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 (about 10 pages, but length is flexible) 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.

Welcome to college—and let’s have some fun.
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
Hugh Kennedy, Everything Looks Impressive
Tom Wolfe, I Am Charlotte Simmons
Will Lavender, Obedience: A Novel
Chad Harbach, The Art of Fielding
J. Courtney Sullivan, Commencement

Note: Quite a few of these are out of print, but are available online on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Half.com. The rest are at the NYU Bookstore. Any edition is OK.

Syllabus

Week 1  Introduction to the course. We’ll read selections from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fanshawe (1828, but set in 1750s), Owen Johnson’s Stover at Yale (1911), Alice Walker’s Meridian (1976, but set in 1960s), Natalie Krinsky’s Chloe Does Yale (2005), and Brian Wood’s The New York Four (2008, set at NYU right now). [We won’t get to all of these; we’ll discuss the rest next week.]

Week 2  Read: F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (plus selections handed out the week before, all of which are also posted on Blackboard under Overview). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due: One-page response to college so far, any style.


Week 4  Read: Rona Jaffe, Class Reunion, and selections from Begley, Matters of Honor, Sullivan, Shortest Gladdest Years, and Trillin, Remembering
Denny (all available on Blackboard under *Prejudices*). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due: 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.

### Week 5


### Week 6

Read: James Simon Kunen, *The Strawberry Statement*, selections from Alice Walker's *Meridian* and Mary Gordon's *The Company of Women*, and John Short’s "The Weathermen're Shot" (available on Blackboard under *Vietnam Era*). 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.

### Week 7

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* (available on Blackboard under *Vietnam Era*). Biographical and historical report/literary discussion. Writing due: Feature story—journalism, not fiction—based on reporting assignment.

### Week 8


### Week 9


### Week 10

Read: Hugh Kennedy, *Everything Looks Impressive*, and selections from Tom Perrotta's *Joe College* and possibly Owen Johnson's *Stover at Yale*, Calvin Trillin's *Remembering Denny*, Natalie Krinsky's *Chloe Does Yale*, and/or Diana Peterfreund's *Secret Society Girl* (available on Blackboard under *Yale through Decades*). Discussion of point of view.

### Week 11

(all available on Blackboard under *Getting High*). Sharing of student work.

**Week 12**

**Week 13**

**Week 14**