

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR 101 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Spring Semester 2012

First Year Seminar 101 provides an opportunity for first-year students to study the inter-relationship between language and thinking and to develop talents in writing nonfiction essays. The class is designed to provide a cooperative workshop environment and close attention to the process of writing and revision, so that both gifted writers and those with more fundamental needs can improve upon the rhetorical skills they bring to the class.

This course focuses on those features of writing that are shared by all fields: writing that is significant, clear, unified, developed, economical, and thoughtfully presented. However, because writers in different fields necessarily write in different ways, students are strongly urged to seek further guidance specific to the field in which they later specialize. To begin this process, all sections of FYS-101 emphasize rhetorical inquiry into such things as

- analyzing texts;
- conducting research: finding, assessing, using, and citing information from published and electronic sources;
- designing manageable and significant topics;
- planning, structuring, and composing drafts;
- revising and editing.

Instructors design a wide range of topics for individual classes. Students are strongly advised to choose a topic that interests them. These special topics and descriptions of the different sections are available from the First-Year Programs office, the English Department, and the Web.

Because nearly all first-year students take Words and Ideas, this course often serves additional purposes. It might serve as an introduction to Denison, to college life in general, or to faculty expectations of student work. The course might be linked with academic advising or with local events, exhibits, performances. The course, therefore, serves many important purposes on our campus. But the complex and interrelated processes of writing, thinking, and revising are the primary focus of all sections of First Year Seminar 101.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas "*Placing Ourselves: Narratives of Self and Community*"

Section 1 S	8:30-9:20	MWF	Weaver	4
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This class is primarily a writing class, and we will use both fiction and nonfiction to examine the various ways in which authors conceive the intersections between individual, family, community, and national identities. The first part of the course title, "Placing Ourselves," is meant to capture the ways in which we place ourselves in relation to others, to our larger communities and histories, and to our natural environment; the second part, "Narratives of Self and Community," calls attention to the primary role stories play in grounding us in those various environments. The course is organized

into three units based on those interrelationships. While our analysis will focus primarily on literary texts, we will also use these texts to reflect on how our own identities are negotiated and constructed--so our conversations will range from the reading we're doing to the lives we're living. Throughout the semester, our primary goal will be to develop your reading, writing, and critical thinking skills as we explore these ideas. Our main texts will be Russell Banks's *The Sweet Hereafter*, J. California Cooper's *Family*, Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*, and Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, which we'll supplement with assorted short stories and essays. Course requirements will include five essays and active participation in class discussions.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Fire and Ice: (Post-) Apocalyptic Narratives in Science Fiction and Fantasy*”

Section 2 S	9:30-10:20	MWF	Brown	4
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Robert Frost's ironic meditation on theories of the end of the world suggests that either fire or ice “would suffice,” but the choice of method in tales of the apocalypse might at times and with certain audiences facilitate certain effects. This course will allow us to consider the implications of choices made by writers of apocalyptic narratives and by ourselves as writers of nonfiction and argumentative essays. In this course, we will explore all stages of the writing process, evaluate each other's work, and learn about the techniques and ethics of research, particularly the accurate and ethical citation and representation of sources. As a means of reevaluating and refining our approaches to reading, writing, and research, we will think critically about the representation of cataclysmic events in select works of science fiction and fantasy. Questions provoked by tales of the apocalypse are likely to include the following. What draws readers and writers to such tales? What anxieties do doomsday stories express? How do they tap into more “universal” terrors, and how do they address more particular worries of a specific historical period? How do writers use these tales of THE END to achieve various goals? What kinds of destruction are represented, and is the means of destruction of importance? In what ways can literal destruction be interpreted metaphorically, symbolically, or satirically? For example, how do these works represent general fears and questions about life and death and, more specifically, about the nature of identity, both personal and human? How do stories that unsettle and sometimes obliterate the physical, social, ideological, and emotional texture of human and earthly life effectively challenge assumptions, values, or sacred beliefs about the human species, nationality, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability? Supplementary nonfiction essays will help frame and facilitate our discussions of the fictional works. The primary goal of this course is, of course, to strengthen our capacities to analyze what we read (or watch and listen to) and to write coherently and thoughtfully about it.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Voices of the Earth*”

Section 3 S	9:30-10:20	MWF	Bulford	4
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Within the context of words and ideas, *Voices of the Earth* offers students the opportunity to explore the thoughts and techniques of literary, philosophical, and scientific writers and to pose--perhaps to answer--significant environmental questions: Just what and how real are contemporary environmental crises and concerns? What can humanity do about them? What can individuals do? Wherein lies the hope? What can be gained from studying and undertaking nondidactic “nature writing?” Course objectives will include development of increased critical thinking skills, familiarity

with new ideas, improvement of expository writing techniques (including grammar) and research skills, and practice with group projects and informal presentations. Course work will include reading (books, short selections), writing (journals, short papers, end-term research paper), and involved participation in dynamic class discussions, peer reviews, and presentations.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Defining the World, Defining Ourselves*”

Section 4 S	10:30-11:20	MWF	Read	4
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Genuinely original writing comes out of the writer finding her or his place in the world. This certainly applies to personal essays, in which reflection, rumination, and resolution signify prominently. However, the subject matter of essays, no matter how personal, has to do with all of us. It is, as Annie Dillard notes, “the world itself, which, so far, keeps on keeping on.” By reading choice examples of the essay and practicing the craft of writing (and re-writing) essays, we will address the essential work of getting closer to what matters, attempting to understand the world better--and to capture, if only for an instant, that elusive, flitting chameleon of self.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Voices of the Earth*”

Section 5 S	10:30-11:20	MWF	Bulford	4
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Within the context of words and ideas, *Voices of the Earth* offers students the opportunity to explore the thoughts and techniques of literary, philosophical, and scientific writers and to pose--perhaps to answer--significant environmental questions: Just what and how real are contemporary environmental crises and concerns? What can humanity do about them? What can individuals do? Wherein lies the hope? What can be gained from studying and undertaking nondidactic “nature writing?” Course objectives will include development of increased critical thinking skills, familiarity with new ideas, improvement of expository writing techniques (including grammar) and research skills, and practice with group projects and informal presentations. Course work will include reading (books, short selections), writing (journals, short papers, end-term research paper), and involved participation in dynamic class discussions, peer reviews, and presentations.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Writing and Human Rights*”

Section 6 S	11:30-12:20	MWF	Shuler	4
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This first-year seminar will explore the relationship of writing and the description and exploration of human rights abuses. The course will focus on how writers use their craft to “witness” human rights violations, to research claims, and to express their human dignity. We will begin by asking: What are human rights? Where does the idea of human rights come from? What are the contested terrains of human rights? Where and how do human rights abuses occur? Who is human in human rights? Then we will turn our attention to the relationship of writing to human rights discourse: Why do people choose writing as a means for addressing human rights issues? What forms of writing are used? How are human rights issues researched and reported? How do writers act as witnesses (or proxy witnesses) to violations of human rights? How do victims of human rights abuses overcome their traumatic pasts? How can we as scholars read and critique literary art that exposes or witnesses

human rights violations? Finally, what does it mean to be human? And how is writing used as a method for asserting one's humanity? What is the rhetoric of the text? How does the author organize and make her argument?

In order to answer these questions, we will explore human rights issues throughout the world and in our own backyard. Some of the issues we will address will be quite challenging—slavery, war, and the abuse of workers. We will read poems, personal narratives, novels, and formal reports including work by Uzodinma Iweala, Brian Turner, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and others. We may also watch films and attend on-campus lectures appropriate to our discussions. We will gain a basic understanding of some human rights issues while developing our academic writing and research skills. We will explore the discourse of human rights by writing rhetorical analyses of human rights literature, position papers, and an extensive research-based essay—the culmination of the course. This project will require a focused investigation of one human rights issue and call for the identification, evaluation, integration, and documentation of a wide-range of sources.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Food and Culture: Traditions of Nourishment*”

Section 7 S	12:30-13:20	MWF	Kanter	4
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The primary goal of this course is to improve students' reading and writing abilities in academic discourse, the type of writing commonly used by students and professors at U.S. colleges and universities. The course emphasizes the tools of academic literacy: reading well, writing fluently and accurately, responding to the ideas of others in one's own work, evaluating library resources, citing sources accurately and developing a thesis and argument through critical and creative thinking.

Throughout the semester, we will examine the dynamics of culture and identity through the lens of food/nutrition/nourishment. We will read, analyze and interpret texts about food, nutrition and cuisine in various cultures and subcultures, including our own, asking questions like these: How do these writers view the cultures they belong to and the ones whose cuisines and diets they explore? What role does food play in constructing cultural identity? and What can we learn about our own cultures through analyzing our food choices? Readings will include Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and Goodall's *The Ultimate Student Cookbook*, along with shorter selections.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Literature of Travel*”

Section 8 S	13:30-14:20	MWF	Barickman	4
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This course will survey the rich history of travel writing, from the explorers of empire, the nineteenth century pursuit of the sublime, to the modern writers' more subjective quest for an authentic experience. We will discuss such issues as: the opposition between travel and tourism, the political link between empire and travel, the nostalgia for the primitive, and the desire to escape modernity and globalization. Authors include Montagu, Trollope, Darwin, Dickens, Twain, D. H. Lawrence, Kerouac, and Naipaul. Our long works will be Twain's *Roughing It*, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* and Jonathan Raban's *Old Glory*. Required work: short essays analyzing themes and techniques, frequent workshops on the craft of writing, and sparkling participation.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Women in Literature and Film*”

Section 9 S 10:00-11:20 TR McDonnell 4

Through reading texts and viewing films centering on women, seminar participants will explore the basic elements of literary and film analysis and practice essential principles of effective critical writing. The readings, including (among others) Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, and Curtis Sittenfeld’s *Prep*, and the films, including Susan Seidelman’s *Desperately Seeking Susan*, Willy Russell’s *Educating Rita*, and James Lapine’s *Impromptu*, should give rise to fascinating discussion of such topics as the roles of women in society, the silencing of women, the nature of women’s passion and sexuality, the economic basis of marriage, and the discrimination suffered by women of color and women of minority sexual orientation. Intelligent engagement with the course’s texts, polished writing of several formal essays, and thoughtful class discussion will be expected.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Reading and Writing Africa: Colonial and Postcolonial Perspectives*”

Section 10 S 13:30-14:50 TR Mafe 4

The primary objective of this course is to polish your reading, writing, and analytical skills. We will consider the various factors that influence our perceptions of a text. Do we have a default point of view depending on our individual and/or collective identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and so on)? Is there a “right” way to read and interpret a text? How much influence does society have on how we *see* things? Similarly, we will consider the writing process and the means by which a strong academic paper is produced. In exploring and practicing our writing, we will address grammar, format, argument, style, voice, and language.

The topic for this course is colonial and postcolonial perspectives on Africa. So our reading, writing, and analyzing will concentrate on both colonial European works depicting Africa *and* more recent postcolonial works written, for the most part, by African authors. These texts will be our focal point as we exercise close reading, shape essays, and ask critical questions. Beyond the geography of the continent, what does “Africa” signify in these texts? Why do colonial discourses use the phrase the “dark continent”? What do the terms “colonial” and “postcolonial” mean in an African context? Do the assigned texts dialogue with each other? Are there messages or morals (whether subtle or blatant) in these narratives? Do we find ourselves approving of one author and disapproving of another? Are we finding multiple versions of “history” depending on who is telling the story?

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Storytelling: Nuts and Bolts*”

Section 11 S 13:30-14:50 TR Coley 4

Probably even before the cave drawings human beings have been fascinated with stories. After all, we live by the narratives we tell to one another—about our weekend, the party we went to, the boy we met at that party. But what we often don’t think about is how stories are put together. We know, innately, they have a beginning, middle, and end. We know, innately, they must be interesting, but do we know how storytellers start and maintain interest? What tricks do they use to keep us

“hooked” on the story? This class is interested in storytelling structure and uses movies, novels, short stories, and television episodes (plus the occasional song) to discuss and examine how narratives are put together and to teach us how to write cogent, thoughtful papers on those practices. You’ll never look at a novel or movie the same way again and you’ll never write another five-paragraph essay again, either. These are both things you should embrace.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Food for Thought*”

Section 12 S

10:00-11:20

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The primary objective of this class is to improve your abilities to write effective nonfiction prose: expository writing that is persuasive, significant, honest, informed, clear, unified, developed, economical, interesting and thoughtfully presented. In all, writing is thinking. To generate prompts for our writing, we will look at the food industry and its alternatives from different perspectives, including our own. We will examine and read about food, with special focus on the fast food industry and the consequences our society faces from its pervasive presence in our culture. Books include *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan, *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver, along with other current readings and blogs. You will read and write and revise and rewrite extensively, making frequent use of print and electronic sources.