WRIT 201
Empathy, Identity, and Contemporary Rhetoric

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Course Description:

“Empathy isn’t just listening, it’s asking the questions whose answers need to be listened to. Empathy requires inquiry as much as imagination. Empathy requires knowing you know nothing. Empathy means acknowledging a horizon of context that extends perpetually beyond what you can see.”
— Leslie Jameson, The Empathy Exams

We live in an increasingly divided world. Communication between religious, economic, or political ideologies can be fraught, and can feel pointless to all sides, yet understanding is more crucial than ever. Contemporary modes of rhetoric, from Twitter to texting to think pieces, are often derided or dismissed by traditional rhetoricians, but these are the tools and texts we must employ to bridge the growing ideological chasms. So what does this mean? How can both academic and everyday rhetoric serve to build, broaden and advance our identities, opinions, and beliefs?

This term, I would like us to reframe truths and assumptions we often take for granted. As readers, you will explore unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable views, finding a balance between critical inquiry and meeting the writer on their terms. As writers, you will focus on building empathy through your own rhetorical skills.
Learning Outcomes:

WRIT 201 is an Intermediate Writing Course. The university learning outcomes include:

- 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

I expect our section outcomes to include a collegiate level of empathy, critical thinking, and open engagement with your writing, your peers, and our texts.

Required Texts:

*College Writing II: Rhetoric and American Cultures* (available at the UM bookstore only)

PDFs and links will be made available on Moodle.

Required Materials:

Please come to class with your work, a copy of any reading we will be discussing, and a notebook and pen or pencil.

Class Expectations and Policies:
Attendance: Per University policy, if you miss the first two classes, you will need to drop the course on Cyberbear and enroll in another semester. 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. 5 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 (for example, A drops to B)
4th absence: final grade drops two letter grades (for example, A drops to C)
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 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. On the first day of class, you will choose a partner with whom you can check in if you miss class or are confused about an assignment.

You may make up one absence by attending a Second Wind reading and writing a 500 word reflection.

Classroom Community: As our class considers the concepts of belonging and identity, we’ll inevitably run up against issues that are seemingly hot-button or
conflict-laden. This is when you will be asked to step outside of your preconceived notions and consider the broader complex cultural reality surrounding an individual and their opinion. Writing is a profoundly vulnerable activity. It can be extremely difficult to share what you’ve written. It is imperative that we create an inclusive, supportive, and nonjudgmental atmosphere in this classroom. By being here, we are all agreeing to treat everyone with respect and sensitivity. Commentary, in writing or in person, that disparages, marginalizes, or insults someone else or their writing will not be tolerated.

Email Decorum: I love getting your emails and I generally respond frighteningly fast. However, if you ask me a question about the homework a few hours before class, you run a high risk of not getting answered, as well as signaling to me that you aren’t prioritizing my class. Please go to Moodle, the syllabus, and your class partner before emailing me about any confusion. Part of a college education is learning to find the answers yourself. That being said, don’t hesitate to reach out if you feel lost. I can’t help you if you don’t know.

One of the most professionally crucial and underemphasized modes of modern rhetoric is email. It is profoundly important that you leave my class with the ability to send an email that won’t undermine your credibility with future professors or employers. This means addressing your recipient with their preferred title (Amelia), using proper grammar and syntax, and employing appropriate decorum.

Extra Credit: Extra Credit will be offered throughout the term for 300 word written reflections on extracurricular cultural events. These include seeing movies at The Roxy, Second Wind readings, concerts, museum exhibits, and lectures/performances at UM. I will let you know about events I find, and you’re welcome to ask me if something you’re interested in qualifies.

Late/Handwritten Work: Late assignments will not be accepted unless you have an excused absence on the day that assignment is due. Major Assignments must be delivered to my mailbox (IRL or email) on the day they are due if you are absent from class. Printing stuff happens. Strive to be strong on your time management,
and if an occasional emergency comes up email the assignment no later than ten minutes before class. If you email me an assignment, you must bring a hard copy to our next class or it will be counted as late. All assignments must be typed.

**Moodle:** I can see when you check into Moodle, and if you are downloading readings. Dystopian, but true. You should be logging on bi-weekly, at a minimum.

**Participation:** Participation makes up 35% of your grade, and encompasses in-class discussions (participation and leading), reading reports, short assignments, and an overall demonstration that you are thoughtfully engaging with the course work. This class will require a lot of reading and writing. On my end, I will commit to assigning readings that are interesting and insightful, and I will not give you writing assignments that I don’t truly think are productive. I would like you to commit to thoughtfully completing the assignments and readings. I understand that you have responsibilities and personal lives outside this course. However, writing is a skill that requires time and practice. Without investing yourself in this class, you cannot expect to excel in it.

**Technology:** Laptops and tablets are not allowed in class except in cases of documented necessity. Cell phones should be silenced and put away except in cases of documented necessity, emergency, or specific in-class work. If you have an emergency, please leave the room to use your phone, EVEN if you’re only texting. I hate having to call people out for being on their phones. If I have to tell you more than once, it means your participation grade has suffered.

**Writing Center:** The Writing Center is a valuable resource. I recommend using it early and often. In your final portfolio, you may turn in a 300 word statement for any or all revised Major Assignments on your visit to the Writing Center led to specific changes in your final revision. I will take these statements as demonstration of effort when calculating your final grades.
Major Assignments:

Major Assignment #1 “Think Piece”: Profiling the Personal and Political
Major Assignment #2 The Rhetorical Analysis of a Written Argument
Major Assignment #3 Multigenre Exploration of Culture and Identity
Major Assignment #4 Cover Letter/Personal Statement

Grades:

YOU MUST EARN A C- TO BE AWARDED CREDIT FOR THIS CLASS.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

Participation: 35%
Final Portfolio: 65%

Letter grades are not available until the end of the term. The University of Montana uses a check system for Major Assignments in all beginning and intermediate writing courses. This system is as follows:

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.

I will always freely talk to you about your work, your standing, where you’d like to be at the end of the term versus what you’ve done so far. You never need to be uncertain about how you’re doing in this class. I will give copious feedback and am always available to talk more doing office hours.

Portfolio Grade Descriptors for WRIT 201

A Superior portfolios will demonstrate initiative and rhetorical sophistication that go beyond the requirements. A portfolio at this level is composed of well-edited texts representing different writing situations and genres that consistently show a clear, connected sense of audience, purpose and development. The writer is able to analyze his or her own writing, reflect on it, and revise accordingly. The portfolio takes risks that work.

B Strong portfolios meet their rhetorical goals in terms of purpose, genre, and writing situation without need for further major revisions of purpose, evidence, audience, or style/mechanics. The writer is able to reflect on his or her own writing and make some choices about revision. The writer takes risks, although they may not all be successful.

C Consistent portfolios meet the basic requirements, yet the writing would benefit from further revisions of purpose, evidence, audience, or writing style/mechanics (or some combination) and a stronger understanding of rhetorical decision-making involved in different writing situations and genres. The writer composes across tasks at varying levels of success with some superficial revision. The writer has taken some risks in writing and exhibits some style.

D Weak portfolios do not fully meet the basic evaluative standards. Most texts are brief and underdeveloped. These texts show a composing process that is not yet elaborated or reflective of rhetorical understanding related to composing in
different genres and for a range of writing situations. Texts generally require extensive revisions to purpose, development, audience, and/or style and mechanics.

F Unacceptable portfolios exhibit pervasive problems with purpose, development, audience, or style/mechanics that interfere with meaning and readers’ understanding. Unacceptable portfolios are often incomplete. A portfolio will also earn an F if it does not represent the writer’s original work.

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.

Academic Conduct and Plagiarism Policy

You must abide by the rules for academic conduct described in the Student Conduct Code. According to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code, plagiarism is “representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing a course, or even expulsion.” Academic honesty is highly valued in the University of Montana community, and acts of plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students should review the Conduct Code so that they understand their rights in academic disciplinary situations. The Conduct Code can be found at http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php. If you have any questions about when and how to avoid academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, please review the Conduct Code and speak with me.

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.