Writing for Critical Consciousness

This course has two overarching goals: to gain fluency and agility in written expression, and to analyze the political power of language. Although these two goals may at times seem to trip over each other, I believe that graceful and powerful writing comes from understanding language on both syntactical and political levels. Throughout the semester, we will evaluate writing — our own work as well as published work, we will consider our political roles as writers, and we will examine the relationship between rhetoric and discourse.

Texts

Texts for this course are available in Amherst at Food For Thought. I strongly encourage you to patronize your local bookstore before going shopping on the internet. Food For Thought is a wonderful workers’ collective — a labor model directly in-line with STPEC’s curriculum and values — and they need our financial support.

We will read and discuss all of the required texts. I don’t expect them to be too expensive, and I do expect you to invest in them. Since books are fundamental to your educational experience, skimping on the required texts is probably not the best way to save money.


Strunk, William and White, E.B. The Elements of Style (any edition will do)

Recommended:


We won’t draw directly from Zinsser’s book this semester, but it’s one that has helped my own writing enormously. I recommend it. You can find it in the library or at a used bookstore.

You should know that the required texts for this course are not easy. I’ve chosen some challenging readings. I’m quite confident we can get through them in one piece, and I’m looking forward to some rich and intellectual discussions. But, especially because these books won’t be
easy reads, you'll need to devote significant time to reading, note taking, and studying the texts. You probably won't "get it" on your first read through an assignment; I expect and encourage you to take the time necessary for you to understand some of the major points, themes and implications that our authors make. I'll try to keep the assignments from getting too long, and you should try to take advantage of shorter assignments by putting extra time into studying the readings.

Late assignments are not accepted. If you are having trouble, or a personal emergency has come up, let me know as soon as possible. Extensions are rare, but if you would like one and feel that you have a compelling reason, speak with me at least 24 hours before the due date. Be prepared to show me your work and have a sound case for an extension. Assignments in this class are spaced intentionally to correspond with readings and discussions, and to allow time to work on them. One late assignment causes a train wreck of overdue papers further down the line. It's best to stay on top of your work. Be warned: the reading load is relatively light so that you can focus on your own research and writing; you will have a writing assignment due nearly every week. Incompletes are possible in extreme cases only.

Peer Review
We will spend some time reviewing each other's writing. Peer Review can often be a frustrating experience, but I believe it has wonderful potential for building community, helping us develop as writers, and resisting colonial and patriarchal conventions of the classroom. In order for the process to be effective, everyone must participate enthusiastically. I encourage you to peer review papers for your other courses as well. Evidence of peer review with a partner from our class is mandatory for a passing grade.

Weekly Writing
For every week's reading you will write a 2-3 page response. These can be somewhat informal, but should articulate your thoughtful reactions to the text. Please do not summarize the reading. I am trying to get a Spark page set up; if it works, you'll post the Weekly Writing to Spark. If I'm not, you'll email the class. Weekly Writings are due every Tuesday by midnight. You may miss two Weekly Writings.

Essays
You will write several essays for this class. Some will be 6-8 pages; others, 2-3 pages. The emphasis of all essays is on sound writing and strong content, not on length. Think of the shorter papers as opportunities to generate ideas, and the longer papers as opportunities to explore those ideas.

All papers should be written at the college level. Proper grammar and appropriate citations are a given. Never turn in an essay of any length without a works cited page. All essays must be stapled, with pages numbered, and margins adjusted to one inch.

To receive a grade and the benefit of my feedback, all papers must be handed in by the due date. I will not grade emailed papers.
Portfolio
At the end of the semester you will turn in a compilation of your work and achievements during this course. More on this later. Be sure to save all of your work – physically as well as digitally – for this assignment.

Participation
Come to class, arrive on time, be prepared, turn your work in on time, and participate in class discussions. Participation is worth 10% of your final grade; it is not meant to be punitive, but helpful.

Plagiarism is passing off another author’s work as your own, paraphrased or word-for-word. Plagiarism is considered a strict offense by the University and carries strict penalties. Please attribute all ideas, work and language to the source.

Grades

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Projects

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<td>Short Essays (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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Tips
Writing well requires practice. Fifteen minutes spent writing each day will do more to improve your writing than will the occasional all-nighter. You’ll get more out of your work if you approach it in manageable pieces rather than large chunks. Because this course meets only once a week, you must make an extra effort to manage your work.

In addition to the required texts, you might check out Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (Owl) for help with research papers and for general writing advice:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

Additionally, the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers is available in the library.

Schedule
Thursday, September 8: Introduction.

Thursday, September 15: *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Chapter 1 “Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory”)
Asa Hilliard, “Psychological Factors Associated with Language in the Education of the African-American Child” (JSTOR)
*Bring list of ideas for short essay to class today

Thursday, September 29: Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places” in Writing Culture (Rosh Hashanah) Decolonizing Methodologies (pages 45-50)
Also: A brief history on the teaching of composition in college
Due: Short Essay 1 (2+ pages)

Thursday, October 6: Decolonizing Methodologies (Chapter 3 “Colonizing Knowledges”)

Thursday, October 13: James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory” in Writing Culture
Due: Short Essay 2 (2+ pages) on Writing Culture

Thursday, October 20: Decolonizing Methodologies (Chapters 5 and 8)
Bring to class some ideas, notes for Major Essay 1

Thursday, October 27: Michael M.J. Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory” in Writing Culture
Bring to class Draft for Major Essay 1

Thursday, November 3: Due: Major Essay 1

Thursday, November 10: Working

Thursday, November 17: Working
Due: Short Essay 3 (2+ pages) on Working

Thursday, November 24: Thanksgiving

Thursday, December 1: TBD; Work on Final Essays

Thursday, December 8: Final Class Session; Due: Portfolio

Thursday, December 15: Final Essay and All Other Work Due to my box in Machmer