

Instructor: Stacy Bell

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Office: Humanities 105

Office hours: TWTh 1-3, 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 four 5 page 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 and open office hours throughout the week. You can come to my office to sign up for an appointment or email me if you would like to meet outside of my office hours. Please come see me for help with your written assignments at any stage in the writing process. I am always happy to help you with your essays.

Attendance: As per Oxford College policy, class begins at the designated time. **If you are not present when class begins, I will mark you absent.** If you are not prepared for class, I will mark you absent. You may miss three days of class without penalty, beyond which I will deduct ten points from your participation grade for each additional unexcused absence. I will excuse absences ONLY in the event of a medical emergency requiring hospitalization or a religious observance approved by the chaplain. Finally, I don't teach in your bedroom—don't sleep in my classroom. Of all the mistakes you can make in college, sleeping in class is the very worst because it sends a clear negative message, to the person who decides your final grade, that you are irresponsible, you are disinterested, and you are disrespectful. If you sleep in my class I'll mark you absent, and you can expect such behavior to have a negative impact on your overall grade.

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 26 and April 19 your class will engage in a planned debate. You will sign up for one of the debates and will be assigned randomly to the pro/con teams. EACH student will prepare a 500 word summary of your talking points + annotated bibliography of 5 sources. You must participate orally during the debate. You will submit your talking points to me and I will assess your team's performance through an informal rubric. Your talking points grade + debate score is 5% of your final grade.

First words: At the beginning of each class, except on days in which students present drafts or we visit the library, you will respond in writing to an assigned prompt for three minutes. Responses will be written in a spiral notebook that you will keep specifically for this purpose. You will receive 25 extra credit points for these writing exercises if you do not have more than three unexcused absences.

Oral presentation: You will lead class discussion of a text or an assigned topic one time during the semester; you will read one written response to the class before submitting it on the due date. You will sign up at the very beginning of the semester for the dates you will lead/read. Successful completion of both will earn you 25 extra credit points.

Essay portfolio: You have been selected to participate in a writing portfolio pilot program. Your cooperation will earn you 25 extra credit points. Please save hard copies of all your graded essays; place them in the folder that I provide to you. I will collect the folder at the end of the semester. In order to earn the 25 points, you need to collect copies of all graded assignments from this class.

Evaluation: Eight one-page written responses: 2.5 % each
Four 4-5 essays: 15% each
Debate written summary and bibliography: 5%
Final Exam: 10%
Participation: 5%
First words: + 25
Peer presentation: + 25
Portfolio pilot: + 25

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. You may not submit an essay more than once. 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 as it is presented in your handbook. All papers suspected of plagiarism will be turned over to the Honor Council (*Oxford College Handbook* pages 98). If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, read your handbook and **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: cell phones, blackberries and iPod/Phones are strictly forbidden in the classroom. If you have one with you, turn it off. If I hear or see it, I'm going to ask you to remove it from the classroom, and I will mark you absent. Laptops are permitted during the final exam ***only***.

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.

print your name

signature

date

JANUARY

13 Introduction and Objectives

15 Discussion leaders:

**20 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* First Written Response Due
Readers:**

22

25 Discussion leaders:

**27 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* Second Written Response Due
Readers:**

29

FEBRUARY

1

3 Essay One Due

5 Class will not meet today.

8 Library class.

10 Discussion leaders:

**12 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* First Written Response Due
Readers:**

15

17 Discussion leaders:

19 Class will not meet today.

**22 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Second Written Response Due
Readers:**

24

26

MARCH

1 Essay Two Due
Discussion leaders:

3 *Welcome to Shirley* First Written Response Due
Readers:

5 Class will not meet today.

8-12 Spring Break

15 Second library class.

17 Discussion leaders:

19 *Welcome to Shirley* Second Written Response Due
Readers:

22

24

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

29 Essay Three Due

31 Discussion leaders:

APRIL

2 Class will not meet today.

5 *Drown* First Written Response Due
Readers:

7

9 Discussion leaders:

12 *Drown* Second Written Response Due
Readers:

14

16

**19 Second Debate: Every American citizen is personally responsible for protecting herself against environmental toxins and diet-related illness.
Debaters:**

21 Film

**23 Essay Four Due
Film**

26 Review

Exam Schedule

Monday, May 3, 9-12:00

