

Critical Reading and Writing: Individualism and Its Critics

English 186, Section 08A, Oxford College of Emory University

Fall 2014 — MWF, 8:15-9:20am

Murdy Hall Seminar Room

Instructor: Joe Johnson

Office hours MWF, 10am-12pm, and by appointment — Oxford Library 131

joseph.johnson@emory.edu

Description

This course focuses on academic reading and writing as the democratic art of close listening to what other people have to say. Our theme will be one of the most controversial ideas in the history of American culture: individualism and its relationship to the American Dream. We will begin by listening to what other writers have said about individualism and its dangers, and we will respond by developing ideas and arguments of our own. In what ways is American society individualistic? What are the different forms of individualism? Is individualism something we should embrace — or reject? Which forms of individualism, if any, are valuable, and which are dangerous — and why?

To explore these questions, we will read many different kinds of texts: works of social thought and political theory, history, philosophy, as well as novels, essays, and film. We will read some of the most famous American individualists — Emerson, Thoreau, Kerouac — and several sharp critics of individualism. The core principle of this course is that effective academic reading, writing, thinking — as well as responsible public discourse — involves not just stating our own views but summarizing the ideas of those around us, past and present, and developing our own arguments in dialogue with other people. Students will learn what it takes to become more active, self-reliant college readers and writers and more thoughtful, engaged citizens of the world.

Note: This course is designed for students whose first language is not English. Students should expect to spend significant time working on speaking and listening skills, as well as academic reading and writing — and English grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Students are strongly encouraged to visit the Oxford Writing Center on the first floor of Branham Hall. Consult your instructor for further details!

Course Requirements

1. *Attendance & Participation*

This course is discussion based. This means I expect you to attend each class, to have done the reading in advance, and to come prepared to discuss the readings. Always bring the assigned readings with you (print them out if necessary), along with the notes you've taken. During the first third or so of most class periods, you will break up into *small groups* (or pairs) to answer questions on the assigned reading before we discuss the material as a large group. You will answer these questions in writing, and one member of your group will be required to revise your answers and post them on Blackboard after class. These answers will help you and your classmates generate ideas and develop skills

for use in your papers, which will be based on the questions and guided by the skills we work on in class. I expect you to *participate actively* in small and large group discussions. More than two unexcused absences from class will *significantly lower* your participation grade. I reserve the right to count lateness as an absence. Lateness is extremely disruptive and will not be tolerated.

Class participation forms an important part of your final grade (20%). You will earn high marks if you attend every class *on time* and participate *every day* in small and large group discussions, in a way that shows you've done the reading and thought deeply about the themes of the course.

2. *Presentations*

You are required to complete two classroom presentations. Your first presentation will be 5-10 minutes in length and focus *summarizing* a key term, theme, or concept that is central to the course. You should choose a term, theme, or concept that we have discussed in class: it can be from any of the readings we cover during the term. Your job is to summarize and explain your term or concept, as a way of reinforcing its significance to the class. Your presentation should include some kind of handout or visual aid. Use of multimedia technology is encouraged, though not required. Your second presentation (due during the final weeks of class) will be 10 minutes in length. You will present the ideas of your final research paper.

We will discuss expectations and strategies for effective classroom presentations throughout the semester. Your two presentations will reflect 10% of your final course grade.

3. *Three Major Papers & Portfolio*

There will be three papers, which will focus on the skills and readings that we work on in class. These papers will range in length from 2-3 pages (Assignment #1) to 3-4 pages (Assignment #2) and 4-5 pages (Assignment #3). These assignments will build on one another — and you will receive feedback on early drafts of each assignment. We will discuss detailed expectations for each assignment well in advance of the due date. Each paper will be worth 20% of your final course grade.

A final course portfolio is also required. We will discuss the details of your portfolio after fall break. It will reflect 10% of your final grade and will be due on the scheduled day of the final exam.

In-class essays, response papers, and journal writing will also be assigned throughout the semester. You will be required to post some of these writings on Blackboard. You are also required to complete a bibliography and research proposal in preparation for writing your final paper. There will be no midterm or final exam.

Here's how each of these elements adds up to a final grade:

Attendance & Participation	20%
Classroom Presentations	10%
Writing Assignment #1	20%

Writing Assignment #2	20%
Writing Assignment #3	20%
Final Portfolio	10%

This is a rough formula to show that I will give more weight to some assignments. I won't be using a calculator, and I always consider improvement throughout the course of the semester.

Cell Phones & Personal Computers

The use of cell phones is prohibited in class. You may take notes on a computer or tablet, but personal web surfing, emailing, tweeting, Facebook posting, etc., is both academically and socially unacceptable in the classroom. This kind of behavior is extremely distracting and your participation grade will suffer if it persists.

Required Books

Jim Cullen. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. ISBN-10: 0195173252 ISBN-13: 978-0195173253.

Jack Kerouac. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin Classics Edition, 1976. ISBN-13: 9781101127575.

John Krakauer. *Into the Wild*. Random House, 1997. ISBN-13: 9780385486804.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Third Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014. ISBN-10: 0393935841 ISBN-13: 9780393935844.

Joseph M. Williams and Joseph Bizup. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Eleventh Edition. Boston: Pearson Education, 2014. ISBN-10: 0321898680 ISBN-13: 9780321898685.

Please make sure you acquire the editions listed above, so we're all on the same page.

Schedule of Classes

Week One

8/27 (W) Introductions and Expectations — "What is Academic Writing?"

8/29 (F) Introductions and Expectation, continued — "What is American Individualism?"
Read: *They Say/I Say* Preface (xvi-xxvi) — as well as Chapter 12 ("I Take Your Point": Entering Class Discussions, 163-166)

Week Two

9/1 (M) Labor Day — No Class

9/3 (W) Read: *They Say/I Say* Introduction ("Entering the Conversation," 1-15) and Chapter 1 ("They Say": Starting with What Others Are Saying, 19-29) — as well

as *The American Dream* Introduction (“A Dream Country, 3-10”) and Chapter 1 (“Dream of the Good Life I: The Puritan Enterprise,” 11-34)

9/5 (F) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 14 (“What’s Motivating This Writer?”: Reading for the Conversation, 173-183)

Week Three

9/8 (M) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 2 (“‘Her Point Is’: The Art of Summarizing, 30-41) and Robert Bellah, “Individualism and Commitment in American Life” [Bb] — as well as *The American Dream* Chapter 2 (“Dream Charter: The Declaration of Independence,” 35-58)

9/10 (W) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 3 (“As He Himself Puts It”: The Art of Quoting, 42-51) and *They Say/I Say* Chapter 4 (“Yes / No / Okay, But”: Three Ways to Respond, 55-67)

9/12 (F) Read: George Kateb, “Democratic Individualism and Its Critics” [Bb]

Week Four

9/15 (M) No Class — sign up for individual conferences

9/17 (W) No Class — sign up for individual conferences

Assignment # 1: Summarizing, Quoting, Responding Due

9/19 (F) Read: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Part 2, Ch. 2, “On Individualism in Democratic Countries” [Bb]

Week Five

9/22 (M) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 5 (“And Yet”: Distinguishing What You Say from What They Say, 68-77) and *The American Dream* Chapter 3 (“Dream of the Good Life II: Upward Mobility, 59-102) and Chapter 4 (“King of America: The Dream of Equality,” 103-131)

In-class Presentations: TBA

9/24 (W) Read: Kerouac, *On the Road*, Introduction (vii-xxxiv) and Part One (1-108)

In-class Presentations: TBA

9/26 (F) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 6 (“Skeptics May Object”: Planting a Naysayer in Your Text, 78-91) — and Kerouac, *On the Road*, Part One continued

In-class Presentations: TBA

Week Six

9/29 (M) Read: Kerouac, *On the Road*, Parts Two and Three (109-248)

In-class Presentations: TBA

10/1 (W) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 7 (“So What? Who Cares?”: Saying Why It Matters, 92-101) and *The American Dream* Chapter 5 (“Detached Houses: The

Dream of Home Ownership, 133-157) — and Kerouac, *On the Road*, Parts Two and Three continued

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/3 (F) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 8 (“As a Result”: Connecting the Parts, 105-120) and Williams and Bizup, *Style*, Lesson 8 (“Global Coherence,” 113-124) — and begin thinking about Assignment #2

Week Seven

- 10/6 (M) Read: Kerouac, *On the Road*, Parts Four and Five, 249-307

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/8 (W) Read: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 9 (“Ain’t So / Is Not”: Academic Writing Doesn’t Always Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice, 121-128) and Chapter 10 (“But Don’t Get Me Wrong”: The Art of Metacommentary, 129-138)

- 10/10 (F) Read: *The American Dream*, Chapter 6, (“Dream of the Good Life III: The Coast,” 159-184) and Conclusion (“Extending the Dream,” 185-190)

In-class Presentations: TBA

Week Eight

- 10/13 (M) No class — Fall Break [view film: *On the Road*]

- 10/15 (W) Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America*, Preface and Chapter 1 [Bb]

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/17 (F) No Class — sign up for individual conferences

Week Nine

- 10/20 (M) **Assignment #2: Entering the Conversation Due [Kerouac]**

- 10/22 (W) Read: *Into the Wild*

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/24 (F) Read: *Into the Wild*

In-class Presentations: TBA

Week Ten

- 10/27 (M) Read: *Into the Wild*

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/29 (W) Read: *Into the Wild*

In-class Presentations: TBA

- 10/31 (F) Read: *Into the Wild*

In-class Presentations: TBA

Week Eleven

- 11/3 (M) Research Paper Workshop — and view film: *Into the Wild*
In-class Presentations: TBA
- 11/5 (W) Research Paper Workshop
In-class Presentations: TBA
- 11/7 (F) **Research Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due**

Week Twelve

- 11/10 (M) No Class — schedule individual conferences
Review: *They Say/I Say* Chapter 4
- 11/12 (W) No Class — schedule individual conferences
Review: *They Say/I Say* Chapters 2, 3, 8
- 11/14 (F) Bring First Draft of Assignment #3 to Class
Review: *They Say/I Say* Chapters 6, 7

Week Thirteen

- 11/17 (M) Read: Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” [Bb]
In-class Presentations: TBA
- 11/19 (W) Continue Preparing Research Paper
- 11/20 (F) **Assignment #3: Entering the Conversation (with Research) Due**

Thanksgiving Recess

11/24 (M) – 11/28 (F)

Week Fourteen

- 12/1 (M) Research Presentations & Discussion (papers distributed beforehand)
- 12/3 (W) Research Presentations & Discussion (papers distributed beforehand)
- 12/5 (F) Research Presentations & Discussion (papers distributed beforehand)

Last Day of Class

- 12/8 (M) Research Presentations & Discussion (papers distributed beforehand)

Portfolio Due on the Last Day of Class

Office of Disability Services

“Emory provides all persons an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and services afforded to others. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) assists qualified students in obtaining a variety of services (i.e., alternative testing, notetaking, interpreting, advocacy, mobility/transportation, etc.) and ensures that all matters of equal access, reasonable accommodation, and compliance are properly addressed. Qualified students and faculty/staff

must register and request services — contact the Office of Disability Services at Emory University or Oxford College. Confidentiality is honored and maintained.”

<http://www.ods.emory.edu/>

Honor Code

“The responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work and in campus judicial proceedings falls upon every individual who is a part of Oxford College of Emory University. The Honor Code is based on the fundamental expectations that every person in Oxford College will conduct his or her life according to the dictates of the Honor Code and will refuse to tolerate actions in others which would violate the Honor Code.”

http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/

Counseling Services

“Counseling and Career Services (CCS) strives to be recognized and utilized as the mental health resource for the entire Oxford College community. Our first priority is to provide ethical and competent mental health and career guidance services to all Oxford students.

Students seeking our help may receive a variety of services, including: consultation, crisis intervention, individual psychotherapy, career counseling and assessment, psychiatric evaluation and medication management, and couples counseling. As needed, we provide referrals for psychological testing, inpatient and partial hospitalization, nutritional counseling, substance abuse evaluation and counseling, and/or long-term psychotherapy. We realize there are students in need who do not visit our facility.

To extend our expertise and services to the students who do not frequent Counseling and Career Services, we offer outreach programs on a variety of issues related to career exploration, academic success and emotional health/wellness.”

<http://oxford.emory.edu/counseling/>

Note: This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion. All changes will be announced during class.