American Literature Call for Papers: Pedagogy: Critical Practices for a Changing World


Over the last year, the media’s funereal preoccupation with the death of higher education has thrown into question the relevance and vitality of literary studies. Focusing on student debt, time-to-completion, and job placement, a new version of stripped-down vocational education threatens to take faculty, scholarship, and liberal arts out of the University. In a fury of business efficiencies, for-profit industries and venture capitalists are “unbundling” faculty roles, building self-service models, and advocating the corporate development of standardized assessments or student “competencies.” This special issue proposes pedagogies arising from the field of American literature as a critical response to these alarming trends in higher education.

Historically, literature produced and circulated in the United States has negotiated a range of contradictory demands to “teach” diverse peoples how to inhabit the geopolitical space and cultural terrain of the nation. Indeed, the concept of American literature was forged amid debates about the connections among literacy, citizenship, and pedagogy. In turning our attention to pedagogy, the editors of this special issue of American Literature would like to ask both how our scholarly engagement with American literature has produced a distinct set of pedagogical practices and how our pedagogical practices raise new questions about the relevance and role of American literature. Why we teach what we teach is just as important as why we study what we study but is seldom discussed as a field-defining issue. This special issue presents an opportunity to integrate discipline-specific knowledge more fully into a critical discussion of pedagogy. By leveraging the location of our pedagogy as developing out of specific scholarly concerns, we wish to illustrate the intersection of theory and pedagogical practice while highlighting the
diverse disciplinary, institutional, and political contributions of American literature to higher education and community-based teaching and learning.

With this special issue, we offer an opportunity to consider pedagogy as increasingly the site where political and economic pressures are grappled with and addressed, including the widening gap between the sophistication of scholarship and critical practice in the field of American literature and the current direction of institutional politics and practices. Rather than focusing on a particular teaching strategy or text, we seek essays that approach the topic from larger philosophical and disciplinary perspectives. For example, how do border theory and the work of such theorists as Paolo Freire and Gloria Anzaldúa inform pedagogical practice in the field of American literature, broadly construed? What kinds of counterhegemonies and subaltern literacies emerge in our contemporary pedagogy? Why teach literary texts and why teach literary texts in a national context? In addition, essays addressing the effect of cross-sectoral pedagogy on the discipline might look at how American literature moves beyond the academy into alternative learning spaces through online education or service learning. For instance, how does teaching American literature in prisons across the country address issues of canon in relation to long and broad histories of genocide and incarceration?

We hope to gather together scholars, teachers, and cultural activists in different stages of their careers, inside and outside the academy, and from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. From these diverse perspectives, this volume will also consider how the robust efforts of our field in transnational, multicultural, gender/sexualities, and race-based theories have led to the rearticulation of a richer pedagogy/critical practice as well as a more expansive understanding of “American literature” historically, materially, and in the context of globalization. Collectively, the volume’s essays are meant to foster dialogue and critical exchange, productively exploring
the relationship between scholarly specialization and what we consider our teaching imperatives, as the transforming landscape of higher education and the broader social and political contexts of our pedagogy bring renewed urgency to these questions.

Submissions of 11,000 words or less (including endnotes and references) should be submitted electronically at www.editorialmanager.com/al/default.asp by August 5, 2015. When choosing a submission type, select “Submission-Special Issue-Pedagogy.” For assistance with the submission process, please contact the office of American Literature at (919) 684–3396 or am-lit@duke.edu. For inquiries about the content of the issue, please contact any or all of the coeditors: Carol Batker (cjbatker@usfca.edu), Eden Osucha (eosucha@bates.edu), and Augusta Rohrbach (augustarohrbach@gmail.com).