OBERLIN COLLEGE

RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION 301: SEMINAR IN SCHOLARLY WRITING

Spring 2014 — Prof. Len Podis, King 139; x58612; lpodis@oberlin.edu; Hrs: TR 2:00–3:00 p.m. or by appt.
Course Writing Associate: Anna Aronowitz

To write with authority about a topic on which one is not an authority is to radiate with disingenuousness and unease, the last things a student writer needs. —Carolyn Callaghan (OC ’10)

What [my sources] were saying to me, if I had listened, was pretty simple: don’t follow us, don’t reproduce what we have produced, don’t live life from secondary sources […] don’t disappear. —Nancy Sommers

Oberlin College is known for educating scholars, many of whom produce lots of writing. In this seminar we will engage with scholarly writing to advance our understanding and improve our ability to write engaging scholarly work. Fortunately we have a good bit of experience to draw on. I would like us to use our experience as a base from which to increase our own skills and as a fund of knowledge and expertise to educate one another. In recent years, many departments have created capstone courses in their majors. In that spirit, I believe this course constitutes a kind of “liberal arts capstone.” Since the course is comprised of seniors and juniors, and since scholarly rhetoric cuts across the disciplines, it seems reasonable to think of this course as a culminating liberal arts experience in which students share the knowledge and methodologies they have gained as members of diverse academic discourse communities.

At the same time that we practice and celebrate our scholarship, I hope we can view scholarly conventions through a critical lens. Often in pursuing such projects, students—and faculty—accept sanctioned techniques without interrogating them. If we think of ourselves as “advanced” writers, we might justifiably harbor suspicions of discursive constraints that appear formulaic or limiting. While there are compelling reasons for adhering to conventions of scholarly writing, it can be fruitful to probe their underpinnings as opposed to using them uncritically. For example, we might explore the footnote (or parenthetical reference) not only in terms of its uses, but also with regard to its larger import. Indeed, one scholar, Peter Elbow, has identified the footnote as the single most distinctive stylistic feature of scholarly writing. In his words, to footnote is “to take a ride on the authority of others.”¹ This course will attempt, among other goals, to examine what it means to take such a ride. It will also consider such practices as clearing space for one’s own work by vigorously contesting the writings of competitors. Ultimately, I believe we should pursue scholarly writing as informed practitioners whose creations belong to genres of rhetoric with their own distinctive conventions, conventions that have both advantages and disadvantages. An important theme of the course will be that becoming an effective scholarly writer involves not only controlling academic discourse conventions but also knowing when and how to resist those conventions.

Course Objectives
- to provide a workshop setting in which you can work on your scholarly project(s)
- to create a space for you to reflect on your own writing habits and processes
- to encourage you to share with classmates what you know about scholarly writing
- to increase your understanding of scholarly writing as a situated practice

Course Requirements
1. regular attendance—no more than 2 absences without a good reason, please
2. assigned readings—see schedule below
3. a weekly journal entry (2-3pp) discussing your ongoing writing projects and your writing processes as well as the course readings, generally due in class every Tuesday
4. in-class discussion of readings and of writing-related issues
5. weekly drafting/revising of material related to your essay projects (see Requirements 7, 8 & 9, below)
6. participation in weekly peer response sessions to review ongoing writing projects of class members
   7. an essay (6-8 pp.) to be drafted and revised early in the semester, due Tuesday, March 4.
   8. an essay (10-12 pp.) to be drafted and revised mid-semester; due Thursday, April 3.
   9. an essay (15-20 pp.) to be drafted and revised the last few weeks of the term; due Weds., May 14 at 4:00 p.m.

Note: For 7, 8 & 9 you may instead work on one project for the whole semester (e.g., an honors essay)
10. two presentation workshops focused on the drafts-in-progress of your writing projects (OVER)


**Recommended:** submission of a paper for publication to an appropriate peer-reviewed journal

**Grading,** I will use a form of contract grading. If you (1) attend regularly (no more than two absences), (2) participate in course activities with dedication, and (3) do all the assignments in a thoughtful way, you will earn a B+. If you honor the contract and go a step further to show exceptional commitment to your work, you will move into the A range. If you don’t meet the contract, your grade will be lower. Rather than affix letter grades to your assignments, I will provide discursive or evaluative commentary. I will also invite you to submit a final self-evaluation (2 pp) that I will consider as I determine course grades.

**Note:** Please write the honor code pledge on all assignments and sign your name following it: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”

**Texts**
- *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, by Joseph Harris. Available at Oberlin Bookstore
- *Stylish Academic Writing*, by Helen Sword. Available at Oberlin Bookstore.
- *Selected readings on Blackboard* (“Course Documents”) These are pieces from scholarly journals and books as well as essays by Oberlin students (mainly from RHET 401, Teaching and Tutoring Writing)
- Please be sure you have access to a research guide and a style manual appropriate to your field.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND READINGS**

**Week 1: Tuesday, February 4:**
For the first class period, we will spend some time introducing ourselves, reviewing the syllabus, and discussing the writing projects we hope to work on during the course. We will also look at some sample journal entries from past years and, as time allows, do some writing in response to a questionnaire I will hand out. For Thursday, please complete the questionnaire.

**Week 1: Thursday, February 6:**
Bring the completed questionnaire to class. We will discuss our answers in detail.

Assignment for next week: Read the selections listed under “Week 2” and write your first journal entry for class on Tuesday, February 11. I will typically ask you to read excerpts aloud from your journals as a way of initiating class discussion, and I will usually collect your journals at the end of class on Tuesdays so I can respond to them and return them to you on Thursdays. Ideally, your journal entries will play an important role in establishing the direction of class discussion.

**Week 2: February 11 & 13**

1. **DEFINING SCHOLARLY WRITING**
2. **INITIATING OUR OWN WRITING PROJECT(S)**

**Reading**
1. “What’s Academic? What’s ‘Alternative’”? Ch.1 in *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines*
2. “Inventing the University,” by D. Bartholomae (Blackboard)
3. “Reflections on Academic Discourse,” by P. Elbow (Blackboard)
4. “Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids,” by J. D. Watson and F. H. C. Crick (Blackboard)
5. “The Incident of 1857,” by Madhu Kolli (Blackboard)

**Writing**
- The first journal entry is due in class on Tuesday, February 11. (Note: journals are due every Tuesday)
- **The 6-8 pp. paper will be assigned on Tuesday 2/11 (due Tues., March 4).** This week we will have our first peer response sessions on essay #1. On Thursday, 2/13, everyone should bring a statement (approx. 2 pages) discussing their preliminary thoughts on the first paper (or alternatively, the first part of the whole-semester writing project). Plan to pair off and work with each other to review the projects.
Week 3: February 18 & 20

1. BRIEF HISTORY OF ACADEMIC WRITING/ 2. GENRE/ 3. STUDENT ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Reading
1. “Introduction,” by D. Russell (Blackboard)
2. “The Subject of Genre,” by T. Helscher (Blackboard)
3. “Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept,” Amy J. Devitt (Blackboard)

Note: The two readings below, # 4 and 5, are included as examples of student academic discourse, not necessarily because of the topics they examine. I hope we can talk about their approaches, textual features, and authorial voices, noting how they are similar to or different from professional scholarship.
4. “Internet Forums and the Writing Student,” by A. Miller (Blackboard)

Writing
• For your journal entry, in addition to reflecting on the readings, please review your files and pick a recent example of your own scholarly writing (at least 5 pp.) to describe and discuss. What is the genre of your piece? How would you characterize its approach, form, voice, etc.?  
• For Thursday (2/20) peer response sessions, write a partial draft (4-5 pp.) of your first essay (please refer to the assignment sheet for the 6-8 pp. paper). We will also aim to have our first presentation workshop.

Week 4: February 25 & 27

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART I / 2. POSITIONING OUR SCHOLARSHIP

Reading
1. “Introduction,” by J. Harris (pp. 1–12 in Rewriting)
2. “Rules of Engagement,” by H. Sword (Ch. 1 in Stylish Academic Writing)
3. “Problem Definition in Academic Writing,” by S. MacDonald (Blackboard) [CE 49 (1987): 315-331]
4. “Previews in Academia: Are They Beneficial?” by P. Le Huu (Blackboard)
5. “The Pros and Cons of Positionality,” by C. Soltys (Blackboard)

Writing
• Continue drafting and revising your project for the first assignment. Write about your work-in-progress in your journal entry along with your response to the readings.
• For Tues., 2/25, bring your draft to class for peer response. We will also have a presentation workshop.

Week 5: March 4 & 6 (Paper #1 Due Tuesday, March 4)

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART II / 2. DISCIPLINARITY

Reading
1. “Coming to Terms,” Chapter 1, pp. 13–33, in Rewriting
2. “Faculty Talk About Their Writing, Disciplines, and Alternatives,” Ch. 2 in Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines
3. “On Being Disciplined” and “Points of Reference,” Ch. 2 & Ch. 12 in Stylish Academic Writing
4. “Objectivity and Ambiguity: Constructing the Textual Persona in the Social Sciences,” by T. Waddelow (Blackboard)
5. “An Analysis of My Processes of Exploration in BIO120 and ENG209,” by M. E. Garza (Blackboard)

Writing
• The 6-8pp. paper will be due Tuesday, March 4. Before you submit the paper, I will ask you to speak about what you wrote, what you learned, your writing process, etc. Also please choose an excerpt to read aloud to the class. In this way everyone in the class can benefit from your paper.
• The 10-12 pp. paper will be assigned Thurs. 3/6 (due Thurs., April 3). We can spend some time brainstorming ideas for the paper (or for the next stage of our semester-long projects).
Week 6: March 11 & 13

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART III / 2. STUDENT AGENCY IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Reading
1. “Forwarding,” Chapter 2, pp. 34–53, in Rewriting
2. “How Our Informants Teach Students to Write,” Ch. 3 in Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines
3. “A Guide to the Style Guides” and “Voice and Echo,” Ch. 3 & Ch. 4 in Stylish Academic Writing
4. “Taking Risks In Academia,” by A. Wysk (Blackboard)
5. “Academic Tracking, Social Justice, and Oberlin,” by K. Thompson (Blackboard)

Writing
• Plan to compose a partial rough draft of your second assignment this week. In your journal entry, please discuss your writing process for this assignment along with your response to the readings.
• For Thurs. (3/13), bring your partial rough draft to class for peer response. We will have a presentation workshop this week, as well.

Week 7: March 18 & 20

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART IV / 2. ETHICAL ISSUES IN SCHOLARLY WRITING

Reading
1. “Countering,” Chapter 3, pp. 54–72, in Rewriting
2. “Smart Sentencing” and “Tempting Titles,” Ch. 5 & Ch. 6 in Stylish Academic Writing
4. “Academic Honesty and the Role of the Writing Tutor,” by J. Sage (Blackboard)
5. “Contextualizing the Debates: A Historical View of Expository Writing,” by G. Chang (Blackboard)

Writing
We will have peer response sessions to allow everyone to get feedback on the draft of the second paper (or semester-long project). On Thursday (3/20), we will have a presentation workshop.

Week 8: March 25 & 27

*****Spring Break*****

Note: In your journal for next week, please include a midterm evaluation of our course, including reflections on your own work so far. We can discuss your thoughts next week in class.

Week 9: April 1 & 3 (Paper #2 Due Thursday, April 3)

STUDENT WRITING AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES

Reading
1. “Students Talk About Expectations, Confidence, and How They Learn,” Ch. 4 in Engaged Writers.
2. “Hooks and Sinkers” and “The Story Net,” Ch. 7 & Ch. 8 in Stylish Academic Writing
3. “Like, it was, you know that I mean?” Conversational vs. Presentational Speech in Student Academic Discourse,” by E. Fawcett (Blackboard)
4. “Scientific Writing: What’s So Difficult About It Anyway?” by Anita Stone (Blackboard)
5. “Academic Papers Within the College Discourse,” by Kanupriya Arora (Blackboard)

Writing
• For Tuesday, April 1, bring your draft of the second paper to class for peer response. We will also have a presentation workshop. On Thursday, April 3, the second paper is due. Before you submit the paper, I will ask you to speak about what you wrote, what you learned, what the process was like, etc. Also please choose an excerpt (a page or so) to read aloud to the class. In this way everyone in the class can benefit from your paper.
Week 10: April 8 & 10

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART V / 2. ARRANGEMENT AND FORM

Reading
1. “Taking an Approach,” Chapter 4, pp. 73–97, in Rewriting
2. “Show and Tell” and “Structural Designs,” Ch. 9 & Ch. 11 in Stylish Academic Writing
5. “The Music of Form,” by P. Elbow (Blackboard)

Writing
• The 15-20 pp. essay will be assigned on Tuesday, April 8 (due May 14.) In your journal, write about your ideas for the final paper (or continuation/completion of your semester-long project).
• For this week’s peer response sessions, write a preliminary draft of a section of your third essay. We will also resume our presentation workshops. (Also: Consider sending a query to a journal or journals to determine their potential interest in reviewing one of your papers for publication.)

Week 11: April 15 & 17

1. STRATEGIES FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING, PART VI / ACADEMIC STYLE AND “BENIGN BULLSHIT”

Reading
1. “Revising,” Chapter 5, pp. 98–123, in Rewriting
2. “Jargonitis,” Ch. 10 in Stylish Academic Writing
3. “Style and Its Consequences: Do as I Do, Not as I Say” by R. Hake and J. Williams (Blackboard)
5. “Writing in Academia: The Politics of ‘Style,’” by V. Pryor (Blackboard)

Writing
• Continue drafting and revising your project for the third assignment. Write about your work-in-progress in your journal entry along with your response to the readings.
• For Thurs. (4/17) bring your draft to class for peer response. **We will continue presentation workshops.**

Week 12: April 22 & 24

1. UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACHES & RESISTANCE/ 2. SCHOLARLY WRITERS GOING PUBLIC

Readings
1. “The Creative Touch,” Ch. 14 in Stylish Academic Writing
2. “Between the Drafts,” by N. Sommers (Blackboard)
4. “An Exploration of the Roots of Standardized Writing Assignments,” by A. Chung (Blackboard)
5. “Writing for the Public,” by Mike Rose (Blackboard)

Writing
• In your journal entry, please write about your own work-in-progress along with your response to the readings for the week.
• For Thursday (4/24) bring your draft of the third essay to class for peer response sessions. **We will continue with presentation workshops.**
Week 13: April 29 & May 1

ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE IN THE ACADEMY

Readings
1. “Discourse and Diversity,” by L. Bridwell-Bowles (Blackboard)
2. “The Hero with a Thousand Voices: The Relationship Between the Narrative and Academic Styles,”
   by Aaron Rester (Blackboard)
3. “Seeing Voices and the Politics of the Pronoun,” by J. Montgomery (Blackboard)
4. “How The Internet Produced My Written Voice: A Mostly-Serious Critique of Old Farts and
   Technology Nay-Sayers,” by T. Morello (Blackboard)

Writing
• In your weekly journal entry, write about your work-in-progress on your final project as well as your
  thoughts about the readings for the week.
• Bring a revised draft of your third essay for peer response sessions on Thursday (May 1). We will
  continue with presentation workshops.

Week 14: May 6 & 8

REVISING AND EDITING OUR SCHOLARLY WRITING PROJECTS

Readings
There are only two additional reading selections for this week, both in Stylish Academic Writing: “The Big
Picture,” Ch. 13, and “Becoming a Stylish Writer,” Afterword. We will focus mainly on our own writing
projects.

Writing
• In your weekly journal entry, write about your efforts to revise and edit your final writing project.
• Bring a revised draft of your final project for peer response sessions on Thursday. We will again have
  presentation workshops both Tuesday and Thursday. (Also: Submit your project to the scholarly journal
  of your choice to be considered for publication.)

*********************************************************************************************

The last class will be held on Thursday, May 8. The final draft of the 15-20pp essay (or the longer full-
semester project) is due Wednesday, May 14 at 4:00 p.m. Please submit it electronically, as an email
attachment. I also invite you to submit a self-evaluation (perhaps 2pp). Feel free to include an estimate
of the grade you think you have earned. While I cannot promise to give you that grade, I will definitely
take your self-evaluation into consideration.