

Gateway to English Studies Course (new English 302)
English Studies
Ways of Reading (title not certain)
February 24, 2005

Course Objectives:

This upper-division gateway course will be the common foundation for students in all four options of the major and will replace the current English 302: Writing about Literature [W, M].

The purpose of the course is to allow students to explore the content areas in the English Department by interpreting and responding to a range of texts, including poetry, fictional and nonfictional prose, images, film and cultural artifacts. Its common theme is the act of interpretation and the ways in which interpretation is shaped by cultural, literary, and social conventions and, in turn, shapes our understanding of the world and the self. The goal of the course is for students to read and engage with an eclectic variety of texts—literary and nonliterary, canonical and noncanonical—and to create their own interpretive frameworks for making meaning.

The basic idea is that interpretation is at the heart of everything we do, whether we're analyzing literature, understanding the appeal of Super Bowl ads or reality television, reading a battlefield letter from a Civil War soldier, trying to write a good poem, figuring out the ways in which texts imitate, resist, or speak intertextually to other texts, or seeing the ways in which cultural forces, including such features as social oppression and the pressures of the marketplace, shape authorial expression in various media. Although some principles of interpretation remain constant, issues of genre, discipline, and social context each contribute specific rules or constraints operating on the ways in which texts are read.

Whether students plan to go to graduate school, teach high school, become creative writers, or pursue jobs outside of academia, they need to understand why textual studies and acts of interpretation are important to a liberal arts education, how scholars approach the research and interpretation of texts, what significance this kind of study can have beyond academia, and how to write and read within different fields of discourse.

Methodology:

Up to five faculty will team-teach the course, covering at least **three** of the following overlapping content areas of English studies: rhetoric, literary analysis, creative writing, professional writing, visual and/or digital media. The course would also conclude with a unit that synthesizes the various content areas, introducing issues of intertextuality and theoretical interpretation.

Each team-teacher would prepare a three-week segment using his or her own texts, assignments, and inquiries.

Learning Outcomes:

The course will prepare students with knowledge of and experience with a range of print and nonprint texts, media and technology, composition processes, and reading strategies. The course will therefore have the following learning outcomes. At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- think critically about complex print and non-print texts.
- understand the importance of interpretation, and to participate actively in interpreting texts.
- be familiar with various interpretive strategies and to understand that interpretive systems can conflict.
- read secondary, historical, and theoretical sources critically and use them effectively in interpretation.
- produce different types of written discourse, appropriate to a variety of purposes and audiences.
- understand the interrelationships between the various content areas of the English major at WSU.

Possible Course Structure:

1. Analyzing Rhetoric. How do we read? What moves or persuades us, and why does it do so? Whose interests are served? How do rhetorical and visual techniques shape audience response?

- Learning about classical rhetorical theories
- Focusing on a special topic, such as Rhetoric and Western Racism
- Forensic rhetoric: Reading a legal document?
- Reading cultural phenomena: rhetorical analysis of weblogs or zines on a particular topic?
- Rhetorical analysis of other forms of media?

2. Literary analysis--Poetry/Fiction/Drama

- Conventions of literary study, etc.
- This might also be taught as #5; for example, Emily Dickinson's poems might be taught beside the conventional feminine poetry that she declined to write.

3. Writing and evaluating creative writing What makes a good popular (or literary) story? How do the rules for contemporary creative writing differ (if they do) from those of literary analysis?

- Students might write a story or narrative in this part.
- Creative writers sometimes talk about the rules of creating a story, poem; what are these?
- What are the hidden assumptions of writing good creative nonfiction?
- Students might analyze texts in various kinds of publications—the McSweeney's story, the *New Yorker* story, etc.
- Creative nonfiction and writing for radio/webcast?

4. Professional writing

- (consisting of --? Arguments? Summaries? Assessments? What could be adapted from existing courses?)
- Writing for scholarships, grants, jobs?
- Specialized language in various disciplines

5. Texts in context: In what ways are texts continually in conflict or conversation with one another? How do texts reflect or construct power relations in a culture? Students should see that the ways of constructing meaning are not fixed and invariable but rather respond to a multiplicity of external forces.

- Looking at the ways in which texts respond to/parody/subvert well-known popular or canonical works: horror films?
- Using conventions to resist received wisdom (e.g., advertisements for runaway slaves, slave narratives; debates on the slavery question, etc.)
- Letters and narratives; autobiographies; historical accounts from multiple perspectives
- Propaganda (fictional or otherwise)

6. Using theory effectively: What can theory contribute to the understanding of disciplinary knowledges? What are its insights? What are its limits?

7. Analyzing Film and other media

Note: The syllabus for this course would significantly revise the extant sample syllabus to account for the modifications in course structure and methodology.