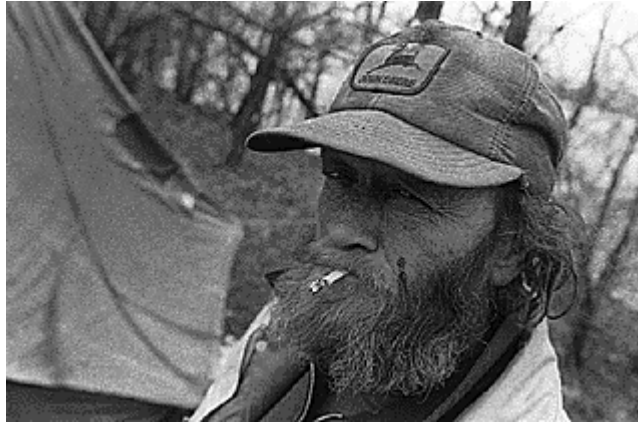


**FYS 198-2: Tryin' to find a way back Home:  
An Introduction to the Literature and Legacy of Homelessness in America**



**Course Syllabus**

**Course Information:**

Instructor: C. Fee

FYS Meeting Time: MWF 9:00-9:50 AM

FYE Meeting Time: TH (from September 2nd to November 18th) 11:30 AM-12:30 PM

Meeting Place: Paul 100

Office: Breidenbaugh 406

Office Hours: MWTHTF 1:00 PM-2:00 PM, and by appointment

Office Phone: x6762

Home Phone: 717.528.4799 (Call before 10:00 PM)

E-mail: [cfee@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cfee@gettysburg.edu)

FYE Partner: Dean J. Ramsey

Office: 2nd floor, CUB, Dean of Students office Suite

Office Hours: Just drop by and Loretta will find a time to get you in!

Phone: x6921

Email: [ramsey@gettysburg.edu](mailto:ramsey@gettysburg.edu)

Peer Learning Associate: D. Blackaby

E-mail: [blacda01@gettysburg.edu](mailto:blacda01@gettysburg.edu)

Cell Phone: 717.253.0901

Class Blog (Weekly Service Journal:) <http://homeless.blogdrive.com/>

DC Video Blog (The Reading Days Experience:) <http://feefys.posterous.com/>

**Required Texts:**

- Egger, Robert. *Begging for Change: The Dollars and Sense of Making Nonprofits Responsive, Efficient, and Rewarding for All*. Collins, 2004. (ISBN: 0060541710)
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. Owl Books, 2002. (ISBN: 0805063897)
- Failer, Judith Lynn. *Who Qualifies for Rights: Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Civil Commitment*. Cornell University Press, 2002. (ISBN: 080143999X)
- Hays, Sharon. *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. Oxford University Press, 2004. (ISBN: 0195176014)
- Hilfiker, David. *Not All of Us Are Saints: A Doctor's Journey With the Poor*. Ballantine Books, 1996. (ISBN: 034545975X)
- Kennedy, William. *Ironweed*. Penguin USA, 1989. (ISBN: 0140070206)
- Kozol, Jonathan. *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America*. Fawcett Books, 1989. (ISBN: 0449903397)
- Liebow, Elliot. *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. Penguin USA, 1995. (ISBN: 014024137X)
- Nunez, Ralph daCosta with Naomi Sugie. *Beyond the Shelter Wall: Homeless Families Speak Out*. White Tiger Press, 2004. (ISBN: 0972442510)
- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. Penguin USA, 1992. (ISBN: 0140186409)
- Rossi, Peter. *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*. University of Chicago Press, 1991. (ISBN: 0226728293)
- Stringer, Lee. *Grand Central Winter: Stories from the Street*. Washington Square Press, 1999. (ISBN: 0671036548)

Selected videos including: *Dark Days*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Ironweed*, *Jumpin' At The Boneyard*, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Saint of Fort Washington*, *The Soloist*, *Where The Day Takes You*

**Course Description:**

"Homelessness" is a term that conjures up unsavory images in the popular imagination, flat, generic, clichés that owe as much to fear as to fact. The truth is that children account for a shocking proportion of the homeless in America today, as do women fleeing abuse, as do the working poor, many of whom find it impossible to secure affordable housing in many of our cities. If working men and women and school-attending children number among the homeless, why do the stereotypes of the pushy panhandler and the drunken skid-row bum continue to dominate our collective vision of homelessness? Why does this population continue to grow? What can be done to alleviate the circumstances surrounding homelessness in America? Should we act? Should we care?

**Course Objectives and General Structure:**

Designed in collaboration with the Center for Public Service at Gettysburg College, this course combines the traditional academic component with experiential education through a number of Service-Learning opportunities. Each student will participate in regular service commitments in the local community throughout the semester, and the keystone of the course will be a four-day group Service-Learning trip over the October Reading Days. The Reading Days trip will be based

at N-Street Village at Luther Place in Washington, DC, and will draw upon very long and well-established relationships between Gettysburg College and N-Street, DC Central Kitchen, The National Coalition for the Homeless, the Congressional Hunger Center, Martha's Table, DC Outfitters, and a host of other service organizations based in Washington. Indeed, a number of Gettysburg alumni work or have worked at some of these organizations, and the class will have the opportunity to serve with a number of members of the Washington Alumni Association over the course of the weekend. Most importantly, we will meet and work with many people who are or who have been homeless, as well as quite a few who have dedicated their lives to serving those less fortunate than themselves. If experience is any guide, we will like a great many of the people with whom we will come into contact; we most certainly will learn from all of them.

In the classroom portion of this course we will study materials from a number of non-fiction texts, organizational websites, popular newspapers and magazines; moreover, we will read a number of memoirs and novels that are concerned with homelessness and related issues, and we will view a number of relevant films. These more literary materials may prove especially useful in transcending the comfort barrier most affluent Americans have learned to construct between "us" and "them," between those who enjoy security and privilege and those who do not. One of the most potent powers of literature is the portal it offers us into another time, place, or consciousness; through such a gateway we may begin the long journey towards understanding and empathizing with those who are (or seem!) different. Literature also reflects a culture's sense of itself, of what it values, and of what it fears. Thus, we will study portrayals of homelessness in popular works of fiction and film in order to refine our understanding of how the American understanding of homelessness has evolved since the Great Depression. Some of these works will reflect common assumptions about the homeless while others may challenge such views, but all will contribute to our understanding of how we as a people face the realities of poverty, homelessness, and social inequities.

#### **Course Evaluation:**

Daily Preparation, Participation, Reflective Writing, & TH Exercises: 10%

Local Service Activities, Electronic Journal, & TH Discussions: 20%

Two Short Written Reports: 10%

Two Short Oral Presentations: 05%

Two Written Movie Reviews: 10%

Final Research Paper & Research Presentation: 20%

DC Service Trip and Video Blog: 15%

Exams: 10%

**\*ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.\***

#### **General Course Workload:**

This course is speaking and writing intensive, involves a great deal of discussion and intellectual analysis, and promises to develop personal confidence and leadership skills. Because this course fulfills the college writing requirement, the minimum amount of writing required is 26 typed, double-spaced formal pages (plus 14 journal pages,) and counting revision you might well write considerably more. In addition, there are three required oral presentations totaling no fewer than 12 minutes per student. The serious and challenging subject matter of this seminar

requires, furthermore, an extraordinary amount of initiative and intellectual self-examination on the part of each participant; it also requires participation in activities outside of the classroom, including at least 20 hours of service over the course of the term. In addition to traditional reading and writing requirements and exams, students must participate in a range of activities, some as a group, some on their own. Thus, students in this course will learn through careful and sensitive observation and thoughtful and timely action, as well as through the traditional academic skills of reading, writing, and studying.

### **Specific Course Requirements:**

- 1) Two short written reports (3-5 pages) and related informal oral reports (2-3 minutes); one each about an on-campus human rights organization, and one each about the student's individual local service program.
- 2) Weekly entries in an electronic journal posted on the course web site (<http://homeless.blogdrive.com/>). These journal entries should be 250-500 words each, and should illustrate the student's reflection on her/his local service activities that week in the context of class discussion and readings. These entries are meant to be informal, and the students need not concern themselves with evaluation; still, simple spelling and grammar checks are less painful than the humiliation of egregious errors in a public forum.
- 3) Two movie reviews (4-6 pages each) discussing the stereotypes of and insights to the issue of homelessness as these are manifested in two or more of the films screened for the class. No more than one third of each review may comprise salient plot summary; at least a third should be devoted to a critical analysis of the film's appropriation of the issue of homelessness, and roughly the same proportion should be devoted to contextualizing the film within the milieu of the course readings and service experiences.
- 4) A final research paper (12-15 pages) on some aspect of homelessness, including the process of (a) selecting the topic, (b) sharing an oral presentation (8-10 minutes), (c) demonstrating research ability in the creation of an annotated bibliography, (d) presentation of an outline with an introductory page.
- 5) Two exams concerning the readings, the films, class discussion, and student presentations. These exams will include both essay questions and short-answer identifications. Students will have some latitude in choosing which questions to answer (e.g. two out of three essays, five out of eight IDs, etc.)
- 6) Weekly involvement (20 or more total hours spread over the course of the term) in an individual student-designed and instructor-approved program of local service such as literacy tutoring, Habitat work trips, regular volunteering at the local soup kitchen or the Adams County Homeless Shelter, etc. In addition, students are expected to participate (2 or more hours) in some of the activities of National Homelessness Awareness Week in November.
- 7) Individual attendance at meetings (4 or more meetings) of a campus service or human rights organization chosen by the student (Amnesty International, Habitat for Humanity, etc.), and participation at (2 or more) organization events.
- 8) Full participation in the course service-learning trip over the October Reading Days; this trip will run from Friday evening through Tuesday afternoon, and will involve work in the homeless shelters of N-Street Village, food-preparation at DC Central Kitchen, and numerous other service opportunities and visits to non-profit organizations. **The related Video Blog is a required part of this experience.**

- 9) Daily class participation and attendance; completion of all in-class reflective writing exercises; regular attendance at evening film screenings (4 or more out of the total of 6, unless the screenings are in conflict with another academic obligation.)
- 10) Substantive contribution to the course interactive web project on homelessness. This project will include each student's electronic journal articles, as well as relevant digital static images and digital video interviews from our individual local service and our group service-learning trip to Washington, DC.
- 11) The moderation of one fifteen-minute discussion concerning an article on some aspect of homelessness found in a major main-stream newspaper or magazine. Each week one student will sign up to lead this discussion, which generally will be held on Monday mornings at the start of class. Each student will be responsible for finding and distributing to the class copies of his/her article by no later than the class period before the discussion.
- 12) All aspects of this course must be completed in order to pass the course.

### **The Writing Process**

- \* Revision is a crucial aspect of writing, and the structure of this course reflects that importance. The writing component of this course is concerned with acquiring and honing necessary compositional skills; such objectives often become blurred by the hoop-jumping nature of the grading process, however, and my role as a facilitator and more experienced writer within a community of writers becomes conflated with my role as evaluator of your work. This does no one much good. I'd like to teach a course such as this one without grades, but that is impractical for a number of reasons. I have, instead, devised a system whereby grading in this course is structured around those things most important to the practice of writing: hard work, perseverance, and revision, revision, revision. The journal writing and in-class reflective writing are "low stakes," and encourage the writer to take risks; the short papers and movie reviews offer the opportunity for ample feedback from the instructor, and are prime candidates for fruitful revision; the research project has a longer trajectory, and offers each writer the chance to work closely with the instructor through a series of compositional stages. I can't promise everyone an "A" in this course, but I can promise that I have structured the grading system so that, if you complete all assignments on time, you do not miss class, and you always come prepared and willing to participate, you should earn a satisfactory grade, and you may improve this grade by revising the graded essays. You may revise these essays as many times as you like, and only the highest score of each will be averaged into your final grade. **HOWEVER:** You must submit each revised draft within **ONE WEEK** of the day you received the previous graded draft. Please refer to the handout on grading for a break-down of my expectations concerning an "A" essay, a "B" essay, etc.

### **Preparation & Participation:**

You are expected to be bodily present, mentally prepared, and fully ready to participate in **each and every class period., including the Thursday Sessions.**

**Exams:**

There will be two exams; each exam will be divided into three sections:

- short-answer identifications;
- passage identifications;
- essay questions concerning major themes which we have discussed in class.

We will review before each exam, and the sort of material which you must know will be clearly indicated.

**Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change**