FYSP 139: Political Leadership

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/Tu & Th 3-4:15

Peer Writing Tutor\(^1\): Jade La Croix (jlacroix@oberlin.edu)
Tutor’s Office Hours for first week of class: Tuesday 7:30-9pm in the Science Atrium
Tutor’s Regular Office Hours: Thursday 8-9:30pm and Sunday 7-8:30pm in the Science Center Atrium

SYLLABUS

1st Semester, 2011-2012

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, 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 how leaders attempt to cope with the demands of the American public and the 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;\(^2\)

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\(^1\) See the Attachment: Memo from the Peer Writing Tutor
\(^2\) 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:
  o Not thinking before, during, or after you write;
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; and
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.

SUPPORTS

In addition to support you are able to obtain from friends, family, and other members of this class, I have arranged for a Peer Writing Tutor to help you: Jade La Croix (jlacroix@oberlin.edu). You are encouraged to consult often with Jade.

Seek out Jade:

- … 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.

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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 acting disrespectfully 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.
6 You also are encouraged to form study groups among yourselves to discuss required reading before class.
In addition, after discussions with Jade, you are encouraged to seek me out to discuss your written work, the quality of your class participation, and ways of improving both.

You are required to attend at least one joint meeting with Jade and the Instructor.

**REQUIRED READING** (to be read in the following order)

3. George Orwell, “Politics and the English language” @ http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit (and elsewhere) [Bb]

* Paperback

Additional reading assignments may be distributed in class or made available on the seminar’s Blackboard site [Bb].

**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. (**Always have at least one copy of your current essay with you in class.**)
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. 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 Peer Writing Tutor 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.

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7 These are required readings you should have; other required readings are available online.
8 It is easier to avoid writing badly than it is to write well. *Strunk and White* will help you avoid writing badly; for a few chances to develop, beyond the semester’s calendar, insight on writing well, see William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* and Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence*.
9 Each of the course requirements must be met, on time, to pass the course. My travel plans do not permit discretionary incompletes.
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.10
6. At least one joint meeting with the Peer Writing Tutor and the Instructor.
7. Keep a copy of the S & W Don’ts and Dos (described below), bring it to every class, and attach a copy 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 persists in habitually writing badly will fail.
10. Following all Course Rules (see below) is a course requirement.

GRADING

For grading purposes, essays and participation count equally.

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 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 Jade 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)

10 Speaking in a group may not come easily. I, however, know a number of “tricks” that make this easier. For these, see the Attachment: Facilitating Questions.
• In class critique of selected essay(s)
• Syllabus highlights
• Assignment for the next class (Thursday, Sept. 8):
  o Read Strunk and White. ¹¹
  o Word-process an expanded (3-5 page), verbatim version of your Initial Essay. (“Verbatim” means type it as you wrote it; don’t change a thing.)
  o Print out this version of your essay and use the Strunk and White text to critique it.
    ▪ Use a colored pen or pencil to make the critical comments that Strunk and White would make on your essay.
  o 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. 8).
    ▪ Keep one copy for yourself, to refer to during our discussion of your essay.
    ▪ Lead a discussion of what you did wrong.
  o 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. 9.
    ▪ Print out and keep a copy of this list for yourself; bring it to all subsequent class meetings. Update it as necessary, adding new Dos and Don’ts.
    ▪ Attach this list to each subsequent essay.
    ▪ Before you turn in any essay, check to make sure you are not repeating previous mistakes.
    ▪ If you persist in making the same mistakes, you will fail the seminar.
  o Feel free to revise this essay in any way you wish, making sure you do not make new Strunk and White mistakes.

HEADS UP: Start reading Joseph S. Nye, The Powers to Lead

Week 2  A clean (and possibly revised) Initial Essay

By noon on Monday, Sept. 12, turn in one clean copy of your Initial Essay.
• Make sure it has nothing that Strunk and White would consider to be a mistake.

Before class on Tuesday, Sept. 13
• To prepare for the Fenty Convocation by:
  o Read pages S-1 through S7 and 1-1 through 1-5 in the report of the National Research Council, “A Plan for Evaluating the District of Columbia's Public Schools: From Impressions to Evidence” (2011), especially pages S-1 through S7 and 1-1 through 1-5 @

¹¹ 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.
Prepare 2-3 questions you would like to put to Mr. Fenty about his political leadership, or lack thereof.

In class on Tuesday, Sept. 13:
- Read aloud (and, if necessary, revise) the questions you would like to put to Mr. Fenty.
- Read, critique, and discuss selected revised essays.

For the Fenty Convocation on Tuesday evening (7:30 pm in Finney)
- Attend the Convocation and quickly queue up to ask your best question

In class on Thursday, Sept 15:
- Discussion of the Fenty Convocation
  - Your impressions
  - Does he appear to have been a political leader? Why or why not?
- Read, critique, and discuss selected revised essays.

Week 3 Revisit your Revised Essay

For Tuesday, Sept 20:
- 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?
- A new perspective on your writing … The assignment for Thursday: Guess what?

For Thursday, Sept. 22:
- The Guess What Assignment: A new perspective on your writing (cont.)

Recommended Reading: Katz, “How to speak and write postmodern” @ http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/how-to-talk-postmodern.html [Bb]

For next week, write a new essay on political leadership, one without …

Week 4 Does the slovenliness of your language make it easier to have foolish thoughts?

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12 A free lunch with Jade and Dawson to those who manage to ask their question of Mr. Fenty.
• Before class on Tuesday, Sept. 27, read the Orwell essay: “Politics and the English language”.  
  o In class, reconstruct, orally, Orwell’s argument.
  
  ▪ “Guidelines for a meaningful discussion”
    • The first step in a meaningful discussion of a text: Demonstrate mastery of this text; i.e., faithfully reconstruct the arguments and reproduce the supporting evidence and examples.
    • The second step: Present your assessment, both positive and negative, of the text.
    • Then … In what ways has Orwell changed your view of language? (Think about this question ahead of time and come prepared to be specific.)

• In class on Tuesday, Sept. 27, let’s examine and critique the current version of your essay for what Orwell refers to as slovenly language and foolish thoughts.
  o In class assignment: In your current essay, find and circle examples of slovenly language and foolish thoughts. Read each aloud and explain why it is.

• Before class on Thursday, Sept. 29: Find examples of slovenly language and foolish thoughts in the written work of any current Oberlin College faculty member.
  o Ask them: “Why do you write this way?” NOTE: YOU MUST ASK THEM IN PERSON: NO EMAIL INTERVIEWS.
  
  ▪ Please DO NOT say any of the following:
    • DO NOT say: “Professor Dawson wants me to ask you why you write so badly.”
    • DO NOT say: “Professor Dawson wants me to ask you why you use such slovenly language.”
    • DO NOT say: “Why do you use such slovenly language?”
  
  o Simply share with them a copy of the excerpt from their written work and ASK, POLITELY: “Would you please tell me why you chose to express your thoughts in this way?” (Write down their answer so that can share it with the class.)

• In class on Thursday, Sept. 29, share …
  o The examples: Have a copy of the excerpt and read it aloud.
  o Read your verbatim account of the responses of the Oberlin author you interviewed.
  o Class discussion of the examples and the authors’ responses
  o What do you conclude from this exercise?

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13 For almost charming examples, see some of the winners of a bad writing contest @ http://www.denisdutton.com/bad_writing.htm

14 Books by Oberlin faculty are shelved on the west wall in Azariah’s.
Week 5  Nye

For class on Oct. 4 & 6:
• Having finished reading Joseph S. Nye, The Powers to Lead
  o Discussion of Nye: “Guidelines for a meaningful discussion”
    ▪ The first step in a meaningful discussion of a text: Demonstrate mastery of this text; i.e., faithfully reconstruct the arguments and reproduce the supporting evidence and examples.
    ▪ The second step: Present your assessment, both positive and negative, of the text.
    ▪ Then … In what ways has Nye changed your view of political leadership? (Think about this question ahead of time and come prepared to be specific.)

Weeks 6 and 7  Machiavelli

Heads up: Start reading Caro, The Master of the Senate

For class on Oct. 11:
• Have read Machiavelli.
  o In class discussion … According to Machiavelli:
    1. What must a prince do?
    2. Why?
    3. Do you agree or disagree with Machiavelli? Why? (Be specific.)
    4. Can political leaders lead without being Machiavellian? If so, how? Examples (real or hypothetical)?
    5. For a leader to lead in a non-Machiavellian manner, what would have to be true? About human nature? About the political system?
    6. If Machiavelli is correct, what must leaders (and those who aspire to be leaders) do? And not do?
    7. What does it take to be a Machiavellian leader?
    8. If political leaders are Machiavellian, what kind of politics will we have? What kind of public policy?

• Write a new essay on political leadership, incorporating, where useful, ideas from The Prince, and, in class on Thursday, Oct. 13, turn in a copy of this new essay.
  o In class on Oct. 13, 18, 20: Discussion and critique of the most recent essay

FALL BREAK: Oct. 22-30

Week 8  LBJ’s Style of Political Leadership

For class on Tuesday Nov. 1 and Thursday, Nov. 3:
• Read Caro (1st fourth of the book)
• In class discussion of the assigned portion of the text
  o Follow the above “Guidelines for a meaningful discussion”
• Begin writing an essay that conveys your view of Johnson as a political leader.

**Week 9**  
**LBJ** (cont.)

For class on Tuesday, Nov. 8 and Thursday, Nov. 10:
- Reading Assignment: Caro (2nd third of the book)
- In class discussion of the first two-thirds of the text
- Meet with the Peer Writing Tutor and the Instructor to discuss your evolving Johnson Essay.

**Weeks 10 and (part of) 11**  
**LBJ** (cont.)

For class on Tuesday, Nov. 15, Thursday, Nov. 17, and Tuesday Nov. 22:
- Reading Assignment: Caro (3rd fourth of the book)
- In class discussion of the text (continued)
- Begin finishing your Johnson essays: Due on the Monday after Break, by noon, in the box outside Dawson’s office.

**THANKSGIVING: NOV. 24**

**Week 12**  
**LBJ** (cont.)

For class on Tuesday, Nov. 29, and Thursday, Dec. 1:
- Reading Assignment: Have finished Caro
- In class critique and discussion of Johnson essays.
- Begin writing your Final Essay in which you present your current view of political leadership, drawing, where appropriate, on course reading and discussion.

**Weeks 13 and 14**  
**Personal Views of Political Leadership Revisited**

- **Final Essay**: Due, by noon, on Monday, Dec. 5, in the box outside my office.
- In class discussion and critique of final essays: Dec. 6, 8, and 13
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” class attendance is required.
3. Come on time; late arrival is not permitted.
4. No in class use of laptops; they are isolating and sometimes disruptive.
5. Turn off electronic gadgets that make a noise.
6. Use the “Facilitating Questions” to help nurture worthwhile class discussion.

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

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.

15 “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.]
16 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.
ATTACHMENT: Facilitating Questions

Facilitating questions are rhetorical devices for improving class discussion and, in general, for promoting learning that is collegial and active.

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, ask the following questions of each other:

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 were 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, not earning 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 27, 2011)
Attachment: Memo from the Peer Writing Tutor

Jade La Croix [Call me Jade; the last name is tricky to pronounce.]
Peer Writing Tutor
Email: jlacroix@oberlin.edu
Phone: 347-309-2620

Office Hours for first week of class: Tuesday 7:30-9pm in the Science Atrium

Regular Office Hours: Thursday 8-9:30 pm and Sunday 7-8:30 pm in the Science Center Atrium—I will have a sign on the table where we will be meeting.
Please Note: I will try to arrange study rooms as often as I can in the Science Library or in Mudd. Look for emails throughout the week with reminders of meeting locations and confirmation of meeting times.

Hi!

I’m a third-year Politics major and Rhetoric& Composition Minor. My interests lie deeply within the American political system, fashion/shopping, tutoring and writing. I’m also a survivor of EVERY Dawson course ever offered!

This semester I’m going to be your peer writing tutor. I am an aide to the course, helping you improve your writing skills, achieve course objectives, and overcome course-related academic challenges.

Throughout the semester I am available for meetings during all stages of the writing process. I’m here for you to brainstorm and to help you express clearly your ideas. I will also help you spot trouble areas in your writing and work with you to find solutions that will become second nature. I’m also available to talk with you about assignments, class expectations, and just about college life.

Both Professor Dawson and I believe that improving writing is an ongoing process. Whether you think you’re an awesome writer or an average writer there is always room for improvement: that’s why I’m here!

I look forward to getting to know all of you and your goals for the course.