



USC

AMST 701
Contemporary Theories of American Studies and Ethnicity
Writing a Chapter of Your Dissertation
Spring 2025
Wednesday 4-6:50

Professor Dorinne Kondo
kondo@usc.edu

Zoom Link for Class Sessions on Brightspace

Office Hours: By appointment, and I am usually available after class.

Course Description

AMST 701 is designed to assist Ph.D. candidates in writing a chapter of their dissertation through a workshop format. Accordingly, this class is limited to students who have successfully defended their dissertation proposals in AMST 700 (or equivalent). Given that some advanced graduate students are no longer in LA, our class will meet via Zoom; the link is available on our Brightspace page. Students who have taken AMST 701 previously can repeat it.

This course provides an accountability structure for you to complete a chapter of your dissertation through deadlines and peer feedback throughout the semester. Many Ph.D. programs do not offer a course like this; dissertation writers are expected to write on their own, which can be a solitary and challenging process. This course provides structure and community to support you in making progress on your dissertation.

This course is an opportunity to reflect on and experiment with your writing process and how best to organize your research. The more deeply you appreciate your own creative process and are willing to transform your work habits, the more likely you will feel empowered in your writing and thinking. Through analyzing and discussing our writing habits, we will acquire tools to maximize both our writing productivity and our well-being.

Class time will be structured around:

1. Exploring and identifying best practices for writing and organizing your research
2. Creating an accountability structure to support each other in meeting goals
3. Offering and receiving feedback on work-in-progress, including learning how to offer and receive feedback
4. Writing collectively on our respective projects

As a workshop with the objective of planning, drafting, and revising a chapter of your dissertation, we will write collectively during class when time permits.

Course Expectations

To facilitate interaction and community building in our online course, please keep your cameras on.

Our goal is to create a supportive classroom environment where we can all ask questions about the profession, participate in honest discussions, and receive feedback on works-in-progress that have yet to reach their potential. Fostering a supportive dynamic requires collective mindfulness.

This course has three goals, and each has an accompanying collective expectation to facilitate meeting it.

Goal 1: To write a full draft chapter of your dissertation. This goal requires the understanding that all great work begins as a “shitty first draft” and that sharing drafts can be a vulnerable experience. We work from the assumption that everyone’s project is important and begins with rough ideas and rough writing. Therefore, our goal is to support each other in developing our ideas and writing so that it reaches its potential. To create an environment where you trust that the feedback you receive is to support you rather than tear you down.

Goal 2: To develop or improve upon our writing practice. To reach this goal, we must be willing to reflect on our approach, share insights with others, and support each other in figuring out what works best for each person. There is no one-size fits all model but there are best practices to explore.

Goal 3: To learn about the many facets of our profession. I myself am from a rural area where people often didn’t go to college, much less pursue advanced degrees. As someone who received her Ph.D. in a pre-professionalized era, I knew little about the profession as a graduate student or even as junior faculty. “Professionalization” was never part of the curriculum; somehow, we were just supposed to “know.” In contrast, the present historical moment is hyper-professionalized. Publication expectations have heightened; expected time for dissertation completion is far shorter. This course is a space to ask questions about the profession (job talks, job market, publishing, attending conferences, tenure, teaching, service, research, writing for a public audience, etc.). We will exchange information, insight, experiences that speak to career issues. Our class presents an opportunity to learn about the profession and its demands/ rewards/ structures. We all benefit from learning more—and learning from each other.

Weekly Assignments

Post to the accountability board on Brightspace:

This course offers an accountability structure to complete a chapter of your dissertation. Therefore, by 9pm on Sundays, each student is expected to post to our accountability discussion board on Brightspace. Please post the following: a) Your writing and personal goals/to-do list for the week aka the outcome of your “Sunday Meeting,” and b) An update and reflection on whether or not you accomplished your goals the prior week. What worked? What didn’t? What might you try differently? At the beginning of each class session, each student will share their goals and reflections on how the prior week went with the class.

Weekly readings:

On most weeks, we will read texts on an array of topics related to writing. Please read these before class and come prepared to discuss whether there were aspects of the reading that did or did not resonate for you in your writing process, suggestions that you would like to try out, or any other thoughts inspired by the readings.

Assignments Throughout the Semester

****All assignments should be posted to Brightspace****

- 1) Semester Writing Plan – due by Tuesday, January 21 at 4pm (24 hours before class)
- 2) Focus Statement (1-4 sentences) and one-page outline – due by Friday, January 31 at 12 pm. Read your peers' focus statements and one-page outlines by class time on February 5th.
- 3) First 4-8 pages of your draft chapter –due Friday, February 14 at 12 pm for discussion on Wednesday, February 19
- 4) Next 4-8 pages of your draft—due Friday, February 21st at 12 pm for discussion on Wednesday, February 26
- 5) Detailed chapter outline (10 pages) – due Tuesday, March 25 at 12 pm.
- 6) First draft of chapter (20-30 pages) – due Wednesday, April 2 and April 9 at the end of class. Half the class will workshop their drafts on the 9th; the remaining two will workshop on the 16.
- 7) Written peer responses for chapter drafts (1-page per peer) – due Wednesday, April 9 and Wednesday, April 16 at 4pm (at the start of class)
- 8) 10 pages of revised text due Friday, April 18 at 12pm, to be workshopped on Wednesday, April 23
- 9) Written peer responses for revised drafts due Wednesday, April 23 at 4pm (at the start of class)
- 10) 10 pages of further revised text due Friday, April 25 at 12pm to be workshopped on Wednesday, April 30
- 11) Written peer responses for further revised drafts due Wednesday, April 30 at 4pm (at the start of class)
- 12) Final chapter draft (30-40 pages) – due by Wednesday, May 7 at 12 pm

Grading

- 50% of your grade will be based on your attendance, participation, and supportive engagement with your peers, including posting to the weekly accountability board, offering feedback to your peers, and the one-page written peer responses at the end of the semester.
- 50% of your grade will be based on the work you produce and develop in the course, including your ability to incorporate feedback.

Required Texts

- Peg Boyle Single, *Demystifying Dissertation Writing: A Streamlined Process from Choice of Topic to Final Text* (2010). Available on Brightspace and digitally at the USC library: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/socal/detail.action?docID=3037631>.
- Additional required articles, available on Brightspace, include selections from:
 - o Joan Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* (1998)
 - o William Germano, *On Revision: The Only Writing that Counts* (2021)

- Mimi Khúc, *dear elia: Letters from the Asian American Abyss* (2024)
- The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD)

Recommended Reading:

- Lori Flores and Jocelyn Olcott, *The Academic's Handbook* (2020)

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 15: Course Introduction and Goals

- Where and when do you write best?

January 19: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

January 22: Developing a Writing Routine, Semester Plan, and Accountability Structure

Read

- Single, Chapter 1, “The Single System for Academic Writing”
- Single, Chapter 8, “Developing a Regular Writing Routine”
- NCFDD, “Every Semester Needs a Plan,” Template
- NCFDD, “5 Secrets to a Super-Productive Semester”
- NCFDD, “The Sunday Meeting”
- Your peers’ semester plans

Post to Brightspace

Create a semester plan using the NCFDD template or equivalent (post by Tuesday, January 21st at 4 p.m.)

January 26: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

January 29: Reading, Note Taking, Drafting

Read

- Bolker, Chapter 3, “Getting Started Writing”
- Single, Chapter 3, “Interactive Reading and Note Taking”
- Single, Chapter 4, “Citable Notes”
- NCFDD, “Writing Rocks”
- NCFDD, “Writing Is Thinking”

Report back

- Research Bibliographic/Reference Management Software systems and report back on which one you use if any.

February 2: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

February 5: Focus Statements and One-Page Outlines

Read

- Single, Chapter 5, “Focusing on Focus Statements”
- Single, Chapter 6, “Transforming a Focus Statement into a One-Page Outline”
- Your peers’ focus statements and outlines before our class meeting

Post

- 1-4 sentence focus statement (post by Friday, January 31 at 12pm)
- One-page outline (post by Friday, January 31 at 12pm)

February 9: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

February 12: How to Give and Receive Feedback

Read

- “Peer Review Template,” PLOS, 1 page
- Elizabeth Chin, Editor of *American Anthropologist*, “Reviewing Review,” 3 pages
- Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process, 2 pages
- “How to Receive and Respond to Peer Review Feedback,” PLOS, 8 pages
- Kel Weinhold, “The Art of Facing Criticism,” *The Professor Is In*, July 18, 2019, 4 pages

February 16: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

February 19: Developing Drafts and Workshopping the first few pages

Read

- Bolker, Chapter 4, “From Zero to First Draft”
- Germano, Chapter 3, “Know What You’ve Got”
- Germano, Chapter 4, “Look for an Argument”
- Your peers’ draft pages before our class meeting

Post

- You will submit the first 3-8 pages of your draft chapter – by 12 pm on Friday, February 14
 - Use William Germano’s chapter 4, follow his three steps to creating an argument, and identify your three-point argument in your 5–10-page draft.

February 23: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

February 26: Next 4-8 Pages, and What Do Completed Dissertations Look Like?

Report back

- Research dissertations in your area and select one to discuss in class: what are your observations? What looks challenging? What looks doable?

Post

- Post the next 4 to 8 pages or revise the pages you have already written by Friday, February 21st at 12 pm. Observe Germano’s steps for creating an argument as you proceed.

March 2: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

March 5: Dealing with Writing Interruptions and Writer’s Block

Read

- Single, Chapter 9, “Overcoming Writer’s Block”
- Bolker, Chapter 6, “Interruptions from Outside and Inside”
- NCFDD, “Why Aren’t You Writing?”
- NCFDD, “Tame Your Inner Critic”
- NCFDD, “Time for a 360”

March 9: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

March 12: Structural Violence in the Academy: Capitalist Productivism and Academic Careers

As we face Spring Break, let's consider works from Critical University Studies that bear on the world we inhabit as academics. Where are we located? How are you feeling, and are you "well" as you face writing, the job market, and taking a position in academia?

Dr. Khúc will be coming to USC on March 23 and 24, just after spring break. I think their work is incredibly important for all of us to consider as we train a critical eye on the structure of the University.

Read

Mimi Khúc, "the professor is ill," *Dear Elia: Letters from the Asian American Abyss*.

March 19: No Class. Spring Break

March 23: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

March 26: Long OutlineRead

- Single, Chapter 7, "Long Outline with References"

Post

- Go back to your semester plan. How is it going? What are your observations? Post any observations with your accountability goals.
- Post your long outline by Tuesday, March 25th at 12 pm: Create a 10-page detailed outline of your chapter. This outline should develop key thesis points, engage American Studies/Ethnic Studies scholarship and connect evidence to your argument. A good outline identifies and connects different kinds of source material that you want to use in the overall development of your thesis. The more detailed the outline the better for your purposes of organizing your research and developing a strong argument. In your outline, be sure to deliberately identify your argument, analytical framework, primary materials, and secondary materials.
 - Everyone is expected to submit a long outline. I will read them and provide feedback. We will not workshop them, but we will discuss your process of writing them.

March 30: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

April 2: Writing Session

We will set intentions for the session and write as an accountability group.

Post

- Two of you should have completed a first draft of your chapter (20-30 pages). Post by the end of class.

April 6: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

April 9: Rough first draft

Read

- Single, Chapter 10, “The Role of Revision”
- Bolker, Chapter 8, “The Second Draft and Beyond”
- Your peers’ draft chapters

Post

- 1-page peer response per draft chapter
 - Your peer response should consider the following questions:
 - First, what is the chapter about? What did you gain from it? What is working or compelling about the chapter? Be sure to convey what is working, interesting, and worth developing. It is helpful for authors to know what readers gained from their writing.
 - Goals: Did the writer achieve their stated goals? What would assist the writer in reaching their goals?
 - Argument: Is the argument sufficiently developed? What might assist in developing the argument further?
 - Evidence: Is there sufficient evidence and analysis to convince the reader? Is the presentation of data/evidence and analysis effective? What might assist in making the evidence more effective?
 - Literature: Does the writer draw on the appropriate literature? Do you have any suggestions for readings?
 - Structure and Writing: Is the chapter well structured? Is the writing clear and compelling? Are you able to follow the narrative easily? What might make the narrative easier to follow or more coherent to a reader?
 - Visuals and Graphic material: If there are visuals or graphic material, do they advance the chapter’s goals and argument? How might it be improved?
- Two more of you should have completed a first draft of your chapter (20-30 pages). Post by the end of class (to be revised next week).

April 13: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

April 16: Rough first draft, part two

Read

- Your peers’ draft chapters

Post

- 1-page peer response per draft chapter

April 20: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

April 23: Revised drafts

Read

- Your peers’ revised sections of their chapters.

Post

- By Friday, April 18 at 12pm, everyone will submit up to 10 pages of revised text.
- 1-page peer response per revised chapter

April 27: Accountability goals; post by 9pm

April 30: Chapter Presentations and Scholarly Critique Continued (Last class meeting)

Read

- Your peers' revised chapters, penultimate version

Post

- 1-page peer response per draft chapter
 - Post updated version of your revised chapter by Friday, April 25th at 12pm.
-

May 7: The final version of your chapter is due to Brightspace by 12pm. It should also be submitted to your dissertation advisor.

REVISED DRAFT OF CHAPTER

- *The chapter text should be complete - (30-40) double-spaced pages, Times 12-point font excluding the bibliography*
- *Use consistent and complete Endnotes or Footnotes in Chicago Manual of Style or MLA format*
- *Bibliography must list all primary source collections and all secondary sources.*
- *Any images or graphs must be clearly identified and labeled (with captions)*
- *Clear and consistent format, headings, pagination, header and footer*

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 1) *Clarity and sophistication of your argument*
- 2) *Sharpness of your identification of analytical and theoretical problems and questions and engagement with pertinent literature*
- 3) *Effective analysis of evidence (textual, visual, audio, other data) which includes your ability to quote sparingly and powerfully to forward your argument*
- 4) *Pertinent and judicious use of scholarly literature (both in its specific detail but also in the able use of key concepts and methodologies).*
- 5) *Effective response to the critiques you received from your peers and from me; ability to incorporate feedback*
- 6) *The professionalism and responsiveness you have demonstrated in all the required tasks for the semester and especially in your oral and written responses to your peers' writing.*