

 <p>THE WRITING PROGRAM MUHLENBERG COLLEGE</p>	NAME:	Jeremy Teissere						
	DEPARTMENT:	Biology/Neuroscience						
	TERM OFFERED:	FALL 2014	XX	SPRING 2015				
Are you teaching the FYS as an overload?	Y	N	Are you interested in attending a 3-day, end of term, paid writing workshop for faculty?	Y	N	Are you applying for grant money through FCT for this FYS?	Y	N
Department Chair approval to offer this course as part of your faculty load								

Proposal to offer a First-Year Seminar

This form should be completed for all new and returning first-year seminar courses. First-year seminar proposals will be reviewed and approved by the Writing Program Committee. We understand that your proposal may be in the preliminary stages of development, but this information helps us provide you with feedback and approval. Please submit this completed form to WPC@muhlenberg.edu, by **Friday, January 24, 2014**.

If you have offered this first-year seminar at the college in previous years, please provide:

- The title _____
- The most recent semester the seminar was offered _____
- The most recent syllabus. *The syllabus may be attached in lieu of the information requested below, or you may provide the information and receive feedback from the Writing Program Committee.*

If you are seeking approval for a new first-year seminar, please provide:

- A Working Title of Seminar
 - Compose a working title that you think will be appealing to incoming students while also emphasizing the academic focus of the course.
 - Please Note: Titles longer than 24 characters will be abbreviated on course schedules and student transcripts.
- Catalog Description of Seminar
 - In 200 words or less, please explain the seminar's focus, including the major questions that you will address and a few of the texts that you plan to read.
 - A sentence that describes the kind of writing you plan to do in the course would be helpful.
- Proposed Reading List
 - First-year seminars must include rigorous, college-level reading. Students need to learn how to negotiate academic texts.
 - Please note that films cannot substitute for readings.
- A brief discussion of how writing will shape the pedagogy of your course
 - What kinds of writing assignments do you envision and how many?
 - Please see the attached Guidelines & Best Practices for Teaching First-Year Seminars for more information.

Approved

Provisionally approved

Not approved

All faculty developing a *new* first-year seminar are welcome to apply for summer grants through the [Faculty Center for Teaching](#). Faculty who apply for grants are invited to ask the Writing Program Committee to write a letter articulating why development of the FYS merits institutional support.

I am seeking approval for a new FYS. This past semester, I taught the Dana FYS seminar (*Other Bodies*; Fall 2013), a topic that I have offered once before, also as a Dana FYS (Fall 2006). I have one more semester (Fall 2014) in which I am scheduled to teach the Dana FYS, so I hope to teach this new incarnation of an FYS below - and perhaps again as a 'standard' FYS in future semesters.

Working Title: *Speak My Language?*

Course Number: DNA 1XX

Catalog Description:

This sentence introduces the theme of this first-year seminar and is composed of words strung together using the rules of English grammar. On second glance, the sentence not only contains words, but also meaning, content, reference, figurative language, an implied audience, and a winking meta-awareness. Where did all of these other elements arrive from and how do they function (more or less) seamlessly together to comprise what we call 'language'? How does one use language to create 'understanding'? And what is happening, down at the level of words and their translations, when we don't understand one another? Our conversations in this seminar will be guided by the premise that language reflects and is in turn shaped by thought, culture, and experience. We will consider how language constructs social identities, how languages are 'built', problems of translation, the relationship of syntax to semantics, and the intersections of power and ideology with language. Our raw data will include fiction, memoirs, media, critical theory, and speech acts in art and performance.

Proposed (& Tentative) Reading List:

Full Manuscripts

- Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*
- Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
- Gladstone, *The Influencing Machine*
- Mohr, *Holy Shit: A Brief History of Swearing*

Articles, Stories, and Excerpted Texts:

- Anzaldúa, *La Frontera*
- Boroditsky, "How language shapes thought", *Scientific American*, February, 2011
- Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*
- Foer, "Utopian for Beginners", *New Yorker*, December 24, 2012
- Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*
- McWhorter, *What Language Is (And What It Isn't And What It Could Be)*
- Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages*
- Roth, "Eli: The Fanatic"
- Stein, *Tender Buttons*
- Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*

Discussion of How Writing Will Shape the Pedagogy of the Course

As in any first year seminar, the major goal will be to model and develop effective writing, speaking, and critical reasoning skills. Other 'meta' learning goals for this seminar include: (1) to learn to critically engage with theory; (2) to clearly show, in both writing and conversation, the theoretical leaps and gaps between evidence and conclusion; (3) to understand how history shapes and is shaped by cultural meanings; (4) to develop sustainable strategies for fearlessly approaching and critically examining cultural dogma.

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In past iterations of my FYS, I have felt that the following writing assignment scheme and 'pacing' of the semester has worked well:

- An early diagnostic essay on a topic related to the theme of the FYS (and that I hope will propel discussion in the first two weeks of class)
- 3 so-called 'abstract' assignments, primarily completed in the first half of the semester (see included assignment sheet). Note that 6-7 opportunities for abstracts are given, but only 4 are required to be completed, and I take only the top 3 scores in calculating a student's final grade.
- 2 analytical papers, primarily completed in the second half of the semester (see included assignment sheet).

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writing abstracts

syllabus description

Abstract assignments afford you the opportunity to deepen your understanding of ideas that we're discussing in class while living your life outside of class. The essential components of an abstract are: (1) one strong argument from an assigned reading, paraphrased closely in your own words, and (2) one compelling idea/argument of your own that responds to the original argument. The evidence that you use to form your idea is "inspired" by the assigned reading, responds naturally by extending the ideas of the author, and reflects the outcome of your own critical ruminations.

assignment expectations

- In the service of the *first* goal, you will provide detail on a specific argument of the author, noting the evidence that the author uses to make this claim. This is a paraphrasing opportunity. You are essentially restating the author's argument in your own words.
- In the service of the *second* goal, you will provide a response to this argument. The response can't be, simply, "Well, I agree." If you do agree, consider extending the argument that the author makes to some area of life, experience, and the world beyond the author's focus. You might wish to apply the author's theories to a new set of examples and evidence, or connect the author's theories to conversations in another discipline. If you do not agree with the author's assertions, equally, you cannot say, "Go away. I don't like your ideas." You must start by respecting the time and the struggle in which the author engaged - that is, by taking the ideas seriously even if you don't agree with them, and either suggesting new ways of considering the ideas that the author neglected, or offer alternative ways of thinking about the argument itself. Abstracts, ultimately, are an opportunity to show me that you are thinking about your own response to a reading.
- A word on style: you are not writing a 5 paragraph essay (God forbid). Do not feel pressured to 'pave the way' with a series of overly broad generalizations in your first paragraph ("Since the dawn of time...", "In today's society") as this makes your instructor vomit a little in his mouth. On the other hand, you are not submitting a list of bullet points. Instead, jump right in. It's as if you are in conversation with other folks (your peers, me, the community of scholars, people in line at Starbucks) about the author's ideas. You might begin by saying, "I take [author's name] to be saying in her essay, essentially..." After completing your paraphrase, you might transition by saying, "This idea reminds me of...", "This idea stands in contrast to...", etc.
- Abstracts are also an opportunity to practice economy: each abstract you write should be no longer than 500 words.
- There are six abstracts assigned over the course of the semester; you must complete at least four. Regardless, I will take *only* your top three scores in calculating your final grade.

format

Abstracts should be typed, contain page numbers, bear your name and the due date, and possess 1” margins on all sides. When you either (a) paraphrase from a source or (b) directly quote from a source, the source must be cited both in text and at the end of the abstract in a separate ‘works cited’ section. Please see the MLA guidelines for questions about formatting citations. If you have any questions regarding honesty and integrity in properly accounting for the work of others in your own abstract, please ask, as I have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty.

tips for writing a strong abstract

I imagine that the first part of an abstract – that is, paraphrasing an argument from the assigned reading in specific detail – will extend and deepen many of the close reading skills that many of you already have. This part of the assignment shows me that you can identify authorial voice, translate the argument of an author into your own language, and demonstrate fundamental understanding of an argument. Here are ways that this part of the assignment could go wrong:

- You’ve glossed over the argument, making it too superficial and simple.
- You’ve ‘hit-and-run’, providing a correct paraphrase, but ultimately one that is too brief, avoids parsing out complexity, and is unsatisfyingly engaged with the author’s ideas.
- You’ve identified an argument with the author, but it’s actually an argument from someone that the author is citing.
- You’ve misunderstood the argument in some key way.

The second part of an abstract makes use of academic skills that may be newer to you. It provides you with an opportunity to interface with the ideas that an author is raising – that is, it’s an invitation to dialogue and allows you to speak from your own critical voice (a tool that we will be honing over the course of the semester). Here are ways that this part of the assignment could go wrong:

- You tell me merely about your *feelings* about the arguments. This is not an opportunity for that sort of opinion. You must take the ideas of the author seriously and respond with ideas of your own.
- Your ideas or questions do not logically follow from the ideas of the article.
- Your ideas or questions merely restate ideas that are already present in the article.
- Your examples that extend the ideas of the author are not convincing evidence, or are uncreative and expected, or in some way unrelated to the claims of the author.
- You have difficulty articulating your ideas or finding your own critical voice.

paper one

relevant dates

Paper proposal due: Thursday, October 10

Paper due: Tuesday, November 5

crafting a proposal

Before you begin to write a formal paper, you must first identify your thesis. Before you identify your thesis, you must first read, research, and think. I assume on beginning this assignment that you have **already** begun to think about your paper topic (and your research and reading process, if not yet completely begun, is beginning **now**). A thesis begins from a question that you have about the world; your research is an attempt to answer that question. Your own ideas are offered as a rationale for why this question is interesting, relevant, and related to our class discussion.

The main goal of the **proposal** portion of the paper assignment is to help you develop your ideas for your final paper. It is also a gentle encouragement to pick a question now in order to allow your thoughts time to germinate. Although your topic may change after you read, research, and think (and after you have written your proposal), you will be working from structure rather than from nothing, a method I find to be much more efficient. The lesson here is *work now so you can work less later*. Should you decide to change your thesis from the one you write in this proposal, no sweat. You do not need to turn in another proposal. It is my hope, however, that should you change your topic, the transition will be much more effortless & elegant than if you had never written a proposal in the first place.

Your paper proposal should be no longer 500 words. This is an opportunity to practice writing as specifically as you can while still keeping in mind the virtue of economy. Your proposal should contain the following elements:

- (1) your research question/thesis
- (2) a rationale for why your topic and arguments fit within the dimensions of the assignment (see below)
- (3) the main authors that you intend to cite and that form the lion's share of evidence that you will present

It should be clear that the abstract assignments are very congruent to the work of this proposal.

paper assignment

In an essay of **no more than 6-7 typed, double-spaced pages in length**, you are to analyze an identity that can be seen as defined by medicine and/or science. We have already discussed "racial" noses, the community of cancer "survivors", and deafness. Please do not choose your identity from one of these three (rather, let these examples guide you to something new).

The major goal of this paper is definitional. A successful example will work to define the relationship of medicine to this identity in clear and fluent prose. You may wish to reflect on the following questions to help you in your analysis (this is an exhaustive list meant to focus your analysis; do not feel pressured to explicitly answer all of these questions):

For your chosen identity,

- how is medicine/science both 'improving the body' and 'improving the State'?
- how is medicine/science enabling individuals to feel happy and/or pass?

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Not approved

- how is medicine/science creating an *essential* identity?
- does this identity straddle the ‘medical versus cultural’ identity divide? If so, how? If not, why not?
- how are elements of biopower at work in constructing this identity?
- how are Enlightenment values at work in constructing this identity?

Remember: you need not solve the world’s problems in writing this paper. You are merely ‘kicking up dust’, drawing the attention of the reader to the complicated and complicating ways in which this identity is shaped by medicine/science. All of the readings that we have done so far in class are fair game for you to cite and make active use of; you need not wholly break with tradition and create a totally new analytical lens from which to view your chosen identity. That being said, do not be afraid to say something unique and new, based on your own ruminations, or argue passionately for your way of seeing things; just make sure to support yourself with strong evidence and a clearheaded set of arguments.

A note on research: In documenting your example, you may need to do some research. The internet will be your friend here – the data you collect about your chosen identity need not be peer-reviewed (thus, blogs, wikis, tumblr, 1990s geocities webpages, and *Teen Beat* are fair game). However, a caveat: use these sources as the equivalent of primary research (like an interview) that you will embed in a rigorous, well-cited theoretical matrix. Put another way, you can write a paper on Kashi cereal, and include quotes from Kashi cereal fanpages, but you must also think analytically about Kashi cereal, and here, theories and ideas that others have published more traditionally should form the spine of your analysis.

A note on quotations: Please be mindful of overusing quotations – they detract from your voice and unnecessarily fill space. Treat quotes like a very rich, expensive butter: a little bit, used sparingly, goes a long way. This strategy will force you to select only those quotes that you feel are highly emblematic and significant for your argument. Better yet, instead of quoting, you should restate everything in your own words, then cite the source.

miscellany

- Please use MLA citation to document your sources.
- Please turn in written work with a single staple in the upper left hand corner. Make sure that your paper is typed, bears your name and the date, is paginated, uses 10, 11, or 12 point font, and has been proofread for grammar and spelling errors. You may submit your paper to me electronically if you wish, but please make sure that your formatting is standard.
- The paper (including the proposal) is worth 16 points.