WRTG 3020 Sect. 56 “Writing about The New York Times”
6:00-7:15 HUMN 160
Spring Term 2011

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Office: ENVD 1B30B. Enter the ENVD nearest the Power Station and go downstairs to the end of the hall. Enter the PWR office on your left. Go in then take your first right down the long corridor. My office is the third bay on your left all the way back to the window. Faculty mailboxes are near the PWR office.

Course Overview:
“Writing About The New York Times” is a writing seminar that examines the way rhetoric is used in the nation’s leading newspaper – both in its news reporting as well as on its opinion pages. As America’s “newspaper of record,” The Times is influential in stimulating and shaping public discussion on current events. As such, you will study the reporting of The Times and respond as engaged citizens do – by writing letters to the editor and crafting opinion pieces about pressing issues of our times.

The writing assignments will involve close reading and critical thinking designed to help you move from description to analysis to argumentation. The major assignments will involve examining and responding to the “opinion pages”: The Times editorials along with guest and regular columns from writers such as David Brooks, Bob Herbert, Gail Collins, Thomas Friedman, and Paul Krugman. These writers’ rhetorical strategies will be studied for their effectiveness in bringing depth and clarity to the public discussion of complex issues.

We will also read extensive media criticism of mainstream media and The Times specifically, focusing on nationally-recognized critics such as Gregory Mantsios, Jeff Cohen, Robert McChesney, Bill Moyers, and Brent Cunningham. By studying a series of news articles in a specific publication, you will assess to what extent their criticisms are valid.

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 with evidence appropriate for its defense
- Raise and address 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

Course Texts:

- A New York Times subscription Monday through Friday (Phone 1-888-698-2655 or 1-800-698-6347). Give them my name and course name and number to obtain the student discount. Order a paper subscription for the first 4 weeks.

- Articles on media criticism by recognized experts posted on CU-Learn. These articles include “Propaganda from the Middle of the Road” by Jeff Cohen, which discusses system-supporting biases; Brett Cunningham’s “Rethinking Objectivity,” questioning traditional notions of “objectivity;” Gregory Mantsios’ “Media Magic” on obscuring class distinctions; and works from linguist George Lakoff on identifying rhetoric that confirms readers’ cognitive biases. These authors’ critiques will be used as theoretical bases for assessing the veracity of these ideas as evidenced in The Times reporting.

- Media Website-- Fair and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a non-profit media-watch organization which publishes Extra! an online journal. FAIR contains articles on corporate ownership, advertiser influence, telecommunications policy, censorship and other media issues: http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4

- Two nationally recognized rhetoric and composition websites: “Silva Rhetoricae” (humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Silva.htm) will provide essential information about the history of rhetoric, different writing appeals (logos, pathos, ethos), and rhetorical terms which will give you a fuller understanding of how to address the challenges of a given rhetorical situation. Purdue University’s OWL (on-line writing lab) will help you with various points of writing: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

- Instructor Handouts on writing and rhetoric. “Form and the Essay” by Paul Murphy will direct students to effective rhetorical organization from the reader’s perspective. http://spot.colorado.edu/~fredrice/intro.html. Excerpts from Rosenwasser and Stephen’s Writing Analytically will help move students from close reading to pattern observation to thesis formulation.

- Your classmates’ essays will constitute a central “text” of the course. You will need to download copies of their work as well as print copies of your own for class workshops. Plan on spending approximately $15 for copying/printing costs.

- Pocket Keys for Writers (Optional) by Ann Raimes (3rd Edition). If you have difficulty with small points of grammar, etc please purchase this text.

Major Assignments:

A Letter to the Editor assignment will require you to read The Times regularly to locate an article to which you wish to respond. Using the specific genre conventions of The Times letters, you will direct your letter to the educated, professional, sophisticated Times readership. The skill of crafting a compact, highly concise piece of writing is transferrable to writing in all disciplines and professions.

Writing a Summary of an Argument will require you to deconstruct the steps of an argument on related to the media in order to recreate it in miniature. This summary
will ground you in a theoretical framework on which to base an analytic essay. The
skill of summary writing is useful in graduate studies as well as in business, law,
education, and the social sciences.

A Critique/Analysis of a Times’ Columnist will give you the opportunity to lead the
class through a close reading of a columnist’s argument in order to uncover its
rhetorical strategies and possibly argumentative fallacies. Studying an individual
columnist’s writing will help you expand your existing repertoire of syntactical choices,
lexicon, voice, tone, use of research, and rhetorical strategies. This critique will be done
with peers presenting their critical analysis and discussion on PowerPoint. Group
critiques prepare students for presentations in many professions.

Extending the analytic skills of the Critique, an Analytic Essay assignment will require
you to write a journalism-based critical analysis of The Times’ coverage of a specific
national or international issue. You will use a theoretical framework on class, bias, or
cognition as a lens through which to examine a set of topic-based articles. This thesis
driven essay will require a high-level of synthesis of theory with original observations
applicable to writing in law, social and political sciences, and education.

A final Argumentative Essay will involve crafting an implicit argument (in the form of
a Sunday Times feature article,) or an explicit argument which refutes criticism of a Times
columnist. This assignment will require you to pay close attention to anticipating
readers’ objections and refuting them in rhetorically appropriate ways. This highly
structured assignment will strengthen your analytic and argumentative abilities for
application in advanced civic contexts, law, business, environmental fields, and
journalism/public relations.

Workshop Format:
This class will be conducted as a Workshop. This means that we will read one another’s
writing and collectively discuss the ideas presented, along with offering suggestions for
how to strengthen each piece. This 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 include all aspects of writing and
rhetoric including such things as identifying flaws in logic, strengthening organization,
questioning underlying assumptions, followed by giving constructive suggestions for
their improvement. In the workshop of the two major papers, you will be assigned to
present a peer review of a classmate’s draft along with handing in a written critique.

All essays on the workshop schedule will be distributed in hard copy during the
previous class. All essays must pass through the workshop process (i.e., one full
workshop for the two major essays and at least one review for the short one) in order to receive a grade. Email submissions of drafts will reduce your grade.

**Quizzes:** As you study the rhetorical strategies used on the opinion pages of *The Times*, you will be given quizzes over during the first five weeks of the course. You will be notified when the quizzes are and which pieces will be covered.

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

- Letter to the Editor: 5%
- Summary of an Argument: 10%
- Short writings: 15%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Columnist Critique: 10%
- Quality of class participation, timely submission of drafts, and peer reviews: 15%
- Analytic Essay: 15%
- Argumentative Essay: 15%

Please 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 essay 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 e.g. A- to B+. 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 from one of your classmates.

**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.

**NOTE:** 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 frustration and disappointment in this course.
Colorado Commission on Higher Education Criteria
The course is intended for juniors and seniors in humanities-related degree programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. This 3000-level course meets CCHE criteria for an Advanced Writing Course (GT-CO3) in the Colorado system of higher education in the following:

Rhetorical Knowledge
Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, involves learning to shape one’s argument for a particular purpose and audience in a particular context. Knowledge of rhetoric sharpens one’s ability to choose the most effective evidence, reasoning, and communication strategies for a given audience and purpose. By closely analyzing The New York Times’ opinion pages, we will be able to study the range of rhetorical strategies used by some of America’s most skilled journalists: David Brooks, Bob Herbert, Gail Collins, Thomas Friedman, Maureen Dowd, and Paul Krugman. Reading these exemplary columns will help you gain a deeper understanding of rhetorical concepts such as voice, tone, and structure. Various concepts will be taught through instructor handouts derived from Rosenwasser and Stephen’s Writing Analytically. One in particular, the practice of making observations or “noticing” to create an “analytical habit of mind,” will be employed to help you formulate your claims for your argumentative essay.

Writing Process
This course offers opportunities to learn about audience-centered writing by focusing on peer reviews of work in progress. By actively participating in a series of small- and whole-class workshops of drafts and by revising your own writing in light of reader feedback, you’ll develop the ability to critique your own work with the same insight and honesty with which you’ll learn to critique the work of others. Through this approach, you’ll discover the ways that revision works as an ongoing, recursive process in academic and professional writing. You will also have opportunities to integrate various technologies (e.g. Internet search engines, electronic discipline-specific databases, CU-Learn Discussions) into your critical analyses and academic arguments while developing advanced information literacy skills pertinent to your research area. You’ll collaborate with classmates in preparing a close reading, analysis, and discussion of a journalist’s work using PowerPoint. Through this, you will try to meet the demands of your peers who enjoy complex ideas and a lively engagement with the text.

Conventions
In this course, you will tailor your writing – in both style and form— to suit the expectation of sophisticated readers of such publications as The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, and Harper’s.
Effective application
Each assignment in the course is geared to a real-world audience – including members of your discipline or professional and potential employers. As we progress, you will become familiar with writing in a disciplinary or specialized rhetorical situation, even as you make your work accessible to secondary audience in other related fields.

Other Important Policies:
Cell phones and computers: Once class begins, you need to put your phones out of sight – yours and mine– and silence them. Texting is not allowed under any circumstances. If you need to input your classmates’ emails or other information, wait until after class. If you use text or phone during class time, you will be marked absent. Laptops are not needed except on rare occasions. Transcribe your notes onto a computer outside of class.

Students with Special Needs
The University of Colorado makes reasonable accommodations for those with documented disabilities. Students should notify the counselor at Disability Services located in the Center for Community (C4C), Suite N200 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
WRTG 3020
Feb. 13, 2011
Essay 1, Draft 3

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 3020-056 Tentative Course Schedule
“Writing About the New York Times” Spring 2011

Week One
M 1/10 Overview of Course and Introduction; Description/Analysis/Argumentation.
For Wed. Get your subscription and read at least 10 articles. What makes reading the Times different from reading other newspapers? Bring 2 observations about the quality of reporting you see, the range of issues, or journalistic style on Wed. Prepare to discuss the 3-4 Times editorials from Tuesday’s paper.

W 1/12 The New York Times in context; Discuss Tuesday’s Section A including Editorials/Op-Eds
For Wed: Read "Rethinking Objectivity" by Brent Cunningham (CU-Learn) Bring 4-5 sentences explaining what Cunningham is trying to tell us and why it is important. Read Section A everyday quickly, concentrating on the Editorial and Op-Ed pages. Read Bill Moyer’s speech (CU-Learn) what does Moyers identify as the factors undermining American democracy? How does he support his claim of “plutocracy”? What gives Moyers credibility to make these claims? Write 250 typed words answering these questions.

Week Two
M 1/17 MLK Day – No class

W 1/19 Discuss Cunningham, Moyers; Quiz on Mon and Tuesday’s Ed/Op-Ed major pieces (notes permitted);
For Mon: Read Section A M-F, including all opinion pieces and bring Monday’s paper to class for quiz; What subjects seem to be prioritized in the Times? What subjects/perspectives do you find absent? To what extent does the Times seem to be a “liberal” or “conservative” paper in your estimation? Do the most “important” articles appear on the front page? Prepare to discuss these questions on Mon. For Tues: Write a Letter to the Editor based on a Times article published since 1/10/11. (Assignment posted on CU-Learn) Post and reply no later than Tues 1/25.

Week Three
M 1/24 Quiz on Ed/Op-Eds; Discussion of above.
For Tues: After you post your letter, comment on two of your classmates’ letters before Wed.
For Wed: Read “Media Magic” by Gregory Mantsios (CU-Learn). Bring 3-4 typed sentences explaining about what Mantsios is telling readers.
W 1/26 Discuss “Media Magic”; Discuss your letters to the editor. Instructor brings in copies.

For Mon: Read “Propaganda from the Middle of the Road: The Centrist Ideology of the News Media” by Jeff Cohen (CU-Learn); Read “Writing from the Center: The New York Times and the Florida Election Dispute” by Andrew Sheldon (CU-Learn); Annotate the structure of each author’s argument on your printed copy: occasion, thesis, sub claims, evidence, recommendation in prep for class discussion. Always download and bring hard copies to be discussed to class. Letter to the Editor DUE Thurs 1/27. Email to instructor.

Week Four
1/31 Discuss Cohen, Sheldon; effective summary writing; rhetorical strategies

For Wed: Bring a 1 ½ page typed summary of Cohen or Mantsios. Make 4 copies.

2/2 Workshop summaries. Discuss Columnist Critique Assignment.
For Mon: Revise summary; Read excerpt from Writing Analytically (CU-Learn). Complete claims/assertion Handout.

Week Five
2/7 Summary DUE. Op Ed Quiz; Discuss claims/assertion handout;

For Wed: Read NYT article TBA and write analytic claim.

2/9 Discuss claims based on the article.
For Mon: Read 3+ columns by regular columnists Friedman, Brooks

Week Six
2/14 Critiques on Friedman, Brooks.
For Wed: Watch interview with Wikileaks founder (CU-Learn) How does Wikileaks have the potential to do good as well as to do harm to US interests? What gives Assange credibility? Type approx. 200 words. Read 3+ columns by Times columnist Krugman.

2/16 Discuss Wikileaks and its impact on journalism; Critique on Krugman.
For Mon: Read 3+ columns by regular columnists Collins, Dowd (Sun).

Week Seven
2/21 Critiques on Collins, Dowd
For Wed: Prepare essay proposal. Read “Think Tank Scholarship” (CU-Learn); Read 3+ columns by regular columnist Herbert.

2/23 Proposal for Analytic Essay due; Critique on Herbert. How to craft a strong thesis statement
For Mon: Investigate area of interest.
Rhetorical Focus:
2/28 21 Individual Conference with instructor to discuss analytic essay plan.
For Wed: Read handout on introductions.

3/2 Discuss introductions: contextualizing one’s thesis
For Mon: Write introduction or body paragraph or detailed outline of paper to workshop in small groups. Read “The Military’s Media” (CU-Learn)

Week Nine
3/7 Workshop analytic essays
For Wed: Reading TBA. Continue to work on essay.

3/9 Workshop analytic essays
For Mon: Reading TBA. Continue to work on essay.

Week Ten
3/14 Workshop analytic essays; peer reviews
For Wed: Reading TBA

3/16 Workshop analytic essays; peer reviews

Week Eleven
Happy Spring Break!

Week Twelve
3/28 Analytic Essay DUE. In-class reflection on this essay. Newspaper comparisons of the same event: what do differences indicate?
For Wed: Read article comparisons. (CU-Learn)

3/30 Discuss comparisons;
For Mon: Assemble sources, do close readings on articles, prepare first draft of argument.

Week Thirteen
4/4 Workshop final paper; peer reviews

4/6 Workshop final paper; peer reviews

Week Fourteen
4/11 Workshop final paper; peer reviews

4/13 Workshop final paper; peer reviews

Week Fifteen
4/18 Editing Workshop.

4/20 **Argumentative Essay DUE.** FCQs; Reflective Writing; Class discussion

Week Sixteen
4/25 Review of course concepts.

4/27 Final in-class writing