

ENGL 496.C01  
Spring 2014  
TR 2:30-3:45  
STA-D 46C  
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## Senior Thesis

Welcome to your English capstone experience, an opportunity to create something original, creative, and important. I am looking forward to working with you as a class and individually. In the coming months, you will compose a 20-page research paper on a literary subject of your choosing. We will spend the early part of the semester brainstorming topics, strengthening your ability to conduct literary research, learning to incorporate sources into your writing, and honing your subject into a thesis. The latter part of the semester will be devoted to organizing your ideas, selecting the best sources, checking your documentation style, revising drafts, and presenting your research to the class.

The course will strengthen your ability to analyze literary and critical texts, to compose compelling essays, and to present your ideas effectively in speech. The key will be to work consistently throughout the semester. This is not a sprint. It's a marathon.

### **COURSE MENTOR**

Dominique Bruno  
dbruno@mix.wvu.edu  
Office: G07 Colson Hall  
Office Hours: MWF 10:30-11:20AM and 12:30-1:20PM

### **COURSE LIBRARIAN**

Kelly Diamond  
kdiamond@wvu.edu  
(304) 293-0332  
Research Consultations: <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/instruction/consultation/>

### **COURSE GOALS**

By the end of the course, you should develop an authoritative understanding of a topic within English studies, based on research, evaluation, analysis, and written and oral presentation. According to the Department of English, upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Four aspects of Goal 1 are especially important. A student should be able to:

- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
- Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity
- Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
- Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts

All of this is possible, I believe, with the support of a community of writers and thinkers.

## COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS

The following texts are available at the WVU Bookstore and the Book Exchange. If at all possible, please purchase these editions.

### Required

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. NY: Modern Language Association, 2009.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/ I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. NY: Norton, 2009.

## REQUIREMENTS

### 1) Attendance and Participation (20% of final grade)

In addition to prompt and regular attendance, this includes the following:

- Your participation grade will be based in part on the thoughtfulness of your responses and your **overall engagement in our discussions and writing activities**. We don't often think of listening as an element of participation, but a productive learning environment is characterized by participants who respect others' words even if they don't agree with them. I welcome debate that is balanced with mutual respect.
- Completion of assigned reading before coming to class.
- An important part of your performance in this class will be your participation in a small workshop group with peers who are pursuing a similar topic. Before each small workshop in my office, you will need to read your group members' drafts on Dropbox and submit feedback to him or her using the "track changes" function. At the end of the semester, you will complete an anonymous, confidential evaluation of your own and each group member's commitment and reliability. I will take these evaluations in account when determining your grade for this portion of the course.

- More than two unexcused absences will result in a zero for attendance and participation.

## 2) Writing and Research Assignments (30%)

- Preliminary paragraph describing possible topic and research questions (250-300 words): 2.5 points possible
- Proposal for Research Essay (250 words): 2.5 points possible
- Annotated Bibliography: 5 points possible
- Essay Drafts: First (5 pages)=5 points possible  
Second (10 pages)=5 points possible  
Third (15 pages)=10 points possible

## 3) Final Paper and Presentation (50%)

The capstone of this course is an essay of 20 pages, double-spaced, with appropriate documentation (45% of course grade). You will also give a presentation of this paper at the end of the semester that will be worth 5% of course grade (15-20 minutes plus discussion).

Because of the unique nature of this course, you must complete **all** of the assignments; failure to submit any one of these will result in failure of the course. Assignments are not accepted via e-mail unless we have made prior arrangements.

## EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR ESSAYS

*While there is no simple, quantitative formula that I can give you for the “ideal” essay, it is important that you have a sense of the criteria with which your essays are graded. Think of your letter grades as a sort of shorthand, communicating the following (with pluses and minuses denoting subtler shadings of these criteria).*

**A Excellent (90-100%).** This paper has a concise, original thesis statement and a well-reasoned argument that is supported by specific evidence. Paragraphs are well developed, transitions clearly mark the direction of the argument, and the organization of the paper serves to elucidate the thesis. The essay demonstrates the student's forethought and engagement with the material. The author has clearly proofread the paper for content and stylistic errors. The grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure throughout the essay indicate fluency and a command of the English language. The “A” essay is also tailored to the desired audience. In short, the writing style is clear, engaging, and smooth, and the argument is interesting and persuasive.

**B Good (80-89%).** This essay has a concise thesis and a well-developed argument. While it demonstrates careful thought and planning, it lacks the originality of the “A” paper or contains more mechanical errors. In contrast to the “A” paper, the “B” essay takes fewer risks and does not develop concepts that are as astute.

**C Acceptable (70-79%).** This essay fulfills the minimum requirements of the assignment. It may lack a thesis, but show an understanding of the ideas under consideration through clarity of presentation. Conversely, it might suggest an interesting thesis, but falter in developing an argument. It may also be characterized by frequent mechanical errors. A paper without a thesis can earn nothing higher than a "C."

**D Poor (60-69%).** This paper resembles an unrevised draft. It does not clearly articulate or develop a focused thesis; it makes illogical, unsupported claims; the organization is confusing or obscures any line of logic. The diction is likely to be repetitive and imprecise. There may be serious, distracting mechanical or grammatical errors.

**F Unacceptable (50-59%).** The paper does not begin to approach the minimum requirements of the assignment.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

Punctual attendance is required. Poor attendance will adversely affect your final grade (**more than two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for participation**). Please make every effort to arrive to class on time; important announcements will often be made in the first few minutes of class. Absences due to serious illness, religious holidays, and personal emergencies will be excused. If a personal emergency or serious health problem arises, please contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611); the Dean will then communicate with me regarding your situation. **Remember that more than two unexcused absences will result in a zero for attendance and participation.**

Late work is not acceptable. Any assignment handed in after the class period in which it is due will be penalized for lateness (**reduced 1/2 letter grade each day it is late, including the day it is due**). If a personal emergency arises and you need an extension, speak to me as soon as possible about your situation. Please plan ahead for computer mishaps: always keep a back-up file of your work, and give yourself plenty of time to print.

I do not discuss grades over e-mail.

Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Your classmates and instructor deserve your respect and support just as you deserve theirs. Try not to dominate the discussion or get us off track; be patient with classmates who may need to ask a question even when the answer seems obvious to you. Likewise, avoid actions that are distracting or that prevent you from getting the most out of the class (**e.g. text messaging, holding side conversations, reading the newspaper, etc.**) You want to signal that you are paying attention and that you respect others. Disruption may result in dismissal from the class.

Plagiarism, a form of theft, is prohibited. Plagiarism is defined as the submission of work that contains ideas not fully your own: ideas taken from publications, other students, your professors, the Internet, etc. Remember that you are required to cite a source if you include a direct quotation *or* if you borrow an idea and put it in your own words. If you have questions about the fine line between being influenced by a text or person and plagiarizing its/his/her ideas, cite the source. For a more detailed description of plagiarism, as well as the correct form for citation of sources, see a writing handbook or ask me. **The consequences of a proven case of plagiarism may result in an unforgivable “F” in the course.**

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. In accordance with that commitment I maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. WVU does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, disability, age, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestion as how to promote such a positive and open environment in this class is appreciated and given serious attention.

Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible, and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700 or Voice/TDD 293-7740).

## **SCHEDULE**

*Each piece should be read by the date on which it is listed. This schedule is subject to change.*

### GETTING STARTED

R Jan. 9 Introduction

### SELECTING A TOPIC AND FORMING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

T Jan. 14 *MLA Guide*, “Selecting a Topic” (6-7); Re-read possible primary text(s)

R Jan. 16 “Academic Proposal Writing” (H); Continue re-reading possible primary text(s)

**DUE: Preliminary paragraph (approx. 250-300 words) describing possible topics and research questions [submit to Dropbox]**

T Jan. 21 Close Reading and Free Writing: “How to Do a Close Reading” (H); Continue re-reading possible primary text(s); *Bring in your primary text(s)*

R Jan. 23 “Thesis Statements” (H); *MLA Guide*, “Thesis Statement” (42-43); Graff and Birkenstein, “They Say” (19-29)

T Jan. 28 Small Group Workshops in my office (typed paragraph)

## RESEARCH

R Jan. 30 Small Group Workshops in my office (typed paragraph)

T Feb. 4 Argumentation and Evidence: Graff and Birkenstein, “Yes/ No/ Okay, But” (55-77)

**DUE: Revised Proposal with thesis statement and research questions [submit to Dropbox]**

R Feb. 6 Library visit: meet in room 136 of Downtown Library (optional)

T Feb. 11 Secondary Sources: Graff and Birkenstein, “Her Point Is” and “As He Himself Puts It” (30-42)

R Feb. 13 Individual meetings with me: no formal class

**DUE: Annotated Bibliography [submit to Dropbox]**

T Feb. 18 Individual meetings with me: no formal class

**DUE: Draft One [submit to Dropbox]**

R Feb. 20 Small Group Workshops in my office (draft one)

T Feb. 25 Small Group Workshops in my office (draft one)

## WRITING

R Feb. 27 The Introduction: “Preparing to Write an Introduction” (H)  
*Bring in an introduction to an academic article that you like*

T Mar. 4 Transitions: Graff and Birkenstein, “As a Result” (105-120)

R Mar. 6 The Conclusion: “Strategies for Writing a Conclusion” (H)  
*Bring in a conclusion to an academic article that you like*

**F Mar. 7 Last Day to Drop a Class**

**March 8-16 Spring Break**

T Mar. 18 Endnotes and Footnotes:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/04/>  
*Bring in one of the articles you will be using*

R Mar. 20 Independent Work (in place of formal class)

**DUE: Draft Two [submit to Dropbox]**

T Mar. 25 Small Group Workshops in my office (draft two)

R Mar. 27 Small Group Workshops in my office (draft two)

**T Apr. 1 Presentations of Second Draft**

**You must attend at least ONE of the following two classes:**

R Apr. 3 Citation Format: see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>

T Apr. 8 Grammar: see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/4/>

**REVISION**

R Apr. 10 Revising: “Revising Drafts” (H)

**DUE: Draft three [submit to Dropbox]**

T Apr. 15 Individual Conferences with me (in place of formal class)

R Apr. 17 Individual Conferences with me (in place of formal class)

T Apr. 22 Independent work (in place of formal class)

R Apr. 24 Last Day of Class: Tips on Presenting Your Work

**T Apr. 29 DUE: Final Paper (by 10 a.m.) [submit to Dropbox]**

Final Public Presentations: TBA