, however, with religious fervor, through episodes such as the Puritan settlement of New England or the Great Awakening, or with the heightened feeling of the culture of sensibility. Rather than examining the history of American literature through one of these narrative frameworks, this course will examine the interplay among three activities – thinking, feeling, and believing – in the literature of the British colonies and early United States. We will read a wide range of texts, including travel writings, sermons, letters, and essays along with poems and novels. Since a study of these three topics necessarily involves considering an Atlantic setting with vigorous transoceanic and international dialogue, these texts include those authored by Europeans as well as colonists and U.S. residents. These texts will be grouped together at times through a common event or topic, but at other times through a shared impulse toward a particular human interface between the individual human and the external world: through empirical observation, through emotional response to physical sensation, or through the extension of religious faith in what cannot be verified through reason or sensory experience.

As we study these texts we will consider the ways in which distinctly modern approaches to epistemology, emotion, and faith influenced each other. We will see, for example, how empiricism, a prioritizing of knowledge acquired through the senses, shaped both theories of sensibility and writings about evangelical revivals, or how elements of Enlightenment philosophy emerged from belief in a benevolent if detached creator. While attending to the circum-Atlantic context of these interrelated developments, this course also will ask how America, its nature and cultures, inflected seventeenth- and eighteenth-century understandings of reason, emotion, and faith. How did the European encounter with the New World influence the Scientific Revolution? How did writings about African slaves or Indians alter moral philosophy and religious belief? To what degree do various emotions and sentiments acquire, in American writings, a particularly American character? It is hoped that addressing these and other questions will promote an understanding of American literature within a broader cultural context, one that eschews a reading of early America as entirely steeped in religion, science, reason or sensibility to the exclusion of these other categories.

Requirements and Course Grade:

Weekly Response Papers: By 5:00 p.m. every Tuesday, please email to me a 1-2 page response to the week’s reading. If possible send me an attachment in Word, with the response paper double-spaced. I will use these responses to structure the next day’s class. These papers should be informal, in that they may deploy an informal or chatty tone, asking questions or making brief
observations. They should, however, contain the polished, proofread writing that I expect in your final papers, with page references (where appropriate) to the reading for the week.

**Class Presentation:** Each of you will begin one class with a presentation on the week’s reading. This presentation should provide an opening for discussion, summarizing which issues you found most interesting and asking several questions to which your classmates and I can respond. You also will distribute a brief, annotated bibliography of about five titles on scholarship related to the book and the issues you are addressing. We will schedule these meetings on the first day of class.

**Book Review:** You will write a 750-1200 word review of a recent scholarly publication relating to the course topic. This review should be of publishable quality, summarizing the book’s main argument, explaining how it relates to current scholarship, considering who its audience might be, and pointing out its strong and weak points. You are welcome to select a text that relates to your own specific academic interests, and/or find a book that relates to your final paper topic. I also will give you a list of possible texts.

**Papers:** You have the choice of writing one long (12-15 page) paper or an annotated bibliography combined with a short (6-7 page) paper.

**One Long Paper:** If you choose to write one long paper, on November 1 you will turn in a prospectus, describing in as much detail as possible the topic and structure of your final paper. This final paper should be 12-15 pages long, it should involve some research of secondary and/or historical sources, and it should set out to argue a particular and precise theory about one or two texts we have studied this term. This paper is due on Monday, December 4.

**Bibliography and Short Paper:** If you choose this option, the bibliography will be due on Monday, October 9, and the paper on Monday, December 4. A topic for the bibliography will be due to me on September 25, and a brief proposal for the paper (approx. 100 words) will be due to me on November 17.

**Special Needs:**

Students with disabilities should contact the Center for Student Academic Support to self-identify their needs in order to facilitate their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Center is located in Holmes Student Center Room 59. All students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and take advantage of services provided by the Center for Student Academic Support such as tutoring, academic counseling, and developing study skills. The Center provides confidential consultations to any student with academic concerns as well as to students with disabilities.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:**

I expect all students in this class to adhere to the standards of academic integrity as defined in the University of Tulsa’s Student Handbook. If I find any evidence that a student has
cheated on an examination or plagiarized a paper, I will fail the particular assignment immediately. I will then forward the case to my department Chair and college Dean for further disciplinary action. Most likely I will give the student a failing grade for the semester and recommend suspension from the university.

The handbook of the Modern Language Association defines plagiarism as follows: “Derived from the Latin word *plagiarus* (“kidnapper”), plagiarism refers to a form of cheating that has been defined as the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own (Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* [New York: Harper, 1952]2). To use another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source is to plagiarize” (Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook*, 4th ed., [New York: MLA, 1995]26).

It often is difficult to determine where the line is between being influenced by a text or person, and taking words or ideas from that text or person. Confusion can arise easily when one is doing extensive research or collaborating with other people. If you have any questions about whether or not you should give credit to a source in your work, I suggest that you always cite that source to be safe. Please also see me if you are uncertain about whether or how to cite a course, or consult the *Modern Language Association Handbook*.

Please note that as part of a general effort to combat plagiarism I will be submitting randomly selected papers from all of my classes to a plagiarism detection service. I also will be using this service to screen any paper that I suspect is plagiarized.

Finally, while not technically a form of plagiarism I do consider it a breach of academic integrity for a student to submit the same paper for credit in more than one class. If you wish to develop some ideas or revise some work you have done in an earlier class, please consult with me first to determine whether such work would fill the requirements for this class. If I discover that a student has submitted work for my class and another class, that student will be likely to fail the class.

**Office Hours and Contacting Me:**

I will be available to meet with all students from 10 to 10:50 on Mondays and Wednesdays. If these hours become crowded with undergraduates, I will set up an office hour for graduate students only. If my office hours conflict with your schedule I will be happy to make an appointment with you at another time.

The best way to contact me outside of office hours is through email, which I try to check daily. My email address is laura-stevens@utulsa.edu. My mailbox is in the main office of the English department, 365 Zink Hall. You may also leave me voice mail or call my office at 631-2859, but if you are calling me over a holiday keep in mind that these messages will be erased automatically after 3 days.

**Required Texts:**
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, The Rights of Man and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Sidney Hook (Signet Classics, 2003), 0451528891

**August 23, Introduction**

**August 30**
Alan Taylor, ch. 1, 2
Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*

**September 6**
Taylor, ch. 3, 4
*The Journal of John Winthrop*

**September 13**
Taylor, ch. 5, 6
Edward Taylor, *The Poems of Edward Taylor*

**September 20**
Taylor, ch. 7, 8
Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*
Gookin, *Historical Account*

**Monday, September 25, Proposal for first Short Paper Due**

**September 27**
Taylor, ch. 9, 10
Cotton Mather, *Selections*

**October 4**
Taylor, ch. 11, 12
Jonathan Edwards, *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*

**Monday, October 9, Annotated Bibliography Due**

**October 11**
Taylor, ch. 13, 14
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*

**Monday, October 16, Book Review Due**

**October 18**
Taylor, ch. 15, 16
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, The Rights of Man and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine*

**Monday, October 24, Prospectus for Long Paper Due**
October 25
Taylor, ch. 17, 18
Judith Sargent Murray, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*

November 1
Taylor, ch. 19
Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*

November 8
William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*
Elizabeth Barnes, “Natural and National Unions,” from *States of Sympathy* (Columbia, 1997) 19-39 [hand-out]

November 15
Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*

Friday, November 17, Proposal for Short Paper Due

November 22 Thanksgiving Break

November 29
Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*