Writing about the New York Times
Spring Term 2006
Catherine Lasswell, Instructor

WRTG 3020 Sect 7 9:00-9:50 DUANE G1B39
WRTG 3020 Sect 16 12:00-12:50 ECON 16

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course will examine the nation's "newspaper of record," The New York Times, as a tool in our democracy that determines and affects public discussion of the issues of the day. Focusing on news articles, we will try to assess the validity of the reporting, comparing the Times to other newspapers, to decipher what, if any, bias exists. We will also read and respond to criticism of the Times' reporting, measuring to what extent critics may be correct in their critiques. These critics include Christopher Lasch, Gregory Mantzios, David Altheide, Trudy Lieberman, Jeff Cohen, and Brent Cunningham among others. Of greatest focus in our study of writing and rhetoric will be the editorial and Op/Ed pages which will be scrutinized as we try to determine to what extent the arguments presented on these pages address crucial issues of our time, bring depth and clarity to complex issues, present reasonable arguments, and contribute to the quality of public discussion in our culture.

WRITING GOALS:
Designed for juniors and seniors in the College of Arts and Sciences, this course will help you do the following:

- Gain familiarity with formal and popular writing genres and with methods of presenting information to a broad, educated public
- Craft an analytical or argumentative thesis and evidence appropriate for its defense
- Raise and answer counterarguments effectively
- Use a range of strategies to address various audiences in different rhetorical situations
- Apply your disciplinary expertise to issues in ethics and public policy
- Hone your writing and critical-thinking skills

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- The New York Times Monday through Friday (Phone 1-888-698-2655. Give them my name and the name of the course. Or you can buy the paper daily at Jones’ Drug.)
- NYT Course Packet (not available until week 3)
- Writing Analytically (Third Edition) by Rosenwasser and Stephen (available online on Amazon.com used—act quickly.)
- A good collegiate dictionary

ASSIGNMENTS:
You will write several short pieces and two longer essays. The shorter pieces will be paragraph length and will concentrate on clarity, provable claims, and reasonable evidence. The two longer essays will involve in-depth analysis on a particular issue or the putting together of arguments to assert or refute a position. Some in-class writing will occur, mainly asking you to respond to readings or to assess your classmates’ writing.
- Letter to the Editor
- Short Response Writings
- First paper – responding to criticism
- Second paper – analysis – why question – or an argumentative piece

COURSE FORMAT -- WORKSHOP
The workshop format assumes that we learn from one another. In order for this to occur, you, as a class member, must commit to carefully considering and critically appraising the work of your peers; in return, you will receive the benefit of your classmates’ thoughtful consideration of your own work along with my comments. Your critique of others’ essays will identify flaws in logic, organization, and expression. Your comments should include suggestions on how to improve these shortcomings. The focus will always remain on the writing in the essay, not on the writer himself/herself.

All essays on the workshop schedule must be distributed in hard copy form in the previous class. Email submissions will reduce your grade. If yours is not distributed to the class at that time, it will not be reviewed again until your turn comes up in the next rotation. All essays must pass through the workshop process (i.e., at least one full workshop for the two major essays and at least one review for the short one) in order to receive a grade.

GRADING: The grades you receive on your individual assignments will contribute to your final grade in the following proportions:

- Short Response Writing 25%
- Quizzes* 15%
- Quality of class participation based on preparedness, quality of workshop contributions, and peer evaluations 15%
- Essay #1 20%
- Essay #2 25%

Refer to the grading policies of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric described below. I will not deviate from these standards in assigning you grades for your work. I may on occasion ask a colleague to critique your paper. In this event, I will take that opinion into consideration when assigning a grade. PLAGIARISM WILL RESULT IN AN “F” FOR THE PAPER AND AN “F” FOR THE COURSE, AND A REPORT WILL BE FILED WITH THE DEAN OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.

ATTENDANCE:
Because this course will be taught as a workshop, your full participation is essential to its success. You are expected to attend class regularly and to be on time. Late arrival to class – i.e. more than 5 minutes late to class – on three separate occasions will constitute one absence. Each absence in excess of three will diminish your final grade by one grading increment. Absences in excess of five will constitute an automatic failure. In the event that you must miss class, you are responsible for getting any missed material.

Program of Writing and Rhetoric Grading Criteria:
A: A paper that is excellent in form, content, and style: original, substantive, insightful, persuasive, well organized, and written in a clear, graceful, error-free style. Although not necessarily "perfect," an "A" paper rewards its reader with genuine insight, gracefully expressed.

B: A clearly written, well-developed, interesting paper that shows above-average thought and writing craft. The paper may have some relatively minor difficulties in content or style, but contains no major flaws that compromise the general effectiveness of the case it presents or the readability of its prose.

C: A paper that represents a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. The paper may be readable, reasonably well organized, and support a focused thesis satisfactorily, but it has some important unresolved problems in content and form, distracting grammatical errors, and stylistic flaws. The paper may fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment, but, finally, say little of genuine importance or significance.

D: A paper seriously deficient in content, form, style, or mechanics. It may be disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, or contain pervasive errors that impair readability.

F: A paper that is incoherent, disastrously flawed, unacceptably late or does not meet the workshop review requirements.

**Grading Scale for Participation:**

A Always prepared for class; participates without being called upon; criticism of other student essays shows insight, close reading; comments clear, succinct, and helpful.

B Generally prepared for class; occasionally participates without being called on; criticism of other students' work shows mastery of the course goals; comments generally clear and helpful.

C Adequately prepared for class; only participates when called on; mastery of the course goals generally evident, but criticism of other student essays, although somewhat helpful, demonstrates a less than thorough reading of the essay.

D Preparation is less than adequate; never participates unless called on; criticism of other student papers demonstrates a casual reading, at best; comments demonstrate a failure to master the course goals.

F Disruptive in class (reading newspaper, talking, continual tardiness, etc.), unprepared when called on, unable or unwilling to participate in class discussions.

This class assumes a certain skill level on your part. If grammatical problems constitute part of your current writing style, you will most likely experience a great deal of frustration and disappointment in this course.

**Students with Special Needs**
The University of Colorado makes reasonable accommodations for those with documented disabilities. Students should notify the counselor for Students with Disabilities located in Willard 322, (303)-492-8671 and their instructors of any special needs. Instructors should be notified the first week of classes so accommodations can be discussed.
Essay Format
All assignments should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. No handwritten assignments will be accepted. Please include your name, the draft number and the date of submission at the top of the first page. Essays that are longer than one page should be stapled before being distributed.

Jane Smith
UWRP 3020
Feb. 13, 2003
Essay 1, Draft 3
Group A

Plagiarism

CU is very clear on its stance toward plagiarism. You can earn yourself an “F” for the entire course if you plagiarize a paper in this class. In addition, the matter is referred to the dean of your respective college. Please do not compromise your own integrity. Two additional observations: I cannot accept a “finished” paper that has not been through the complete workshop process.

Religious Observances

Please notify me at least one week in advance if you will be absent due to religious observances. Missed classes will not be counted as absences. I will make every effort to accommodate your absence including giving make-up exams or extra credit work for in-class assignments missed.

A new classroom behavior policy has been adopted. All students need to read it. Consult [www.Colorado.edu/policies/index.html]
WRTG 3020: WRITING ABOUT THE NEW YORK TIMES
Spring 2006
Tentative Schedule

Week 1: 1/18-20
Course introduction
Read Letters to the Editor (handout)
Write NYT letter to the editor

Week 2: 1/23-1/27
Read "What is News?" by Neil Postman (Wednesday)
Read "Rethinking Objectivity" by Brent Cunningham (Wednesday)
Read "Deep in Suburbia" by Charles McGrath (Friday)
Read "The Socratic Shrink" by Daniel Duane (Friday)
Read at least 5 articles in Section A M-F, in addition to all editorials, and the Op-Eds
Regular quiz on Editorial and Op-Ed pages (every Friday)

Week 3: 1/30-2/3
Read “Propaganda from the Middle of the Road: The Centrist Ideology of the News Media” by Jeff Cohen (Mon)
Read “Writing from the Center: The New York Times and the Florida Election Dispute” by Andrew Sheldon (on-line at Occasions— at Colorado.edu/pwr go to Links for Writers and you’ll see it (Mon)
Read at least 5 articles in Section A M-F, in addition to editorials, and Op/Eds
Letter to the Editor due 1/30

Week 4: 2/6-2/20
Read “Saffie Baliunas, The Global Warming Debate, and Think Tank Scholarship’ by Olivia Koski (on-line at Occasions) (Mon)
Read “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible” by Gregory Mantsios (Mon)
Read “New York Times’ Vitamin Coverage Could Damage Your DNA” by Howard Friel (Wed)
Read “Bad Frame” by Trudy Lieberman (Wed)
Read “American Bioscience Meets the American Dream by Carl Elliott (Fri)
Read editorials and Op-Ed pieces in the Times
Cohen summary due 2/6
Feature Article due 2/6

Week 5: 2/6-2/10
Bring 3 possible ideas for Paper #1(Mon)
Read Writing Analytically Ch.7 Recognizing and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements (Mon)
Bring introductory paragraph with outline for development of paper #1(Wed)
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 6: 2/13-2/17
Workshop paper #1, Round 1
Read classmates’ drafts and write comments on them
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 7: 2/20-2/24
Workshop paper #1, Round 2
Read classmates’ drafts and write comments on them
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 8: 2/27-3/3
Workshop paper #1, Round 3
Read classmates’ drafts and write comments on them
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 9: 3/6-3/10
Read “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Wed)
Read “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible” by Gregory Mantsios (Wed)
Read “Let’s Make Higher Ed. Free for all Americans” by Jim Hightower (Fri)
Read other pieces TBA
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Paper #1 due Mon. 3/6

Week 10: 3/13-3/17
Bring in 3 ideas for final paper
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 11:
Workshop Final paper, Round 1
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 12: 4/10-4/14
Workshop Final paper, Round 2
Read editorials and op-ed pieces in the Times

Week 13: 4/17-4/21
Workshop Final paper, Round 3

Week 14: 4/24-4/28
Workshop Final paper, Round 4

Week 15: 5/1-5/5
Workshop Final paper, Round 4
Final paper due

This schedule is subject to change.
Writing Tips
http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/links.html