Instructor: Paul Dawson, Professor of Politics (Paul.Dawson@oberlin.edu)
Office hours: Tuesday 10-11:30 in Rice 230/Thursday 4:30-6 in Azariah’s (1st floor, Mudd library)
Class Meetings: King 121/TR 3-4:15

Peer Writing Tutor: Jenny Schloss¹ (jschloss@oberlin.edu)
Phone: 978-407-5695
Regular Office Hours: Wed 4:30-6:00 and Sun 7:30-9:00 p.m. in a study room on the first floor, south side of Mudd
Additional hours THIS WEEK ONLY: Tue 7:30-9:00 p.m., same location

FYSP 139: Political Leadership

SYLLABUS

1st Semester, 2010-2011

In this seminar, from various perspectives on writing, through various case studies of political leaders, and through writing and rewriting many essays over the semester, you will learn to write better, mostly by recognizing and eliminating bad writing; you will learn to think more insightfully, by abandoning the mindless repetition of hackneyed phrases; you will gain the intellectual power to see though and reject the unclarifiable blather of politicians and political commentators; and you will learn to think politically, by understanding the ways in which leaders – Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and those who sought the presidential nominations of their parties in 2008 – attempt to cope with the contradictory demands of the American public and the frustrating constraints of the American political system.

OBJECTIVES

In addition to the above concerns, this seminar is intended to help you learn to:

1. Read thoughtfully, with superb comprehension and recall;
2. Think critically, deeply, and incisively;
3. Formulate and present compelling arguments that are well-supported by logic and evidence;
4. Reflect on the meaning of what you write so that you can draw inferences about its significance;
5. Think before you write, as opposed to just pushing words around in the hope that they might add up to something;
6. Improve your writing;²

¹ See Jenny’s attachment.
7. Recognize the difference between writing for the sake of discovery and writing (actually re-writing) for the sake of presentation;
8. Communicate what you think, in prose that is clear and engaging;
9. Be critical of your own writing, so you recognize and avoid mistakes that limit your power of persuasion;  
10. Listen to what others are saying and interact with them in a manner that helps them, others, and you understand their meaning, and explore its implications;
11. Speak in a manner that engages others in your thoughts and enriches the conversation in the room;
12. React to what you hear, by thinking “on your feet” in a manner that is insightful, quick and bold;
13. Not take criticism personally;  
14. Do all this in a particular context, one that leads to an understanding of the nature of political leadership and that introduces you to a way of thinking about the American political system.

WAYS OF REACHING OBJECTIVES

We will reach the above objectives, through reading, discussion, writing, and in class critiques of each other’s writing.

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2 You may not know you write badly; perhaps no one ever told you. There are many reasons why high school teachers, for example, might not have told you. These reasons include …

Other reasons you write badly include:

- Bad writing habits, for example:
  - Not thinking before, during, or after you write;
  - Relying on the use of “lazy” or “weasel” words (such as so, therefore, thus, obviously, inherently) to cover thinly the absence of an argument that has been carefully built, step by step; and
  - Presuming the reader cares about what you are writing, as opposed to taking an active responsibility for making the reader care.
- The “curse of being articulate”; that is, presuming you will write well because you speak well.

3 The flip side of this imperative: do not become defensive and refuse to improve your writing.

4 To be “engaging” you have to avoid giving needless offense by, for example, delivering a monologue or by being disrespectful in some other manner.

5 You, of course, are all wonderful and meaningful; your prose may not be. If you are not open to criticism and willing to benefit from it, you simply remain frozen at your current level of development.
SUPPORTS

In addition to support you are able to obtain from friends, family, and other members of this class, I have arranged for a student Writing Associate to help you: Jennifer Schloss (jschloss@oberlin.edu). You are encouraged to consult with Jenny.

Seek out Jenny:

- … as a sounding board for ideas about your next essay;
- … as a “first critiquer”; i.e., someone who can read and critique your essay before you turn it in;
- … to discuss required reading before we do so in class, thereby mastering the text before we explore its ideas and implications; and
- … to help you understand what you’re doing wrong and how to do better.

In addition, after discussions with Jenny, you are encouraged to seek me out to discuss your written work, the quality of your class participation, and ways of improving both.

As you will note below, you are required to attend at least one joint meeting with Jenny and the Instructor.

REQUIRED READING (to be read in the following order)


* Paperback

Additional reading assignments may be distributed in class or made available on ERes.

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6 You also are encouraged to form study groups among yourselves to discuss required reading before class.
OTHER COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Essays. Over the course of the semester, you will write (and often re-write) 6 or 7 essays; each essay should be approximately 4 to 7 pages in length, although your final essay might be longer.

2. All deadlines for the submission of written work are firm. Late papers will be marked down a full letter grade for each day late.

3. With the exception of the draft of the Final Essay, do not turn in first drafts. Instead, re-write first drafts to catch mistakes and to restructure your argument. (First drafts look like first drafts and will be graded harshly.) To avoid a poor grade, consult early and often with the Writing Associate and run first drafts by her. In this endeavor, as in politics, lead time counts; i.e., you must give her some time to respond.

4. All written work must be printed in dark ink, one side only, left justified only, paginated, dated, and stapled.

5. Active and excellent participation in class discussion.

6. At least one joint meeting with the Writing Associate and the Instructor.

7. Keep copies of the S & W Don’ts and Dos and the Lessons About Writing assignments (see below), bring them to every class, and attach a copy of each to all subsequent essays.

8. Come to class, on time; late arrivals are disruptive and not permitted.

9. Most importantly, this seminar probably will require you to transform radically your writing. Anyone who persistently writes badly will fail.

10. Following all course rules (see below) is a course requirement.

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7 Each of the course requirements must be met, on time, to pass the course. My travel plans do not permit discretionary incompletes.

8 Speaking in a group may not come easily. I, however, know a number of “tricks” that make this easier (see below).
GRADING

For grading purposes, essays and participation count equally, although there may be an objective examination over the Garrow book.

Your final grade will reflect the quality of your written work, your class participation and your progress toward meeting the course objectives (See above).

NOTES:
1. Improved writing will be positively rewarded.
2. Active and constructive oral participation in class will be positively rewarded.
3. Failure to use the “Facilitating Questions” will adversely affect your grade.
4. The failure to learn, as signaled by repeatedly making the same mistakes, especially in your written work, will be graded negatively and harshly.
5. The mistakes you will need to correct are all those described by Strunk and White, Frankfurt, Cohen, and Orwell – plus all the ones I point out in my comments on (and about) your written work (and the written work of your peers).
6. In addition, the failure to prepare for class, by reading for mastery, also will result in a reduction of your grade.
7. There are no exams, although there is an objective quiz over the Garrow text.
8. There is no premium on outside research; i.e., to write your essays, you only need to rely upon the required course reading, class discussion, meetings with Jenny and the Instructor, and your mind. Instead of outside research, I encourage you to spend your time and effort in original and critical thought.

SCHEDULE/TOPIC/ASSIGNMENTS

**Week 1**  
**Personal Views of Political Leadership**

- Write an *Initial Essay* on political leadership. (20 minutes)
  
  NOTE: This and all subsequent written work is public; that is, it may be shared with other members of the seminar and critiqued in class.
- TEN MINUTE BREAK (Feel free to read over the Syllabus)
- In class critique of selected essay(s)
- Syllabus highlights
- Assignment for the next class (Thursday, Sept. 9):
  - Read Strunk and White.  
  - Word-process an expanded (3-5 page) version of your *Initial Essay*.
  - Print out this version and use the *Strunk and White* text to critique this version of your essay.

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9 When the syllabus, under Week 1, says “Read Strunk and White”, this means the text must be read before the meeting for which it is assigned. This is true for all reading assignments.
Use a colored pen or pencil to make the critical comments that Strunk and White would make on your essay.

- Make two photocopies copies of the essay with your critical comments.
  - Turn in one copy at the beginning of the second class meeting this week (Thursday, Sept. 9).
  - Keep one copy for yourself, to refer to during our discussion of your essay.
  - Lead a discussion of what you did wrong.

- After class, prepare and word-process a list of the Strunk and White mistakes that you will never make again.
  - Email me this list, S & W Don'ts and Dos, by midnight on Friday, Sept. 10.
  - Print out and keep a copy for yourself; bring it to all subsequent class meetings and attach a copy to each subsequent essay.
  - If you persist in making the same mistakes, you will fail the seminar.

**Week 2**

Contemporary political leaders

- By Tuesday, September 14, read, in its entirety, Game Change, and be prepared to answer the question: “What have you learned about political leadership, as it appears in the pages of this book?”

- For class on Thursday, Sept. 16, be prepared to discuss your current view of political leadership and ideas you have for a new essay (to be due on Tuesday, Sept. 21).

**Week 3**

New Essay/Bullshit

For Tuesday, Sept 21:
- Turn in your new essay on political leadership
- Have read, and be prepared to discuss, Frankfurt and Cohen (“Read”, of course, means master the text before this class meeting.)
- In class discussion: According to Frankfurt and Cohen …
  1. What’s bullshit?
  2. What does it do?
  3. Why is there so much of it?
  4. Do you agree/disagree? Why/why not?

For Thursday, Sept. 23:
- Discussion of new political leadership essays

*Recommended Reading:* Katz, “How to speak and write postmodern” [ERes]

For next week, re-write your political leadership essay.
**Week 4**

*Does the slovenliness of your language make it easier to have foolish thoughts?*

- Before class on Tuesday, Sept. 28, read the *Orwell* essay: “Politics and the English language”.
  - In class, reconstruct, orally, *Orwell’s* argument.
- In class on Tuesday, Sept. 28, turn in your rewrite.
  - Discussion of rewrites
- Before class on Thursday, Sept. 30: Find examples of slovenly language and foolish thoughts in the written work of any current Oberlin College faculty member.\(^{10}\)
  - Ask them: “Why do you write this way?”
- In class on Thursday, Sept. 30, share:
  - The examples
  - Verbatim accounts of the responses of the Oberlin authors to your question

For next week, create a new file, “Lessons About Writing”, in which you state what you have learned about writing well and, in succinct, catchy and memorable language, state what you will never do again. Email me this file by midnight of the same day we conclude our discussion of slovenly language.

**Week 5**

*Machiavelli*

For class on Oct. 5:

- Turn in one copy of your “Lessons About Writing”.
- Have read *Machiavelli*.
  - In class discussion … According to *Machiavelli*:
    1. What must a prince do?
    2. Why?
    3. Do you think that’s political leadership?
    4. Why/why not?
  - Begin writing a new essay on political leadership, incorporating, where useful, ideas from *The Prince*, and, in class on Thursday, Oct. 7, turn in a copy of this new essay.

In class on Oct. 7:

- Discussion of the new *Machiavelli Essays*
  - Discussion questions include:
    1. Do you disagree with *Machiavelli*?
       a. If so why?

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\(^{10}\) Books by Oberlin faculty are shelved in the northeast corner of Azariah’s.
b. If not, why not? (That is, what other evidence would you offer in support of Machiavelli’s argument?)

2. Can political leaders lead without being Machiavellian?
   a. If so, how? Examples (real or hypothetical)?

3. For a leader to lead in a non-Machiavellian manner, what would have to be true? About human nature? About the political system?

4. If Machiavelli is correct, what must leaders (and those who aspire to be leaders) do? And not do?

5. What does it take to be a Machiavellian leader?

6. If political leaders are Machiavellian, what kind of politics will we have? What kind of public policy?

**Week 6  Political Leadership Revisited**

“What is political leadership?” Re-write your Initial Essay, drawing on all reading, discussion and thought to date.

- Print out two copies of this, the New Essay, and, in class on Thursday, Oct. 14, turn in one copy.
- In class discussion and critique of the New Essay.

**Week 7  LBJ’s Style of Political Leadership**

- Read Caro (1st third of the book)
- In class discussion of the assigned portion of the text
- Begin writing an essay that conveys your view of Johnson as a political leader.

**FALL BREAK: Oct. 23-31**

**Week 8**

**Tuesday, Nov. 2. ELECTION PARTY:** Dawson’s, 8 pm – midnight, BRING YOUR OWN AGE-APPROPRIATE BEVERAGE, 284 Forest Street

http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=Oberlin&state=OH/address=284+Forest+

For class on Tuesday, Nov. 2:
- Reading Assignment: Caro (2nd third of the book)
- In class discussion of the first two-thirds of the text
- You are encouraged to meet with the Writing Associate and the Instructor to discuss your evolving Johnson Essay.

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11 “Re-writing” may require you to make more than cosmetic changes; e.g., you might decide to throw out your initial essay and write a totally different one. If you do this, however, make sure it does not include what Strunk and White would consider mistakes, what Frankfurt and Cohen would consider bullshit, and what Orwell would consider slovenly language and foolish thoughts.
Week 9

- *Johnson Essay Due* (In class, Tuesday, Nov. 9)
- Reading Assignment: *Caro* (last third of the book)
- In class discussion of the text (continued)
- In class discussion of selected *Johnson* essays

Week 10  MLK’s Style of Political Leadership

- Reading Assignment: *Garrow* (1st third of the book)
- In class discussion of the text (continued)
- In class discussion of *Johnson* essays (cont.)
- Begin formulating and writing what will be your *Final Essay* on some aspect of political leadership.

Week 11

- Reading Assignment: *Garrow* (2nd third of the book)
- In class objective quiz to test your mastery of the *Garrow* text
- In class discussion of the text (continued)
- You are encouraged to meet with the Instructor to discuss what will be your Final Essay.

Week 12

- Reading Assignment: *Garrow* (last third of the book)
- In class discussion of the text (continued)
- Draft of your *Final Essay* due (Tuesday, Nov. 30)

Weeks 13  Personal Views of Political Leadership Revisited & 14

- *Final Essay*: The finished hard copy version is due, by noon, on Monday, Dec. 6 in the box outside my office.
- In class discussion and critique of final essays

CLASS RULES

The quality of this seminar will depend, in part, on everyone following class rules. These include:

1. All submitted written work is to be word processed, left-justified, printed in dark ink, paginated, dated, and securely fastened.
2. Show up; “nearly perfect”\textsuperscript{12} class attendance is required.
3. Come on time; late arrival is not permitted.\textsuperscript{13}
4. No in class use of laptops; they are isolating and sometimes disruptive.
5. Turn off electronic gadgets that make a noise.

All class rules are mandatory: not following any of them will result in not passing this seminar.

\textbf{EMAIL}

To reduce the risk of computer viruses, I do not open email from senders I do not recognize. If you want me to read your email, use your OC email name or, with some other email program, use your full name.

\textsuperscript{12} “Nearly perfect” means you attend all but one class, unless you’re hospitalized (and can produce your discharge papers). If you’re sick and “contaminating” (sneezing, coughing, etc.), wear a mask. [No whiny emails, please.]

\textsuperscript{13} If you’re late, as defined by my cell phone and as signaled by the closed door, do not enter. The resulting non-attendance will count against your one permitted absence.
“TRICKS” or facilitating questions; i.e. rhetorical devices for improving class discussion and, in general, for promoting collegial learning.

Active learning is interactive; move away from monologues towards more conversational interaction.

You may have become accustomed to learning passively, probably mostly by listening to your teachers (or pretending to listen) and by taking notes (thereby conveniently postponing an occasion to think about what you were told). As a result, you may have become habituated to passive learning. It’s time to break that habit.

Becoming an active learner is like learning to dance: you awkwardly take a few tentative steps before you gradually become less self-conscious and more fluid.

To become an active learner, take the following steps: Ask the following questions …

**FACILITATING QUESTIONS**

**Soft Questions** (Designed to begin interaction.)

- I’m not sure I’m getting all that you’re saying: I’m hearing …… Do I have it? Am I missing something?
- I’m not sure I fully appreciate your argument: could you please run it by me again?
- Are you saying …?
- Do you mean to suggest …?

**Harder Questions** (Intended to help move the discussion away from what Frankfurt calls bullshit and towards what he refers to as truth.)

- I’m sorry: what’s your point?
- Why?
- What’s your evidence?
- Could you give me a concrete example or illustration?
- How does that relate to the reading? (Today’s or that previously assigned.)
- If you’re wrong, how would we know it? That is, what would you take to be evidence that refutes your point?

**Transitional Questions** (Intended to move the discussion along)

- If you’re right, what might follow from your observation? That is, what might be the implications of what you’re saying? (“So what?”)
- You might be right – but how would you account for the following apparent anomaly or exception …………..?
That’s interesting, although I think you might be wrong: let me suggest an alternative argument (or explanation) …

Is there any connection between what you’re saying and what Petunia said a few moments ago? (Last week?)

I’m not sure I get it: can anyone (other than the original speaker) help me out?

Does anyone agree with this? Why?

Does anyone disagree with this? Why?

Why do I care? That is, why might we, students of political leadership, care about this observation (argument/explanation/assertion/etc.)?

What’s the point? (What should I take away from this discussion? What should I try to remember that might help me in the future?)

Let me see if I can sum up this discussion …

Any last thoughts before we move?

Can we move on?

When should you ask these questions? [GOOD QUESTION!]

ANSWER: All the time, especially if the speaker, after droning on without interruption for a minute or so, is on the verge of a monologue.

NOTES:

1. The above questions are unnumbered; figure out when a particular question is appropriate.

2. You may discover or invent additional questions.

3. Yes, asking these questions will seem contrived and awkward at first.

4. The questions allow you to break in, thereby creating an occasion for you to say something.

5. If you’re droning on, expect to be interrupted.

6. Armed with the facilitating questions, you have less of an excuse for silence.

7. I expect you, in every class session, will ask some of the above questions (or similar ones of your own design). If you’re not doing so, you are probably are not participating well and, thereby, losing one-half your grade.

8. If I were you, I would keep a copy of these questions in front of me during every class.

(August, 2010)
ATTACHMENT

Jenny Schloss
Peer Writing Tutor
FYSP 139: Political Leadership

Email: jschloss@oberlin.edu
Phone: 978-407-5695
Interests: politics, physics, tutoring, unicycling, “The West Wing”
Regular Office Hours: Wed 4:30-6:00 and Sun 7:30-9:00 p.m. in a study room on the first floor, south side of Mudd
Additional hours THIS WEEK ONLY: Tue 7:30-9:00 p.m., same location

Hi. I’m your peer writing tutor. Please consider me an additional support to help you improve your writing and accomplish your course objectives.

This semester I’ll be available to meet with you during any stage of the writing process. You can bounce ideas off of me to get a clearer picture of what you want to express. I’ll help you identify rough areas in your writing and work out solutions. I’m also happy to chat with you about assignments, expectations, and college in general.

Professor Dawson and I consider learning to write well as an ongoing, lifelong process. It isn’t, therefore, that you write well or not so well; it’s that you always can write better. (He will make sure you know you need to do better; I’m here to help.)

I am available on the first floor of Mudd Library on Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. and Sundays 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. If you can’t make either time, feel free to email me and we’ll arrange a more convenient time to meet.

I (and Professor Dawson) strongly encourage you to come to my office hours this week. This first week may be the hardest for you all semester; if you come see me, I’ll share some tips for succeeding in the class. I look forward to getting to know you all.

-Jenny

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14 Interests: politics, physics, tutoring, unicycling, “The West Wing”.