

Instructor: Stacy Bell

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Office: Humanities 105

Office hours: TTh 2:30-4, W 1-4 , and by appointment

*Required Texts*

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*

Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Diaz, *Drown*

McMasters, *Welcome to Shirley*

Spiral notebook of any size

*Course Description*

An examination of grammar, mechanics and principles of effective written expression, with primary emphasis on the expository essay and research incorporating secondary sources. Writing topics are inter-disciplinary, to emphasize the importance of effective written communication across the curriculum.

*Objectives*

You will demonstrate an understanding of the differences in spoken and written English and will apply this understanding in the process of expository writing. You will submit short responses to each text and longer essays on a selected topic; two of the essays will require secondary sources; the essays will be well-organized and will demonstrate mastery of grammar, mechanics and organization appropriate in college-level writing, as well as the ability effectively to utilize a variety of rhetorical forms and to follow MLA guidelines for documentation.

What is effective writing and why does it matter? Many students think that all the “good” writers are English majors, and that only English majors can be “good” writers. In fact, many of the people who make a living as writers never write novels or poetry. The first fact of effective writing is that it occurs within a context, but the context varies across a wide range of topics and disciplines. In my course you will read a variety of texts; the authors are journalists or activist or fiction writers, and they have very different styles and approaches to their subjects. Some are literary; others are reporters. What they all have in common is the ability to present a central unifying claim and to support it; all of them, of course, have mastered the rules of standard grammar and mechanics. Coming from varied backgrounds, they present their arguments in different ways, some with greater success than others. We’ll discuss the ways in which argument—which is the core of most writing—varies in its effectiveness, and we’ll talk about why effective arguments are essential to “good” writing.

The books I have chosen examine issues of inequality. In some we will read about racial and economic inequality, but in others the inequalities will be more subtle. Most of us are aware of differences in race and class, age and gender; we know that discrimination is real and that true equality, an American goal, is often not realized for many people. Our books will help us think about the ways in which people are unequal in our society, and you will be encouraged in writing to think about some ways to balance inequities. We will look at how social class determines our relationship to the natural environment, and how environmental sustainability issues are often neglected in low-income communities; we will read about social and economic outsiders and how bizarre subcultures persist in a modern society; we will look at the incarceration system and discuss its effectiveness in meeting our goals for dealing with deviant behavior; we will apply literary analysis to a collection of contemporary short stories.

### *Responsibilities*

*Blackboard:* Your class conference, including all information about assignments, your grades and your class syllabus, is available to you on Blackboard. You are responsible for keeping up with the information and materials posted there.

*Office Hours:* I have scheduled office hours. You must sign up for individual consultations to discuss your assignments or essays. Come to my office on Friday to sign up for an appointment in the following week. If you cannot meet me during my office hours, you can ask to make an appointment based on my availability. Please come see me for help with your written assignments at any stage in the writing process.

*Attendance & First words:* At the beginning of each class, except on days in which we visit the library, you will respond in writing to an assigned prompt for three minutes. Responses will be written in a notebook that you will keep specifically for this purpose. As per Oxford College policy, class begins at the designated time. I will not distinguish between tardies and absences. You may miss two days of class without penalty; after that, you will lose 5 points from your final Attendance/First Words grade for each absence.

*Research:* Some of your writing assignments will require you to incorporate information from primary and secondary sources. Because this is a Humanities class, we will follow MLA guidelines for in-text citations and Works Cited pages. You may purchase a research handbook or use an online guide to citing; you are responsible for knowing the process and following it. Essays with incorrect citations will be returned ungraded. Please pay attention to what you are doing so that you avoid a trip to the Honor Council!

*Debate:* On March 29 and April 19 your class will engage in a planned debate. You will be assigned randomly to a pro/con team. You must participate orally during the debate. Each team member will write a reflective summary of your team's debate points, including an annotated bibliography of 5 sources. The

purpose of this debate is to practice finding evidence through research to support a position. It does not matter whether you agree with your team's debate position.

*Oral presentation:* You will lead class discussion of a text or an assigned topic one time during the semester. You will sign up at the very beginning of the semester for the date you will lead. Your performance will be evaluated based on an informal rubric—you can earn up to 100 points. Please feel free to see me during office hours to prepare for your oral presentation.

*Evaluation:* Essay lengths are prescribed. If your paper falls below or exceeds the prescribed length, I will not grade it. Reason: effective writing is concise and precise. Learn to express yourself within appropriate parameters.

Eight 300-500 word responses: 2.5 % each

Four 1000-1250 word essays: 12.5% each

Debate written summary [500-750 words] and bibliography: 5%

Final Exam [500-750 words]: 15%

Attendance & First Words: 5%

Oral Presentation: 5%

If you are absent without an excuse on a day in which an in-class activity is assigned, you will NOT be permitted to make up missed work. Your essays will be evaluated based on a predetermined set of criteria, including demonstration of competency in the mechanics and organization of essay writing. This is a college level writing course; spelling errors will not be tolerated. An essay with more than five spelling errors will receive a failing grade--NO EXCEPTIONS.

*Plagiarism:* The work you submit for class must be your own. If you use another author's words, sentence structure or original ideas in your writing, you must give credit to the author by using MLA documentation form. All plagiarized papers will be turned over to the Honor Council (*Oxford College Handbook*). We will discuss plagiarism at the beginning of the semester. Please keep in mind that “I didn't know” is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarizing. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

*Late essays:* Your essays are due at the *beginning* of class on the specified date. I will lower the grade for an unexcused late essay by one full letter grade for each day it is late; after one full week the essay will receive a grade of zero. I will not accept unstapled essays.

*Email:* The best way to communicate with an instructor is in person, during class or during office hours. I accept email for the following reasons:

- To cancel an appointment
- To notify me of an absence
- To ask a legitimate question about an assignment

I will not respond to email requesting information contained in the syllabus. If you don't know what is in the syllabus, you aren't prepared for class. Finally, I

will *never respond* to requests for grades or “averages” via email or in person. Your grades and averages will be available to you on our Blackboard site.

*Electronic toys:* smart phones are strictly forbidden in the classroom. If you have one with you, turn it off. Laptops are required for the final exam. On some days I will ask you to bring them to class for writing exercises. Otherwise you may not use them.

*A Note about Printing:* Blue and gold makes green! Please feel free to print preliminary drafts on recycled paper, and print double-sided final drafts to save paper. I realize that you must pay for all printing, and I am not able to subsidize this expense. You must turn in hard copies of all your essays, no exceptions. Plan ahead. I cannot accept “I have no money left on my swipe card” as an excuse for a late essay.

Unless you obtain approval from the Academic Dean, there will be no exceptions to the policies outlined in this syllabus, which represents a contract between student and instructor. The instructor will meet her responsibilities in regard to instruction and evaluation of the student, and the student will meet his or her responsibilities in regard to completion of all assignments and adherence to all class policies.

I have read and understand all components of this syllabus. I agree to adhere to all the policies and guidelines outlined in this syllabus.

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print your name

signature

date

## JANUARY

- 13 Introduction and Objectives
- 18 Intellectual property & avoiding plagiarism: “Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age”; “Evidence Is Old-Fashioned?”
- 20 Discussion leaders:
- 25 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* First Written Response Due
- 27 Discussion leaders:

## FEBRUARY

- 1 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* Second Written Response Due
- 3
- 8 Essay One Due  
Library class.
- 10 Discussion leaders:
- 15 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* First Written Response Due
- 17
- 22 Discussion leaders:
- 24 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Second Written Response Due

## MARCH

- 1 Second library class.  
Essay Two Due Friday, March 4 by noon; leave the essay in the box on my office door.
- 3 Class will not meet today.
- 8-10 Spring Break
- 15 Discussion leaders:
- 17 *Welcome to Shirley* First Written Response Due

22 Discussion leaders:

24 *Welcome to Shirley* Second Written Response Due

29 First Debate: Marijuana should be legalized in order to reduce the U.S. incarceration rate. Debaters:

31

## APRIL

5 Essay Three Due  
Discussion leaders:

7 *Drown* First Written Response Due

12 Discussion leaders:

14 *Drown* Second Written Response Due

19 Second Debate: Relaxed gun laws in some states increase the likelihood of gun violence. Debaters:

21 Film  
Essay Four Due

26 Film  
Review

## *Exam Schedule*

10J Friday, April 29, 9-12:00

1J Tuesday, May 3, 2-5:00

