Writing Across Cultures: Visual Rhetoric and The Language of Photographic Texts
Writing 230SK
Fall, 2014

Dates / contact hours: 3 meetings a week for 7 weeks / 300 minutes each week / 100 minutes each class
Academic Credit: 1 course
Modes of Inquiry: W, CCI
Course format: seminar

Instructor’s Information

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Prerequisite(s), if applicable

For Duke undergraduates, completion of Writing 101

Course Description

Writing Across Cultures

Writing experience and training through theme-based seminars on a topic selected by the instructor, such as body and illness, local communities, art and dance, folktales and children’s literature, photography, etc. Course component includes cross-cultural inquiry within writing, as well as an emphasis on making texts public.

Visual Rhetoric and the Language of Photographic Texts
How does the language of visual rhetoric and literacy operate in a multi-cultural social media world of iPads and cell phones, celebrity paparazzi photos, Google image, and Facebook? In what ways does the visual have a language and textual life of its own separate from cultural norms? What are the possible ethical implications of making certain images public and does this change according to geographical location and venue? To what degree does appropriating images involve individual and social responsibility for how these images are used?

To honor the diversity within the DKU classroom, students will start by first sharing their personal and culturally constructed personal writing backgrounds. By completing a series of projects that specifically analyze photographic texts from different cultural perspectives, students will then develop strategies for critical, thoughtful, and reasoned arguments. We will first focus on academic writing strategies and techniques – including close reading, research, summary and analysis, prewriting, drafting, and revision strategies. We will, in turn, use these strategies and techniques to analyze iconic photographic images; for example, the Times Square kiss, the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima and at Ground Zero, the migrant mother of the Great Depression, the Afghan Girl, and Che Guevara. Field trips might include local photography exhibits. The final research project will be an annotated photo essay, where individual students or small groups of students will carefully select a single iconic photograph to comment on and analyze in relation to several other images. Thus, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts, with students creating and analyzing a new composite image.

The actual labor of producing a written academic argument usually involves taking a text through several drafts. In developing their work-in-progress, students are offered practice in:

1. **Researching.** Students critically read scholarly work about their topics of interest. This research may include locating sources, questioning methodology, examining evidence, identifying social or political contexts, or considering the implications of an academic work.

2. **Workshopping.** Academic writers reread their own writing and share work-in-progress with colleagues in order to reconsider their own arguments. Students learn how to become critical readers of their own prose through responding to one another in classroom workshops, seminar discussions, and individual teacher/student conferences.

3. **Revising.** Students are asked to rethink their work-in-progress in ways that go beyond simply fixing errors or polishing sentences in order to extend, refine, and reshape what they have to say and how to say it.

4. **Editing.** As a final step in preparing documents for specific audiences, students learn how to edit and proofread.

One additional step will be for students to make their texts public, such as through the Thompson Writing Program website, or a student gallery display at Duke and/or DKU.

**Course Goals / Objectives**

**GOALS OF THE COURSE**
The central goal of the course is to give guided practice to native English speakers and English language learners in intellectual reading and writing of the sort expected in other courses across the academy and in civic and professional life beyond the university, whether in China or elsewhere. Intellectual writing typically includes certain features:

- locates the project within the context of previous thinking on the subject
- responds to and makes use of the work of others
- judiciously offers reasons in support of its central claim
- recognizes the guiding assumptions and contingencies of the findings
- cultivates an attentiveness to how global contexts can shape and reflect rhetorical traditions, values, and beliefs.

Although the “Visual Rhetoric and the Language of Photographic Texts” course focuses on the complex relationships between words and iconic images, the reasoning, writing, and revising students will do in response to photographs and readings is akin to the scholarly analyses they will take up elsewhere in their studies.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR “WRITING ACROSS CULTURES” COURSE**

For this pilot fall semester this course is designed and taught by a scholar trained in the humanities. Future courses could be taught by scholars from the natural sciences and social sciences as well. Thus, although future individual sections might focus on different topics and readings, every section will emphasize writing as a social process and a commitment to helping students generate effective academic arguments.

Students will learn to:

1. *Engage with the work of others.* In pursuing a line of inquiry of research, scholars need to identify and engage with what others have communicated.
2. *Consider cross-cultural perspectives:* In an increasingly multi-cultural world, scholars need to cultivate a more in-depth understanding of cultural differences in academic writing and scholarly practices.
3. *Articulate a position.* The point of engaging with the work of others is to move beyond what has been said before. Scholars respond to gaps, inconsistencies, or complexities in the relevant literature, anticipate possible counterarguments or contradictory evidence, provide new evidence or interpretations, and advance clear and interesting positions.
4. *Situate writing for a multi-cultural audience.* In order to best contribute to their fields of inquiry, scholarly writers need to develop an awareness of the expectations and concerns of their intended readers. These expectations include not only appropriate and effective support for arguments, but also differing cultural conventions of acknowledgement, citation, document design, and presentation of evidence.
5. *Transfer writing knowledge into situations beyond the “Writing Across Cultures” course.* Even as scholarly writers situate their writing for specific audiences, they also need to transfer knowledge and practices across cultures, disciplines, and contexts.

As my former colleague Professor Van Hillard of Davidson College states,
No one is born an intellectual writer. Instead, intellectual writers acquire certain language behaviors through guided practice. Part of my job is to demystify and to explain the nature of academic reasoning, writing, and revising, and to suggest how you might strengthen your work and make it more effective and readable. The course challenges you to take on new and sophisticated analytic tasks and to construct a committed intellectual persona both on the page and in the seminar. You will need to analyze complex issues that have no single correct interpretation and advocate for what seems to you the best interpretations in the face of reasonable disagreements with colleagues.

SERVICE-TO-COMMUNITY COMPONENT TBA

By signing up for this class, students agree to be available several hours a week to work in partnership with local children in Kunshan. They will be paired with several classmates (a fluent Mandarin speaker in each group), and their commitment will be to mentor a group of children once a week. The program’s activities will involve story telling and photography and culminate in a “Take a Picture, Tell a Story” final project that will be part of a public exhibit at the end of the semester.

THE PUBLIC SPACE OF THE SEMINAR

Our seminar class size permits us to engage in productive dialogue about texts and ideas. In order to assess their contribution to the in-class discussion, they should ask themselves these questions:

1. What observations or questions did I offer in response to the day’s work?
2. How did I respond to my colleagues’ observations and questions?
3. Did I treat my classmates and their comments with dignity and respect and respect any cultural differences?
4. What connections did I make between elements of the day’s discussion and earlier class discussions?

Required Text(s)/Resources


Course Requirements / Key Evidences

There are several writing projects in the course, with an increasing degree of complexity as the term progresses. We will start by examining a single image, then a single image and text, then two images and several texts and, finally, for the final project and public exhibit a montage of images with your own explanatory text. Dispersed among these major projects will be postings on Sakai in response to questions posed regarding the readings for a particular class. In addition is the service-to-community component of the course, with various directed reflections during the course of the semester. Field trips to local photography exhibits are also possible.

Prewriting exercises, drafting, and revising are integral to a student’s success as a writer. Feedback will take a variety of forms - audio, written, and audio/written combination – from a variety of sources such as
peers, teacher, and tutors.

**Technology Considerations**

1. Access to Adobe Illustrator software for the final project
2. Laptops for internet access to images
3. Sakai and/or Word Press class site
4. Projection in class of images, and PowerPoint, Brainshark, and Prezi presentations

**Assessment Information / Grading Procedures**

Although I will comment extensively on your drafts, I will not assign final grades on your major assignments until the end of the semester. To assess your progress in the course, you will need to keep a portfolio of your work that includes both drafts and revisions of the major written assignments. I will also keep a file that includes your drafts (with my comments) and essay revisions and will evaluate your portfolio mid-way through and again at the end of the course. I will ask you to review your own progress as a writer mid-semester and at the end of the course.

I will calculate your grade for the course in the following ways

Final Portfolio of Four Essays .................................................................50%

Other as detailed in signed contract............................................... 50%

**GRADING CONTRACT NON-PORfolio PART: 50 % OF THE FINAL COURSE GRADE**

*To earn an A for the non-portfolio part of this course, which will count for 50% of your final grade, you must:

1. Engage actively during every class period, and always use classroom time productively. Everyone has an off day from time to time, but for nearly every class meeting your brain should be working the entire class time.

2. Participate actively during every in class workshop, and push yourself to provide your classmates with consistently thorough, thoughtful, helpful feedback. You should help your classmates to become better writers throughout the semester. Taking their work seriously enough to think hard about how it can be improved is crucial for your success, and theirs, in this course.

3. Use the feedback provided by your instructor and your classmates to improve your writing. You do not have to make every change suggested by your readers, of course, as readers will sometimes disagree. But you must take all feedback seriously, and your drafts should show evidence of your careful consideration of your readers’ suggestions.

4. Work with your classmates to complete any group assignments to the satisfaction of everyone in the group. Divide group assignments fairly and complete, on time, all the work you agree to take on for your group.
5. Produce complete, thoughtful drafts of every assignment, and turn all work in on time. Post every assignment to Sakai by the deadline, and bring a complete, printed draft to every writing workshop.

6. Revise thoroughly and thoughtfully. Revision means substantially clarifying your ideas, reorganizing your argument, rethinking your claims, strengthening your evidence, deepening your research, adjusting your style, and/or reimagining your relationship to your audience. Make substantial revisions before submitting the final draft.

7. Proofread final drafts to eliminate distracting surface errors and typos. Final drafts do not have to be perfect, but you should learn any grammar rules that consistently cause you trouble, by talking with a classmate, using a handbook or online resources, and/or meeting with me.

8. Attend all scheduled conferences with me and with and come prepared to use the conference time productively. If I indicate on a draft that I would like you to schedule an appointment to talk with me, do so within the week.

9. Maintain your academic integrity and avoid plagiarism by (a) taking careful notes to help you distinguish between your own ideas and language and those you have borrowed from sources, (b) attempting to cite all sources correctly even in first drafts, (c) mastering citation conventions and citing all sources correctly in all final drafts, and (d) never attempting to disguise another’s work as your own, never purchasing essays online, and never engaging in any other act of academic dishonesty. New ideas only come about because we are all constantly borrowing ideas and sharing our work with others; be generous about attributing and citing those whose work has influenced your own.

10. Show respect for your classmates and your instructor. This includes using respectful language, taking each other’s ideas seriously, and refraining from distracting behaviors, such as checking email, surfing the Web, or texting during class. Check that your cell phone is never on during class.

11. Be on time for class consistently, and be absent very rarely. Two tardies equal one absence. Being more than 10 minutes late for class counts as an absence. More than one absence, except for illness or other emergencies, throughout the semester will break the contract and affect the contract grade.

12. Be prepared for class. Complete the required reading, print any required handouts, and bring your laptop and whatever drafts, revisions, or research I’ve required.

If you break the contract, your contracted grade for the course will be lowered as follows:

For minor breaches, I will permit you a limited number of “Mulligans” — occasional minor missteps that will not break the contract. Several such breaches, however, will lower your contract grade to below an “A.”

For major breaches (failing to participate actively in a group activity, failing to turn in or revise an assignment, having more than one unexcused absence, etc.): no Mulligans; your contract grade will immediately be lowered to an A- after the first major breach, B+ after the second, and so on.

You are responsible for being aware of and following the contract stipulations. I will help you remain aware by notifying you of excessive minor breaches and any major breaches of the contract.

GRADING CONTRACT PORTFOLIO PART: 50% OF THE FINAL COURSE GRADE

Essays 1, 2, and 3 will receive a composite, non-weighted final grade when you turn in all both at the end of the semester as part of your final portfolio. Late portfolios will NOT be accepted.
Once you submit your working drafts, you will receive detailed feedback from both peers and me. After submitting your final drafts you will receive feedback from me, and you will continue to revise until you submit your portfolio at the very end of the semester. We will also have writing workshops the last week, to give you a chance to work on revising for the portfolio. I will grade the portfolio as a whole and award one grade that will count for 50% of your final semester course grade.

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By signing below, I indicate that I have read and understood the course policies and contract requirements.
I agree to abide by these policies and requirements.

Signature: __________________________________________
Date: _______________________________________________

Diversity and Intercultural Learning

The thematic choice for the pilot semester of “Writing Across Cultures” is visual rhetoric/iconic photography, which lends itself to equal access by a diverse group of students to the materials being analyzed. Drawing from the diverse demographic of the students enrolled in the class, we will consider the impact of changing multicultural social, political, and economic forces on academic writing/critical thinking.

Writing workshops in class will illustrate the expectations of different cultures regarding both form and content, in comparison to the conventions and expectations of American academic. The combination of the visual and the written will provide a fertile ground for collaborative learning. In addition will be a greater inter-cultural understanding of the challenges of writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue, for both English language learners and native English speakers. A service-to-community program, with students interacting with children in the local community on a project that involves photography (“Take a Picture, Tell a Story”) will build on the multi-cultural backgrounds of the students and provide a shared experience.

Course Policies and Guidelines

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

We are members of an academic community, and academic intellectual integrity is essential. Please familiarize yourself with Duke’s web materials on plagiarism to ensure that you are aware of the academic conventions for crediting the sources you use. Plagiarism is defined here, and various possible misuses of source material are analyzed for their errors. The penalty for plagiarism is failure of the course and/or judicial sanctions. (See http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism).

ABSENCES AND TARDIES

Situations may arise that necessitate your missing class. You are permitted to miss a total of two class meetings over the course of the term without penalty. Any absences beyond this limit will result in your final course grade being lowered a full letter grade for each additional day missed. (In other words, a grade of B- would become a C-.)
I expect you to arrive to class on time, ready to engage in the day’s work. I permit you three tardies (5-10 minutes late) without penalty over the course of the semester. If you are tardy beyond this limit, your final course grade will be lowered a half grade for each tardiness beyond the limit of three. (In other words, a grade of B would become a B-.

THE WRITING STUDIO: WORKING WITH A TUTOR

During the semester, you will be able to meet with a Writing Studio tutor based at Duke University in Durham, NC via Skype, Google Hangout, or Adobe Connect. The tutor will strategize with you about how to revise your work, taking up concerns about analysis, argument, and structural strategies. You will be able to schedule regular individual tutoring sessions. E-Tutoring sessions will also be available, where you can fill out a detailed submission form and submit a draft for feedback electronically.

Tentative Course Outline

Seven Week Schedule

UNIT 1 / Week 1: Overview of “Writing Across Cultures” Course, Visual Rhetoric, and Iconic Photography
Selected Readings: Errol Morris (Liar, Liar), Susan Sontag (On Photography), John Berger (Ways of Seeing)
Writing Workshop: Invention and brainstorming
Essay: Personal multi-cultural writing history

UNIT 2 / Weeks 2 and 3: Inquiry into Multicultural Writing Practices
Selected Readings: Chronicle of Higher Education, 3 C’s, College English, etc. articles
Writing Workshop: Drafting and revising
Essay: Selected single image and text

UNIT 3 / Weeks 4 and 5: Case Studies of Iconic Photographs: Multicultural Perspectives
Images: Times Square Kiss, Afghan Girl, Che Guevera, Iwo Jima, etc.
Selected Readings: John Lucaites (No Caption Needed)
Writing Workshop: Final editing and proofreading
Essay: Selected multiple images and texts

UNIT 4 / Weeks 6 and 7: Annotated Photo Essay Project and Final Exhibit
“Take a Picture, Tell a Story” service-to-community final exhibit
**Writing Workshop: portfolio revision**

**Essay: Exhibit quality annotated photo essay**

Small sampling of final projects (not full size):

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**NOT-SO-PLAIN WHITE TEES**

*How Wearing Our Icons Eclipses Them*

by Daphne Henderson

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**Billboards these days come in T-shirt sizes.**

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**LOUDER THAN WORDS:**

*The Use of Photography as a Social Statement*

by Cameron Howie

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**Post / course codes**

18 February 2014