UUNI 110 Seminar in Writing & Critical Inquiry  
Spring 2017

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Email: psahney@albany.edu  
Office hours: TTH 1:15-2:15PM (or by appointment)  
Office: Business Administration 332

Course Description
Writing and Critical Inquiry (WCI) emphasizes intensive practice in academic writing as well as writing in other rhetorical contexts. Based on established principles of rhetorical theory, WCI engages students in sustained inquiry into the nature of written discourse and the practice of writing. In WCI, writing is both a subject of study and a vehicle for academic inquiry. Students engage in rigorous guided practice in various rhetorical tasks in order to deepen their understanding of writing and enhance their ability to negotiate varied writing tasks in different academic and non-academic contexts.

Required Text
Peggy Reeves Sanday. Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus.

Course Goals
In WCI students will
(a) Learn to approach writing as an individual process of textual production, a form of inquiry, and a social practice;
(b) Practice applying rhetorical principles to assess various rhetorical situations and complete varied discipline-based writing tasks;
(c) Gain experience and develop competence in writing effectively for a variety of purposes, to different audiences, and in different media (including traditional, digital, and multi-media formats); and
(d) Learn appropriate concepts and develop a lexicon for discussing and analyzing writing and writing situations.
Description of Ethnographic Projects

The course is designed around the theme of ethnography which can be describe as a detailed study of the customs and cultures of people in a particular setting. However, the kind of ethnography you will be asked to conduct in this class is not simply factual. You will be asked to get to the deeper meaning of why people practice the customs and cultures that they do, for whom, and for what purpose. Throughout the semester, I will push you towards providing what Clifford Geertz describes as “thick description.” However, this “thick description” will be accompanied with not only facts, but also commentary, interpretations, and interpretations of interpretations and comments. As you continue to write and rewrite these thick descriptions you will find that your theses will emerge from it. In addition to the primary texts that you will produce through your fieldwork, you will also look at the social or historical and/or cultural contexts that produce these customs and traditions. Therefore, your final research paper should be a study of text in context. We will talk more about this in class.

Choice of Topics
Regarding topics, you may choose to either do a personal history project or a study of place project or a study of ritual project. I would prefer that you learn about a person or place or ritual about which you know nothing (or one that you know too well, but have never considered academically). Please note, I am not making it mandatory for you to pick a topic that involves a completely different culture, but I am encouraging you to do so for many reasons. We will discuss insider/outside issues more in class.

Personal History project: In a personal history project, you will be asked to conduct an extensive interview with any one person and learn about the history of their life. It does not mean that you have to document their entire life from birth. Rather you will be asked to interview them on particular experiences of their life such as— journey to the United States, life as a teenager in South Korea, life as an International student in the US, growing up in the Bronx, and so on.

Study of Place: In this project you will be required to critically examine a particular “place” and people’s interactions in that place. Examples of “places” include— a park, place of worship, basketball court in the Bronx, tattoo parlor, barber shop in Brooklyn, and so on. You will observe the ritual, but also conduct interviews on the use of place for the people. Once again I would urge you too pick a place that you don’t know much about. However, if you are from Brooklyn or Bronx and plan to go home at least four times this semester, you may choose a place from your neighborhood that you never considered critically.
**Study of a Ritual:** In this project you will be required to critically examine a ritual. Examples include fraternity or sorority ritual, a ritual within a festival of a different culture that you are unfamiliar with, and so on. You will observe the ritual, but also conduct interviews on the meaning of the ritual for the participants. This may be a topic to consider if you belong to a fraternity or sorority and prefer and have never considered their rituals critically.

**Note:** Please keep in mind that no matter what topic you choose, your eventual goal will be to analyze the story, place or ritual within a larger context. For example, what can this person’s story tell us about the larger history of immigration in the US; how can we make sense of this fraternity ritual within the larger cultural question of what it means to be American; what can this surviving barber shop in Brooklyn tell us about the history of gentrification in NYC, what can the high school life of this teenager tell us about the stress on social values in South Korea, and so on.

**A Note on Ethnics**  
I am urging you to get to know the personal history or critically understand a place or ritual that “genuinely” interests you. I stress this word “genuine” because ethnography involves deep engagement, interaction, and conversations with people who are often very different from you in skin color, religious orientation, social class, the language they speak, the childhood they have had, the neighborhood they grew up, and so on. Some of the best ethnographies are frequently written by simply “hanging out” with that person or in that place. My aim is not to make you an anthropologist, but I do hope that as you get more engaged in your ethnography over the months, your genuine interest in this person’s story or place or ritual will strengthen, that you will raise more questions, and begin to earn a sense of satisfaction that is beyond just earning a good grade. Please remember that “genuineness” is cultivated and it can be sensed by the person whom you are interviewing and working with, especially if they are from a different culture, language, or racial group. If they feel your interest is superficial and only limited to earning a good grade, you will fail to earn their trust and respect, and your project will suffer. On the other hand, if they sense genuine interest and respect from you for their story or culture, then you will both gain. My hope is that at the end of the project you will come away with not only a better sense of a different culture, but also a better sense of yourself.

**Required Materials**  
You are required to bring a laptop to every class. If you do not have access to a personal laptop, please get one from the university. These can be borrowed for a short duration of time. You will be expected to do your in-class writing in the “In-Class Journal” that I have created on Blackboard. The journal entries listed for homework should be done under “Homework Journal.” You will also submit all major assignments via Blackboard.
Also, I expect you to buy the textbook and bring it to every class once we begin the Analysis section.

**Grade semester breakdown**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fieldnotes # 1</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fieldnotes # 2</td>
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<td>Fieldnotes # 3</td>
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<td>Fieldnotes # 4</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis project</td>
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<td>Final Research paper</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Collaborative project</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1000</strong></td>
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**Description of Assignments**

**There are three major writing assignments:**

1. **Narrative:** Writing to explore or inquire into one’s experience of a problem, idea, concept, question, phenomenon, or issue (What is my experience of this issue?)
2. **Analysis:** Writing to analyze a question, text, idea, experience, event, or phenomenon for an academic audience (What have others written about this issue?)
3. **Argument:** Writing to participate in a conversation about a relevant question or problem (What can I contribute to the conversations about this issue?)

**Collaborative Project**

The Collaborative Project will be done in teams and should incorporate some kind of media. You will also present the project to the class at the end of the semester. A handout with more details will be distributed in class.

*Students should note that assignments, due dates, and readings are subject to change. These changes will be announced in class or via Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check with me or your peers regarding these changes.*

**Attendance**

Attendance is required. After three absences, I will begin docking 10 points for every absence. I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you are absent
due to illness, a death in the family, or religious observance, you will be excused, as long as documentation from the Undergraduate Dean’s office is provided.

**Participation**
Active participation is a mandatory requirement of this class. You are required to actively engage in class discussions, group activities, turn in your assignments on time, make regular journal entries and have a respectful attitude towards your peers, the course in general, and the instructor. Also, I do not allow the use of cell phones during lectures. If you are found texting excessively during my lectures and group discussions, you will be asked to leave the class. It will also affect your participation points.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**
Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. Based on the severity of the case, I reserve the right to file formal disciplinary action with the University, a process that often results in suspension or expulsion. I also reserve the right to impose a grading penalty that may result in a failing grade for the entire course. Therefore, please do not plagiarize.

From the University Guidelines on Scholastic Integrity:

> Presenting as one’s work the work of another person (for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else). Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgement, submission of another student’s work as one’s own, the purchase of prepared research, or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one’s reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness, and the consequences for violating University regulation.

> Examples of plagiarism include: failure to acknowledge the source(s) of even a few phrases, sentences, or paragraph; failure to acknowledge a quotation or paraphrase of paragraph-length sections of a paper; failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a major idea or the source(s) for an ordering principle central to the paper’s or project’s structure; failure to acknowledge the source (quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) or major sections or passages in the paper or project; the unacknowledged use of several major ideas, or extensive reliance on another person’s data, evidence, or critical method; submitting as one’s own work, work borrowed, stolen, or purchased from someone else.
Writing Center
SUNY-Albany has a Writing Centre in the Humanities building, Room 140. You can stop by any time, but you are encouraged to reserve an appointment with one of the tutors.

ADA Statement
Please contact me during the first week of class to discuss any particular needs. Every effort will be made to provide fair and appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.

Grading Scale
94-100 = A  90-93 = A-  87-89 = B+  84-86 = B  80-83 = B-  77-79 = C+
74-76 = C  70-73 = C-  67-69 = D+  64-66 = D  60-63 = D-  0-59 = E

Schedule of Readings and Writing Assignments

1/24  Distribution of syllabus; discussion of assignments and grades
1/26  Judith Ortiz Cofer “The Myth of the Latin Woman”
1/31  Immaculee Ilibagiza, “Left to Tell”
2/2   Gary Shteyngart “Sixty-Nine Cents”
2/5   Narrative due on Blackboard
2/7   Introducing the Ethnographic Project
2/9   Project Proposal draft due in class
2/14  Final Project Proposal due in class
2/16  Conducting interviews and making observations
2/21  No Class (Away at workshop)
2/23  Field notes # 1 due in class (Raw Observation)
2/28  Commentary on field notes # 1 due in class (Building context)
3/2   Secondary sources for field notes # 1 due in class
3/7   Interpretation of field notes # 1 due in class
3/9 Interpretation of Interpretation for field notes # 1 due in class

3/12 Analysis paper due on Blackboard

3/14 No Class (Spring break)

3/16 No Class (Spring break)

3/21 Field notes # 2 due in class (Raw Observation)

3/23 Commentary on field notes # 2 due in class (Building context)

3/28 Secondary sources for field notes # 2 due in class

3/30 No Class (Away at conference)
   Interpretation of field notes # 2 due

4/4 Interpretation of Interpretation of field notes # 2 due in class

4/6 Campus Party Culture (from Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus)
   also
   Writing ethnography

4/11 No Class (Passover)

4/13 No Class (Away at conference)

4/15 Field notes and interpretations 3& 4 due on Blackboard

4/18 The XYZ Express (from Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus)
   also
   Writing ethnography

4/20 The Initiation Ritual: A Model for Life (from Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus)
   also
   Writing ethnography

4/25 Final paper draft 1
4/27 Final paper draft 2

5/2 Collaborative Project Presentations

5/4 Collaborative Project Presentations

5/9 Final Paper due

HAVE A GREAT SUMMER