



WOST 391W: Writing and Queer Representation
Fall 2009
Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 11:15-12:05

Instructor: Mitch Boucher

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Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays 9:30 – 11:00 am and by appointment

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“Two or three things I know, two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that to go on living I have to tell stories, that stories are the one sure way I know to touch the heart and change the world”

Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*

Course Description:

This writing course fulfills the university's junior year writing requirement for Women's Studies majors. Students will be asked to learn and engage in a writing process that will prepare them to write for personal, political and scholarly purposes. This semester, the course will be organized around the theme of queer representation. In particular, we will focus on stories and storytelling. What are the stories that have been told about queer people? What are the stories we tell about ourselves and to ourselves? How do we discover the stories of “queer” people in history, and how do we narrate these stories today? What are the personal and political effects of the stories we tell to each other, to ourselves, through our scholarship, in our political strategies? How can queer people create stories (personal and political) that are large enough to encompass the vast diversity within our communities? Can we create a new world through new stories? Or, do stories always create boundaries that define who counts as “real,” who deserves representation, and from whom we will request silence or of whom we will tolerate erasure? What are the stories we do not tell, and what effects do such silences produce?

Through writing, research, and reading we will explore both the vital importance of storytelling for queer people, and the problems or quagmires that come with creating representation. We will look at how queer people have documented their lives and political issues through a variety of representational structures including autobiographical fiction, performance art, photography, archival and oral history collections, activist posters and political statements, theoretical writing, and articles and books based in scholarly research. Through research and their own writing projects, students will tell their own stories and examine how queer people have used writing to document their lives and make their political issues visible. **You do not have to identify as queer or glbt to take part in this class. Although the course centralizes queer issues, assignments do not require a queer identity. There is plenty of room in the course for people of all sexual and gender identities!! I fully welcome anyone who would like to or needs to take this class. There will be room for you to create and share your own stories.**

Throughout the course, students will engage in different types of writing for a variety of purposes. Some writing will be private writing viewed only by the writer, and some writing will be reviewed by peers and/or the instructor for feedback. Some writing will be read, but not graded. Some more formal pieces of writing will go through a drafting process and will be completed for grades. Sometimes students will complete pre-writing assignments that they will develop later in the course, and some pre-writing will not be further developed. Students will synthesize the ideas of other authors, and they will use writing to generate and communicate ideas of their own. Within this context and through their own writing projects, students will explore the stakes of queer storytelling, what it means to write queerly, and how queer writing might open new representational and documentary possibilities for alternative genders and sexualities.

Course Objectives:

- Familiarize students with a variety of writing techniques, including a writing process, which will help them to successfully organize and develop their writing projects.
- Critically engage with theoretical ideas through writing and other visual texts.
- Successfully document and incorporate secondary sources into scholarly writing according to academic standards.
- Introduce students to archival and oral history research.
- Engage in dialogue over the stakes of representation as they relate to the lives of queer people.

Required Course Materials:

- Spiral notebook to be used for journal writing and in-class writing.
- Three-ring binder and dividers to be used for your final writing portfolio.
- At least two portfolio folders, the kind that fold open and have a pocket on each side.
- Allison, Dorothy. *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. NY: Plume, 1995. Available at Amherst Books.
- Access to SPARK available with UMass OIT account. You will be automatically enrolled in SPARK when you register for this course. You can access SPARK from the university web page. Use the same username and password that you use for your UMass e-mail account.

Student Responsibilities:

Writing Projects:

There will be four major writing projects that must be completed to pass this class. Each project has preliminary writing assignments which are also required. The projects reflect a variety of writing styles that might be expected of Women's Studies graduates. They are also designed to give you an opportunity to experiment with different writing styles and writing for a variety of purposes.

- Project One: Representing Self: The Stories that Make Us Who We Are: This project is designed to give you an opportunity to reflect upon the issue of representation as it relates to your own life and identity. We will look at representation within a queer theory context, and you will be encouraged to experiment with and combine different representational mediums and writing styles when creating your own project. In this section, you also will be introduced to different patterns of development that you can use to enhance your writing for this assignment and others. To prepare for this project, we will look at the work of queer writers who have tackled the topic of identity and representation through performance pieces, autobiographical fiction, photography, and essays. You will be able to use any or all of these forms of writing to create your own project. In addition to your final piece, this project will require you to complete three pre-draft writing assignments and two analytic responses.
- Project Two: Telling the Stories of History, An Oral History/Archives Project: This project will give you an opportunity to learn about and practice oral history and archival research. Both of these forms of research have been crucial to the cultural preservation of queer lives, communities, and politics and to the construction of queer history. In preparation for this project, we will visit the UMass Special Collections and Archives where we will be introduced to the practice of archival research and the queer collections housed there. We will also go on a field trip to a queer community archives in Northampton, MA called the Sexual Minorities Archives where we will learn about the mission and significance of community archives projects for queer communities. A guest speaker from the Valley Women's History Collaborative will come to our class and speak about the work this organization is doing to preserve the history of feminist and lesbian organizing and community-building in Western Massachusetts. She also will discuss oral history interviewing as a research technique being used by this organization.

For your final archives/oral history project, you will choose to either 1) visit a local archives and describe and analyze something you find there, or 2) conduct an oral history interview of your own. Your final paper for this project will be one that both describes your experience and analyzes the interview you produced or the artifact you studied. It will be 5-6 pages. Before submitting your final oral history/archives project, you will prepare a preliminary draft of your paper and exchange it with a peer for peer response.

Before starting your archives/oral history project and to give you a chance to practice working with archival objects and oral history texts, you will be required to analyze one cultural artifact (2 pgs.) and read and analyze one oral history (2 pgs.) from the online archives available to you on SPARK.

- Project Three: Deciphering Stories: Media Representation and Textual Analysis: In this section of the course, we will look at media representations of queer sexualities and genders with the goal of developing analyses that move us beyond good/bad or positive/negative framework for thinking about queer representations in media. Within this context, you will work on developing complex thesis statements and adequate support for analytical argument papers, and you will practice summarizing and incorporating secondary sources into your own work. Your final paper will be a textual analysis paper that focuses on one specific media representation of queer sexuality and/or gender. In this paper, you will state an argument, provide convincing and adequate support for your claims, and incorporate and document secondary sources according to academic standards. Your final paper will be 7-8 pages in

length, documented in MLA style. You will prepare a preliminary draft of your paper and exchange it with a classmate for peer response.

- Project Four: Stories and Politics: Contemporary Queer Issues and the Art of Storytelling: We will begin this section by looking at the issue of representation as it was addressed by queer communities during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s. During this time period, queer activists, artists, and community members wrote speeches, made posters, created written and verbal testimonies, wrote poetry and literature, made films, created quilt patches, wrote editorials, painted pictures, and created political and theatrical performances that were designed to call attention to a crisis that was mostly ignored by the dominant culture. Queer people needed to use representation to shock an apathetic non-gay community into action and to educate queer communities about how to survive. Representation was vital, yet people struggled to find a way to adequately capture the shock, pain, anger, grief, and feelings of betrayal that they were experiencing.

Using this time period as a model, each student will investigate a contemporary issue and create three writing projects using analytical and persuasive writing techniques. The first will be a three page reflection paper that analyzes the conceptual and representational structure that activist groups and dominant culture use when addressing the contemporary issue they choose. The second will be a letter to the editor or to a congressional representative or a speech that is meant to educate others about the issue and call them to some sort of action. The third will be a visual text such as a poster, educational pamphlet, zine, painting, or photo(s) display that is designed to call attention to and educate others about the issue and/or actions others might take to address it.

Journal Writing:

I ask that you to keep a journal as a place to explore ideas, record your reactions to texts, make observations about the world around you, brainstorm for paper topics, and write about anything else you would like to explore or think through in writing. The more exploratory writing you do, especially if you use writing to think through complicated ideas or feelings, the more complex your writing assignments might be. Like any skill, writing takes lots of practice. Practice need not and should not only take place in the form of formal writing. I will not be grading your journal, but at your mid-term conference and at some point at the end of the semester, I will flip through your journal (without reading it so that it can remain private) and check to see that you have written at least five pages for each half of the semester (10 pgs in all). I will count this as 4 out of 10 points of your participation grade. I will also try to periodically provide class time for you to write in your journal, but I highly recommend that you schedule a regular ten minutes a day to write in your journal about your thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc. If you schedule a regular time to write, for ex. before bed, you might start to enjoy, rely upon, and see the benefits of this type of writing.

Participation and Classroom Environment:

The quality of our class depends upon your willingness to be here in mind and body and to participate in our activities and discussion. This is your class! **Speak up, ask questions, and make this class your own.** I believe that the more you are willing to take risks, be honest, share ideas, and listen respectfully to others, the more you, your classmates, and I will get out of the course. I will do my

best to encourage your participation and I am interested in what each of you has to say. **You don't have to agree with me to participate.**

Since every person's participation is important to the success of this class, you are expected to attend class and to participate in discussion, peer responses, at least one individual conference with me, and in-class writing exercises or activities. If you are someone who absolutely cannot speak in class, come talk to me and we will find another way for you to convey your thoughts about discussion and earn your participation grade.

In order to create a safe space for discussion and learning, I require that you listen and speak to each other with respect. Please listen carefully to what others are saying or *trying* to say, and I will do the same. It is OK to have different opinions, but I ask that you share them in a way that is educational for, gentle, and respectful to others. Please remember that for some people in this class the material is very new, and for others it will relate to their own lives in such a way that they might feel a deep personal investment in the material and discussion. I encourage everyone to ask any question they have, and I ask that you give each other the room to learn and grow throughout the semester.

Saving Your Work:

You are responsible for saving AND backing-up ALL of your work. Everything you write should be backed-up on UDrive, a flash drive, and/or a disk. I suggest that you save all of your work in two places, one copy on a flash drive or computer hard drive, and one copy on UDrive. If you would like instruction on how to use UDrive, please see me. Save all of your work, including free-writing, pre-writing exercises, preliminary drafts, peer and instructor feedback, revisions, and final drafts.

Submitting Your Work:

Your work needs to be submitted on time and as a hard copy. Bring it to class on the day it is due. If you are absent, send it with a friend from the class. If illness or any emergency has kept you from completing your work on time, it is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements for when you will submit it. I will not accept e-mail submissions. PLEASE do not submit your paper to me via e-mail!

Attendance:

You are allowed three absences without penalty. Please use these absences for illness, doctor's appointments and family emergencies. If you are experiencing a serious illness or family emergency that will cause you to miss more than three classes, then please come see me and provide documentation. If you will be absent due to religious observance please see me ahead of time to let me know. **For every absence over the first three, your grade will be reduced by one third of a letter grade. This is true even if you use your three absences and then encounter an emergency. So, save your absences for illness and family emergencies or events.**

Contacting Me and Office Hours:

I encourage you to come to my office hours. It helps me to know about the questions or experiences that you are having in relation to the class, and I welcome your visits to my office hours. You do not have to have a particular agenda to come talk to me during office hours. If you would like to meet

with me, but cannot make my office hours, please set up an appointment! I hope I see you all of you at some point during office hours this semester!

Please see me immediately if any problems arise for you during the course; the sooner we address any difficulties, the more time we have to find a solution to the problem together. **Please give me at least 24 hours to respond to e-mails!**

UMass Writing Center:

The Writing Center is located in the northwest corner of the W.E.B. DuBois Library's Learning Commons. It is open everyday except for Saturday and many nights until 9pm. The Writing Center provides free one-on-one assistance for anyone who wants extra help at any stage of their writing. They meet individually with writers in forty-five minute consultations and you can have up to two appointments per week. I highly recommend their services. For hours, policies, and appointments visit <http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/>

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

The University's policies on plagiarism apply to ALL written work in this course. Taking a sentence, paragraph, idea, or entire paper from any other writer, including Internet sources, without using proper citation, or handing in someone else's writing as your own counts as plagiarism. You are not allowed to submit work that you have written for another class or that you will submit to another class for credit. According to university policies, submitting the same paper for credit in more than one class without permission from both instructors is plagiarism. To better understand the definitions of and penalties for plagiarism, please visit the following URL: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/#B. If you are feeling desperate and unable to complete an assignment on your own, then you need to contact and speak to me. If you are willing, I will help you get what you need in order to succeed.

Learning or Psychological Disabilities:

UMass is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services, you may be eligible for academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. If you had a documented disability in high school, or if you think you might have a physical, learning, or psychological disability, I strongly urge you to contact Disability Services for consultation. Their number is: 545-0892, or e-mail inquiries to DS@educ.umass.edu

Grading:

Each project will be submitted to me as a mini-portfolio which includes your pre-writing exercises, preliminary drafts, peer and instructor responses, and your final paper. Your portfolio will be graded as a whole with the most weight given to the final paper. However, your final portfolio grade will be reduced by one letter grade for **each** piece of preliminary writing (pre-drafts, pre-writing exercises, preliminary drafts, and peer responses) that is missing. An organized final portfolio with all of your writing and grades and a final writing reflection paper is due at our final exam period.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- 20% Portfolio One: Representing Self
- 20% Portfolio Two: Oral History/Archives Project
- 20% Portfolio Three: Textual Analysis and Documented Essay
- 25% Portfolio Four: Contemporary Issues Projects
- 10% Participation (in-class writing exercises, small group work, individual conference, peer responses, journal writing)
- 5% Final Portfolio Reflection

Grading Scale: A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73; D+ = 67-69; D = 64-66; D- = 60-63; F = 0-59

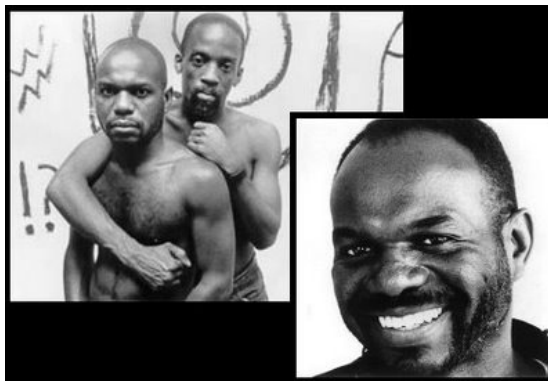


“Why am I compelled to write?... Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger... To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispell the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit... Finally I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing.”

--Gloria Anzaldua, “Speaking in Tongues”

Excerpt from
“Tongues Untied”
By Marlon Riggs

In search of self
I listened
to the beat of my heart,
to rhythms muffled
beneath layers
of delusion, pain,
alienation, silence.



The beat was my salvation.

I let this primal pulse lead me
Past broken dreams, solitude
And framents of identity
To a new place, a home
Not of peace, harmony and sunshine.

No.
But truth.

Simple, shameless, brazen truth.



“Two or three things I know for sure, and one is that I'd rather go naked than wear the coat the world has made for me.” --Dorothy Allison