

Writing 340 Advanced Writing in the Health Sciences Perspectives on Global Health

Faculty Contact:

Dr. Ashley S. Karlin
The Writing Program
Office: JEF 215
Email: akarlin@usc.edu

Class Meetings:

Tues, Thurs
9:30-10:50 GFS 111
11-12:20 GFS 112

Overview:

From Global Medical Brigades to Doctors Without Borders, undergraduates, medical students, and healthcare professionals have multiple opportunities to take their skills and services across the globe to places that desperately need their expertise and resources. The writing projects in this section of WRIT 340 will prepare students with interests in global health, public health initiatives, and service-abroad programs to critically examine their cross-cultural experiences, travel, and service with maturity, insight, and a strong foundational understanding of the communities they wish to serve.

Students who take this section of Writing 340 will also have the option to apply for a month-long Problems Without Passports and Writing 440 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, which will run May-June 2015. The Writing 340 will offer specific preparation for the PWP, which combines medical service, non-profit work, and intensive writing, but is relevant to any student who plans to serve abroad.

The four writing projects for the Writing 340 portion of the sequence—outlined in greater detail below—ask students to examine fully, and with nuance, what it means to travel and what it means to ‘serve.’ As such, these writing projects will prepare them for their future work as health professionals interested in serving in a global context. The first assignment asks students to think critically about “service” and “help” by considering situations in which helping behaviors might actually not help much at all. The second assignment adds the dimension of intercultural communication to the mix. It will prepare students not just to serve but to serve culturally diverse populations. Students will examine the relationship between language and culture, as well as the roots of intercultural miscommunication, to come up with strategies to identify and address such miscommunications. The third assignment is a critical reflection on traveling away from home. Students will analyze global medical narratives as they address the question, “beyond a fun experience or a resume entry, why might we leave “home” to learn and to serve?” The fourth writing assignment will ask students to turn the microscope to their own motivation to join the health professions. In this manner, they will start their journey with greater self-knowledge and, simultaneously, prepare for writing career narratives in the course blog and AMCAS personal statements. For those who participate in the Writing 440 course in Haiti, this final assignment will be revisited at the end of our travel.

2. Course Objectives

USC pre-health students are encouraged to participate in study abroad at some point during their junior year. By this point in their time at USC, many students have already had some global experiences and have participated in programs like Global Medical Brigades or MedLife. With the “writing as epistemic” philosophy of the Writing Program as our guide, the course will boost USC pre-health students’ skillsets, capacities, and knowledge in three key areas:

1) Global Competence:

One core tenet of the Writing Program is that we ‘know’ what we write. Many students, especially in the health sciences, travel abroad to demonstrate global competence on their application and out of a genuine, authentic desire to help others. However, most of the descriptions of service-abroad experiences provided by students in person and in fellowship and medical school applications offer only shallow understanding of these experiences. For the most part, students lack the skills or training to articulate those experiences with specificity and nuance. This course will provide them with tools for introspection and communication prior to travel. It will prepare students to decipher, retain, and articulate their global experiences.

2) Humanizing Medicine:

The curriculum of this course contributes to larger, national movements to humanize medicine. Top medical schools seek the “empathy factor” in their prospective students. The MCAT 2015 behavioral science/social science element is one attempt to prepare students for clinical practice, but many have noted that memorizing the concepts does not necessarily indicate deft application. Additionally, service abroad often unwittingly fosters more superficial, temporary relationships between students and the people they serve. This course will facilitate greater preparation for service-abroad programs and the tools to process, understand, and articulate experiences that they have already had. It will also prepare students to make the best of short-term, temporary interactions, since we cannot always build long-term relationships, and the opportunity, via the PWP, to develop longer-term partnerships in Haiti.

3) Critical Reflection on Service:

Strong pre-health students will already have accumulated a number of hours volunteering in hospitals, shadowing physicians, and working front-desks in medical offices. This course will ask students to step back and examine *why* they are doing all of this work at a point when many students are starting to burn out in the pursuit of building their curriculum vitae. This trip will give students the opportunity to do clinical service abroad, while grounding that service in a

strong understanding of the geopolitical, socioeconomic conditions of the place in which they serve. The writing they produce will teach them to address the needs of an external audience in addition to their own developing personal narratives.

These three elements contribute to student writing that connotes maturity, empathy, and potential for future growth. While empathy is, in part, a feeling, it also gives rise to action and specific sets of helping behavior (cf. Kohut, 1981; Batson, 2009). It can accordingly be invoked by teaching students about rhetorical situations. To articulate these compassionate feelings and empathic actions in authentic, honest ways is a key to writing an effective, powerful personal statement. With the right observational and analytical tools in place *before* they travel, students can start to process their experiences more efficiently and meaningfully, and have the discipline to continue to do so over the course of their medical careers.

3. Writing Prompts and Course Readings for WRIT 340, Spring 2017:

The following section outlines the four writing projects for this Writing 340 course. These will each include short readings on intercultural communication theory, analyses of altruism and service across cultures, and a sampling of creative non-fiction and travel writing. Students will also be expected to incorporate outside sources (primary and secondary) in every assignment. The writing prompts for this 340 curriculum will ask students to examine their assumptions about travel, service, and cross-cultural exchange, as well as how these assumptions come to bear on their professional identities and career aspirations.

Writing Project 1: Altruism and Service Across Cultures

The second and third writing prompts work from the understanding that students joined this particular course for a reason – namely, they want to make a difference in a global context and they are excited to go somewhere new and different. The WP2 prompt asks them to think critically about their own underlying assumptions about service and what “making a difference entails.

Prompt: Philosopher Peter Singer has chastised what he calls the “warm glow” of altruistic action, claiming that what people *feel* is a helpful action is often not so helpful after all; he claims that we cannot trust the warm, fuzzy feelings that accompany doing “good” for another person or a cause. Yet, those same feelings often motivate people to donate to a cause or to intervene when another person clearly needs help.

Choose a real world scenario in which actions that seem helpful on the service may actually create bigger problems for the recipient of a positive act, for the person offering help, or to a larger social system -- we will go over a few cases in class, so choose one that is different from those we have already studied. What are the major

challenges to service in your chosen scenario? Are they theoretical, practical, or both? In light of your analysis and all of the potential obstacles, what is the best course of action for all involved parties?

Potential Readings:

Janice Wong, "Pre-Med Volunteer Trips: Sensitivity and Sustainability"

One of my former 340 students, Janice Wong reflected on service abroad trips she had taken over the course of her college career. This provides a student perspective on pre-health volunteer trips and offers some analysis from on-the-ground experience.

John Darley and Bibb Latane, "Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility"

A classic text on altruism, Darley and Latane's work on bystander behavior will offer the basis for critiquing both passive and interventionist responses to hardship.

Tejú Cole, "The White Savior Industrial Complex" *The Atlantic*

Cole questions the motivations behind the rhetoric of "making a difference" and offers students an alternate perspective on serving populations beyond the local-level.

Peter Singer, "Effective Altruism"

Singer critiques the "warm glow" of helping behaviors and challenges motivations for service that rely on feelings of connection and immediate satisfaction.

Healers Abroad: Americans Responding to Human Resource Crisis in HIV/AIDS
(Committee on the Options for Overseas Placement of U.S Health Professionals)

Writing Project 2: Intercultural Communication

When we write within and about another culture or a geopolitical context where we are "outsiders" participating for a brief period of time before returning to our respective homes, we must consider the ethical, interpersonal, and rhetorical consequences of the writing we produce. The first assignment cycle in this course will ask students to do a close-reading of their own values, their own communication assumptions, and their own linguistic and cultural background in relation to the one they are about to enter. We will also have a few guest speakers come to class during this assignment cycle to speak to us about their experiences in both the U.S. and Haiti.

Prompt: Identify a situation in which cultural or linguistic difference has led to miscommunication in the past. This can be a case study of a well-known

intercultural miscommunication or an example from your own experience working at the intersection of different cultures. Based on your close reading of the context and content of that miscommunication – what might participants have done to resolve or prevent this miscommunication?

Potential Readings:

Mary Louise Pratt: “The Art of the Contact Zone”

Pratt’s seminal work on the challenges of navigating the “contact zone” between individuals and groups of people who embody different experiences, identities, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Provides students with touchstone vocabulary for discussing sensitive issues, especially regarding privilege and socioeconomic status.

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

Fadiman’s book is a powerful, beautifully written examination of a Hmong family’s experiences of the U.S. medical system. The text presents a number of intercultural miscommunications encountered by medical professionals and the family in attempting to treat a child with a seizure disorder.

Edward Sapir, “The status of linguistics as a science” (1929) and J.J. Gumperz and S.C. Levinson, *Rethinking Linguistic Relativism* (1996)

Canonical reading for any student who wishes to examine the relationship between language, culture, and reality. These two texts examine the concepts of linguistic relativism and linguistic determinism, the latter reviewing how these concepts developed in the years since Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf proposed them in the earlier 20th century. In reading excerpts of these two texts, the class will consider the following questions: How might language shape our experience, and vice versa? Does our first language create a ‘model of the universe’ through which we interpret all others, and must we learn another language to access the experiences of people from other cultures? How does 21st century globalization and digital culture throw new light on questions posed by early cultural anthropologists?

Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong-Scollon: *Intercultural Communication*

We will examine a few select excerpts on politeness styles, inductive and deductive communication strategies, and rubrics for analyzing intercultural contexts for communication.

Writing Project 3: Why We Travel

This open ended prompt is designed to allow students freedom to build their own “statement of travel” – in this assignment, they will craft an argument outlining their reasons and justification for traveling, for serving abroad, and for going *somewhere else*. We

will consider whether travel is necessary at all, how we might make our travel most meaningful, and how to deal with the conflict-laden relationship between personal discovery and social responsibility.

Prompt: Why travel? Consider Pico Iyer's iconic essay, "Why We Travel", and construct your own cohesive argument for (or against...) travel.

Potential Readings: We will examine short excerpts from the following texts in class and discuss what works best about them, as well as what gives us pause and might indicate an intercultural problem. Our goal will be to identify a running list of rhetorical strategies that we can "steal" from each author. Additionally, we will mine these texts for the *best* and *worst* reasons for traveling.

Pico Iyer: "Why We Travel"
Edwidge Danticat: *The Dewbreaker*
Jonathan Katz: *The Big Truck that Went By*
Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*
Abraham Verghese: *My Own Country*
Arundhati Roy: *The Cost of Living*
Dervla Murphy: *Full Tilt*
Elizabeth Gilbert: *Eat, Pray, Love*
Mark Twain: *Roughing It*
Paul Theroux: *The Great Railway Bazaar*
Annie Dillard: *Teaching a Stone to Talk*
Martha Gelhourn: *Travels With Myself and Another*
V.S. Naipul: *An Area of Darkness*

Writing Project 4: The Personal Statement/Professional Narrative

The fourth writing project bridges from the second and third, asking students to assess their overarching motivations and aspirations for joining the health professions. For most students, this is the umbrella reason for doing medical service abroad and for joining this version of the course.

Prompt: Why have you chosen a career in the health professions?

This prompt, following the AMCAS common application for medical school, asks students to assess their reasons for studying in the health professions, for their future career aspirations, and the narrative arc that leads them to their current spot. For some students, this assignment will form the basis for their AMCAS personal statements, for others, especially those who have already received acceptance to medical or graduate school, it will help them to establish a stronger foundation for their professional identity. Those who are accepted into the PWP will use this writing as a point of entry, of insight, into the experiences that each student has

pre-travel and pre-service, so that they can reassess these aspirations with greater understanding at the end of the PWP experience. Regardless, this writing project prepares students for the AMCAS application cycle, application to graduate programs, or the job market -- it will set them up with a foundation for engaging in the profession that explicitly focuses on articulating service and global experience.

Required Materials:

- A **Blackboard account** – All assignments and readings will be posted on Blackboard, so you must frequently check your account for updates and new materials.
- A **laptop or old school notebook and folder** – I try to run as paperless a class as possible. My preferred method of distribution will be to post course materials on Blackboard and I run a hybrid classroom, where we do some activities on the computer and some activities with pen and paper.

Course Requirements and Schedule:

Writing Project 1 (Weeks 2-4)	See above	6-7 pages	15%
Writing Project 2 (Weeks 5-7)	See above	8-10 pages	20%
Writing Project 3 (Weeks 8-11)	See above	8-10 pages	20%
Writing Project 4 (Weeks 12-13)	See above	~4 pages, plus a 2-page rhetorical analysis.	10%
Portfolio (Weeks 14-15)	Substantial revisions of two of the first three papers + a reflection on the writing process and course themes.		25%
Participation	Attendance and <i>active</i> participation in class discussions, small group work, writing workshops,		10%

	and conferences. Includes short, low-stakes writing assignments that lead up to larger assignments (reading reflections, discussion board posts, and in-class writing exercises).		
--	---	--	--

Essays: You will write four thesis-driven essays, each of which will address the needs of a different audience and be directed towards a specific rhetorical purpose. The prompt, writing guidelines, and schedule of relevant assignments for each essay will appear under “Course Documents” on Blackboard. On the day that an essay is due, please submit your final draft and all ancillary materials, including your rough plans, your invention documents, your rough drafts, and (when applicable) your peer review worksheets to a specified assignment portal under “Assignments” on Blackboard.

Ancillary Writing: Throughout the semester I will ask you to write brief and informal pieces that will help jumpstart your critical thinking and facilitate your larger writing projects. These will not receive a letter grade, but rather will be grade on a 3-point scale. If you miss an in-class ancillary writing assignment, including any documentation related to peer review sessions, it will not be possible to make up the assignment.

Final Portfolio: Your final portfolio will consist of a 1-page reflection on the semester and significant revisions of two of the first three major assignments for the course. Another instructor and I will grade the portfolio collaboratively in order to ensure consistent grading procedures within the Writing Program. For this reason, ***final portfolios must be turned in on time, there will be no extensions.*** Also, bear in mind that in order to submit a portfolio, you must not be failing the class before portfolio week.

Conferences: Once during each writing project, I will cancel our formal class meeting to meet with you individually or in groups. For the first conference we will discuss your essay’s invention and planning, to make sure you’re on the right track, but other times we might work on a draft you have written or discuss prior papers and consider how you might improve on them. Our discussion, whether on a thesis statement or a draft, will always be focused; make sure you arrive at our meeting prepared with questions, and understand that what we cover during the conference in no way encompasses all that you could and should revise. I will cancel one class period per writing project to make time for these one-on-one meetings. Before a paper is due, I will email you all a link to an online sign-up sheet for that week’s available conference times; if for some reason you are not available during any of these times, let me know *in advance* and we can find another time. ***Conferences are mandatory; missing one will count as an absence.***

Course Policies:

Attendance: Since this class is primarily a workshop in which you will collaborate with your peers and work through various stages of the writing process in class, your attendance is mandatory and your active participation is imperative. When you miss class, you not only hurt yourself and your own grade, but you deprive your peers of the valuable feedback on drafts and the insight you provide during class discussion. **You will not be directly penalized for your first three unexcused absences.** For each subsequent absence, there will be $\frac{1}{4}$ deducted from the final grade.

Students who accumulate seven or more unexcused absences before the Withdraw date are strongly urged to withdraw from the class. Any such student who does not withdraw and any student who reaches seven or more total unexcused absences after the withdraw date will very likely fail the course. Regardless of whether or not your absence would be excused or unexcused, you should *always contact me (as much ahead of time as possible)* as soon as you know you will miss class.

Do not, however, ask me to rehash everything we did in class or ask me if you “missed anything” -- instead, keep your eye on your email and Blackboard for updates from me and develop relationships with a few of your peers who can give you their notes for the day or share insights from the discussion.

Late Papers: Unless an assignment indicates otherwise, papers are due at the beginning of the class period. If you need more time on an assignment (for a good reason), please come talk to me ***before the assignment is due***. If you hand in a paper late without consulting me before the due date, that paper will lose one half-letter grade (i.e. from a B+ to a B) for each class session that it is past due. Please note that I will not accept essays for which you have completed little or no preparatory work (invention activities, rough plans, rough drafts, etc.). Failure to hand in one of the five essays at all will result in an F for that assignment.

Email Assistance: If you have any questions about the course at any point, you should not hesitate to email me. That being said, I cannot comment on entire drafts over email; I will only respond to specific questions about specific portions of a draft (i.e. a paragraph). You should also have realistic expectations about my response time. I can usually respond within twenty-four hours, but if you email me in the middle of the night before a paper is due, it is unlikely that I will get back to you in time. I will try to respond to emails within a 24-hour time frame, but I do not respond to email after 6 PM on weekdays or on weekends, so please be mindful of this in writing. If you have any questions that are more appropriate to ask in person, please do not hesitate to visit me during office hours on Wednesdays.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism – that is, any form of unacknowledged and/or illegitimate academic assistance – is not tolerated in the academic community and will result in serious penalties at both the program and university levels. It is your responsibility to be aware of the policies regarding academic integrity in the *Writing 150 Coursebook* and the SCampus Student Guidebook. Remember that plagiarism includes the following:

- unacknowledged and inappropriate use of ideas or wording of another writer
- submitting a paper written or obtained from another
- using a paper or essay in more than one class (even if you wrote it) without the permission of the instructors involved
- allowing another student to use your work as though it were his or her own

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or are feeling desperate enough to plagiarize, please contact me. I would much rather spend extra time with you and provide the help that you need than deal with the consequences of plagiarism.

Writing Center: The Writing Center is the Writing Program's consulting service to the whole university, providing one-to-one conferences and workshops to help students improve their critical thinking and writing skills. They aim to make better writers, not just better papers; this means they will NOT edit or proofread a paper for you. Instead, they will help you develop skills to revise your own work. You may call ahead to make an appointment or walk in for a focused, interactive, and goal-oriented 30-minute session. The consultants there treat writing as a process in the same way we will, so they will be very familiar with the type of writing you are doing in this course and will be able to help you no matter what stage of the writing process you find yourself in. The Writing Center does not exclusively serve students of WRIT 150, nor is it aimed at "low level" or "weak" writers. I encourage you to take advantage of this free service if you have an assignment for another course as well.

Location: Taper Hall, THH 216

Phone: 213-740-3691

Daytime Hours: M-Th 10AM-5PM

Evening Hours: 7-9PM M-Th in Leavey Library, Lower Commons, Rm 3Z

There's also an Online Writing Center that offers services via Skype:

<http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/consultations-via-skype/>

Students with disabilities: Please let me know if you require specific academic accommodations for this class. Students requesting accommodations are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP, which is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30AM – 5:00PM, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Classroom Etiquette: One of the norms of the academic discourse community is respect for others' racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, religious and political beliefs, sexual orientations, and gender. This norm should be respected in your written work, as well as in class discussion. Everyone in this class should feel free to express him or herself, but must always be conscientious and respectful in whatever dialogue we may have. Bring an open mind when it comes to discussion with your peers, aim for intellectual honesty in the work you produce, and, remember that the aim of debate in our course is to bring us all greater knowledge and to craft and articulate effective solutions to problems in our world.