GSTR 110: Writing Seminar I: Critical Thinking in the Liberal Arts

Change

Fall 2010 MTWF 11:00-11:50 IA 108A

Instructor: Dr. Brad Christensen
Office: Danforth Building Room 101E
Office Hours: mornings every day or by appointment at other times

Course Description:

The college years can be a time of dramatic change. Change can be self-initiated, forced from the outside, or caused by no single identifiable source. Change can be resisted, embraced, or temporarily ignored. It cannot be avoided indefinitely. In this course, we will read and discuss several fictional stories and factual stories involving change. We will analyze the cause of the change and the forces driving it. We will identify the characters that resist the change and those whom embrace the change. We will observe how the changes affect the characters and the world in which they live. Finally, we will compare and contrast these accounts of change to our own experiences. Throughout this course, we will develop skills in reading, critical thinking, argument formation, oral communication, and library use. Our reading and discussions will contribute to an understanding of life in an environment that is constantly changing.

Goals:

1. To develop, compose, and complete college-level essays that are documented, that engage and use various kinds of texts, and that are expository (develop reasons, evidence, support for a thesis)
   a. Use the writing process to
      1. Generate and explore ideas
      2. Draft a focused essay with a clear purpose and controlling idea
      3. Revise the essay effectively
      4. Proof read accurately so that the final product has few surface errors.
   b. Write complete, grammatical sentences and compose well-developed paragraphs.
   c. Use St. Martin’s Handbook as a guide to the writing process, grammar, style, and documentation.
   d. Document references to primary texts in MLA style, recognizing and avoiding plagiarism.

2. To identify and use properly some common modes of reasoning (analogy, argument) patterns of reasoning, and basic critical thinking concepts such as consistency, ambiguity and vagueness and general criteria in thinking well about a variety of topics and texts
3. To use the Hutchins library facility and its resources, including the library home page and library web sources
   a. Become familiar with the physical facility of Hutchins Library.
   b. Learn where to find specific services and resources.
   c. Learn to navigate BANC
   d. Learn to use basic reference sources beyond general encyclopedias, atlases and almanacs,
   e. Become familiar with the Dewey Decimal System
   f. Learn how to evaluate basic reference sources.
   g. Learn to navigate the Library Home Page and to become familiar with the location of the library web resources

4. To research, read, and evaluate a variety of sources to assemble and appropriately diverse bibliography, and to appreciate different types of sources can work together.

5. To understand how preparation, engaged attentiveness, reflection and thinking with appropriate criteria leads to learning from experiences beyond the formal classroom.

Assigned Readings:

Butler, Octavia E. Kindred, Beacon Press, 1979


Vern, Jules From the Earth to the Moon, Bantam Books, 1993

Others as assigned

Other Required Materials:

Lunsford, Andrea A. The St. Martin’s Handbook, Bedford/St. Martins, 2009

Weston, Anthony A Rulebook for Arguments, Hackett Publishing Company, 2009

Fully functional EDGE laptop computer
Course Policies

Attendance

Because much of the learning in this class will be from discussion, your regular attendance is critical. There is no way to make up what you miss. Attendance will be monitored. Unexcused absences are often an indicator of problems. Therefore, it is necessary that you contact me before, or immediately after each absence. If not, I will contact you. Here are the definitions and details:

Absence - not in attendance or more than 5 minutes late.
Excused absence - you have discussed the absence with me (preferably in advance, although this is not always possible) and it is clear that the absence is warranted. An excused absence may involve additional work in an attempt to substitute for learning missed.
Unexcused absence - you have not discussed the absence with me or the reason given is not acceptable. No attempt will be made on my part to recover lost learning. I would, however, strongly encourage you to make the effort.

Attendance will be treated as a test based on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Unexcused absences</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>105%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55%</td>
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Assignments

At various times during the semester you will be required to submit written work, provide a presentation, or conduct some other form of work outside of class. Often this work will involve additional research or reading. The assignments will be designed to require creativity and in-depth critical thinking that may not be possible in the “spur of the moment” during a discussion. It is expected that all assignments will be submitted on time. Late assignments will be accepted only if some emergency or other unexpected event makes the deadline unreasonable. Please do not expect me to accommodate irresponsibility with numerous avenues of make-up work.
Tests and Quizzes

Traditionally, a test or quiz infers that there is a single right answer. That may not always be true in this course. Tests and quizzes will require you to defend your position, not necessarily agree with others or me. Although I hope not to resort to this method, I do reserve the right to administer “pop quizzes” if I feel the incentive is necessary.

Student Needs

If there is some aspect of your learning of which I should be aware, please visit with me. If there is some aspect of your college experience that could be improved through private discussion, I am available. I may not be able to help, but I can probably find the person who can.

Students who have a disability that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should contact the Disability Services Coordinator, Cindy Reed at (859) 985-3212, or e-mail cynthia_reed@berea.edu, to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation in this course. Upon request, this syllabus can be made available in alternative forms.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be based on the followed components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. In-Class Participation (see attached rubric)</th>
<th>10%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Assignments</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays related to class readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief response papers and/or journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Assignments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (group work, projects, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Quizzes and Tests</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Berea College Faculty adopted the following definitions of letter grades in the spring of 2003.

A/A-: These grades signify consistently outstanding achievement in all aspects of the course.

B+/B/B-: These grades reflect work of good to very good quality. Work at this level often has outstanding characteristics but is not as consistent throughout the term or in all aspects of the course as required of “A” or “A-” work.

C+/C: These grades denote that the student has attained an acceptable level of competence. The student has demonstrated a basic understanding of the course material and abilities sufficient to proceed to more advanced courses in the area.

C-/D+/D/D-: These grades indicate work that is minimally adequate. These grades raise serious concerns about the readiness of a student to continue in related coursework.

F: This grade represents work that is unsatisfactory and unworthy of credit.

For this course, consider the following percentages:

- **A**: 90-100
- **B**: 80-89
- **C**: 70-79
- **D**: 60-69

**Participation**

I have found through experience that only a fraction of what I have learned in class comes from the instructor. Much of the educational value of a classroom setting comes from the contributions of fellow students. You will be expected to participate in discussions, sharing your observations, insights, and ideas. You may, or may not be accustomed to sharing your ideas in a classroom. I would hope to create an environment where you feel comfortable. For this reason, it is important that all of us respect the views of others and allow each person the opportunity to contribute. There will be no tolerance for “put-downs” or personal attacks.

**Writing**

You will be asked to complete a variety of writing assignments. These will include short responses and brief essays as well as longer reports later in the semester. In some situations, you may be asked to keep a journal of your ideas while reading. Plagiarism
will not be tolerated and may result in your dismissal from the class (and possibly from the College).

**Library Assignments**

One of the goals of this course is to improve your ability to use library resources. To accomplish this goal, our class will be meeting in the Library on various occasions.

**Computer Use**

Along with many (if not all) of your instructors, I expect all written work to be completed on the Microsoft Word program. These assignments will be submitted electronically through Moodle software. If you are experiencing difficulty in working on the computer or using electronic means of communication, there is help available through the Information Systems and Services office. I can help you get in contact with the right people.

Please bring your fully functioning EDGE laptop to class each day unless instructed otherwise. Before class connect to the network and boot up the computer. Any misuse of the computer, such as chat room discussions or “web surfing” during class will not be tolerated. Also, please refrain from displaying lewd, offensive, or pornographic photos on your computer screen.

**The Learning Center**

Some of you may have already met the friendly people at The Learning Center. If not, you are encouraged to contact the Center for help with your assignments. The Learning Center is located on the main floor of the Draper Building. They offer several workshops that may be of interest to you. The schedule of these workshops will be publicized in class, on Moodle, and via email.

**Dress Code**

College is a time of transition into a professional position. Being “professional” involves a certain degree of public scrutiny, so I expect your appearance to be appropriate. Do not wear clothing that causes a disruption, a distraction, or communicates a negative image.
# Class Discussion Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution</strong></td>
<td>Indicates in-depth analysis, careful wording of responses, clearly communicated</td>
<td>Insightful comments but lacking depth, comments not clearly connected to current topic</td>
<td>Surface observations only, comments not connected to current topic</td>
<td>Not certain that you read the assignment, comments are not consistent with reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>Intently focused on others, incorporated other’s ideas into own comments</td>
<td>Listening, but other’s comments do not always affect yours</td>
<td>Pick up some of the conversation but seem to ignore others</td>
<td>Demonstrate little interest in other’s comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Stayed with the flow of the discussion, comments are appropriate, involved but not dominating</td>
<td>Comments were at times repeat of a previous comment or not timely, dominated at times</td>
<td>Involved in some of the discussion, at other times you seemed disinterested</td>
<td>Only occasional comments and involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>