COMPOSING KNOWLEDGE

WRTG 3020 Topics in Writing
Fall Semester 2008

Dr. Hallie Meredith

Section 047  MW 4:30-5:45  HUMN 160

Course Office Hours and Contact Information:

Wednesdays 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. and by appointment
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- Course Overview and Objectives

Welcome! This course offers an opportunity to think of yourself as a writer and a producer of knowledge, especially when, for much of your college career, your other courses often positioned you as a consumer of what other people already know. We’ll discuss—and more importantly, enact—what it means to be a writer in college (and beyond!).

This course will hone your capacities for critical and analytical thinking and creative expression by engaging you directly and reflectively in acts of reading and writing. Our work together is based on the principle that the best way to learn to write is by writing—by engaging frequently and intensively in the arts of composition. My goal in this course is to provide you with ways of composing, and ways of interacting with texts, that will enable you to become a more reflective, active, and effective participant in the intellectual life of our culture. Through your own acts of reading and writing, criticism and research, you will learn first hand the ways that knowledge is composed, beliefs are formed, and values are sustained—and you will learn that your own voice can make a difference.

Our topic for the semester will be “Composing Knowledge.” Through readings and individualized writing projects, this course encourages you to explore the role of language and rhetoric in “composing” what—and how—we “know.” Is knowledge a given, something to be consumed? Or is it constructed and composed, shaped by language and by communities of knowers that organize themselves through language? Working and writing together, we’ll explore the connection between language and inquiry. Specifically, we will examine assumptions about critical thinking, literacy, and communication that various disciplines hold, and how those assumptions relate to the expertise you acquire and share in your major. The course invites you to explore and appreciate the tacit rhetorical education that lies behind your acquisition of facts and information. It treats the academy as a culture
that deserves scrutiny and ethnographic exploration. The theme is meant to provide a common backdrop to the individualized projects that lie at the heart of the course.

We will organize our work during the first nine weeks of the semester in a broad arc that touches on three themes:

- Writing one’s way into the university
- Discourse conventions within the university
- Writing beyond the university

A set of readings will support our work in each of these three areas. A short paper (3-4 pages) on each of the three themes introduces you critical thinking and writing skills and to the possibilities of ethnographic research.

The final seven weeks of the semester will be devoted to a major project of your own design that takes up in detail one issue or facet of composing knowledge, relevant to your interests and your major. Drawing on primary and secondary research, and on feedback on preliminary drafts, you will have the opportunity to develop a sustained argument (roughly 10 pages) that showcases the fruits of your inquiry. The course will also address oral presentation skills essential to presenting your work effectively before an audience. Near the end of the course you will have the opportunity to propose new readings that future offerings of this course might consider.

This course is taught as an intensive writing workshop, augmented as appropriate by technology. We draw on the latest educational technologies to support teaching and learning, and we will help you develop skills in critical information literacy so crucial for you as you search for, work with, and evaluate a variety of sources, both print and electronic. The course deals with issues of style, grammar, and organization, not in isolation, but in the context of larger rhetorical and argumentative concerns.

- **Why is this class a “Core Course”?**

This writing and rhetoric course satisfies core requirements in various CU-Boulder schools and colleges because it addresses rhetorical knowledge and writing skills in ways that advance your work at this flagship state institution.

More broadly, this advanced honors course is part of the statewide “Guaranteed Transfer” pathway of courses. In the context of statewide courses, this course meets the goals of an Intermediate Writing Course (GT-CO2):

1. It deepens your *rhetorical knowledge* by focusing throughout on rhetorical situation, audience, and purpose; by addressing strategies for voice, tone, format, and structure suitable to those purposes and audiences; and by having you write in several genres and thereby extending your work in general academic contexts to more specialized communities and audiences. We will use Rolf Norgaard’s *Composing Knowledge* as our primary published text. It is an advanced rhetoric and reader that focuses on conducting ethnographic research in educational and civic settings. We will also draw on the substantive materials on two nationally recognized rhetoric and composition websites: The Purdue University OWL (on-line writing lab,
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/), and the Colorado State University Writing Center and WAC Clearinghouse (http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html).

2. It deepens your experience in writing processes by making intensive use of multiple drafts and peer review; by developing strategies for rhetorical invention; by familiarizing you with advanced research tools and information literacy skills; and by drawing on multiple technologies (email, research databases, and various functionalities of writing software, such as the comment function in Word).

3. It deepens your understanding of writing conventions by helping you learn to make sophisticated, strategic choices regarding format, style, specialized vocabulary, genre conventions, and documentation.

4. It demonstrates your comprehension of content knowledge by having you develop documents to various specific audiences for particular purposes (especially in our final project), and to adapt your arguments and your style to meet the expectations of those specific rhetorical contexts.

- Texts and Materials

Working as a writer in college (and beyond) means working together. Writing is a social and collaborative act. To that end, the principal text in the course will be your own writing, and the principal activity will be sharing our work with each other and encouraging each other as we look forward to that next draft. Please have drafts ready for circulation 24-48 hours prior to class discussion. Drafts are required, but not graded. Please date all drafts. Your participation grade in the course (not to mention the quality of your work) will take a nose dive if you don’t submit and circulate your work on time. If you miss classroom discussion of your work because you do not turn in drafts in advance of class, the quality of your papers will almost certainly suffer. I will not accept final papers that have not been reviewed on a regular basis over the course of the assignment. "First draft" final versions are unacceptable and will receive an F. Late papers will not be accepted (except under extraordinary circumstances).

- Required Texts


A college-level handbook of your choice. The handbook will be very useful to you as a writer throughout your college career and beyond, but it is not something we will “cover” in class in any systematic way.

A college-level dictionary of your choice.

Other readings and course materials will be provided in the form of handouts or by electronic means.


- **Attendance and Participation**

As writers, we rely on each other as fellow writers and as readers. For this reason, regular attendance and active participation throughout the semester are crucial to this seminar/writing workshop. Students who miss class will be expected to ask classmates for the information and assignments they missed. Students who miss more than three classes can expect their final grade to be lowered by one fraction of a letter (i.e. A to A-) for each absence after the third. Even when excused, more than seven absences can result in an IW, IF, or F for the course. **Please note this attendance policy.** You have, in essence, three “freebies.” Horde them and use them wisely: anticipate that you may feel under the weather one day, or that you may fall madly in love, or that you may need to recover from falling out of love. Class starts at the announced time; tardiness is not acceptable (two late arrivals count as one absence).

- **Ongoing Assignments**

Ours is a collaborative classroom. A regular and required assignment is that you pick up (or electronically download) and read papers to be discussed in **advance** of the class. You must come to class ready to comment on the work of your colleagues and to share in their inquiry. Student presentations on readings and on drafts submitted by classmates will be a regular feature of the workshop. These presentations should be prepared in advance of class and should be well organized, cogent, and to the point. In our “workshops” (as elsewhere in life), the Golden Rule applies well. Do unto other writers as you would have them do unto you. Writers want and need more than empty praise. They want an attentive and discerning audience, one that is ready to help improve the writing and thinking.

In addition to a number of short assignments and activities, you will develop a major project for this class, one that joins an ongoing conversation in your major or field of interest. Frequent revisions will be necessary. You will be expected to work on these documents throughout the semester, even on days when your draft may not come up for discussion. You cannot pass this course without successfully completing the three short papers and the major project. Be sure to date and save all drafts, and to save your work (including various drafts) on computer files. Always retain a hardcopy of every assignment for your files.

This class will use e-mail communication for messages from me, for general discussion, and at times for the circulation of drafts. Please check your university e-mail account (colorado.edu) several times each week as well as on those days when drafts may be circulated. If you use a non-university e-mail account (e.g. hotmail.com, msn.com), be sure to link it to the university e-mail account. Access to on-line library materials requires that you be identified as a university user (colorado.edu). See the Library/PWR site, address above, for information on remote access and setting proxy servers. It is your responsibility to become familiar with sending and receiving attachments using commonly available software (e.g. Microsoft Word), and for pasting text into the body of an e-mail. For assistance on technical computing matters, contact 735-HELP or 5-4357 for the Information Technology Help-Line.
Special Notes

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard Hall, room 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

If you speak English as a second language, you should contact me before the third class meeting so that I can better assist you in the course, advise you about special ESL courses, and/or refer you (if needed or desired) to appropriate services on campus.

I am happy to accommodate students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See me well in advance of any conflict: http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Plagiarism will not be tolerated; the paper will receive an automatic F, and your case reported, consistent with the procedures of the new Student Honor Code. We’ll discuss a good deal more about learning from and using the words of others during the course. This writing seminar provides an opportunity to understand issues of intellectual property and the appropriate use and citation of sources. All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at: http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh

A writing class offers a special opportunity to discuss work in progress in a supportive yet critically demanding “workshop” environment. As you develop drafts and other materials for this course, you should bear in mind that you are “going public” with your work. This act carries with it an obligation for civil discussion and for understanding the concerns of your audience and their interests in your point of view.

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner
in which students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. See policies at:

http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html &
http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

**Overview of Assignments and Readings**

**Short paper 1:** A 3-4 page summary/response that explores the process of writing one’s way into the university. The essay should draw on 1-2 of the following readings and your own experience and observation:

- **Learning the Language**
  Perri Klass, “Learning the Language” (p. 48)
  David Berreby, “It Takes a Tribe” (p. 53)
- **Writing the University and Constructing Classrooms**
  Barbara Mellix, “From Outside, In” (p. 76)
  Sharon Rubin, “Professors, Students, and the Syllabus” (p. 152)
  Charles Bazerman, “Where is the Classroom?” (p. 181)

**Short paper 2:** A 3-4 page essay that explores the discourse conventions within the university and its various disciplines. The essay should draw on 1-2 of the following readings and your own experience and observation:

- **Voice, Authority, and Authorship**
  Nancy Sommers, “Between the Drafts” (p. 129)
  Patricia Limerick, “Dancing with Professors” (p. 119)
  Joseph Williams and Greg Colomb, “Two Metaphors for Learning and the Novice Writer” (p. 216)
- **Disciplinary Conventions and Territories of Knowledge**
  Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” (p. 340)
  Jared Diamond, “Soft Sciences are Harder than Hard Sciences” (p. 360)
- **Intellectual Frameworks and Conceptual Schemas**
  Ernst Gombrich, “Truth and Stereotype” (p. 709)
  Roger Schank, “Story Skeletons and Story Fitting” (p. 304)

**Short paper 3:** A 3-4 page essay that explores the process of writing one’s way out of (or beyond) the university, drawing on connections between the university and larger social and cultural issues. The essay should draw on 1-2 of the following readings and your own experience and observation.

- **Why Universities?**
  Louis Menand, “What Are Universities For?” (p. 254)
  Paulo Freire, “The Banking Concept of Education” (p. 239)
- **The Culture Wars**
  Jane Tompkins, “A Visit to the Museum” (p. 453)
  Katha Pollitt, “Why We Read: Canon to the Right of Me” (p. 230)
• Technology and the Image
  Ian Parker, “Absolute PowerPoint: Can a Software Package Edit our Thoughts?” (p. 640)
  Neil Postman, “Virtual Students, Digital Classroom” (p. 597)
  Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” (p. 690)

**Project prospectus:** A roughly 400 word prospectus that articulates the issue or problem that you will pursue for the course project and that places your concerns in the context of an ongoing conversation.

**Rough full draft of course project.**

**Oral presentation:** A formal 5 minute oral presentation on your field project to a relevant audience.

**Revised full draft of course project.**

**Final version of course project.** A sustained argument (roughly 10 pages, with works cited) that showcases the fruits of your inquiry and clarifies its relevance to an ongoing conversation in your field.

**Calculation of Grades**

Your final grade will be determined as follows (assignments worth less than 10% are graded on check/check plus/check minus basis):

- **40%** Three short essays (15% for best two essays, 10% for the third)
- **10%** Oral presentation
- **35%** Field project
- **15%** Rhetorical process/revision effort, timely submission of drafts, class participation, quality of discussion and referee comments in class, etc.
Grading Policies and Guidelines

This class holds your writing to high standards. Because the grading is rigorous, we also want to be sure that it is fair, and that you have a rich set of opportunities to learn and excel in this course.

- **Working Drafts**

  Working drafts are not graded—all the more reason that you should welcome constructive comments for improving your paper. You can take advantage of workshop discussions by submitting thoughtful, substantive revisions on a regular basis, by keeping an open mind during discussions, and by asking for clarification from your instructor or classmates on any suggestions that remain confusing. You are always welcome to ask your instructor for additional help outside of class, or to visit the Writing Center of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric for additional consultations.

- **Improvement**

  We’re here to help you improve your writing. Although the course does not grade on improvement as such (we base grades on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent), we do weight your better papers more heavily when determining the final course grade. We want to give you a grade that reflects what you’ve learned in the course.

- **The Grading Process**

  The syllabus and schedule for your section of the course will specify when final drafts are due. As you revise your paper in preparation for its submission, your instructor will prod, coach, guide, advise, exhort, and encourage. Once you turn in your final draft, your instructor will judge the paper against the same standards that motivated the instructor’s comments during its preparation.

  To ensure fairness and provide you with additional feedback, your papers also may be graded by another instructor in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric. Although the instructors will consult with each other about grades, your own instructor is responsible for determining your grade.

- **Appeals**

  Should you feel that the grade you have received is unfair, you are always welcome to submit an unmarked original copy of your paper to your instructor, with the request that it be graded by yet another reader. The grade for your paper may be adjusted in light of the comments given by the additional reader.

  The Program for Writing and Rhetoric has an ombudsperson to help you resolve any concerns or conflicts you may have. Please contact the main office for more information.
Grading Guidelines

The Program assigns grades based on the evidence provided by the final version of the essay that you submitted. The classroom workshop in which your drafts are discussed encourages you to improve your work, and provides you with the tools to do so, but grades on the final papers are not assigned based on effort, progress, or time spent on the task. Pluses and minuses attached to grades reflect shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. A-/B+).

A  A paper that is excellent in content, form, 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. Such a paper is an ambitious project that engages interesting, complex ideas in a perceptive manner. It offers a nuanced, specific claim that responds to a genuine question at issue, and it follows a compelling line of reasoning. It engages and responds to questions and counterarguments in a thoughtful manner, and explores well-chosen evidence in a detailed and revealing way. The paper does not repeat, but rather enhances, what writer and reader already know. Offering a context for its ideas, the essay could be read and appreciated by someone outside of the class. The style is clear, precise, and graceful, and the author’s voice engaging.

B  A clearly written, well-developed, interesting paper that shows above average thought and writing craft. The essay reaches high, and meets many, though not all, of its aims. The thinking and writing are general very solid, but the paper may have some unresolved problems in argument and style, some thin patches in content, or some tangents that don’t fit in. Despite these problems, the paper does not have major flaws that compromise the general effectiveness of the case it presents or the overall readability of its prose. OR A paper that is far less ambitious than an “A” paper, but reaches all of its aims. This is an essay that may be well organized and cleanly, even elegantly written, but whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be somewhat routine or self-evident.

C  A paper that represents a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. The paper may be somewhat readable, organized at the surface level, and have a claim, but it will have real unresolved problems in one or more key areas: conception, quality of the claim, line of reasoning, use of evidence, and language, style, or grammar. The paper may fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment, but, finally, say little of genuine importance or significance. OR A competently written essay that is largely descriptive. OR An essay that offers scant intellectual content and little more than personal opinion, even when well written.

D  A paper that is seriously underdeveloped or seriously deficient in content, form, style, or mechanics. It may be disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, or contain pervasive errors that impair readability. A paper that does not come close to meeting the basic expectations of the assignment.

F  A paper that is incoherent, disastrously flawed, unacceptably late, plagiarized, or nonexistent.


**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

*Due dates for graded documents indicated in **bold**. Dates are subject to change, as needed. Read drafts and readings *prior* to classroom discussion.

**Unit One**  
**Writing One’s Way Into the University**

**Week One**

**M 25**\textsuperscript{th} August  
Course overview and introduction. Getting to know each other: inferences. Preview first short essay assignment and related readings.

**W 27**\textsuperscript{th} August  
In-class activity on rhetorical context. Foundational concepts for the course.

*Reading for this week:*
  
  “Introduction” to *Composing Knowledge* (p. 1-32)

**Week Two**

**M 1**\textsuperscript{st} September  
NO CLASS – Labor Day Holiday

**W 3**\textsuperscript{rd} September  
Discuss the 5 readings for short essay 1 (summary/response). Organize writing and editing groups.

*Readings for this week:*
  
  Perri Klass, “Learning the Language” (p. 48)  
  David Berreby, “It Takes a Tribe” (p. 53)  
  Barbara Mellix, “From Outside, In” (p. 76)  
  Sharon Rubin, “Professors, Students, and the Syllabus” (p. 152)  
  Charles Bazerman, “Where is the Classroom?” (p. 181)

**Week Three**

**M 8**\textsuperscript{th} September  
Writing group A: workshop drafts of essay 1.

**W 10**\textsuperscript{th} September  
Writing group B: workshop drafts of essay 1. Introduce pastiche activity

*Readings for this week:*
  
  Revisit the readings related to short essay 1.  
  Start reading the essays for short essay 2.
Unit Two  
Discourse Conventions in the University  

Week Four  

M 15\textsuperscript{th} September  Writing group C: workshop drafts of essay 1.  
W 17\textsuperscript{th} September  Discuss the readings for short essay 2. (students lead discussions)  

Readings for this week:  
- Nancy Sommers, “Between the Drafts” (p. 129)  
- Patricia Limerick, “Dancing with Professors” (p. 119)  
- Joseph Williams and Greg Colomb, “Two Metaphors for Learning and the Novice Writer” (p. 216)  
- Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” (p. 340)  
- Jared Diamond, “Soft Sciences are Harder than Hard Sciences” (p. 360)  
- Ernst Gombrich, “Truth and Stereotype” (p. .709)  
- Roger Schank, “Story Skeletons and Story Fitting” (p. 304)  

Week Five  

M 22\textsuperscript{nd} September  Pastiche assignment.  
W 24\textsuperscript{th} September  Writing group A: workshop draft of essay 2.  Due: final version of essay 1.  

Readings for this week:  
- Revisit readings for short essay 2.  

Week Six  

M 29\textsuperscript{th} September  Writing group B: workshop draft of essay 2.  
W 1\textsuperscript{st} October  Writing group C: workshop draft of essay 2.  

Readings for this week (for short essay 3):  
- Louis Menand, “What Are Universities For?” (p. 254)  
- Paulo Freire, “The Banking Concept of Education” (p. 239)  
- Jane Tompkins, “A Visit to the Museum” (p. 453)  
- Katha Pollitt, “Why We Read: Canon to the Right of Me” (p. 230)  
- Ian Parker, “Absolute PowerPoint: Can a Software Package Edit our Thoughts?” (p. 640)  
- Neil Postman, “Virtual Students, Digital Classroom” (p. 597)  
- Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave” (p. 690)
Unit Three  
Writing Beyond the University

Week Seven

M 6th October  
Discuss the readings for short essay 3.  (Student led discussions)

W 8th October  
Discuss your ideas for the field project.  Due: final version of essay 2.

Readings for this week:  
Revisit the readings for short essay 3.

Week Eight

M 13th October  
Writing group A: workshop draft of essay 3

W 15th October  
Writing group B: workshop draft of essay 3

Readings for this week:  
Revisit the readings for short essay 3.

Unit Four  
Major Fieldwork Projects

Week Nine

M 20th October  
Writing group C: workshop draft of essay 3.

W 22nd October  
Writing group A: workshop detailed prospectus/exploratory draft of field project

Readings for this week:  
Secondary literature related to your project.

Week Ten

M 27th October  
Writing group B: workshop detailed prospectus/exploratory draft of field project

W 29th October  
Writing group C: workshop detailed prospectus/exploratory draft of field project.  Due: final version of essay 3.

Readings for this week:  
Secondary literature related to your project.
Week Eleven
M 3rd November  No class – work on rough full drafts of project
W 5th November  Writing group A: workshop rough full draft of project

Readings for this week:
Secondary literature related to your project.

Week Twelve
M 10th November  Writing group B: workshop rough full draft of project
W 12th November  Writing group C: workshop rough full draft of project

Week Thirteen
M 17th November  Writing group C: formal oral presentations.
W 19th November  Writing group A: revised full draft. FCQs

Week Fourteen -- FALL BREAK

Week Fifteen
M 1st December  Writing group B: revised full draft
W 3rd December  Writing group C: revised full draft Last class: final remarks.

Field Project due: as early as Wednesday 3rd December but no later than Friday 5th December at 3:00 p.m. No final exam.