Academic Credit: 1  
Modes of Inquiry: W, CCI  
Course format: Seminar

Instructor’s Information

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Prerequisite

For Duke Students, completion of Writing 101

Course Description

Writing Across Cultures

This course offers writing experience and training through theme-based seminars on a topic selected by the instructor. The course component includes cross-cultural inquiry within writing, as well as an emphasis on making texts public.

Celebrating Darwin Across Cultures

In 2009 the world celebrated the life and scientific contribution of Charles Darwin, the British naturalist who pioneered the modern theory of evolution by natural selection. It was the 200th anniversary of his birth and 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, the text that transformed the biological sciences and humankind’s sense of our place in the natural world. Dutch scholars recreated Darwin’s five year long expedition on *HMS Beagle* and hundreds of universities around the world held commemorations and conferences on Darwin’s influence on science, culture, politics, philosophy, art, and various other human endeavors. In this course students research and write extensively about Darwin’s impact across cultures, both geographically and intellectually.
In the first unit, students begin by reading and writing critically about Darwin's *Origin* and other primary texts. This establishes Darwin's central theory and explores the intellectual reach of Darwin's ideas. Readings and discussion provide context to Darwin's work in the 19th century. Students write an essay review of the *Origin* from the perspective of a British intellectual, being mindful of the various ways in which this theory could impact cultures beyond the scientific elite.

The second unit expands on the first, requiring students to think about the influence of Darwin's work on other cultures geographically. Readings and discussion focus on the way in which Darwinism was taken up in Russia and China. Students write short blog posts on the influence of Darwinism in a particular culture of their choice. Topics could include, but are not limited to: American eugenics, social Darwinism and the influence of British colonialism abroad, Russian Marxism, and Chinese politics. These blogs are posted online in an effort to translate student work in the classroom to a wider online audience. In-class discussion and a careful examination of scientific blogs provides students with clear stylistic and visual standards for this type of writing. Students must be mindful of the public nature of this writing project and modify their writing style accordingly.

The final unit of the course expands on the cross-cultural influence of Darwin's work by examining his impact on various other aspects of human culture, including: politics, philosophy, art, music, religion, literature, etc. Students work on a major writing project that examines how Darwinism affected one aspect of human culture by focusing on one or several texts or thinkers that drew from his works. This unit provides students the opportunity to do independent research and thinking about a subject matter of their choice. The final product is a carefully constructed argumentative essay that draws from primary and secondary source material and situates a central claim with respect to previous research on the topic.

While Darwin's work and influence across cultures is the topic of this Writing 230 class, the course focuses on teaching students to write well-reasoned and critical work for academic and popular audiences. The work of producing written texts is laborious, though hopefully it is a labor of love! In this class students practice strategies for success in writing by focusing on the following activities.

- **Researching.** Student critically read and discuss scholarly work about the topics of interest for their projects. This work involves locating sources, examining evidence, identifying the context for the sources, and considering the implications of the ideas therein.
- **Workshopping.** Academic writers work and rework their texts alone and with colleagues. Students learn how to become critical readers and thinkers through working in groups to refine their own work and the work of others. Classroom workshops, seminars discussions, and individual student meetings provide on the ground training in effective strategies for workshopping works in progress.
- **Revising and rewriting.** Writers must revise and, frequently, rewrite texts in order to refine their works in progress. This process goes far beyond simply correcting errors in the text. Students carefully and thoroughly consider how to reshape and revise what they've written to most effectively convey their ideas.
- **Editing.** As a final step, students learn to proofread and polish their writing in order to prepare it for publication.
Course Goals

The central goal of this course is to provide native English students and English language learners with an intellectually rigorous and guided practice of deep reading and critical argumentative writing expected in other classes and in life beyond the university. Intellectual writing typically includes the following features:

- Locates the project within the context of previous thinking on the subject
- Makes judicious use of the work of other scholars and thinkers
- Makes a central claim and provides evidence for the validity and value of the claim
- Recognizes the assumptions of the author and limitations to the project
- Formality and precision in the execution of the work

This course also provides students with a working knowledge of Darwin’s ideas and a variety of cultural interpretations of his ideas. Students learn to think about how ideas influence other cultures in various ways.

Learning Objectives

Students learn to:

1. Engage with the work of others. In pursuing a line of inquiry in research, scholars identify and engage with what others have communicated.
2. Consider cross-cultural perspectives: In an increasingly multi-cultural world, scholars 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 previously written. 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.

Required Text(s)/Resources

Additional Materials (optional)

Laptop and access to the course website and Duke Library resources

Course Requirements

Students develop three writing projects in this course. The first is an essay review (1500-2000 words) of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. This writing project requires students to situate this text in the context of 19th century Victorian science. Students explicitly engage with the broader cultural implications of the book. The second project is a short (700 word) blog post about the adoption of Darwinian ideas within a particular geographical culture. While this is a blog, students are expected to engage deeply with the readings and do other research on their own. Given the digital format, students are expected to integrate visual images into their writing for this project. The final essay is a lengthy argumentative research essay (3500-4000 words) on a subject of their choosing related to the course theme. Students engage in research practices, project development, and learn writing skills employed by academics around the world.

Pre-writing exercises, drafting, workshopping, revising, and editing are all integral to a student’s success in the classroom and beyond. Students work collaboratively and with the instructor to design and refine their writing projects over the course of the semester. Feedback to students is given in writing, audio comments, or in individual meetings. Students work closely with the professor as they develop their projects and refine their ideas.

Assessment Information / Grading Procedures

Attendance and intellectually rigorous participation at the weekly seminar sessions, and in all other work, is central to this course. Unexcused absences are inexcusable. Students interact and engage a diversity of viewpoints and background philosophies in these sessions. Each student is likely to be confronted with ideas to which he or she is sympathetic or potentially opposed. Students must be thoroughly familiar with the assigned materials for each seminar and contribute respectfully to the discussion and workshops. Intellectual intimidation or any other disrespectful behavior is not tolerated.

Contributing to discussion in class and submitting work for revision and workshopping on time are both essential aspects of intellectual participation. Drafts submitted for the workshop should represent the best effort on the particular stage of each project. Consequently, submission of all material on time is considered a part of the participation grade. The numerical value for participation is a cumulative value based on the submission of work on time and in-class participation in every seminar session.

The numerical value for each essay is based on an assessment of the final submission. See below
for further discussion of essay standards.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay Review</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog Post</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Essay</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**Grade Distribution**

- **A** 100%-93.0%
- **A-** 92.9%-90.0%
- **B+** 89.9%-87.0%
- **B** 86.9%-83.0%
- **B-** 82.9%-80.0%
- **C+** 79.9%-77.0%
- **C** 76.9%-73.0%
- **C-** 72.9%-70.0%
- **D** 69.9%-60.0%
- **F** 59.9%-0%

**Essay Grading Standards**

Because students have a good deal of time to work on these essays, the expectations for the essays are very high. Grading is based on structure, clarity, argumentation, style, and grammar and punctuation. While this sounds complicated, the essays are basically evaluated on two aspects. First, an argument is a linguistic performance that utilizes the English language to communicate a series of ideas. Second, an argument is a rational activity. Therefore, essays are evaluated both for language/writing AND thinking/argument. What follows are a few guidelines that indicate the nature of excellent, good, adequate, marginal, and failing essays.

*Excellent* (A)

An excellent essay is distinguished by genuine intellectual power. The student has engaged the subject in a very rigorous and imaginative way. The result is an essay that captivates the intellect of the reader in an unusually effective manner. An excellent paper is always original in style or argument in some sense. It indicates that the student possesses independence of mind and has arrived at conclusions after thorough examination of relevant information.

Excellent papers are impeccably organized and (nearly) perfectly written. Typically, the essay progresses through clearly ordered and necessary stages. All evidence is concrete, substantial, and consistently relevant. Individual paragraphs are unified and coherent, and transitions are effective. Individual sentences are skillfully constructed: coherent, forceful, and effectively varied.
The author of an excellent paper revised the work over an extended period of time, and usually multiple drafts. Attaining this grade is possible only after dedicating a significant amount of time and effort to the task.

Good (B)

The good essay possesses many characteristics of an excellent paper, but it is not as consistently distinguished in all areas. The content is sound, but perhaps not as original or as profound as that of an excellent paper. The organization and style are generally effective, but they may not be as polished or elegant as those of an excellent essay. Occasional awkwardness in the writing may be present, but it should not seriously detract from the effectiveness of the work. While a paper may be free of errors, it may only be judged as ‘good’ if the content does not warrant the higher grade.

Adequate (C)

An adequate paper is satisfactory. The student demonstrated some command of the subject, but the paper lacks distinction. Often times the adequate paper maintains a clear central idea, but the generalizations are not as thoroughly developed and supported as an excellent or good paper. There may be problems with vagueness or repetitiveness.

In some cases, a paper that is good or excellent in content is deemed adequate because of problems in style, sentence structure, or mechanical errors. While the errors are not be so numerous as to hinder communication very seriously, they detract from the overall effectiveness of the work.

The grading status 'adequate' acknowledges the basic competence of the essay, while also suggesting that there are significant areas in which the work could be improved. In many cases, the student needs to spend more time on planning, revision, and proofreading.

Marginal (D)

The marginal essay suffers from major problems, but is still minimally passing. In some cases the central idea is not entirely clear or its development is inadequate; there may be little supporting evidence for the admittedly sound generalizations.

This grade is a warning sign that the student should work closely with the instructor to determine the precise source of the major problem with this essay.

Failing (F)

The failing paper suffers major problems in content, form, or both. In some cases the content is unclear or the central idea is not supported. Organizational problems and/or errors in sentence structure, diction, etc. may severely hinder communication. In other
cases, the paper may fail to conform to the requirements of the assignment. (For example, a student may turn in a descriptive essay rather than an argumentative essay.)

Diversity and Intercultural Learning (see Principles of DKU Liberal Arts Education)

This course is designed to incorporate the cultural diversity of students in the class as well as extend the consideration of cultural learning beyond simple geographical differences. By considering various cultural interpretations of Darwin’s work across academic, artistic, and political landscapes, the course fosters intercultural learning of various kinds. Drawing from the diverse intellectual and cultural demographic of the students enrolled in the course, students consider Darwin’s influence across cultures that are familiar to some and novel to others. The course provides a safe environment for students to explore various cultural and intercultural interactions of individuals across spaces and throughout history.

Course Policies and Guidelines

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

We are members of an academic community, and academic intellectual integrity is essential. Students should be familiar with Duke’s web materials on plagiarism to ensure that they 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 missing class. Please contact the instructor before missing classes. Any unexcused absences directly result in losing points for the intellectual participation requirement of the course.

THE WRITING STUDIO: WORKING WITH A TUTOR

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