

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR 101 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Spring Semester 2010

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 *"Roman Epic"*

Section 1 S	08:30-09:20	MWF	Kershner	4
Section 2 S	09:30-10:20	MWF	Kershner	4

It should not be controversial to say that the poetic form of epic has more to say about a civilization's cultural identity and psychology than most other forms of written expressions. Epic is based upon the mythology and ideologies that a people uses to understand itself and present itself to other civilizations. This concept is especially true of the Roman epic tradition. In this class, students will read three major epic poems from the Roman tradition with the intent of

understanding the Roman cultural perspective from the inside: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, and Statius's *Thebaid*. We will attempt to understand what "epic" is (if anything at all), how an epic is constructed to use the cultural tradition yet innovate, what the role of mythology is in epic, and how Roman epics converse with each other to express what it really means to be a Roman. Indeed, there is a reason that Dante, in the *Inferno*, refers to all three of these poets as "his guides." In addition, this course will highlight these ideas with an objective of using them to improve our writing. We will emphasize all aspects of the writing process including the development of an idea, the careful construction of an efficient and persuasive argument, and the complete revision process. Course work will include reading (the three works listed above and secondary pieces), writing (short papers and a research paper), and engaged participation in class discussions and the peer review process.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas "Rhetoric and Consumer Culture"

Section 3 S	09:30-10:20	MWF	Davis	4
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The primary objective of this course is to improve students' abilities to write and revise effective nonfiction prose: writing that is significant, informed, clear, unified, developed, economical, and thoughtfully presented. To generate topics and contexts for our writing, we will examine and read about American consumer culture since the 1980s, namely the advertisements, magazines, films, and other texts of our increasingly commercial culture. Students will write and rewrite extensively, making frequent use of print and electronic sources.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas "Voices of the Earth"

Section 4 S	09:30-10:20	MWF	Bulford	4
Section 5 S	10:30-11:20	MWF	Bulford	4

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 "Popular Science Writing: Stories about Human Evolution"

Section 6 S	10:30-11:20	MWF	Glover	4
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This course will improve your ability to write and revise non-fiction essays and hone your critical reading skills. To accomplish these goals, course content will focus on popular press coverage of the research of the physical and behavioral evolution of *Homo sapiens*. Careful journalistic coverage is

especially important for research on human evolution since it can be emotionally, religiously, and politically charged. However, superb science writing is a complex and demanding art, and sloppy journalism can lead to a confused and misinformed public. In this course, you will explore how to more effectively communicate human evolution to the public by evaluating science journalism with a critical eye as well as begin to practice the art yourself.

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

Section 7 S 11:30-12:20 MWF Brown 4

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 *“Identity, Ethnicity, and Culture”*

Section 8 S 11:30-12:20 MWF Kanter 4

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. We will construct our own understandings primarily through acts of composition—brainstorming and creating prose in the classroom and at home, revising with purpose, completing multiple drafts, editing and proofreading systematically and commenting thoughtfully on each other’s projects. 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 authors accurately and developing a thesis and argument through critical and creative thinking.

Throughout the semester, we will read, analyze and interpret texts about the role of ethnicity in constructing one's identity. Most of these texts are autobiographical works by authors who live in the U.S. and have cultural, ethnic and linguistic roots in other nations. We will ask and respond to questions such as these: What is ethnicity, and how is it involved in identity construction? Is there any common perception of American identity, and if so, what is it and how did it develop? How is identity constructed, and how do family, schooling, social class and other factors influence this process? Readings will include *Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska, *No-No Boy* by John Okada and excerpts from *Hunger for Memory* by Richard Rodriguez. Scholarly articles and other brief texts will assist us in analyzing these works.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Curses, Blood, and Betrayal: Reading and Imagining the Agamemnon/Clytemnestra Plays*”

Section 9 S	12:30-13:20	MWF	Papaleonardos	4
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This course is an introductory writing class designed to enhance students' abilities to think critically as well as write and revise college level papers. Class readings will focus on some of the ancient Athenian plays that have defined drama as we know it, as well as modern and cutting-edge adaptations of those same plays. Writings will include weekly short papers, end-term research paper, and creative projects.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Constructing Alternate Realities: Fantasy and Science Fiction*”

Section 10 S	12:30-13:20	MWF	Scott	4
Section 11 S	13:30-14:20	MWF	Scott	4

This course will examine the ways authors use language to construct and define reality as a means of studying the inter-relationship between language and thinking. Imaginary worlds, whether utopias, dystopias, fantastic realms, analogues of our own world, or projections of the future, enable the writer to consider what is, what could be, and what should be. Through reading authors such as Tolkien, Asimov, and Le Guin, students will develop their ability to analyze and think critically as a means to improve as writers and revisers of effective nonfiction prose. Course work will include reading, writing, research, discussion, peer reviews, and presentations.

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

Section 12 S	10:00-11:20	TR	Frolking	4
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The primary objective of this class this semester is to improve your abilities to write effective nonfiction prose: expository writing that is 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 food from different perspectives, including our own. We will examine and read about food, specifically fast food, its industrialization and corporatization, and the consequences our society faces as a result. You will read and write and revise and rewrite extensively, making frequent use of print and electronic sources.

101 - First Year Seminar - Words & Ideas “*Placing Ourselves: Self and Community*”

Section 13 S 10:00-11:20 TR Weaver 4

This course will examine the various ways in which authors conceive the intersections between individual, family, and community identities in multiple contexts. While our analysis will focus on literary representations of family and community, we will use these texts to build into considerations of how our own identities are shaped in negotiation between our own families and communities. Throughout the course, our primary goal will be to develop your reading, writing, and critical thinking skills as we discuss such novels as E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, J. California Cooper's *Family*, Russell Banks's *The Sweet Hereafter*, and other works of literature.

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

Section 14 S 15:00-16:20 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 “*Commemoration and History*”

Section 15 S 16:30-17:50 TR Nekola 4

The purpose of this class is to improve students' abilities to think critically and communicate effectively, practicing productive reading, writing, speaking, and study habits. We will investigate how sites of memory (monuments, memorials, historical sites, commemorative acts, etc.) actively create or silence particular histories. To do this we will study argument. By argument, we don't mean a disagreement of opinion, as in "I say red; you say blue." Instead, making an argument means engaging in reasoned debate with others. Thus it requires understanding one's subject, engaging thoughtfully and respectfully with an audience, and anticipating how taking a position or stating a claim will involve real consequences, both intended and unintended.

Throughout the semester we will study how sites of memory reflect particular arguments which themselves reveal deeper social tensions and ideological disputes. By analyzing the conflicts and contestations behind these sites we will practice understanding, interpreting, evaluating, and constructively critiquing the debatable arguments put forth by others. By writing about these conflicts we will practice making reasonable and debatable arguments of our own.

Course work will include reading from popular and scholarly sources; writing, workshopping, and revising multiple drafts of formal papers; learning library and research skills; and actively participating in class discussion and peer review. Skills practiced throughout the semester will be put to use in a final research paper.