

## **Critical Reading and Writing: America Then and Now**

English 185, Section 01C, Oxford College of Emory University

Fall 2013 — MWF, 1:15-2:20pm

Faculty Technology Development Center (FTDC)

Instructor: Joe Johnson

Office hours MWF, 3-5pm and by appointment, Branham Hall

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### **Description**

This course is an introduction to college-level reading and writing through the study of key issues in American cultural debate. Students will explore what contemporary commentators (including their peers at colleges and universities across the country) have to say about (1) the value of higher education, especially the status of liberal arts learning in the twenty-first century; (2) the complex issue of race, gender, and ethnic identity in the United States; (3) the changing status of “American” language, and debates about global English; (4) the influence of the economy, and the role of work in our everyday lives; (5) the responsibility of individuals and communities to the natural environment.

Students will read a range of historical sources that situate these themes in the context of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century American literary and intellectual history. Our goal will be to twofold. First, we will listen closely to a range of voices — past and present. Then we will work to develop ideas and opinions of our own.

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 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!

### **Texts**

Robert Atwan, ed. *America Now: Short Readings from Recent Periodicals*. Tenth Edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. [purchase at bookstore]

Diana Hacker, ed. *The Bedford Handbook*. Eighth Edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010. [purchase at bookstore]

[Additional readings distributed by email in PDF.]

### **Goals**

Students will develop their abilities to

- craft substantive, motivated, balanced academic arguments
- write clear, correct, coherent prose

- read with understanding and engagement
- plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively
- evaluate and improve their own reading and writing processes
- respond productively to the writing of others
- express themselves verbally and converse thoughtfully about complex ideas.

[Course goals adopted from the Boston University Writing Program.]

## Requirements

### *Reading*

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche described the practice of “slow reading” as something that “teaches how to read well, that is, slowly, profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes.” This is something we will work on the entire semester. Reading slowly — reading well — takes a great deal of time and effort. It also takes increased attention to detail. The only way to become a better reader (and thus a better writer) is to commit yourself on these three levels: spend more time, put forth more effort, pay closer attention. All students should approach daily reading assignments with an open and active mind.

### *Writing*

You will begin the semester by writing a 3-5 page education autobiography, which reflects on your experience in school, your habits and process as a writer, reader, and thinker — as well as your strengths and weaknesses, the high points and low points of your life as a student. What challenges have you faced? What have been your accomplishments? In this essay you will also establish some initial goals for your first semester in college.

You will also be assigned five academic essays of 3-4 pages in length. These essays should explore and respond to issues discussed during class. All students will engage in a process of multiple drafts and revision — with special attention to peer review. All five essays should be submitted via email to [joseph.johnson@emory.edu](mailto:joseph.johnson@emory.edu). Please be sure to keep all related notes, drafts, peer review sheets — any scrap or doodle related to the process of writing your essays. You will hand these materials to me following the email submission of your finished work. (Please buy several folders or a large clasp envelope for the purpose of keeping all your notes, drafts, review sheets, and other scraps of writing together. These items will help you assemble your portfolio at the end of the semester.)

All students will submit a portfolio of writing during the week of finals. Your portfolio should include your education autobiography, all four academic essays with notes, drafts, etc., as well as a reflective essay describing your best work during the semester. Your reflective essay should measure your progress in terms of the goals you set at the beginning of the term. Have you grown at all as a writer? As a student? As a speaker and participant in class? If so, how? If not, consider your strengths and weaknesses — and how you might address them in the future. Your reflective essay should be 3-5 pages in length.

I will assign frequent in-class writing and occasional take-home assignments. Much of this work will be in the form of journal or freewriting activities as well as reading comprehension work. In-class and take-home assignments are designed to encourage students to think and write actively about topics that come up during the course. Freewriting will also help spur classroom discussion.

All essays (education autobiography, academic and reflective essays) should be typed, double-spaced, with one inch margins and 12 point font. Due dates are provided below.

### *Speaking*

Good writing is a form of conversation. Strong writers engage the voices and opinions of others in the process of making their own arguments. With this in mind, classroom discussion is a key component of this course. Students are required to come to class informed, and each student must actively participate — this means you must speak up — as we grapple with ideas that arise from course readings and student writing. The best way to improve your habits of classroom discussion is to *listen to your classmates* and respond to them with your own questions and possible answers. Another way to become more active in classroom discussion is to prepare a few points of interest or inquiry before you arrive to class. You might respond to an issue or perspective in the assigned reading, or you might revisit a point that was touched upon in a prior class meeting. Write these points down in your notes, and refer to them during discussion. This will help get your thoughts flowing as you sit down to work on your essays. Classroom discussion will be the most important aspect of your participation grade.

Note: At times I ask for volunteers to deliver short, 3-5 minute informational reports on aspects or issues of the cultural debates that we discuss in class. You are not required to volunteer, but this is a great way to participate in class. Most topics take a little outside research and allow you to contribute to classroom discussion in a meaningful way. Consider speaking up to volunteer for class reports!

In addition to daily participation in classroom discussion, each student is required to participate in one forum during the course of the semester. Forums will be made up of four to five students, and topics will focus on the key themes of the course — education, race, gender, and ethnicity, the economy and work, and the natural environment. Each student in the forum will deliver a 5-10 minute presentation on their topic, and then the group will lead the class in further discussion. Individual presenters should *not* read their entire presentation aloud, without looking up or engaging the audience; rather, students should communicate their ideas in a manner that is persuasive and engaging to the audience. Throughout the course we will discuss presentation strategies.

### *Attendance*

In order to succeed, you must come to class. Attendance is required. If you are sick or unable to attend class, *you must contact me beforehand* to say you won't be there. Failure to notify me — either in person or via email — will result in an unexcused absence. *Three or more excused or unexcused absences will significantly lower your final course grade.* Also, please arrive to class on time. Lateness is distracting to me and your fellow classmates. If this becomes a problem, I

reserve the right to count lateness as an unexcused absence. I take attendance and mark lateness every day.

## Grading

The breakdown of final course grades will be as follows:

Education Autobiography	10%
Essays 1-5	10% each
Classroom Participation (including Forum)	20%
Portfolio and Reflective Essay	20%

(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.)

## Schedule

8/28 (W)      Introductions

### Unit One: Education — What is the Value of College?

8/30 (F)      “The Persuasive Writer” in Atwan, pages 1-46

9/2 (M)      No Class — Labor Day

9/4 (W)      “The Writing Process” in Hacker, pages 1-61

9/6 (F)      **Education Autobiography Due** — Writing Workshop

9/9 (M)      Andrew Delbanco, “Three Reasons College Still Matters” in Atwan, pages 241-249

9/11 (W)      Alex Tabarrok, “Tuning in to Dropping Out” in Atwan, pages 249-254 and Michelle Singletary, “Not All College Majors Are Created Equal” in Atwan, pages 254-258

9/13 (F)      Writing Workshop

9/16 (M)      Maria Dimera, “A College Degree Is a Worthy Achievement” in Atwan, pages 258-263 and Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (handout)

9/18 (W)      Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Literary Ethics” and Henry David Thoreau, “Reading” (both handouts)

9/20 (F)      Writing Workshop

9/23 (M)      **Essay #1 Due — Forum on Education**

Unit Two: Race, Gender, and Ethnic Identity

- 9/25 (W) Dave Mosher, “Easily Pronounced Names May Make People More Likable” in Atwan, pages 49-53 and Maria Venegas, “The Devil’s Spine” in Atwan, pages 54-57
- 9/27 (F) Gregory Nasif, “Washington, Yea! Redskins, Boo!” in Atwan, pages 58-64 and “Who Named America” in Atwan, 65-66
- 9/30 (M) Pico Iyer, “The Terminal Check” in Atwan, pages 119-123 and Meher Ahmad, “My Homeland Security” in Atwan, pages 124-131
- 10/2 (W) Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” (handout) — also see <http://constitutioncenter.org/amoreperfectunion/>
- 10/4 (F) Writing Workshop
- 10/7 (M) Thomas Chatterton Williams, “As Black as We Wish to Be” in Atwan, pages 132-137; “Think Indian” in Atwan, pages 137-140
- 10/9 (W) Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” (handout)
- 10/11 (F) Writing Workshop
- 10/14 (M) No Class — Fall Break
- 10/16 (W) **Essay # 2 Due — Forum on Race, Gender, and Ethnic Identity**

Unit Three: “American” Language and Global English

- 10/18 (F) Mikita Brottman, “Spelling Matters” in Atwan, pages 217-219 and Anne Trubeck, “Use Your Own Words” in Atwan, pages 220-224
- 10/21 (M) Christopher Muther, “We Get the Point!” in Atwan, pages 224-229 and Shayna Diamond, “Words Are What We Make Them” in Atwan, pages 229-235
- 10/23 (W) “The Telegram” in Atwan, pages 236-239 and Selections from David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (handout)
- 10/25 (F) Writing Workshop
- 10/28 (M) Gish Jen, “What Means Switch” (handout)
- 10/30 (W) Amy Tan, “Rules of the Game” (handout)
- 11/1 (F) Kathryn Nocerino, “Americanism” and Frank Chin, “Railroad Station Time” (handout)
- 11/4 (M) **Essay # 3 Due — Forum on “American” Language and Global English**

### Unit Three: The Economy and Work

- 11/6 (W) Michael J. Sandel, “What Isn’t for Sale” in Atwan, pages 143-152 and James Livingston, “Americans, Thou Shalt Shop and Spend for the Planet” in Atwan, pages 153-156
- 11/8 (F) Amel Saleh, “Is the Holiday Season Too Materialistic?” in Atwan, pages 157-161 and “The Powerful Theory of Conspicuous Consumption” in Atwan, pages 162-165
- 11/11 (M) Stephen Marche, “We Are Not All Created Equal” in Atwan, pages 265-271 and Bruce D. Meyer and James X. Sullivan, “American Mobility” in Atwan, pages 271-279
- 11/13 (W) Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, “The Making of the 99%” in Atwan, pages 279-286 and Breanna Lembitz, “A Taste of Freedom: What I Got at Occupy Wall Stret” in Atwan, pages 287-297
- 11/15 (F) Writing Workshop
- 11/18 (M) **Essay # 4 Due — Forum on the Economy and Work**

### Unit Four: The Natural Environment

- 11/20 (W) Chris Mooney, “We Can’t Handle the Truth” in Atwan, pages 321-333 and Joseph Bottom and William Anderson, “Unchanging Science” in Atwan, pages 333-340
- 11/22 (F) Sarah Laskow, “Debunking ‘Green Living’: Combatting Climate Change Requires Lifestyle Changes, Not Organic Products” in Atwan, pages 341-344 and Mona Charen, “Cuddly Symbols Not Cooperating in Climate Change Panic” in Atwan, pages 344-348
- 11/25 (M) Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selections from *Nature* and Selections from the *Journals* (both handouts)
- 11/27 (W) No Class — Thanksgiving Recess
- 11/29 (F) No Class — Thanksgiving Recess
- 12/2 (M) Tatevik Manucharyan, “Professor Lectures on Dangers of Climate Change” in Atwan, pages 248-354 and “The Warming of the World” in Atwan, pages 355-357
- 12/4 (W) Writing Workshop
- 12/6 (F) **Forum on the Natural Environment — Essay # 5 Due by 12pm on Friday, December 13**

12/9 (M)      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/](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.