Starting college can be exhilarating—and terrifying. A chance for intellectual enlightenment—or intense loneliness. An escape from a stultifying small town of narrow-minded people—or a riot of alcohol, sex, and drugs. In this class we’ll read a selection of college novels from different historical periods, ranging from (parts of) Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe* (about life at Bowdoin in the 1700s) to J. Courtney Sullivan’s 2009 bestseller *Commencement* (about sex, gender, and friendship at Smith). We’ll discuss these novels from a variety of perspectives, literary, historical, and journalistic. Together we’ll explore this important life passage, examining life as we live it.

Along with attendance and informed class participation, students will be expected to present biographical and historical/cultural reports on at least two of the authors and their novels and to write about their own experiences as first-year students at NYU in several genres, including fiction and nonfiction. For your final assignment you will produce a short piece of fiction or memoir about college life in any style you choose. What stories will you choose to tell? How will you find your voice? How does a writer construct a narrative? These are some of the questions we’ll ask in this intense reading and writing seminar.

All class sessions will be discussions, not lectures. Each week we will be discussing the assigned book listed for that date. That means we’ll read 13 complete novels over the course of the semester, some short, some quite lengthy—some literary, and some pretty trashy. This is a course for people who enjoy reading fiction! If that doesn’t sound like fun to you, please select a different seminar.

Welcome to college—and let’s have some fun.
**Requirements/Assignments**
1. You are expected to attend all class sessions.
2. You are expected to do each week's reading and come to class prepared to discuss the assigned novel.
3. You are expected to do two 10-minute oral presentations—probably with a classmate—about a week's assigned author and novel. As part of your presentation, please bring to class a biographical handout about the author, with copies for all your classmates, and a second handout about the historical period covered in the book. (These can be printed in the Journalism Institute if printing is a problem.) And please come prepared with comments about the text, including a discussion of themes, key characters, historical context, literary allusions, and author's voice. (We'll discuss all these topics, so don’t worry if they’re unfamiliar to you.)
4. You are expected to keep a personal journal sparked by our readings and your own experiences this semester, reflecting on your own welcome to college as you live it. (I think you'll value this diary in later years.) Some of this we'll share in class. Please write at least a page every week, for a total of at least 14 pages by the end of the semester. In addition, you’ll complete several short writing assignments that we’ll discuss in class.

**A Word About Grading**
This class is a seminar, which means that student engagement is key. Your grade will be based on participation in our discussions, your two oral presentations, and of course your writing. This grading rubric is not applied rigidly and there is room for flexibility, but in general, your final grade will be calculated roughly as follows: discussion and participation, 20%; two oral reports, 20% each; journal, 20%; all other writing assignments, 20%.

**Required Reading**
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*
Anton Myrer, *The Last Convertible*
Rona Jaffe, *Class Reunion*
Chip Kidd, *The Cheese Monkeys*
James Simon Kunen, *The Strawberry Statement*
Sigrid Nunez, *The Last of Her Kind*
William Hart, *Never Fade Away*
Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*
Elif Batuman, *The Idiot*
Jennine Capo Crucet, *Make Your Home Among Strangers*
Tom Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*
J. Courtney Sullivan, *Commencement*

*Note:* Some of these may be out of print, but are available online on various sites. Please purchase *The Last Convertible* and *Class Reunion* online before the start of class. The rest are at the NYU Bookstore. Any edition is OK.
Syllabus

9/4  Introduction to the course. We’ll read selections from Owen Johnson’s Stover at Yale (1911) and Natalie Krinsky’s Chloe Does Yale (2005). We’ll think about what’s changed in the last 100 or so years.

9/11 Read: F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, along with selections from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fanshawe (1828, but set in 1750s), Alice Walker’s Meridian (1976, but set in 1960s), Brian Wood’s The New York Four (2008, set at NYU a few years ago), and Rebecca Harrington’s Penelope (set at Harvard, 2012), all of which are posted on NYU Classes under Resources, in the folder called Overview. Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due: One-page response to/reflection on college so far, any style. How are you feeling?


9/25 Read: Rona Jaffe, Class Reunion, and selections from Louis Begley, Matters of Honor, Scott Sullivan, Shortest Gladdest Years, and Calvin Trillin, Remembering Denny (all available on NYU Classes in the Prejudices folder). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due, three pages: Is anyone an “outsider” at NYU today? Are you? You can address this directly or describe an encounter—real or fictional, rewarding or scary—between two very different students.


10/9 NO CLASS: CLASSES MEET ON MONDAY SCHEDULE

10/16 Read: James Simon Kunen, The Strawberry Statement, and selections from Alice Walker’s Meridian, Mary Gordon’s The Company of Women, and John Short’s “The Weathermen’re Shot” (on NYU Classes in Vietnam Era folder). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Discussion of the difference(s) between fiction and nonfiction. Reporting assignment: What issues do students care about today? These don’t have to be political; the assignment is to get a sense of the current zeitgeist here at NYU. Interview at least
10 students and write up your notes in the form of a three-page research memo to an editor. You can work in teams.

10/23 Read: Sigrid Nunez, *The Last of Her Kind*, and selections from Joyce Carol Oates's *Black Girl/White Girl* and Martha Moody's *Best Friends* (in *Vietnam Era* folder). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due, three pages: Feature story—journalism, not fiction—based on reporting assignment. (You can find examples in the *Feature Stories: Journalism* folder.) Again, you can work in teams.


11/13 Read: Jennine Capo Crucet, *Make Your Home Among Strangers*. Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Discussion of narrative. Writing assignment, three pages: You've been here two months now—what's different from your expectations? Have you changed your expectations? You can respond in any form, including fiction. Sharing of student work.


