WRIT 201
We Are Our Stories: Rhetorics of the Contemporary American Essay
TR 11:00–12:20 / LA 302

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Office Hours: T 12:30-3:30 and by appointment

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.” —Joan Didion

“I always wanted to get people’s stories and access to their lives. I feel I’m at the interface of biography and biology, person and person-hood.” —Oliver Sacks

Course Description
Writ 201 asks you to consider the ways in which traditional rhetorical concepts are still at work in our world today. How can writers recognize the often subtle needs of their rhetorical scenes and situations? How do such writers, in turn, make informed rhetorical choices in order to reach, and hopefully influence, their target audiences? This class will examine the ways in which we can use rhetorical strategies to become better thinkers, writers, and communicators.

In particular, our class will examine the contemporary American essay and its many forms: from deeply personal essays in which writers draw on memories and experiences in order to better understand their selves and their personal histories, to more formal essays that use research to make broader, even universal claims about the human condition, the world, and shared experience. We will look at arguments these essay writers make, both explicitly and implicitly, to see how they are constructed, and to what ends. We will consider, too, among other features, the roles of tone, humor, honesty, and bravery in essay writing, as well as the importance of the “I” personal essay writers construct on the page.

Much of our class time will be devoted to discussion, in-class writing, and small group work. Because writing and revision are processes that take place over time and across different writing situations, all WRIT 201 classes use portfolio evaluation as a primary means of evaluation. By the end of the semester, you should be able to “scan” your own rhetorical scenes and situations, as well as target audiences, in order to make savvy rhetorical decisions that will have the greatest impact on your readers.
Learning Outcomes

- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing
- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

Required Materials

I will provide photocopies and/or PDFs of our readings throughout the semester. You are responsible for bringing these texts with you to class, along with a notebook for in-class writing. You will also need a folder or binder for your final portfolio. Please also note that the homework and major papers for this class must be typed; you will therefore need access to a reliable printer. Please plan accordingly!

Major Projects

- Essay #1: Rhetorical Analysis  (Due 2/28/17)
- Essay #2: Exploratory Essay  (Due 3/30/17)
- Essay #3: Personal Ethnographic Essay  (Due 4/20/17)
- Essay #4: Portfolio Introduction  (Due 5/4/17 – Last day of class)
- Final Portfolio  (Due 5/4/17 – Last day of class)

These due dates are subject to change. (Essays will not, however, be due before the date listed above.)

Grade Breakdown

Students enrolled in WRIT 201 are graded by the traditional letter grade A, B, C, D, F or are given NC for no credit. The NC grade does not affect grade point average. It is reserved for students who have worked unusually hard, attended class regularly and completed all assignments, but whose skills are not at a passing level at the end of the semester.

You must earn a C- in this class to be awarded credit. (Or a C if you are in the business school.)

- Participation: 35%
- Final Portfolio (includes your four major papers, one revised paper, and other required materials): 65%

**You must turn in your portfolio and complete all major essays by their deadlines in order to receive credit for this course.**
Grading System

This class follows the portfolio grading system, which means you will receive feedback and written comments, but no letter grades, on papers or other work throughout the semester. Your final course grade will be based on the total body of work you have produced this semester, as well as your total contributions to the class (see Participation on the next page).

Daily Short Assignments and Homework. You will receive comments but no grade on informal writing submissions. Short assignments play an important part in your overall participation grade.

Major Papers. To give you a sense of the check system I’ll be using, please refer to the following descriptors:

- **Check**: A project with a check generally meets its rhetorical goals in terms of purpose, genre, and writing situation without need for extensive revision. Written comments will elaborate on strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for focused revision.
- **Check minus**: A project with a check minus meets the basic requirements, but would benefit from significant revision and a stronger understanding of rhetorical decision-making. Written comments will elaborate on strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for revision.
- **Unsatisfactory**: A project with a U does not meet basic standards, and requires extensive development and attention. An unsatisfactory submission may be incomplete or inappropriate to the assignment. Such a submission may receive a request to rewrite within a week in order to receive teacher comments.

Late Work. Your work needs to be typed, printed, and in class with you to be considered "on time."

- Late or handwritten homework does not receive credit.
- Emailed assignments are considered late.
- Late major papers are unacceptable. They will not receive in-depth revision comments from me.
- If you miss class, the homework is due the next class period; homework will be marked late unless your absence is excused.
- You are always welcome to complete assignments early if you will be missing class.

Participation

Participation includes coming to class prepared and on time, taking part in class discussions, asking questions, contributing your knowledge and insights in whatever form is appropriate, and striving to make all your contributions excellent. It also includes doing the required reading and writing for each class. Note: Please come to class on time. Lateness will hurt your grade because it is an unnecessary interruption and because latecomers are likely to miss valuable information.

Participation Grade Descriptors for WRIT 201

- **A**: Superior participation shows initiative and excellence in written and verbal work. The student helps to create more effective discussions and workshops through his/her verbal, electronic, and written contributions. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members...
are tactful, thorough, specific, and often provide other student writers with a new perspective or insight.

- **B:** Strong participation demonstrates active engagement in written and verbal work. The student plays an active role in the classroom but does not always add new insight to the discussion at hand. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members are tactful, specific, and helpful.

- **C:** Satisfactory participation demonstrates consistent, satisfactory written and verbal work. Overall, the student is prepared for class, completes assigned readings and writings, and contributes to small group workshops and large class discussions. Reading and writing assignments are completed on time. In workshop or conferences, suggestions to group members are tactful and prompt, but could benefit from more attentive reading and/or specific detail when giving comments.

- **D:** Weak participation demonstrates inconsistent written and verbal work. The student may be late to class, unprepared for class, and may contribute infrequently or unproductively to classroom discussions or small group workshops. Reading and writing assignments are not turned in or are insufficient. In workshops or conferences, suggestions to group members may be missing, disrespectful, or far too brief and general to be of help.

- **F:** Unacceptable participation shows ineffectual written and verbal work. The student may be excessively late to class, regularly unprepared, and not able to contribute to classroom discussions or small group workshops. This student may be disruptive in class. Reading and writing assignments are regularly not turned in or are insufficient. In workshops or conferences, the student has a pattern of missing, being completely unprepared, or being disruptive.

### Attendance Policy

If you miss the first two classes, you will need to drop the course on CyberBear and enroll in another semester. This is university policy and the reasoning behind it is that important groundwork for the semester is put in place in the first few class meetings. Students without that foundational framework are better served by taking the course when they can give it the attention it deserves.

**More than two absences from a TR class will compromise your grade. Five or more absences from a TR class will result in a failing grade.** Here’s the breakdown:

- 3rd absence: final grade drops one letter grade
- 4th absence: final grade drops one letter grade
- 5th absence: final grade is an F

Here’s the reasoning behind the attendance policy. Without attending class, you cannot perform your role as a student involved in learning, planning, inventing, drafting; discussing reading and writing; learning and practicing rhetorical moves and concepts; or collaborating with your instructor and classmates. Required University events will be excused if you provide appropriate documentation. Personal situations inevitably arise that make it impossible for you to make it to class. Remember, however, that’s why a few absences are allowed; please reserve those for emergencies.

If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.
A Note about Community

In many ways, this class will be unlike most of your other courses. Our class investigates the ways that text, reading, and composition form links of understanding between author and audience—roles that we each adopt. I urge you to take risks in your writing and research, to explore the range of your own written voice, to question the perspectives that you find most comfortable, and to share your uncertainties with your peers and me. I’ve found that students who take these risks not only deepen their intellectual engagement, but they also contribute more thoughtful discussion comments and write more insightful essays.

To that end, I take our classroom community very seriously. It’s my aim to create an academic space where risk-taking is a highly valued part of our discourse and students are comfortable expressing vulnerability. (This might involve asking what feels like a silly question, graciously disagreeing with a statement that’s been made, sharing a relevant part of your personal history, or expressing how your background and identity inform your ideas.) Obviously, respect and open-mindedness are required from all of us. Hopefully it goes without saying that discrimination or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in our classroom community. Let’s all work together to cultivate an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome and free to express themselves openly and honestly.

Academic Conduct/Plagiarism

You must abide by the rules for academic conduct described in the Student Conduct Code. If you have any questions about when and how to avoid academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, please review the Conduct Code and talk with your instructor. The Council of Writing Program Administrators describes plagiarism as follows: “plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” Academic honesty is highly valued in the University community and acts of plagiarism will not be tolerated.

If I suspect that something a student has written has been plagiarized, in full or in part, intentionally or unintentionally, I take the following actions:

- I alert the student of areas of the text that are suspicious.
- The student receives no credit on the paper, pending failure, and it is up to him/her to prove that he/she turned in original work.
- The student is asked to provide me with hard copies of the research she/he used in writing the paper.
- If the student cannot provide documentation of her/his research, the student will fail the paper.

Please note, these measures are also put into action when a paper is poorly cited. When a student brings his/her research to me I use the time to talk with them about citation and make sure that they understand how and when to cite in the future.

In the case that the student is unable to provide evidence of his/her original work, or in the case that I have evidence that the student has intentionally plagiarized his/her work:

- The student will automatically fail the given assignment.
• The student may fail the course unless, at my discretion, I offer alternative assignments and/or conditions.
• I may pursue a plagiarism citation unless, at my discretion, I offer alternative assignments and/or conditions.
• The student may receive alternate assignments, etc. to avoid failure. In this instance, all conditions must be met. I need to see evidence of excellent work and effort, and work must be completed on time.
• All other previously established conditions in the class (i.e. attendance, participation, homework grades, etc.) still stand and can still cause a student to fail the course in the case of blatant or egregious offenses, I will not negotiate against course failure and will pursue a University Citation of Plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

Participation in University Assessment
This course requires an electronic submission of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the writing program. Your papers will be stored in a database. This assessment in no way affects either your grade or your progression at the university.

This syllabus is subject to change.