Special Topics in Writing: Race, Class, and Gender
WRTG-3020 | Section 41 | Fall 2010
Monday/Wednesday, 4:30pm – 5:45pm
MUEN D439

Instructor: Kit McChesney, MFA, MA
Office: GRDV CB185
Office Hours: Tuesday/Wednesday, 1:00pm - 2:30pm (by appointment only -- you must make an appointment)
Email: kit.mcchesney@colorado.edu (best/quickest way to reach me)
Web site: http://www.writingworks.org

Required Texts: (LH=Left Hand Books; CUB=University of Colorado Bookstore in the UMC)

Required Materials
• Writing Journal (bound or loose leaf)

Additional Readings: Additional readings to be announced, and provided through e-Reserve, CULearn, or assigned to you to locate at Norlin and/or via other sources.

Books are available in two locations. Because the CU Bookstore rarely orders an adequate quantity of books to cover the needs of the entire class, I also order from Left Hand Books on Pearl Street (1200 Pearl, Suite 10, across from Ben and Jerry’s, downstairs). Left Hand Books is a great local resource, an independent, progressive, not-for-profit cooperative that supports local writers. LHB carries a selection of progressive texts and trade books you are unlikely to find anywhere else in Boulder. So as you purchase your textbooks, you can support the CU Bookstore and/or Left Hand Books.

About the course
Through sustained inquiry into a selected topic or issue, students will practice advanced forms of academic writing. The course emphasizes analysis, criticism, and argument. Taught as a writing workshop, the course places a premium on substantive, thoughtful revision. The goals for this course include the following, in the categories of critical thinking, rhetorical context, and writing process.

Critical Thinking
• Analyze issues, problems, or opportunities relevant to the subject of study.
• Identify and evaluate information sources for relevance, validity, and credibility.
• Recognize the elements of sound reasoning.
• Pose questions that lead to sustained inquiry and innovative thinking.
• Frame an issue and develop a stance based on evidence and sound reasoning.
• Recognize the elements and logical progression of persuasive arguments.
• Employ rhetorical strategies to produce a coherent and persuasive argument.

Rhetorical Context
• Analyze the societal context of issues, problems, or opportunities under consideration.
• Understand writing and other forms of communication as collaborative dialogues among authors, audiences, editors, critics, and colleagues.
• Recognize and address the imperatives of social responsibility.
• Understand how a variety of constraints influences any rhetorical situation.
• Analyze the values, perspectives, and expectations of different audiences.
• Base rhetorical strategies on a thorough understanding of audience and a highly focused purpose.
• Shape rhetorical strategies from an understanding of the elements of genre, persuasion, voice, and style.
• Use field-specific language appropriate to the academic context of the field of study that is also intelligible to a non-expert audience.
Writing Process

• Understand writing as an ongoing, recursive process that requires multiple drafts as well as various strategies for developing, revising, and editing texts.

• Develop skill in critiquing works in progress, whether your own or the work of colleagues.

• Convey meaning through concise, precise, highly readable language and understand options for shaping meaning through syntax and diction.

• Use standard grammar and mechanics and develop the habit of proofreading.

Portfolios and Reflective Learning

This course centers on the creation of a writing portfolio. If you have taken a studio class in a subject such as music composition, fine arts, or creative writing, you will be familiar with the portfolio as a collection of pieces providing both broad and in-depth views of a comprehensive body of work. Pieces included in a creative portfolio often include informal sketches to finished works, as well as notes, supplementary materials, or any collection of artifacts that represents both the effort and the process, as well as the final product, of a sustained inquiry or exploration.

Two primary types of portfolios serve the student writer: the learning portfolio and the evaluation portfolio. As its name suggests, the learning portfolio affords you the chance to demonstrate your learning as a reflection of the journey, or process, of learning. An evaluation portfolio, sometimes called a “best works” portfolio, also demonstrates the learning process, but its ultimate goal is to showcase product rather than process. In our class, we combine the two models into one. In developing the writing portfolio, you will accumulate all the artifacts of your work for the course, from the first to the last assignments, including every draft, every version, and every revision. Keep everything! And keep it organized!

Evaluation: Assessment and Grades

Evaluation consists of assessment and grades. Assessment is subjective and qualitative, composed of comments on the margins of your papers, verbal feedback in workshops and conferences, and summaries of your performance in commentary on selected works, by instructor and peers. Most important, you will assess and reflect on your own performance. Self-evaluation/assessment is a core part of the reflective learning process, and you will be able to express your own assessment of your efforts in a series of reflective pieces over the course of the semester. The portfolio provides the perfect vehicle for assessment because it contains the comprehensive picture of your efforts.

Grades are the quantitative assessment of your performance, and really have very little to do with the learning process. Studies demonstrate that focusing too much on grades defeats learning, especially in writing courses. If you really expect to learn to write, and therefore earn that stellar grade, focus on the process, not the product. The work of the course should be its own reward, and the graded outcome will reflect the degree of dedication you demonstrate as you move through the learning process.

“So how do I get an ‘A’ in this class?”

One word: Excellence. The “A” reflects a consistent dedication to the pursuit of excellence, in process and product, in attendance, in class participation, all showing that you have pushed yourself to a superior performance. And by definition, the “A” grade is somewhat rare for the simple reason that only a handful of students consistently push themselves to excel. That’s not to say that they can’t, but the truth is, they often don’t. By analogy, does every good swimmer end up at the Olympics? Is every pianist destined to play Carnegie Hall? What distinguishes the merely satisfactory from the good, and the good from the excellent? Surprisingly, the difference is usually due not to talent, but to persistence. The University of Colorado has established the Uniform Grading Policy defining grade classifications as follows. We will discuss and further define these designations and descriptions in class.

Grade/Description

A/Superior, excellent
B/Good, better than average
C/Competent, average
D/Below average
F/Failing

Course Components and Assignments

This course encompasses a variety of activities designed to give you the broadest possible exposure to the topic and to the process of composing in a variety of genres, for varied audiences, and for diverse rhetorical purposes. The coursework is composed of five primary projects: the writing journal, the course discussion forum, and three formal essays.
Course Components | Percentage of Course Grade
--- | ---
Writing Journal | 20%
Class Discussion Forum | 20%
Essay 1 (including all notes, drafts, and revisions) | 10%
Essay 2 (including all notes, drafts, and revisions) | 20%
Essay 3 (including all notes, drafts, and revisions) | 30%

**Class Participation and Attendance**

Full class participation is absolutely essential, and your complete presence—physical and intellectual—is required. Discussion and writing intensive, this course is a creative, collaborative venture among all the writers in the class. In addition to the work we do as a group, students work collaboratively with peer partners and small groups during the course, both in class and online. Every person’s input is important to the collective success of the course, and to each person’s progress. Every student in the course should be prepared to actively participate in the course, every day.

*Note: Please turn off all electronic devices while in class. If you are unable to be completely present for the entirety of the class, expect to be counted absent. If I see that you are more interested in your electronic devices than in being present in class, I reserve the right to mark you absent for that day.*

The attendance policy is designed to make clear the importance of being in class every day. Each student will be permitted three unexcused absences during the semester, no questions asked, regardless of the reason. With the fourth absence, the final course grade will be reduced by one full letter-grade. The fifth absence reduces the grade by another full letter-grade. With six absences, you will fail the course, regardless of the quality of your work. You may also be administratively dropped from the course if you miss two or more class sessions during the first two weeks of the course.

*Note: Be aware that extracurricular activities (fraternity or sorority events, for instance) do not qualify as excused absences, so use those three “free passes” sparingly.*

**What to do if you miss a class**

Every class is a unique, interactive, unrepeatable event. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact your peer partner or another class member to find out what happened in class that day. It is not my responsibility to recreate the content of a class for you if you are absent. Ask another class member for that day’s details. And do come to the next class fully prepared as if you had not missed class. If you don’t understand something we’ve covered, I am more than happy to help you, but you need to make the effort to apprise yourself of the day’s activities prior to contacting me. We will be writing in class every day, and something will be due each day, so if you miss a class, you will be required to make up that work before the next meeting of the class (so if you miss Monday’s writing assignment, you should bring it to Wednesday’s class).

**Office Conferences**

My office is an extension of the classroom, and I keep office hours so you can meet with me to discuss any aspect of your course work. **If you plan to visit during office hours, you must make an appointment in advance.** Making an appointment for a specific time creates a commitment on your part to show up and make that appointment productive. **Come to the meeting fully prepared.** Each student will also be required to attend at least one regularly scheduled conference during the semester outside regular class hours. If you cannot attend a scheduled conference, you must notify me **at least 24 hours in advance** of your plans to cancel. Your timely cancellation will give another student a chance to take your place. If you miss a meeting without contacting me, the missed meeting will be considered an absence, just as if you had missed a regularly scheduled class.

**Contact/Email**

Back in the twentieth century, when I was a college student, to contact an instructor or professor outside class or office hours was not only impossible, it was usually unnecessary. The advent of email has created the mistaken impression that we are “always on,” and accessible at all hours of the day and night. Not so. Please note that I check email once daily, in the mornings, on my teaching days (Monday through Thursday). I do not check email on Friday or on the weekend. My primary motive for placing boundaries around my accessibility is to encourage you to depend upon your own considerable resources to take care of yourself. Most of the questions students ask me in
hurriedly composed emails sent in the wee hours are already addressed by the syllabus and schedule, and in the
texts, and other information can be obtained from peers in class.

If you have questions that require contact with me, please make an appointment to see me on campus during office
hours. Should you choose to send me email, please keep correspondence brief and to the point. **Five sentences is
a good rule of thumb, and a great exercise in learning to write concisely.** Also note that I do not discuss grades,
assessments, or any other involved issues over email.

**The Writing Center**

If you need additional instruction and help with your writing and the writing process, visit The Writing Center at
Norlin Library (Norlin E-111). Professional writing consultants are available to help you with all aspects of the writing
process. Although I do not give credit to students for visits to the center, I guarantee that your writing will improve
dramatically if you take advantage of this resource. The one-on-one instruction provided by the consultants is
outstanding, and best of all, free! All consultants are or have been writing instructors for the PWR, so you can be
sure that you will receive top-quality instruction. I encourage you to visit the center often. Visit the center Web site at
http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html for more information, to register, or to schedule an appointment.

**University Policies and Procedures**

The Honor Code

http://www.colorado.edu/honorcode

**On my honor as a University of Colorado at Boulder student I have neither given nor received unauthorized
assistance on this work.**

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 and those students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity
policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member involved and non-academic sanctions
given by the Honor Code Council (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion).

Please refer to http://www.colorado.edu/honorcode to view the specific guidelines. If you have any questions related
to this policy, please contact the Honor Code Council at honor@colorado.edu.

**Religious observance and attendance**

Campus policy regarding religious/spiritual observances requires that I make every effort to reasonably and fairly
deal with all students who, because of religious or spiritual obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams,
assignments, or required attendance. In this class, your right to religious observance is respected, and encouraged.
If you must be absent or cannot submit an assignment due to conflicts with religious/spiritual services or
observances, please notify me as early in the semester as you can. For further details on University of Colorado
policy regarding religious observances, visit http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

**Classroom behavior**

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.

Note: Please turn off cell phones, iPods, laptops, and any other electronics while in class. For further information
about appropriate classroom demeanor, visit http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html.

**Disability issues**

If you qualify for accommodation due to disability, please notify Disability Services as soon as possible when the
course begins so that your needs may be addressed in a timely manner. Disability Services determines
accommodations based on documented disabilities. You may contact them at 303-492-8671, in Willard 322, and at
http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

**Discrimination and sexual harassment**

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 he or she has been the subject of discrimination or
harassment based on 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 are located at http://www.colorado.edu/odh.