

Instructor: Stacy Bell

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Office: Humanities 105

Office hours: TTh 2:30-4:30, MW 12-1, and by appointment

Required Texts

Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*

Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Diaz, *Drown*

Tomine, *Shortcomings*

Course Description

An examination of grammar, mechanics and principles of effective written expression, with primary emphasis on critical reading and writing and documentation of 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 writing process; 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. You will read four short books and will be quizzed on each. Developing critical reading skills is an essential objective in 185. The texts will be the basis for your essays and for practicing rhetorical and literary analysis.

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 this course you read a variety of books by journalists, activists, and fiction writers who have different styles and approaches to their subjects. 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. At the end of the semester you’ll see that good writing and good reading skills are not mutually exclusive. Both require strong *critical thinking* skills.

You will submit a short [350 words] essay and a longer essay [1000-1200 words] for each book. The word limit is strictly enforced. In some cases your short responses will be developed into longer essays. You will be required to use secondary sources for two long essays and to follow MLA guidelines for documenting sources; practicing research skills is mandatory in 185, and you will be visiting the library twice this semester for research instruction with our personal librarian.

Assignments & Evaluation

Research: Two essays will require information from other sources. To keep it simple, we will follow MLA guidelines for in-text citations and Works Cited pages, but be aware that other disciplines require different documentation styles. The differences are mostly mechanical: the basic principles of giving credit for outside sources transfer across disciplines. 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 citation format will be returned ungraded. Please pay attention to what you are doing to avoid a trip to the Honor Council!

Oral presentations: you will lead one class discussion of our text or an assigned topic. You will sign up at the beginning of the semester for the day you will lead. You must meet me during office hours before your presentation to discuss your plan for class; on the day of your discussion, you must submit a 100-word summary of the topic, as well as a minimum of two thoughtful discussion questions. Your oral presentation is 5% of your final grade. If you are absent without an excuse on your assigned day, you cannot make it up.

Debate: On April 19 and 24 you will engage in a planned debate. You will be assigned to one of two teams and each team will submit a well-written thesis statement of your position and an annotated bibliography of 6 sources; each team member must speak during the debate. I will assess your team's performance through an informal rubric and your classmates will decide the winner. Your debate thesis + bibliography is 5% of your final grade.

Reading quizzes: You will take a 5-minute, 5-question quiz for each book. If you read the book, you will get 100% of the questions correct; if you don't, you will fail. Each quiz is 5% of your final grade.

Essays: Essay lengths are prescribed [as a general rule, your word count should be within 10% of the limit]. If you do not adhere to the limit, I will not grade the essay. Reason: effective writing is concise and precise. Practice expressing yourself within appropriate parameters.

Four 350 word responses: 2.5% each

Four 1000-1200 word essays: 10% each

Your final exam will be a written response to a film you will view and discuss in class. The exam is 15% of your final grade.

Attendance: 5% of your final grade

Business

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 knowing the information and materials posted there.

<http://ms-bell-s-english-185.posterous.com/>

Office Hours: Please sign up for an appointment. There will be a sign up sheet outside my door every week. If you cannot see me during office hours, speak to me after class to arrange an appointment.

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.

Attendance: I will not distinguish between tardies and absences. You may miss two days of class without penalty; after that, you will lose 10 points from your attendance grade for each absence.

Email: Use email for the following reasons:

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

I delete emails requesting information contained in the syllabus. I delete emails about grades. Let's have those conversations in person; let me know and I will be happy to talk to you in my office. Your grades and averages will be available to you on our Blackboard site.

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 or original ideas in your writing, you must give credit to the author by using MLA documentation form. All papers suspected of plagiarism will be turned over to the Honor Council (*Oxford College Handbook*). If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, see me.

Electronic toys: Laptops are permitted when I require them for class. Silence your phone and put it away during class.

A Note about Printing: Blue and gold makes green! Print preliminary drafts on recycled paper, and print double-sided final drafts to save paper. You must turn in paper copies of all your essays, no exceptions.

JANUARY

- 19 Introduction and Objectives
- 24 Intellectual property & avoiding plagiarism: “Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age” & “Evidence Is Old-Fashioned?”; How to write an email; How to lead class discussion.
- 26
- 31 **Discussion leaders:**
Salvation on Sand Mountain reading quiz

FEBRUARY

- 2 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* short essay due
- 7 **Discussion leaders:**
- 9 *Salvation on Sand Mountain* long essay due
- 14 Library class.
- 16 **Discussion leaders:**
Are Prisons Obsolete? reading quiz
- 21 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* short essay due
- 23 **Discussion leaders:**
- 28 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* long essay due

MARCH

- 1 Second library class.
- 6 **Discussion leaders:**
Shortcomings reading quiz
- 8 *Shortcomings* short essay due

13 Spring Break

15 Spring Break

20 Discussion leaders:

22 No class; I will be attending a conference.

27 *Shortcomings* long essay due

29 No class; I will be attending a conference.

APRIL

3 Discussion leaders:
Drown reading quiz

5 *Drown* short essay due

10 Discussion leaders:

12 *Drown* long essay due

17

19 First Debate:

24 Second Debate:

26 Film

MAY

1 Film
Review

Exam Schedule

10J Monday, May 7 9-12:00

1J Wednesday, May 9 9-12:00

