

Writing 101 Seminars Fall 2009

Topic: Vanished Peoples and Lost Civilizations: Pop Archaeology
Instructor: Dave Huelsbeck

Was the earth visited by ancient astronauts? Did the Egyptians use mysterious technologies to build the pyramids? Is Sasquatch a real creature? These are a few of the questions that are examined by a wide range of public media. Pop archaeology is concerned with many of the same issues as academic archaeology: humans and their culture, human origins, and the development and understanding of human behavior. However, pop archaeology often relies on methods, theories, and assumptions that differ dramatically from academic archaeology. We will begin by learning to recognize the methods of science and pseudoscience and develop a framework/method to evaluate competing claims. Then, we will use that methodology to explore, discuss, and write about “mysteries” of the human past.

Topic: Conflict and Peace
Instructor: Callista Brown

When was the last time you experienced conflict with someone? Most of us don't have to think back very far. Is conflict inevitable? If so, must it be destructive? Can conflict be transformed into peace? How?

In this course, we will explore our personal encounters with conflict, analyze theories of the causes of violence, examine the accomplishments of renowned peace activists, and study local community efforts to address conflict and further peace. Students will read and write autobiography, social science summary and analysis, and book and film reviews.

Topic: From Virtue to Vice
Instructor: Mike Hillis

The Beatles once wrote, “All you need is love.” A splendid thought, most of us would agree. In a world of hate and jealousy, hostility and revenge, the emphasis on such an untroubled dictum would appear to be the right course of action. However, as G.K. Chesterton, the noted Catholic apologist once wrote, “The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone.” This Writing 101 course will explore the nature of virtue and how those virtues can readily turn to vice.

Topic: Fathers and Sons
Instructor: Tom Campbell

A semester in which we will think, talk, and above all, write about one of the most significant human relationships. In journals, letters, autobiographical narratives, descriptive essays, and critical analyses, we will explore the dynamics of fathers and sons and related issues of masculinity and gender construction. Readings from short stories, scientific articles, memoirs, and the texts of popular culture (TV, ads, movies, etc.).

Topic: Our Place in the World: Exploring Nature, Spirit, Culture

Instructor: Barbara Temple Thurston

The DaLai Lama suggests that we live in a time when “there is much in the window, but nothing in the room.” Using readings by various thinkers and activists, we examine an alternative to an aggressive and materialist worldview. Focusing on the centrality of nature, spirit, and culture as an inspiration for action in the world, we explore through careful writing notions of personal, social, and political transformations for the common good. Central texts are Resurgence magazine, a journal devoted to a vision of sustainable future where spiritual imperative and governance as trusteeship work in harmony with each other, the novel Into the Forest by Hegland, as well as a few autobiographical and short readings by others committed to peace and the common good. All are courageous people seeking change in today’s world.

Topic: Four by Shakespeare

Instructor: Dennis Martin

This writing course challenges students to respond to four of Shakespeare’s best and most widely loved plays, “Romeo and Juliet,” “Othello,” “Hamlet,” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Writing topics will emerge from reading the plays, holding class conversation and watching selected scenes from the most recent film treatments. The workshop format allows student writers to experience and benefit from the public presentation and critique of their work. This course will require very active participation by all students.

Topic: Dreams

Instructor: David Seal

Effective writing, whether expository or narrative, needs powerful images to convey its intent. Writing can’t just appeal to the abstract parts of our brain. It needs to sway our whole psyche: Feelings as well as thoughts, the unconscious as well as the conscious, the music as well as the message. Concepts are not enough. They must be married to images.

There is no better source of images than our own dreams. So we will learn about dreams as a way of understanding the power of images in our writing. We will write in several genres: Exposition, narration, poetry. And for us, dreams will become the Swiss Army Knives of our psyches.

Topic: Law and Justice

Instructor: Susan Dwyer-Shick

This seminar examines the concepts of "law" and "justice" within the Anglo-American experience, with with an eye toward developing a comparative perspective, too. A range of interdisciplinary texts--from fiction to non-fiction, theatre to television, newspapers to court proceedings, legislative enactments to role-playing simulations, and more--provides us with several opportunities to explore the nature of law and justice in our attempt

to understand what is "legal" and what is "just" within a contemporary American social, cultural, and political context. Frequent exercises in reading, writing, speaking, observing, and interviewing will be assigned to explore a variety of discourse styles and voices, for example, descriptive, analytical, narrative, comparative, persuasive, objective, and collaborative.

Topic: Epidemics
Instructor: Angelia Alexander

Epidemics are outbreaks of either infectious or chronic diseases that are attention-grabbing because larger numbers of people become ill during a relatively short period of time than is usually the case. If such an outbreak spreads around the world, we say we have a pandemic. SARS, bird flu, the more common flu, measles, HIV-AIDS, obesity, suicide, certain kinds of cancers have all been given epidemic status at one time or another. An epidemic often signals an emerging disease—one we haven't seen before. HIV-AIDS, Ebola, Hantavirus are examples of viral infections that fit this category. Emerging diseases often change the course of history.

In this course we will write about epidemics: the factors that cause them, the impacts they have, the steps we take to respond to them. To do this, we'll have to consider not only the microbes that cause infectious outbreaks but also the genetic, social, and cultural factors that influence both infectious and chronic diseases and their consequences. We'll also look at how we manage the consequences through technology and social change.

Topic: Gender and American Popular Culture
Instructor: Jennifer Smith

What kinds of images do we see in popular culture and how should we read them? Who creates and disseminates these images? How does popular culture shape our conventional assumptions regarding women, men, sexuality, and citizenship? Why are some icons of popular culture loved, feared, revered and/or reviled? These questions will serve as the basis for our extended examination of the forms and function of popular culture. We will begin by debating the idea that images and other cultural texts actually construct our ideas about men and women, sexuality, and society rather than reflect the "natural" order of things. With this idea in mind, we will embark on an analysis of numerous types of cultural texts including advertisements and fashion magazines, television, movies, music and music videos, and pop culture icons. By critically interpreting how these texts represent images of men, women and sexuality, we will come to read them as political texts that influence and inform our opinions and choices, that socialize and discipline us even as they entertain us.

Topic: Autobiography of a Face
Instructor: Rick Barot

The entity of American individualism is continually re-defining itself, compelled by cultural and political forces to absorb new questions and answers regarding contemporary life. In this writing seminar we'll look at literary works that describe the ways in which various writers, various imaginative thinkers, have negotiated with profound, traumatic change. We will look at individualism through the lenses of several thematic strands that identify zones of stress in recent American society: the impact of war, the AIDS epidemic, the immigrant experience, and the

dramatically changing dynamics of childhood and family life. We will read fiction, memoirs, poems, plays. Writing assignments will include critical papers and works of creative writing.

Topic: Serious Comics: The Rhetoric of the Graphic Novel
Instructor: Matthew Levy

While the-men-in-tights-beat-each-other-up genre of comic books remains popular, comic artists have expanded their medium by taking on serious personal and public issues in many styles. Book-length comic books have earned the grown-up name of "graphic novel" and, given the adult subject matter, "graphic" may refer to more than their visual nature. We will also read books and essays about the techniques and significance of comics and view films adapted from comics and about the artists. We will write summary-response essays, personal essays, research and analysis. Drawing ability is not necessary, but we will also try our hand at writing comics.

Topic: Sustainability: Balancing Self, Community, and Environment
Instructor: Jim Albrecht

Environmental advocates of "sustainability" argue that our ecological crises are at heart not technological problems, but cultural ones. In this course, we'll consider the interrelated challenges of creating healthy selves, communities, and environments. We'll read Thoreau's Walden along with contemporary environmental theorists, and consider John Dewey's definition of community as a counterpoint to Thoreau's more individualistic vision. Our other main "text" will be P.L.U. itself: we'll study the University's ongoing efforts to make our campus more environmentally sustainable, and, through service projects with the units that care for our campus and its inhabitants, we'll strive to better understand and contribute to our community. And, of course, at every stage we'll advance our learning by writing—expository essays, autobiographical reflections, interviews, ethnographies, research projects, and a service journal. *NOTE: Required service-learning component.*

Topic: Going to School Around the World: Education for All?
Instructor: Cathy Yetter

The major quest of this course is to discover how schooling is defined in countries around the globe and how children's lives are impacted by the educational opportunities available to them. We will explore the ways in which the educational system of a country help us better understand national goals, values, and priorities. We will examine our own educational experiences and extend our investigation by looking at the history of education in the United States. We will focus the major part of the semester on a consideration of educational systems around the world. Readings, conversations, interviews, and digital media resources will support our investigation.

Topic: Endurance: Confronting Adversity
Instructor: Solveig Robinson

Poet Robert Burns observed that "The best laid schemes o' Mice and Men/Gang aft agley." This course will examine how people cope with unexpected adversity. Through an

examination of both fictional and nonfiction accounts, we will explore the qualities that enable us to endure the most difficult circumstances and meet the challenges they pose. Texts will include Shackleton's *South* and Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, contemporary and historic accounts of the sinking of the *Titanic*, Holocaust memoirs, and Defoe's classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* and its legacy. The course will concentrate on expository writing (writing that explains).

Topic: Eat My Words: Writing and Food

Instructor: Rona Kaufman

We all have to eat—right? But who eats what, and why, and how? In this writing course, we'll look at the roles food has played in our lives and in broader cultures and communities. We'll also connect food, and the representation of food, to issues of race, gender, and class. Students will write personal narratives, ethnographies, and critical analyses, as well as do a lot of informal writing, to demonstrate learning and to construct knowledge about issues generated in the course. All students will also engage in community service and use their service sites as a resource for writing.

Topic: Writing for Communication

Instructor: Robert Wells

Professional communication writers have three jobs. The first is to gather information; the second is to put that information into a form appropriate for the medium in which she or he is working. The third requires the communicator to adhere to the professional standards of accuracy and integrity. This course instructs students in the skills and ethics required to perform these jobs. As a student in this course, you will be introduced to basic mass media writing styles and standards. You will routinely practice these skills by producing articles and other material for print media, public relations, broadcasting and convergent media.

Topic: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism

Instructor: Kris Plaehn

September 11, 2001 was a turning point for the United States. It brought the reality of terrorism faced by millions around the world into the everyday lives of Americans. People had so many questions: "What would cause people to fly airplanes into buildings? How can some people be cheering for it? How do people "become" suicide bombers? What is narco-terrorism, or cyber-terrorism? What is the biggest terrorist group based in the US (hint: it's not a Middle Eastern group!)? How do we stop this?" This course will focus on learning about the philosophical, political, and religious roots of terrorism and the options for countering this threat. Class activities are designed to help students improve their analytical and writing skills.

Topic: Writing About the Arts

Instructor: Jason Skipper

Through the arts, we develop an understanding of our own and others' ways of envisioning the world, and we become attuned to the dimensions and meaning of our own lives. Engaging forms as diverse as the visual arts, performing arts, music, and film, this course will

explore not only how the arts reflect different views of the world but also how different views of the world are reflected in the arts. As a class and individually, students will consider various paintings and photography, films, the theater, and music both in and outside the classroom. In addition to engaging the arts directly, the class will read and consider the writing of art critics and essayists, in publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *The Big Takeover*.

Topic: The Changing Face of the U.S: Immigration in America

Instructor: JoDee Keller

Who are we as a country? Where do we come from? Who are the most recent immigrants to our country? The U.S. has been called a nation of immigrants. The majority of us trace our roots to other countries, other continents. Yet, we as a nation have not always been welcoming of others who make their way here. In this class, we will explore the topic of immigration. We will hear from immigrants in their own voices through readings, videos, guest speakers, and visits to an ESL class. We will explore immigration history and, through our writings, reflect on each of our individual histories. We will examine the impact of immigration on our past, present and future identity, both as a nation and as individuals.

Topic: Image, Narrative, Memory

Instructor: Nathalie op de Beeck,

How do we tell stories in words and pictures, and how can captions and contexts alter the meanings of visual information? How do we communicate to diverse audiences in speech, writing, and other verbal and nonverbal modes (from music to jokes to photos to fashion)? How do our cultural knowledge and memories influence the way we express ourselves and decode others' expressions? In this course, we will investigate perception and representation through comics, photographs, advertisements, films, and other media. Our readings and assignments will combine literary and visual studies, with special attention to the definitions of image, narrative, and memory. Everyone will compose creative experimental pieces, keep a journal, and campus readings and exhibitions). In addition to developing critical literacy and writing/research skills, this course invites imaginative participation, creative risk-taking, and open minds.

Topic: Mermaid's Feet and Devil's Mirror: Subversion and Sexuality in Hans Christian Andersen

Instructor: Troy Storfjell

If you've only seen the Disney version of "The Little Mermaid," you don't know the half of it. Despite the worldwide popularity of many of his stories (such as "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Emperor's New Clothes," for instance), Hans Christian Andersen remains relatively little understood by many who consider his stories to be 'merely' children's literature. This class will explore how Andersen's fairy tales challenge Romantic ideals and subvert middle class values, creating an unsettling terrain in which individual identity and sexuality are destabilized and social norms are stood on their heads. We will develop critical reading skills, using writing as a strategy for opening these texts to disturbing readings that have little to do with the comfort of the bedtime story.