

UHON 122-003

The Legacy of Failure: Losing and “Losers” in the America

Class Time: 11-12:15 MW
SHC-12
Professor Ryan Swanson

Office: SHC 19C
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Office Hours: Monday 9-10:30, By Appt.

Course Description

Failure. Losing. Rejection. Defeat. A look around American society and throughout history reveals that countless noble efforts and ideas have failed. Individuals have crashed and burned, so to speak. Some of these failing endeavors nearly succeeded; others never had a chance. This course will investigate notable failures and "losers" in America's past and present. The course will weave together economics, history, and psychology in order to address how and why these failures occurred. Just as significantly, we will study how the rejections were received. The course will begin with Articles of Confederation and end with the New Mexico Spaceport. In between we will consider winless basketball teams, real estate collapses, failed inventors, and spectacularly flawed political experiments. Students (and the instructor) will be asked to consider failure and losing on a more personal level as well. And we will, of course, debate the very definition of failure itself. Students will be evaluated regularly on both their written and verbal analyses.



Student Learning Objectives: During the course of the semester, using the topic of failure, students will...

1. Analyze, critically interpret, and evaluate primary works within the humanities.
2. Evaluate how some key works in the humanities reflect either a historical period or national, cultural, ethnic or gender issues.
3. Compare how these works invoke shared human experiences that may relate to readers and the world today.
4. Construct persuasive arguments and increase writing proficiency through analytical essays.

Course Level and Participation:

This is an introduction-level interdisciplinary honors class. Students should take personal responsibility for filling in the gaps in their knowledge when it comes to basic people and events. If you come across a person or event that seems important but you don't know it, look it up. Use the Internet or a standard textbook to refresh basic chronology as needed. In this course you will be asked to read, discuss, and write about the role of failure in American society. It is a seminar style course. Students will earn participation credit by ... being in class and participating. Ask questions, disagree, have opinions.

Required Readings The following books are available for sale in the bookstore:

1. Pat Conroy, *My Losing Season*
2. Michael Lewis, *The Big Short*
3. Scott Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*
4. Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*

Assignments

Participation (attendance, discussion, responses, etc)	20%
Short Talks (4)	20%
2 Response Papers (3-5 pages)	40%
Final Project and Presentation	20%

Grading Scale: A = 93-100% Credit = 70-92% No Credit = 0-69%

Due Dates: Short Talks: 2/1; 2/22; 3/22; 4/12; RP1 2/24; RP2 4/14; Final Project 5/5

****NOTE** Deadlines are FIRM; requests for extensions will not be granted.** The *only* exceptions to the “no extensions” rule will occur in cases of illness (documented by doctor’s note) or family emergency of which I am informed *before* the assignment is due. *Lots of other work does not count as an emergency.* Late assignments will be penalized by a third of a letter a day, including weekends and holidays (A day-late B becomes a B-). Plan responsibly; submit work on time.

Office Hours:

I’m here to help. I enjoy teaching and being part of UNM and the Honors College. I welcome opportunities to discuss the course and your progress in it. In addition to scheduled office hours, please feel free to email me to set an alternative time to meet. I rather obsessively check my email Monday through Friday.

Adds/Drops

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me so we can determine the best plan of action as soon as possible.

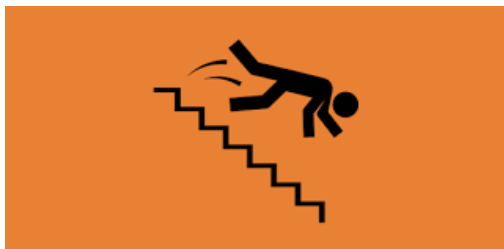
Title IX Reporting Requirement

"In an effort to meet obligations under Title IX, UNM faculty, Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Assistants are considered “responsible employees” by the Department of Education (see pg 15 - <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>). This designation requires that any report of gender discrimination which includes sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence made to a faculty member, TA, or GA must be reported to the Title IX Coordinator at the Office of Equal Opportunity (oeo.unm.edu). For more information on the campus policy regarding sexual misconduct, see: <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2740.html>."

So if you tell me about such an occurrence I must report it, even if you tell me you don’t want me to say anything.

Description of Assignments

I. Class Participation (20%). You are required to attend and participate in this course. Taking an active role in discussions and activities comprises just as much of your responsibility in this class as writing the papers and doing the reading. You will also be asked, for some classes, to bring a written response of the reading to class. The way to prepare for discussion is to do the reading listed on the syllabus before coming to class, listen to the related lecture and your classmates’ responses to the reading, and contribute your own. The class participation grade honors the fact that interaction with each other comprises a major part of this course. If you choose not to participate, you cannot do well in this course.



Reading Notes: Once during each unit, you must come to class with a written 1 page (12pt font, double spaced) response to the day’s assigned reading. This response *should not* be only a summary, but should zero in on the strong/weak points of the reading, and connect the reading to a question that you’re grappling with this semester.

Absences: You get one free absence for the semester. After that freebie, missed classes will decrease your participation grade.

Discussion Facilitator: In addition to doing the reading and participating every week, each student will be asked to be a discussion facilitator during the semester. Don’t worry, this does not mean that you have to

run the class for that day. It simply means that you need to come prepared (i.e. you've already thought about and written down) a couple of questions/insights on the day's topic. These questions should not be meant to stump your colleagues. On the contrary, the point is to facilitate conversation. If you have a problem understanding a certain concept in the reading, don't try to hide it. Put it on the table and see what your classmates think. You may be called on to start off the class period or to interject somewhere in the middle. Be ready. From a grading standpoint, your session as a discussion facilitator will be weighted as triple your normal, daily participation grade.

Reading Quizzes: I reserve the right, if I sense that students aren't quite keeping up, to have reading quizzes. Such quizzes will be straight-forward and designed to ensure that you are doing the required reading.

Required Out-of-Class Events: It is required for all Legacy course students to attend the following events over the course of their first semester in Honors: 2 lectures anywhere on campus; 1 writing workshop; 1 Honors Student Association event. Attending these events will be counted toward your participation grade in the same fashion as attending a daily class session. So missing all these events would constitute 4 absences. In order to get credit, you must do the following: A) send me proof of attendance via email (picture, photo, etc), B) Send a 1 paragraph assessment of the event also via email.

II. Short Talks (20%): Four times over the course of the semester, you will be asked to give a short (c. 2 minutes) speech. These talks will be given either in class or via YouTube. The topics and particulars of these speeches will vary significantly. More details to come.

III. Response Papers (40%). You will turn in two response papers during the semester. In each 3–5 page paper, you will respond to an interpretive question. There are two sources of questions for these papers. 1) Use one of the questions suggested by the professor. 2) If you have a burning question/topic that you would like to address, get email approval from the professor. You must get *prior* approval to do a non-list question. The email will be your proof that you did so.

All papers must be thesis-driven and analytical. They must engage with the texts and primary sources we use in class. No outside research is necessary. All papers must state a thesis, organize the paper to support that thesis, and use evidence (specific examples from the text) to prove the point. Don't simply tell a narrative story. You must cite your sources. All papers will be due at the beginning of class on the specified date. You must hand in a hardcopy.



IV. Final Project (20%). The final project for the course will assess failure in America – past, present, and future. It will include both written and verbal components. More information to come.

How Paper Grades are Determined: The response papers will be evaluated on three main criteria: thesis, organization, and evidence. Each of these categories will be discussed more fully in the context of each assignment, but in general, a paper that does a good job in each category is a B. A paper that almost does is a B-, and a paper that performs well in each category and goes beyond in one category is a B+. A paper that is satisfactory but weak in one or two categories is a C. A D paper is weak in three or more categories, or omits one criterion completely (i.e. lacks evidence). An A range paper performs exceptionally well in each category, and achieves something extraordinary in two or more categories.

Appealing a Grade: You are always welcomed and encouraged to discuss a paper with the professor. But if you want a grade reconsidered, you must first submit (by email is fine) a paragraph in which you evaluate

your paper in each of the 3 criteria. Appeals must be submitted no later than one week after graded papers are returned in class.

Bringing Your Readings to Class: Please bring the books assigned to class on the days that we are discussing them. Regarding the articles, I know paper is expensive. Therefore I don't expect you to print all the articles assigned here. However, you are strongly encouraged to bring your readings to class in some form. You will be expected to grasp the arguments and the most significant details that you have read in preparation for class.

Class Schedule

**** All provided links are current as of 1/15/2017. For journal articles you may need to log into JSTOR or Project Muse through the UNM Library database site. Should one of the links not function properly when you go to read your assigned texts, please Google the title of the article. If this does not work, please let me know ASAP.**

Unit 1: Defining "Failure"

Weeks 1-3

Reading: selected articles and primary documents

Assignments: First 2 minute talk



January 18: **Course Introduction**

January 23: **The Questions: What is Failure? How does it happen? What are its effects?**

1. "Why We Need a Philosophy of Failure," *Prospect*, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/philosophy/against-happiness-why-we-need-a-philosophy-of-failure>
2. Harvard Commencement Speech, JK Rowling, "The Fringe Benefits of Failure," <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/06/the-fringe-benefits-failure-the-importance-imagination> (Read or Listen).

January 25: **Gathering data; Forming a Hypothesis**

1. William Desmond, "Philosophy and Failure," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25669888?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
2. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Man in the Arena," <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsorbonnespeech.html>

January 30: **Failure Lit.***** Last day to turn in Unit 1 Response

1. "MBA Failure Essay Examples," Aringo MBA Admissions Counseling, <https://aringo.com/mba-failure-essays/>
2. "Don't Be a Hypocrite about Failure," *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2016/08/dont-be-a-hypocrite-about-failure>
3. Excerpt, *The Gift of Failure*, <https://www.brainchildmag.com/2015/08/the-gift-of-failure-excerpt/>
4. "Why Parents Need to Let their Children Fail," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/01/why-parents-need-to-let-their-children-fail/272603/>

February 1: **2 Minute Talks: "So Here's My Working Definition of Failure..."**

Unit 2: Historical Failure

Weeks 4-6

Reading: Born Losers, selected articles and primary documents

Assignments: Second 2 minute talk; Response paper 1

February 6: **Going Bust**

Born Losers, prologue, chapters 1-3

February 8: **America's First Failure**

1. The Articles of Confederation: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/artconf.asp
2. The Federalist No. 21, Other Defects of the Present Confederation, <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa21.htm>
3. First Inaugural Address of George Washington, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/wash1.asp

February 13: **"The Big Red Book of Third Rate Men"**

Born Losers, chapters 4-6

February 15: **Prohibition**

1. US Constitution, Amendments, XVIII and XXI, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/amend1.asp#21
2. "Alcohol Prohibition Was a Failure," Cato Institute Opinion Paper, <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa157.pdf>
3. "Actually Prohibition Was a Success," *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/16/opinion/actually-prohibition-was-a-success.html>

February 20: **When Ambition is a Bad Word** *** Last day to turn in Unit 2 response

Born Losers, chapters 7, 8, and epilogue

February 22: **2 Minute Talks: "When America has failed in the past..."**

Response Paper 1 due Friday February 24, by 5pm

Unit 3: Personal Failure

Weeks 7-9

Reading: My Losing Season, selected articles and primary documents

Assignments: Third 2 minute talk

February 27: **Strength through Trials?**

My Losing Season, prologue, chapters 1-10

March 1: **You're Fired**

1. "Job Loss and Health in the US Labor Market," *Demography*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/265125>
2. Read five "Getting Laid Off" stories, <http://howigotlaidoff.com/>
3. "The Terrifying Reality of Long-Term Unemployment," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/the-terrifying-reality-of-long-term-unemployment/274957/>

March 6: **Letting Go**

My Losing Season, chapters 11-20

March 8: **Guest Speaker**

Readings TBA



March 13, 15 – No Class, Spring Break

March 20: **“Ex-Basketball Players”** *** Last day to turn in Unit 3 response
My Losing Season, chapters 20-30, epilogue

March 22: **2 Minute Talks: “So here’s how I failed…”**

Unit 4: Systemic Failure

Weeks 10-12

Reading: The Big Short, selected articles and primary documents

Assignments: Fourth 2 minute talk; Response paper 2

March 27: **Debt and Failure**

The Big Short, prologue, Chapters 1-3

March 29: **Thank Goodness for Mississippi: New Mexico and National Rankings**

1. “Failure to Launch: How NM is Paying for Richard Branson’s Space Tourism Fantasy,” *Buzzfeed*,

https://www.buzzfeed.com/jgwheel/failure-to-launch-how-new-mexico-is-paying-for-richard-brans?utm_term=.dgqdlkaOE#.ud9yX7joO

2. “Justice Dept Blasts UNM for Failing to Address Sexual Assaults,” *Washington Post*,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/04/22/justice-department-blasts-u-of-new-mexico-for-failing-to-address-sexual-assault/>

3. “Education Quality Report Ranks New Mexico 49th in the Nation,” *Albuquerque Journal*,

<http://www.abqjournal.com/702674/nm-49th-in-report-on-education-quality.html>

4. “Albuquerque More Competitive Than Ever Before,” *Albuquerque Economic Development*,

<http://www.abq.org/Rankings.aspx> (Read two of these positive stories)

April 3: **How Much Greed is Too Much?**

The Big Short, Chapter 4-7

April 5: **Detroit: The Failure (and Possible Rebirth) of a City**

1. “The Anatomy of Detroit’s Decline,” *New York Times*,

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/17/us/detroit-decline.html?_r=0

2. “Detroit’s Decline is a Distinctly Capitalist Failure,” *Guardian*,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/23/detroit-decline-distinctively-capitalist-failure>

3. “The Downfall of Detroit,” *The National Review*,

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/353959/downfall-detroit-mark-steyn>

4. “Tough, Cheap, and Real: Detroit is Cool Again,” *National Geographic* (Read Part 3; Explore the rest of the site), <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/taking-back-detroit/see-detroit.html>

April 10: **“Everything is Correlated”** *** Last day to turn in Unit 4 response

The Big Short, Chapters 8-10, epilogue

April 12: **2 Minute Talks: “In America, the deck is stacked against…”**

Response Paper 2 due Friday April 14, by 5pm.

Unit 5: Failure and Recovery

Weeks 13-15

Reading: *The Glass Castle*, selected articles and primary documents

Assignments: Final project

April 17: **Chronic Instability**

The Glass Castle, parts I & II (pp. 1-125)

April 19: **The Decline of Small Town America**

1. "Rural Poverty and Well Being," *USDA*,

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/child-poverty.aspx>

2. "The Graying of Rural America," *The Atlantic*,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/06/the-graying-of-rural-america/485159/>

2. "Why Some Return Home to Rural America and Why it Matters," *USDA*, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015-july/why-some-return-home-to-rural-america-and-why-it-matters.aspx#.V7M4IZgrJhE>

April 24: **Rural Poverty**

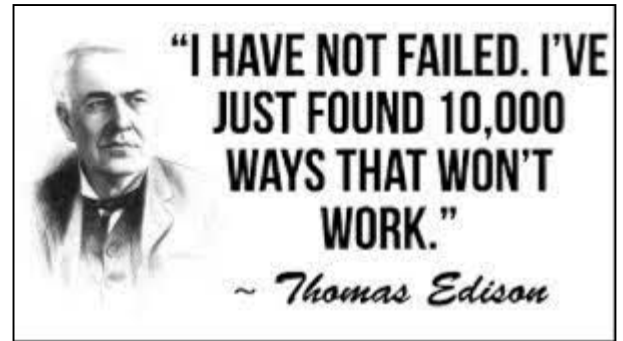
The Glass Castle, part III (pp. 126-242)

April 26: **Wrapping up *** Last day to turn in Unit 5 response**

The Glass Castle, part IV (pp. 243-end)

Final Presentations:

May 1 and 3



THE MAN IN THE ARENA

IT IS NOT THE CRITIC WHO COUNTS; NOT THE MAN WHO POINTS OUT HOW THE STRONG MAN STUMBLES, OR WHERE THE DOER OF DEEDS COULD HAVE DONE THEM BETTER. THE CREDIT BELONGS TO THE MAN WHO IS ACTUALLY IN THE ARENA, WHOSE FACE IS MARRED BY DUST AND SWEAT AND BLOOD; WHO STRIVES VALIANTLY; WHO ERRS, WHO COMES SHORT AGAIN AND AGAIN, BECAUSE THERE IS NO EFFORT WITHOUT ERROR AND SHORTCOMING; BUT WHO DOES ACTUALLY STRIVE TO DO THE DEEDS; WHO KNOWS GREAT ENTHUSIASMS, THE GREAT DEVOTIONS; WHO SPENDS HIMSELF IN A WORTHY CAUSE; WHO AT THE BEST KNOWS IN THE END THE TRIUMPH OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHO AT THE WORST, IF HE FAILS, AT LEAST FAILS WHILE DARING GREATLY, SO THAT HIS PLACE SHALL NEVER BE WITH THOSE COLD AND TIMID SOULS WHO NEITHER KNOW VICTORY NOR DEFEAT.

~ THEODORE ROOSEVELT