

WRT 150: Writing and Critical Reasoning: Thematic Approaches

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Greetings and Welcome

Office Hours: 9:50-10:50am T/Th

Fall 2014

Law and Social Justice

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Writing 150 is designed to encourage students to value the process of writing as a learning activity – not merely a single outcome. Writing provides the opportunity to explore how we understand the world and ourselves. The primary class goal is to help you develop a writing process that can work for you beyond the content of this course and through the rest of your educational journey. Over the coming weeks, you will develop and sharpen your critical thinking skills, cultivate critical reading skills, conduct intertextual argument and analysis, and produce writing that will help you enter the world of academic discourse. You will have opportunities to recognize writing as a craft that requires an awareness of audience, style and syntax. Understanding writing as process allows for writing to be a tool for discovery— discovery of things that make learning (in and out of the academy) long lasting.

COURSE THEME

This WRT 150 course theme is law and social justice. The theme is designed to invite students from any academic discipline to strengthen their writing and critical reasoning skills while exploring the interdisciplinarity of law, justice, and social justice. Students will develop their abilities to enter the academic discourses related to law and social justice from the standpoint of their own interests and experiences. Along the way, students will have the opportunity to make intellectual discoveries about a variety of topics within the theme while maintaining a clear focus on rhetorical argument. Please note: rhetorical argument requires that you demonstrate how your experiences and discoveries have helped you arrive at your critically reasoned conclusion(s). Consequently, the theme should serve as a common 'text' for all of us to consider and respond to together as we cultivate our writing and critical reasoning skills.



COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

- Readings: The readings will appear as PDF files in Dropbox and/or Blackboard
Folder: Buy and use a two-pocket folder to hand in essays and prewriting activities
Printing: You will need to print your Assignments and any of the prewriting associated with them.
Laptops: Laptops are encouraged at every session

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Participation: 5%
Ancillary Writing Activities: 15%
Writing Project 1, 4-6 Pages ("How LSJ Intersects with my Life World"): 10% (Due 9/16)
Writing Project 2, 5-7 Pages ("Where I Enter the Conversation on LSJ"): 15% (Due 10/2)
Writing Project 3, 4-6 Pages ("Who is Already Discussing LSJ"): 20% (Due 11/6)
Writing Project 4, 6-8 Pages, and Portfolio ("What We Need to Do about LSJ"): 35% (Due 12/4)

EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Participation

This class is run as a workshop with lots of group discussion, small group work, and in-class activities. Your attendance, participation, and preparation are vital to the success of each class session and the course as a whole.

You should come to each class prepared and ready to actively participate. Active participation includes:

- bringing your readings and work when they are due,
- contributing verbally to discussions,
- listening actively,
- engaging with my input as well as your classmates' comments in small group and partner activities,
- and completing in-class writing thoughtfully
- bring your Writing Journal (described below) to every class session

Workshopping means that you will be sharing your work and reading your classmates' work during the majority of our class sessions. Another critical thinking skill you will learn in this course is the ability to ask for and provide constructive feedback on your own and your peers' writing. This means your classmates may read any assignment you turn in, so always put forth your best effort and only submit pieces you don't mind having others read.

We will often be discussing sensitive topics, so please be ready to challenge your own assumptions first, then respectfully voice your opinions. Offensive language or speech that violates the USC ethics codes will not be tolerated. If you are ever uncomfortable about a class discussion, talk to me about it as soon as possible.

Ancillary Work

Ancillary writing activities are short but in-depth writing assignments designed to promote class discussion and create a common language in writing workshops, all of which should be viewed as important stepping stones toward completion of the Writing Projects due for the course. Some ancillary activities will be in class, handwritten, typed, submitted through various online mechanisms (Dropbox, Blackboard,) etc. Ancillary assignments will be graded

as follows: exceptionally thorough, well organized, and well thought-out (3 points), acceptably organized and thoughtful (2 points), and weak (1 point). Combined, the ancillary work will total 15% of your grade (or the equivalent of Writing Project 2), so it's in your best interest to complete them with care. All ancillary is due on the stipulated date and *cannot be made up after that point*. Below are descriptions of some of the regular ancillary activities you should anticipate and plan for re: time management.

Quizzes

For every assigned reading, expect there to be an in-class quiz at the start of the class meeting for which that reading is due. (In other words, if a reading is due on Wednesday, expect that there will be a quiz when you walk in the door on Wednesday). The quizzes will require you to share a short, written response (around 150 words) to a question about either the single or several reading(s) assigned for that day. Although these quizzes are informal, you should convey your ideas with a professional audience in mind.

Writing Journal (Backboard)

Journaling provides every writer an opportunity to make connections: connect course concepts to personal experiences, connect the act of writing to discovering and journeying. The last five minutes of every class session will end with your writing reflections in your Writing Journal. These entries can be written as reflections on the coursework as a whole, a specific class discussion, a reading from the week, a topic related to the course topics or the act of writing in any way. I will be the only audience for these entries, so your tone may be very informal. I require that you write one (1) journal entry (150 words) per week on your own (outside of class time). Even if you are absent you should write so that you have a total of at least 24 entries (approximately 12 outside of class and 12 from the allotted class journaling time).

Discovery Memos

As we progress through the assignments, each one will require some background knowledge on the type of writing you will pursue. Throughout the semester, you will be asked to submit Discovery Memos on specific topics (listed below). Each Discovery Memo should be approximately 250-500 words in length (single spaced is fine), typed, and in hard copy.

- Discovery Memo #1: Re-understanding the Term 'Law'
- Discovery Memo #2: Understanding Your Skeptic(s)
- Discovery Memo #3: Narrowing Your Topic to an Issue and a Main Claim
- Discovery Memo #4: Recognizing Stakeholders for your Social Justice Issue

Other Writings

For Writing Project #3 you will be asked to write a few separate components, apart from the primary paper for the project. Give these items a great deal of attention. Your level of dedication to and completion of the ancillary work does have a strong impact on your course grade.

All of your invention and other preliminary writing work is important as you progress toward a submittable assignment for your Writing Projects. Make sure to keep and submit all of these pieces and place them in your folders when you hand in your Writing Projects. While I will not grade these early writings, I will factor them into your Ancillary Work grade.

Attendance

Your presence in every session is important to me, to your classmates, and to your own writing process. Be here. You'll miss a lot when you're not.

That said, I recognize that life happens. You may miss two (2) class periods over the course of the semester with *no penalty*. You don't need to provide a justification for your absence. For the first two absences, there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

More than two weeks of absences will result in a zeroing out your attendance grade for the course. Beyond that number of absences, with or without legitimate excuse, your absences may become grounds for failure. In short, students who miss a lot of classes almost always do worse on their papers than they would if they attended, making their final course grades even lower. If you are facing difficulties at any point in the semester please speak with me.

NOTE: You are still responsible for timely submission of any work that is due, even if you are unable to attend. I will not provide a reprieve from a due date because of an absence, so regular penalties will apply to late work resulting from an absence. If you miss a class, make sure you get in touch with a classmate or me to ask about what you missed. Also check Dropbox for any handouts or materials.

Excused absences are permitted and include documented family or personal emergencies or a university-sponsored events which gives administrative clearance through the department. You are responsible for informing me via email at least one week prior to any university-sponsored event which will take you out of class.

Lateness is distracting and disruptive. Two (2) lates are disruptive but I will overlook them. After that point, two (2) lates will equal one (1) absence. Students who arrive later than 20 minutes after the start of class will be marked absent, but will be allowed to remain for the session to avoid missing relevant information and exchanges.

Conferences and Office Hours

Throughout the term you'll be meeting with me to discuss your progress in the course and your writing process. Sometimes class sessions will be used to facilitate our meetings. Absence from a conference session counts as a class absence.

Conferencing one-on-one allows me to get to know you individually as writers - your strengths, challenges, and ideas. For these meetings to work well, you need to be prepared. Bring all required pre-writing or drafting activities with you to your meeting with me so we can make the most of our time and if requested bring print-outs of your writings.

Email

I will use email and other electronic communication a lot throughout the course. Please check your email and read any emails from me carefully – they will contain important course information.

I will answer your email(s) within 48 hours (Monday-Thursday) or 60 hours (Friday-Sunday), often much sooner. If you do not receive an email response from me within those parameters, it means I did not receive your email.

NOTE: I will not comment on full drafts over email. If you'd like to discuss a draft before it is due I'm happy to do so in person during office hours. If you would like email feedback on your writing, you can send me no more than one paragraph of your essay with three focused questions so I can respond directly to your concerns within my stated 48 or 60-hour response period. I will be strict with this policy so my response to an email without questions will simply be to ask for those questions.

Laptops/Cell Phones

Laptops are allowed (and encouraged) in class, but only when I have asked for them to be out on the tables/desks. When we are not using them for a class exercise, I expect them to be out of arm's reach. When we are using laptops, they are to be used solely as tools for the course. I will walk around a lot to speak with each of you on the days we use them and your participation grade will suffer greatly if you are found doing other work or allowing yourself to be distracted by non-class related activities. Please keep phones off/silent and away at all times during class. Your engagement during class necessitates that you refrain from texting and/or looking at your phone during class.

Deadlines

Essays are due at the beginning of class. If they are not there when class starts, they are considered late. For each class period that an essay is late, you lose a third of a grade (B to B-, for example). I will not accept papers that are more than 3 class periods late.

Logistics for Assignment Deadlines:

- All assignments must be submitted in a two pocket folder;
- The folder must include all pre-writing materials and rough drafts;
- Every essay must be handed in as a hard copy (stapled, please!) in class;
- Every essay must be uploaded to Turnitin on its due date so I have an e-file of it as well.

Essay Format

Essays should conform to MLA style format (except for the heading, which I prefer single spaced as described below). Essays need to be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins. Number the pages. Do not insert extra spaces between paragraphs. If appropriate, include a properly formatted MLA style works cited page. The works cited page does not count in the page count. Do not include a cover page – center the title (yes, each essay should include a title) above the first paragraph. The top, left hand corner of each assignment should contain the following items (single space this administrative information so that your paper doesn't start halfway down the page):

Your Name

My Name (Instructor: DeAnna M. Rivera)

WRIT 150, Section Number

Date

Assignment # ____

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

USC highly values academic integrity and plagiarism undermines this integrity. A plagiarized paper will receive an "F" and may result in failure of the course.

While you are welcome to draw upon knowledge from current classes, note that you *may not hand in recycled papers*. For the last two papers, I expect you to familiarize yourself with scholarly journals to develop and support your arguments as you draw on your considerable critical thinking skills to analyze and assess them for your own – and newly realized –claims.

Blackboard and TurnitIn

I will upload all course materials on Blackboard so that you have them in soft copy, and will sometimes post pictures of class notes/activities. You also need to upload your final assignment to TurnitIn on its due date in addition to submitting it in its 2-pocket folder.

Grading

We will discuss writing-as-process throughout the course and I will share tools to help you adapt your process to the high expectations of your discourse community. As your writing coach, I teach process and as your instructor I grade product. You will produce four assignments, each of which will be graded based on the rubric I will share with you in soft-copy (via Blackboard and/or Dropbox).

Study the rubric. Recognize the criteria by which your work will be assessed. Writing 150 is one of the most difficult courses you will take, but it is not an impossible one. Please note that the average final grade for lower-division writing at USC, regardless of the professor, is a B. If you have questions or concerns about your grade, please meet with me during office hours. I recommend that you wait for 48 hours to think about and process a grade, *ie*: really study the paper by comparing it to the rubric, before meeting with me.

GOOD PRACTICES

Keep all work

Because we look at writing as a process, it's important that you are able to look back at work you've done over the course of the semester. Keep all hand-outs, class notes, and *especially* earlier drafts of essays with comments from me or your classmates. Back up all digital files and save copies of links to ALL sources that you use when conducting research. This included backing up your work in several hard drives if necessary – as tech failures are not to be used an excuse for late submissions.

Proofread your work

Read your work outloud to a friend. Read it outloud to yourself. Read the sentences in reverse order – last sentence to first – so you can look critically at each sentence. (This helps you avoid skimming, which you will tend to do since you know your own paper all too well in those hours before submitting it). Find ways to proofread that will help you catch those last-minute mistakes before submitting it to me – and especially before submitting it to your portfolio.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Writing Center

The Writing Center (located in THH 216) offers 30-minute, one-on-one appointments with trained consultants as well as small-group writing workshops. The staff is prepared to help you at *any* stage of the writing process, including the beginning (before you've written even one

word), so please take advantage of their services! Call them at 213-740-3691 to make an appointment.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification can be obtained from DSP; please make sure that this letter is delivered to me as soon as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and can be contacted at (213) 740-0776.

Syllabus Subject to Change:

At any point during the term, I might alter the syllabus and its corresponding Schedule of Assignments to better accommodate the needs of the class. If I make changes, I will send an email notification and then re-post the revised syllabus to Blackboard/Dropbox.