

Spring 2-1-2018

## LIT 491.01: ST: David Foster Wallace

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### Recommended Citation

Gilcrest, David W., "LIT 491.01: ST: David Foster Wallace" (2018). *Syllabi*. 7662.  
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**LIT 491**  
**David Foster Wallace**  
**Spring 2018**

2:00-3:20 T&Th  
LA 105

Professor David Gilcrest  
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Office Hours:  
Tu&Th 1-2  
W 11-12

**“I read,” I say. “I study and read. I bet I've read everything you read. Don't think I haven't. I consume libraries. I wear out spines and ROM-drives. I do things like get in a taxi and say, “The library, and step on it.” My instincts concerning syntax and mechanics are better than your own, I can tell, with all due respect. But it transcends the mechanics. I'm not a machine. I feel and believe. I have opinions. Some of them are interesting. I could, if you'd let me, talk and talk.”** (*Infinite Jest*)

**“What goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant.”** (“Good Old Neon”)

### Course Description

LIT 491 is an introduction to the aesthetic sensibilities and intellectual preoccupations of David Foster Wallace. We will survey a range of short fiction and nonfiction as well as reading in its entirety his *magnus opus*, *Infinite Jest*.<sup>1</sup>

### Course Goals

Students who successfully complete LIT 491 will:

- demonstrate through class discussion and careful writing familiarity with Wallace's major concerns as a writer
- demonstrate through class discussion and careful writing familiarity with the many rhetorical strategies that shape Wallace's work
- demonstrate through class discussion and careful writing an understanding of Wallace's place in the American literary canon

### LIT 491 Requirements

- Regular class attendance and participation, steady preparation
- Successful completion of the DFW Lexicon Project
- Three critical essays
- A portfolio that includes your revised essays

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<sup>1</sup> I'm happy to argue this claim with you, esp. *vis a vis* *The Pale King* . . .

## Grading

DFW Lexicon Project	10%
Critical Essay #1	30%
Critical Essay #2	30%
Critical Essay #3	30%

## Course Policies and Procedures, and Unsolicited Advice

- Attendance and Participation: Because I believe you can learn the material covered in this course only by being here, your attendance and **ACTIVE** participation are required. Your final grade will be dropped one full letter grade after **four** unexcused absences; a failing grade will be assigned after **five** unexcused absences. (An **excused** absence requires a **pre-arranged** scholastic or athletic commitment or a **bona fide and substantiated** medical emergency.)
- If you miss a class, **please make arrangements with a colleague to get notes**. Also, please check with me to see if you missed any handouts or special instructions.
- Each class period requires approximately 3 hours of preparation—that is 3 hours of careful reading and critical thinking (and writing). **If you cannot commit to this work, LIT 491 is probably not the class for you.**
- If you get confused, or have a question, raise your hand. If your hand is not in the air, I can only assume you understand the texts and ideas under consideration **PERFECTLY**.
- Texts: The texts under consideration are central to our work in this class, especially during class time. You **MUST** purchase the texts for this class **and you MUST bring the texts to class**. No exceptions, no excuses.
- Being a careful reader and scholar means **LOOKING UP THE DEFINITIONS OF ALL UNFAMILIAR WORDS**. Anything less reflects neglect, if not contempt, for the efforts of authors, and of language itself, the ground of our study, and delight.

### **DFW Lexicon Project 10% of Final Grade**

“[Books] should be read as deliberately as they are written.”  
--H.D. Thoreau

I would like you to keep track of the many unfamiliar/erudite/exotic words and phrases in DFW’s work, and their definitions. At the end of the term I would like you to turn in a list of up to 100 words and phrases and their definitions. For every ten words and phrases you will be awarded 1 point toward your final grade—up to 10 points.

- Laptops and notepads may be used for note taking; laptops and notepads and cellphones used for other purposes will be confiscated and given to wayward children.
- Deadlines: All work is due in class on the assigned date. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.**
- Presentation: Essays must be printed. Black ink. 10 or 12 pt. font. Either Arial or Times New Roman, e.g., is sufficient. Please, no funky fonts. I would like you to follow the MLA citation and documentation guidelines in this class. Make sure you include on your work your name, the title and draft number, this class and section number, my name, and the date.
- Please make hard copies of all your work and keep them in a safe place.
- I do not accept work in electronic form. Recycled paper saves trees. Double-sided printing is fine.
- Revision: Because true revision is an essential part of serious writing, **you are invited to revise either of your first two Critical Essays, as necessary.** A final grade will only be recorded after I receive, and evaluate, your revisions. Please follow the **Guidelines for Revision** that I will give you.
- The instructor and the University reserve the right to modify, amend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, etc.) as needed.

### **Scholarship**

**All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course.** The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrase) must be properly documented. Students who plagiarize face serious consequences that may range from receiving a failing grade on a given assignment to failing the course. Students who plagiarize also face additional University sanctions.

### **Accommodations**

If you have a disability (physical or learning) that you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first week of the term so we can discuss whatever accommodations may be necessary.

### **Required Texts**

*A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*  
*Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*  
*Consider the Lobster*  
*Infinite Jest*

You should also budget a few \$\$ for additional texts to be downloaded from our course Moodle site.

Also, a two-pocket folder for your portfolio

**To Be Scheduled: a showing of *The End of the Tour***

**SYLLABUS**

*SF* = *A Supposedly Fun thing I'll Never Do Again*

*CL* = *Consider the Lobster*

*BI* = *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*

*IJ* = *Infinite Jest*

1/23 Tu Introduction: "Where be your gibes now?"

Ethos

1/25 Th "Derivative Sport" (*SF* 3); "Consider the Lobster" (*CL* 235)

1/30 Tu "A Supposedly Fun Thing" (*SF* 256)

2/1 Th "Michael Joyce" (*SF* 213)

2/6 Tu "Authority and American Usage" (*CL* 66)

2/8 Th "Big Red Son" (*CL* 3); "The View From Mrs. Thompson's" (*CL* 128)

Theory, Irony, Sincerity

2/13 Tu "Greatly Exaggerated" (*SF* 138); "Signifying Nothing" (*BI* 82)

2/15 Th "Host" (*CL* 275) **Essay #1 DUE**

2/20 Tu "Octet" (*BI* 131); "Adult World" I & II (*BI* 161, 183)

2/22 Th "E Unibus Pluram" (*SF* 21)

2/27 Tu Brief Interviews: (*BI* 17-34; 82-100); "Think" (*BI* 72)

2/29 Th Brief Interviews: (*BI* 100-124; 213-234)

3/6 Tu "Forever Overhead" (*BI* 5); "BI #20" (*BI* 287)

*Infinite Jest*

{All readings in *Infinite Jest* require careful consideration of relevant footnotes.}

3/8 Th *IJ* (3-68)

3/13 Tu *IJ* (68-135)

3/15 Th *IJ* (135-219)

3/20 Tu *IJ* (219-299)

**Essay #2 DUE**

3/22 Th *IJ* (299-379)

**3/26-3/30 Spring Break**

4/3 Tu *IJ* (379-450)

4/5 Th *IJ* (450-527)

4/10 Tu *IJ* (528-601)

4/12 Th *IJ* (601-662)

4/17 Tu *IJ* (663-723)

4/19 Th *IJ* (723-808)

4/24 Tu *IJ* (809-876)

4/26 Th *IJ* (876-934)

5/1 Tu *IJ* (934-981)

5/3 Th “Depressed Person” (*BI* 37); “Porousness” (*BI* 211); “Suicide” (*BI* 283)

**5/10 Th Completed Portfolio, Including Essay #3, DUE by Noon**