ENGL 360 Women Writers: Chick-Lit  

Dr. Lynn Houston  
Office: Taylor 117  
Email: lmhouston@csuchico.edu  
Office hours: Wednesdays 3-5 p.m. and Thursdays 12-2 p.m.

REQUIRED READING

*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen  
*Jemima J* by Jane Green  
*Confessions of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella  
*Good in Bed* by Jennifer Weiner  
*Playing With Boys* by Alisa Valdes-Rodriquez  
*The Dim Sum of Things* by Kim Wong Keltner  
*Sex and the South Beach Chicas* by Caridad Pineiro  
*The Frog Prince* by Jane Porter  
*I Don’t Know How She Does It* by Allison Pearson

Plus secondary readings (scholarly articles on feminist theory) available on course website.

REQUIRED VIEWING

*Pride & Prejudice* (any version)  
*Bridget Jones’ Diary* (movie)  
*In Her Shoes* (movie)  
*Sex & The City* (Television series – any 3 episodes)

ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to a comprehensive final exam, course assignments include online discussion questions/exercises and 1 major paper:

**Major Writing Assignment:**

1) a 5-6 page piece of creative writing written “in the style of” chick lit accompanied by a 3-4 page reflection indicating how your creative writing follows the format of the chick lit genre. I will provide more information in class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Modeled after courses on this topic recently entered into the curriculum at prestigious institutions such as Harvard, the University of Illinois, and Antioch college, this class allows students to identify the major defining characteristics of the genre of contemporary fiction called “chick lit” and seeks to endow students with a sense of the
origin/history of this genre as it arises out of eighteenth century British novels written by women, as well as a sense of the relationship that chick lit has to the history of feminism. The course will be fully online. Some of the televisions series and films adapted from chick-lit novels will be viewed and discussed.

In a May 26, 2006 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled “A generational Divide Over Chick Lit,” Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young argue why it is important for academics to take account of this genre of women’s writing. They explain that the genre, like many aspects of popular culture, is overlooked by scholars because of its popularity in the market. This, however, contradicts the history of feminism, where, in the seventies, many of the most forward-thinking minds in the field made their careers by studying works by women authors that had been “dismissed by the academic literary establishment.” They state that chick-lit offers much fodder for the feminist scholar, and that works in this genre are important because they focus on a number of the issues dear to cultural critics' hearts: the relationship between identity and sexuality; the contemporary fixation on consumer capitalism; and the concerns of race, ethnicity, and class. Even more to the point, chick lit deals with issues essential to feminism, like the pressures on women to balance work with intimate relationships [. . .]

[C]hick-lit heroines, such as the plus-size characters of Jennifer Weiner's novels, bemoan the injustice of being measured against capriciously imposed standards of physical beauty. Bridget Jones confesses that she has "been traumatized by supermodels." The novels also explore the potential liberation produced by sexual freedom, and the comforts of female friendship.

In this course, we will not be studying these works of literature as “romance novels,” but, instead, as Ferriss and Young suggest above: by surveying and debating the theoretical problems involved in contextualizing this manifestation of women’s contemporary experiences within the history of the feminist movement. To do this, we will read some feminist theory and raise questions about whether or not chick lit is third wave feminism or postfeminism, and why the use of the word “chick” (a term reappropriated from its patriarchal connotations by the latest generation of young women) is so hotly debated. We will also read Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as a touchstone text by which to understand the historical development of the marriage plot in women’s literature. Here are some of the literary and cultural concerns that will drive our discussion of this genre:

What do these novels reveal to us about . . .

- women’s identity?
- the value and nature of their relationships with others?
- their connections to their families?
- their romantic needs and desires?
- their struggles in the workplace?
- their relationships to their bodies?
- the gendered marketing of consumer goods (brand name fashions, etc.)?
the evolution of the marriage plot away from class concerns?

Beyond these cultural concerns related to women’s role in society, and in addition to the literary concerns of plot and of protagonist development, we will also discuss the ways in which authors of chic lit employ humor through literary devices of storytelling.

**GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Postings and Activities</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to know your grade in the course, please figure it out using the above percentages. Please do not ask me to calculate your grade during the course of the semester while assignments are still due! You can do it as accurately as I can with the above percentages. However, if you wish to have a general conversation with me about how you are doing in the class, I am always open to such a discussion. Also, I do not send grades to students via email at the end of the semester; once I record your grades, they are available for you to view online (please see User Services or Records and Registration for help viewing your grades online).

Things that will negatively affect your grade:

- incomplete assignments
- late assignments
- poorly realized assignments
- not participating in class discussions
- disrespectful attitude
- excessive absences
- coming late to class
- leaving class early
- disrupting class in any other way
- being unprepared for class
- plagiarism (any suspicion of plagiarism will be turned over to Student Judicial Affairs and could result in your failure of the course and/or expulsion from the university)

**Grading Scale:**

**A:** Work of this quality is superior and represents an achievement normally attained by only a small amount of students.

**B:** “B” level work is better than adequate and shows strong competence in the subject matter/skill.

**C:** “C” quality work shows adequate or satisfactory mastery of the subject/skill.
D: “D” level work barely meets the minimum requirements for the course or assignment.

F: Failing grades are reserved for work that falls below the minimum requirements for the course.

LATE WORK

You should turn your work in on time. Late assignments will be appropriately downgraded. I do not give make-up exams. I do not accept assignments once a week has passed after the due date.

Postings should be made by Sunday at midnight. If your posting is made after that, I may give it partial credit if it is exceptionally brilliant, but I make no guarantees. You can respond politely to classmates’ posts anytime you wish.

ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES, AND PARTICIPATION

There are no excused absences. I will call roll at the beginning of each class. I expect you to raise your hand, look at me, and say “here” or “present.” It is your responsibility to make sure that I have marked you on the attendance roll. If you come to class late (which you should not make a habit of), you need to see me after class has ended to be sure that I have marked you present (but late). Coming to class late four times equals a full absence. If you miss more than 2 week’s worth of class, you cannot receive a passing grade (this has to do with the way that credit hours are calculated based on the amount of face-to-face time we have each semester).

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

According to the University Catalog, California State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, disability, race, color, or national origin. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at CSU Chico, you must register with Disability Support Services V/TTY: 898-5959.