

Fall 2010 English 461 – 02
COMMUNITY LITERACY STUDIES

Mondays 4-6:45
Dr. Lauren Rosenberg

This course investigates the relationship between reading and writing as subjects of school instruction and as activities that people do in their everyday lives in community settings outside of school. Through our readings and discussions we will try to answer: What does it mean to be literate in America? Who decides? What do definitions of literacy suggest about the values of our culture? We will examine how the history and politics of public schooling have fostered the myth of a free society where the opportunity to succeed is equally available to all. We will then investigate Community Literacy Studies, which explore alternative venues where people practice literacy, such as community centers, libraries, churches, kitchens, living rooms, and prisons; and the purposes people have for becoming more literate and for using their literacy to enact social change. We will read ethnographies of Hmong immigrants, an Amish family, African American ministers, and women writers in inner city San Francisco, to understand how and why people use writing when they choose it.



Throughout the course, we will interrogate our own practices as schooled individuals. The final project for the fall semester will be a literacy autobiography in which we “read” our own *literacies* as subjects for critical analysis. The ethnographic studies we read will prepare us to conduct mini community studies of our own during the spring semester. Possible subjects might range from analyzing the casual language practices of African American girls in an afterschool leadership group to observing the performance styles of teenage hip hop poets. We will use ethnographic methods to research and write up our studies as the major project for the course.