

## **Introduction to Composition and Rhetoric**

**The City College of New York**

**Spring 2015**

**NAC 6/303, 4:45-6:35**

Professor Tom Peele

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00-4:00

### **Course Description**

This course will introduce you to some of the key works in the field of composition and rhetoric from the 1960s to the present, but we will begin the semester by reading contemporary studies that are the result of this rich history of scholarship. These studies will help us situate our own scholarly interests in the field and provide us with models of scholarship. The first of these studies emphasizes the importance of looking at writing in its social, historical, and cultural contexts (Shipka). In the second study, we will read about how writing can mediate between knowledge and information in the context of a service-learning project that aims to help community residents navigate government data (Grabill). We will also read case studies that address issues of digital literacy and family literacy, and we will look at theories of discourse analysis and the limitations of the terms “critical consciousness” and “liberatory pedagogy” (Norton).

This collection of theoretical concepts and research methods--as well as the knowledge that you bring with you from your course work and your experiences--will equip you to conduct your own study for this semester. You will be asked to describe the subject and design of your study in a research proposal, and you will be encouraged to begin work on your study soon after we have discussed the proposal. I hope the studies will vary widely, depending on your interests. The studies could be traditional literature surveys that will help you better understand a subfield in composition and rhetoric such as feminism, queer studies, critical race theory, disability studies, second language acquisition, or something else. You might conduct a case study on a subject that interests you, or you might want to study and practice writing and community action. Once this work is underway, we will look back at the evolution of the field. These articles will further ground you in your understanding of the field, help you identify major trends and threads that appear in contemporary scholarship, and acquaint you with some of the on-going debates in the field.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

**Write** essays that apply theories of language and literacy to analysis of published texts, experience, and observational studies;

**Acquire** a strong knowledge base of major, contemporary theories of language, language learning, and literacy that inform the teaching of writing in adult literacy and college writing and reading programs;

**Practice** using digital literacies for classroom discussions, informal learning, research, and writing;

**Practice** critical reading of scholarship, research, and literature;

**Conduct** independent research projects on topics related to language & literacy; and

**Formulate** new professional goals or **gain deeper understanding** of existing professional goals.

## Course Policies

### Attendance and Participation

Participation can be hard to evaluate since some students simply aren't comfortable speaking in class. I will do my best to accommodate reluctant speakers, but everyone is expected to participate actively in class discussions. This also means that if you like to talk in class, you might have to resist the temptation to speak so that others have a chance. I don't expect to see extended whispered conversations in the class or a general lack of engagement. Intelligent critiques of reading assignment are welcome, but the critique should be grounded in the essay and should not include general attacks on the subject or the author. Please make every effort to arrive to class on time. Lateness is disruptive. Multiple and excessive late arrivals will have a negative impact on your grade. I will alert you by email if your late arrivals are beginning to negatively affect your grade.

If you have an emergency that requires you to miss class, please contact me as soon as you can so that we can try to arrange for you to complete the course work. Unless we have made arrangements to compensate for your absences, for each class that you miss beyond one your final grade will be lowered by one full letter. If you miss four classes you will fail or, in rare cases, be assigned an INC for the course.

Grades for late assignments will be reduced by one full letter for each twenty-four hour period that they are late. If an assignment due at 12:00 is submitted at 12:05, the final grade will be reduced by one full letter. If it is submitted at 12:05 the next day, the final grade will be reduced by two full letters.

## **Course Policies (cont.)**

### **Cell Phones and IMs**

If we are not using them for class purposes, please put away your phones and disconnect your IM devices during the class. Please keep them out of my sight. If you use them during class for personal reasons, your final grade will be lowered by 2% for each occurrence.

### **Required Texts**

Miller, Susan, ed. *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*. New York: Norton, 2009.

Grabill, Jeffrey. *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton P, 2007.

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2011.

## **Assignment Descriptions, Grade Weights, and Grading Criteria**

### **Weekly Discussion Board Posts (10 posts; 30%)**

The discussion board posts should be between 750-1000 words in length and should be in response to that week's readings. **These posts are due at 8:00 a.m. on the Wednesday before the class meets.**

The response post serves many functions: it demonstrates that you've read the text, extends your learning, and opens opportunities for discussion. The content of your response post will vary depending on the assignments and your reading of them. Depending on the reading assignment, you'll either want to discuss multiple readings in your blog post and make connections between them, or you'll want to focus on just one reading assignment. You should be prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings. You should take advantage of the Web platform; embed videos, images, and use hyperlinks. As the semester continues, we might switch discussion board platforms as an exercise in looking at the relationship between the medium and the message.

The discussion board assignment is fairly loosely structured for a reason: I want you to be able to have some flexibility in your approach to these assignments because I want you to be engaged by them as much as possible. If you are really interested in one of the reading assignments and want to focus on an exploration of it for your post, everyone wins. If, however, you consistently write about just one of the assigned articles, and is always the shortest one, it will start to look like you're using this option because it seems like less work to you. Be sure to have a variety of types of discussion board posts.

### **Weekly Discussion Board Posts (cont.)**

As a general rule, you'll want to provide a brief summary of the text and then provide an analysis of it. In the summary, make sure to describe to your readers the article's central argument or idea. If someone asked you what the article was about, what would you tell him or her? If you decide to respond to more than one text, you'll want to make connections between the various articles. You might also want to include some additional research; can you link to Web pages or videos that help clarify your point? It might strike you, though, to respond to the text in a way that covers these criteria but that I have not anticipated. Please let me know if there's some kind of response that you want to make that you don't see covered here.

In addition to making an original post, you must engage in online conversation with your classmates. In your comments on other students' posts, you'll want to ask questions and engage in discussion. What I would like to see is a genuine conversation taking place online. To that end, please reply to at least four posts a week.

I don't expect for you to agree with everything you read in this class, but please be respectful when you express your opinions. Comments that disparage the work such as "this was boring" or "this was confusing and poorly written" don't help me or anyone else understand what your questions are. Explain to your reader in some detail what questions the author has left unanswered. Imagine that you are building on rather than attacking the work of an author. Before you post your comments, ask yourself if you would say them directly to the author.

Be sure that the blog posts meet the minimum requirement; I want your responses to be fairly comprehensive. Posts should do more than refer generally and briefly to the article and then move on to lengthy, tangential anecdotes.

### **Proposal (10%)**

In the proposal, you should describe your study and the research methods that you intend to use. For those of you who decide to investigate a subfield within composition and rhetoric, your description of methods will be limited. All of you, though, will have been introduced to research studies in the first weeks of this course that you can draw on and imitate as you define your own study. You might want to conduct a discourse analysis of a number of texts, or to study the revision practices of students, or to study writing in the context of community action. The proposal assignment is an opportunity to think through the challenges of the study and to make a timeline.

In addition to describing the subject of the study and your methods, you also need to identify a target journal for the publication of your article. Although this site has some dead links, you can

**Proposal (cont.)**

find an extensive list of journals at the Council of Writing Program Administrators Web site: <http://wpacouncil.org/rcjournals>. You should briefly describe at least three journals that you seriously considered (though in some cases this won't be possible, since there might not be three journals devoted to writing centers), and then provide a thorough description of your final choice. The description should include basic information about the number of articles the journal is likely to publish in a year, the kinds of authors they publish (established professionals, new professors, graduate students), the number of articles in an issue, and the typical length of an article. You should also include a description of how the journal is distributed. Is it print or digital? If it is a print journal, take a look at an actual copy. How big is it? What's the paper like? If it's digital, how well organized is the site? Are the articles "born digital," or are they .PDFs of traditional articles? Do the journals have sections? What values do the journal's contents and organization express?

After you have identified a target journal, find two or three articles from that journal that you can use to help inform your own study and then do a close reading of one of these articles. Your goal is to find an article that you like so that you can use it as a model for your essay. You may not want to use it as an exact model, but you should learn what the journal's expectations are. How lengthy are the introductions? What kind of information do they contain? Some might contain the substance of the conclusion while other only describe the sections of the essay. Are there other standard elements, such as institutional context, interviews, observations, or other forms of primary research? Do the articles rely mainly on secondary research? Is that research more pedagogical or philosophical in nature? How do the articles conclude? Rather than providing a general description of these attributes, describe the article in detail. You will need to quote from it.

**Research Essay (40%)**

The research assignment is an opportunity for you to explore a field of study that interests you. The more interested you are in the study, the more successful and rewarding it is likely to be. The research study can take a wide variety of forms, including a literature review, a discourse analysis, a case study, or a service-learning project. You may also be interested in conducting field work, including interviews and observations. The study should be situated within an area of scholarship in the broader field of composition and rhetoric and you should aim to contribute knowledge to the field in the form of a publishable article. When you finish the course, you should have what is essentially the first draft of an article length essay, something that you would send to a journal editor after more revision. This is not to say, of course, that you will be turning in an actual first draft. The essay should be reasonably polished, but, given

### **Research Essay (cont.)**

the other demands of this course and the rest of your life, it's also reasonable to expect that you'd have to continue to work on the essay before submitting it for publication.

The essays should be about twenty pages in length, including the works cited pages. They should include between ten and twenty citations; the number of citations depends on your study. Citations can include interviews and observations. You can publish these essays using the appropriate media platform, including print, digital, or something else.

### **Presentation (5%)**

Because our time in class is very limited, your presentation should be approximately fifteen minutes. While it may fall short of fifteen minutes by as much as two minutes, it should in no case exceed fifteen minutes. Imagine that this is a short conference presentation, which generally run for twenty minutes. In the presentation, you will describe what you set out to study, how you accomplished that study, and what your results are. Imagine your audience is a group of interested professionals who are familiar with your field of study but do not have in-depth knowledge of it. Most presentations benefit from visuals, so please plan to supplement your talk with a visual presentation of some kind. You should rehearse the presentation several times before you deliver it. Equip yourself with a timer. Print your presentation text in a large font so that you can read the presentation and make eye contact with your audience.

If you would like, you can make a digital video of your presentation, including visuals, and post it to a video sharing platform such as Vimeo. You could also distribute the video in some other, less public way (though you can use the privacy settings on a video sharing platform to limit who views your video) such as compressing it and sending it via email or posting it to a Dropbox folder and sharing the link with me and your classmates. You cannot upload it to Blackboard only because it's unlikely to work. You can earn up to 3% extra credit for the course if you take the digital option.

### **Portfolio Cover Letter (10%)**

Using the course outcomes as your guide, take this opportunity to think about what you've learned over the semester about the field of composition and rhetoric and your particular area of study. How do you think differently about the field now than you did at the beginning of the semester? What areas would you like to explore? How has your study of the literature in the field affected your professional goals? Where were the turning points in your study? What evidence, in your blog posts or your essay, do you have of these turning points? Be sure to quote from your own work.

### Participation (5%)

This grade is comprised of regular class attendance and participation in the online and in-class discussions.

Assignment Due Dates	
Discussion Board Posts	Various, but always before 8:00 a.m. on the day before class.
Proposal	April 2
Research Essay	May 21
Portfolio Cover Letter	May 21
Presentation	May 21

### Grading Schema

Grades Scored Between	Will Equal
97 % and 100%	A+
94 % and Less Than 97%	A
90 % and Less Than 94%	A-
87 % and Less Than 90%	B+
84 % and Less Than 87%	B
80 % and Less Than 84%	B-
77 % and Less Than 80%	C+
74 % and Less Than 77%	C
70 % and Less Than 74%	C-
67 % and Less Than 70%	D+
64 % and Less Than 67%	D
60 % and Less Than 64%	D-
0 % and Less Than 60%	F

<b>Class Schedule</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading Assignments</b>
1/29/2015	Introduction
2/5/2015	Jody Shipka. <i>Toward A Composition Made Whole</i> . 1-82.
2/12/2015	No Class (Lincoln's Birthday)
2/26/2015	Shipka 83-150.
3/5/2015	Jeff Grabill. <i>Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action</i> . 1-58.
3/12/2015	Grabill 59-125.
3/19/2015	No Class (4Cs). Online discussion.
	James Gee. "The New Literacy Studies and the 'Social Turn.'" 1293-1310.
	Alan Luke. "Theory and Practice in Critical Discourse Analysis." 1339-50.
	Cindy Selfe et al. "Literacies and the Complexities of the Global Digital Divide." 1499-1531.
3/26/2015	Paul Matsuda. "Negotiation of Identity and Power in a Japanese Online Discourse Community." 1583-99.
	Sara Webb-Sunderhaus. "A Family Affair: Competing Sponsors of Literacy in Appalachian Students' Lives." 1600-16.
	Juan Guerra. "Putting Literacy in its Place: Nomadic Consciousness and the Practice of Transcultural Repositioning." 1643-54.
4/2/2015	Research Proposals
4/9/2015	No Class; Spring Recess
4/16/2015	Where Do English Departments Come From? 3-17.
	The Roots of Modern Writing Instruction: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain. 33-52.
	From Freedom to Manners: African American Literacy Instruction in the 19th Century. 119-28.



4/23/2015	Sharon Crowley. "The Evolution of Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric: 1850-1970." 333-46.
	Frank D'Angelo. "Nineteenth-Century Forms/Modes of Discourse: A Critical Inquiry." 347-57.
	James Kinneavy. "Expressive Discourse." 372-86.
	Richard Young. "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention." 397-413.
4/30/2015	Joseph Williams. "The Phenomenology of Error." 414-29.
	Maxine Hairston. "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing." 439-50.
	James Britton et al. "Shaping at the Point of Utterance." 461-67.
	Kenneth Bruffee. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" 545-62.
5/7/2015	Patrick Hartwell. "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar." 563-85.
	David Bartholomae. "Inventing the University." 605-30.
	James Berlin. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." 667-84.
5/14/2015	John Trimbur. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." 733-47.
	Joe Harris. "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing." 748-58.
	Nedra Reynolds. "Interrupting Our Way to Agency: Feminist Cultural Studies and Composition." 897-910.
	Barbara Schneider. "Uncommon Ground: Narcissistic Reading and Material Racism." 919-32.
5/21/2015	Presentations Research Essays Portfolio Cover Letters