Course Description: Financial crises are continually recurring and devastating phenomena. So much is painfully obvious in this historical moment. Less clear, but supremely vexing, is how they arise, how they may be prevented, why institutions and individuals respond to them the way they do, and what a given crisis suggests about prevailing social, economic, and cultural values. This course approaches this dilemma through a careful reading of representations of actual and imagined financial panics in nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century (primarily American) literature. We will be chiefly concerned with, first, the ways in which fiction is utilized explain to wide, non-specialist audiences complicated economic transactions (what gets emphasized, what gets elided; the role of affect and emotion); how these representative works of “finance fiction” highlight how capitalism can (and cannot be) popularly imagined at a given historical point (we will not be overly concerned with how these authors “got it right” or “got it wrong” with respect to actual economic history); the relationship between fictional and “documentary” representations of the market and how the two are interrelated; the relationship between psychology and economics (behavioral economics).

Books: The novels listed below are available at the Norris Center bookstore. I have included the ISBN number for the specific edition we will be reading in class in case you would like to procure these books elsewhere. However, it is imperative that you bring the assigned texts to each class, and that you use the edition specified below. You will be marked absent if you do not have the assigned text in class; your written work will not be accepted if you cite from editions other than those listed below.

Don DeLillo, Cosmopolis, 0743244257
John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer, 0618381864
Theodore Dreiser, The Financier, 014310554X
Benjamin M. Friedman, The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth, 9781400095711
Frank Norris, The Pit, 0140187588
Gary Shteyngart, Super Sad True Love Story, 0812977866
Upton Sinclair, The Moneychangers, 0486469174

Assignments:

1. **Regular attendance and active participation, 10%**.

2. **First paper, 1500 words, due in class on Wednesday, October 24. 25%**. I will distribute detailed instructions and a list of prompts for this essay during the quarter. You will be able to write on texts or films not listed on the syllabus, but you will first need my permission to do so.
3. **Weekly Blackboard responses. 15%.** Brief (300-500 word) responses to the week’s reading in which you demonstrate close textual analysis with respect to a larger question or theme presented by the assigned reading. Please refrain from commenting on how a text made you feel, or whether you liked it or not, and please do not write in a presumptuous or generalizing way (i.e. never assume your reader thinks the same way you do about anything; spell out exactly what you mean, and what leads you to interpret a text in such a way). Responses are to be posted to the Discussion Board on Blackboard by **9AM on Mondays**, beginning in week two and concluding in week nine.

4. **Final paper abstract w/ 5 sources due in class Monday, November 26. 10%.** 300-500 proposal for your final essay. Should make clear the question you are pursuing in your essay, and how you intend to answer it. Must also include a bibliography of at least five sources you intend to use with brief (2-3 sentence) annotations explaining the rationale for using them.

5. **Final Paper, 2500 words, due by Noon on Wednesday, December 12th in University Hall 215. 40%.** Several possibilities for this paper, which will be more open-ended than the first paper. Details to be discussed later on in the quarter. This paper will require outside research to build on major topics/issues/questions covered in class. Once again, you may write on primary texts that are not listed on the syllabus, but you must do so in consultation with me.

**Grading Criteria For Essays:**

1. Clear argument & thesis statement: 20% (extra credit awarded for relevance/originality)
2. Argument well supported by citations: 30%
3. Close reading & incisive analysis of passages/scenes from the texts: 30%
4. Proper use of grammar & well-organized: 20% (extra credit awarded for stylistic elegance)

**Course Policies:**

1. You must hand in all written work on or by the due date. Late work will be penalized one full letter grade for each day it is withheld past the due date. Last minute extensions will be granted only in case of a major (and documented) emergency.

2. You are allowed no more than two absences this quarter. If you miss more than two classes your participation grade will be capped at a “C”; miss more than three classes and your participation grade drops to an “F.” Regard these absences as you would a “sick day” in a professional job: you make take them whenever, and for whatever reason, but they are strictly limited in number, *except* in cases of a documented illness.

3. Please show up on time for class with the assigned reading completed, with the assigned texts in hand, and ready to actively participate in class discussions. Frequent tardiness, drowsiness in class, and perpetual silence during discussion will lower your participation grade. I will send around an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class. If you are not in class in time to sign the sheet, you will be marked absent.

4. No laptops in class. Please take notes by hand.
5. You are expected to be familiar with Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences standards of academic integrity and the procedures in place for handling students who violate them. That information, along with more general university-wide guidelines to academic integrity at Northwestern, is available on the Office of the Provost’s website:

http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/index.html

You should bring any questions you have about these policies to my attention in the first week of the quarter, after which I will assume you have read and fully understand them.

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student with a documented disability and requiring accommodation is requested to speak directly to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (847-467-5530) and the instructor as early as possible in the quarter, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain strictly confidential.

**Schedule:**

**N.B.** With the exception of Friedman, all supplementary readings will be available under “Documents” on Blackboard. “A Deal in Wheat” by Norris will also be available on Blackboard.

**10/1:** Introduction

**10/3:** Norris, “A Deal in Wheat,”; *The Pit*, pp. 1-39

**Recommended:** Friedman, *from “Ideas, Origins, and Their Implications,”* pp. 3-50; Kindleberger, “Financial Crises: A History Perennial”

**10/8:** *The Pit*, pp. 40-278

**10/10:** *The Pit*, pp. 279-Finish

**Recommended:** Zimmerman, “Frank Norris and the Mesmeric Sublime”

**10/15:** Dreiser, *The Financier*, pp. 1-144

**10/17:** *The Financier*, pp. 145-207

**Recommended:** Friedman, *from “Democracy in America,”* pp. 105-157; Zimmerman, “*The Financier* and the Ends of Accounting”; Michaels, “Dreiser’s *Financier*: The Man of Business as a Man of Letters”

**10/22:** *The Financier*, pp. 207-365

**10/24:** *The Financier*, pp. 366-403 – FIRST ESSAY DUE IN CLASS

**Recommended:** Horwitz, “Dreiser, Debs, and Deindividualization: Hypothecation, Union, Representation”; Kindleberger, “Fueling the Flames: The Expansion of Credit”
10/29: *The Financier*, pp. 404-Finish

11/5: *The Moneychangers*, pp. 46-Finish
11/7: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, pp. 1-64

**Recommended:** Tabb, “Realism in Financial Markets”; Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital”

11/12: *Manhattan Transfer*, pp. 65-Finish

**Recommended:** Friedman, *from “Democracy in America,”* pp. 158-180; Chakravartty and da Silva, “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction”

11/19: *Cosmopolis*, pp. 63-Finish
11/21: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASSES

11/28: *Super Sad True Love Story*, pp. 262-Finish


12/3: READING WEEK – NO CLASSES
12/5: READING WEEK – NO CLASSES

12/12: **FINAL PAPERS DUE BY NOON IN UNIVERSITY HALL 215**