

Self, Society, and Other: Political Theory and Duty

English Composition

Prof. R. Cream

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Class Description

The goal of the *English Composition* course is to teach students the necessary skills of thinking and writing in an academic setting.

There are two foundational principles guiding the pedagogy of this course. First of all, I believe that the instruction of writing requires practice—regular, repeated, reflected practice.

We'll write this semester from beginning to end, weekly, and with an eye to continued development of analytical and interpretive forms. Writing is not a skill which can be developed through a theoretical understanding; the only way to develop oneself as a writer is to write. This class, therefore, will not devote much time in articulating a theory of writing, or in lectures on writing. Instead, the instructional act will inhabit the relationship developed between teacher and student in the moment of evaluation, as witnessed through conferences and written comments. The pedagogical goal is for you to transfer that relationship to yourself, as an evaluator and critic of yourself.

The second principle guiding the pedagogy of this course is the notion that good writing requires good thinking. One can't write well without thinking well. Accordingly, we will spend a considerable amount of time this semester thinking—thinking through reading, thinking through writing, and thinking through the discussions. Since there can be no writing in the absence of thinking, your ability to think, critically and creatively, in response to the themes of the course will drive the writing that you do this semester.

The class this semester looks at the topic of political theory. We'll think about what it means to be in a society, in a group with others, and the ways in which the necessary grouping produces and influences the self we know. Throughout the semester our focus will be toward using what we read to inform what we write.

Office Hours

6:00-7:00, Monday & Thursday 4th Floor Ast Tower
I will also be available via email, at randall.cream@thinkingtogether.org. You should feel free to email me with questions or concerns, and I generally respond the same day (sometimes within minutes).

The Online Component

Our course this semester is a hybrid course with required elements of online participation. 20% of your grade this semester will be derived from the participatory writing you perform on the online discussion forums. Through the technology of the forums, this class can extend beyond its once a week meeting, enabling you to think and participate at times of your own choosing. While this class requires online participation, you must make the time and space for that

participation. If you do not wish to participate in required discussions of this class, you should withdraw from this class and select another course which does not require you to participate in this manner.

The Readings

In order to help you to write essays that are thought-provoking, insightful, and sophisticated, we'll read material that is thought-provoking, insightful, and sophisticated. The readings, therefore, may well be quite difficult. Difficult or complex readings, however, produce complex and substantial essays. Our task as a class will be to find ways to think through the readings, to make sense of the materials in order to produce insightful, original, critical essays that articulate a well-thought out position.

In-Class Discussions

We will spend class time each week thinking through the major issues of the readings. The classes will be centered around participatory lectures— that is, I'll prepare lectures to address what I consider to be the important features of that week's reading, and I'll expect you to participate in order to fill in the features you consider to be important to the week's reading.

The Writing

As we discuss the readings, we'll spend time in and out of class writing on some of the important issues in the texts. This writing will help solidify our understandings of the texts, and provoke you to develop your ideas more fully. The weekly writing will take the form of expository analyses—short essay questions that will ask you to explain and defend a position on the reading. At a bare minimum, in order to receive a passing grade on the weekly writing you must have read and thought about the assigned texts.

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected of all students. To be successful you must attend regularly. If you know now that you will be unable to attend several classes, you should drop this class. Missed in class work can't be made up—it is linked to a class's specific activities. Late essays will lose a letter grade each calendar day not submitted.

Materials

All of the readings necessary for this class will be made available to you on the course webpage. I strongly suggest you print out the readings, and acquire a notebook to collect them together.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the submission of someone else's work as though it were your own. Plagiarism is dishonest. Plagiarism is especially troublesome in a collaborative and/or online class. The distinction between plagiarism and collaboration is

quite clear: whereas collaboration engages, responds to and incorporates others' ideas, plagiarism dishonestly hides its use of others' work. Before the essays are due, we will speak at length about the ways in which you can engage in. You will write three 5 to 8 page essays for this class. These essays will be formal, polished out of class writings that represent a serious attempt to think alongside the issues of the class. You will be graded on the sophistication and development of ideas, on the fluency and cohesion of language, and on the structure and success of the argument. Part of each essay assignment will involve a period of drafting, revising, and rewriting. Let me be clear, however: each essay will receive an unalterable grade— I do not allow revisions after the due date. I'll give much more information on the essays as I assign them.

Interpretive Analyses 20%

Each week's reading assignment will carry along with it a writing assignment. These assignments will ask you to critically analyze some specific textual question— either to interpret some passage, or to explain some concept, or to make some connections between ideas. Over the semester, there will be approximately 6 or 8 of these assignments, which will be averaged together for 20% of your final grade. Each writing assignment will ask you to think about some specific aspect of the text and present a reasoned perspective on that issue. These minor writings are a tool for you to prepare for the essays, as they spur your thinking about the issues of the class. The purposes of these writings are twofold: to support the readings, and to spur you to develop your ideas about the readings in argument form. They also serve to prepare you for the essay assignments. Missed writings can't be made up, regardless of the excuse. I will drop your lowest writing in this category before computing the average.

Participation— Writing on the Discussion Forum: 20%

This class uses an online discussion forum as a significant pedagogical element. The discussion forum allows the class to collaborate in forming a shared understanding in response to the reading and writing assignments. It allows the classroom to extend beyond the confines of our classroom. It also allows and compels you to develop yourself— as a thinker and as a writer, in collaboration with your peers. You should view your forum activity as collaborative writing— that is, as writing that engages with and responds to the words and ideas of others. I will grade the quality and the quantity of your posts. In order to excel in this area, you should read and think about the texts and issues of this class and post contributions to the forums which present your understandings while engaging the understandings of others. Frequent disruptive posting is not to be desired; the best participation engages with the issues of the class, the texts, and your peers. Your grade will be computed as follows: You must make 25 quality posts by the end of the semester (an average of about 2 posts per week), and you must make at least 1 quality post per week. See forum description for details on my expectations for forum participation. Here is the grading scale:

collaboration and avoid the danger of plagiarism.

Essays 60%

25+ quality posts = 80 min; 100 max

20–24 quality posts = 70 min; 90 max

15–19 quality posts = 50 min; 75 max

Additionally, for each week you fail to make at least one quality post, I will deduct 10% from your participation grade. So, for instance, if you have 25 quality posts by the end of the semester, but you failed to make a post during Week Two, you will score somewhere between 70 and 90, rather than between 80 and 100.

Tentative Schedule

Week One

Week One: January 19

Introduction to the Course

Week Two: January 26

Politics Ia: Plato

Week Three February 2

Politics Ib

Week Four February 9

Politics IIa King

Week Five February 16

Politics IIb

Week Six: February 23

Thesis Review

Week Seven March 2

Rough Draft Review & Conferences

Week Eight March 9

Essay I Due

Week Nine March 16

Politics IIIa Locke

Spring Break

Week Ten March 30

Politics IIIb

Essay II Due

Week Eleven April 6

Politics IIIc

Spring Weekend

Week Twelve April 20
Thesis Exercises

Week Thirteen April 27
Rough Draft Review and Conferences

Week Fourteen May 4
Essay III Due

Final Week May 11

Course Objectives for English 101

- ☞ To introduce students to “the language of the academy”— that is, to the complex literacies of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking required of college students regardless of their area of specialization.
- ☞ To help students recognize the value of thinking intelligently and rigorously and to become comfortable thinking abstractly.
- ☞ To help students improve their ability to read a variety of texts critically and resourcefully and to integrate material from the readings into their essays using proper documentation. Students will write essays in which the sense of self supports rather than overwhelms the writer’s argument.
- ☞ To help students improve their ability to engage in some strong analysis and higher-level thinking and to evaluate ideas and issues effectively.
- ☞ To introduce students to the specific requirements and standards of academic writing, including essay format, voice, and organizational strategies.
- ☞ Students will write at least three essays, with each essay running approximately 5 to 7 pages.

Course Outcomes

By studying English Composition, students will

- ☞ Recognize that a successful essay contains a main idea, supporting information, a logical pattern of development, and the effective attribution of material from outside sources.
- ☞ Write non-narrative essays that have a clear focus and adequate support drawn from a group of thematically linked readings.
- ☞ Arrange the supporting details in a clear, logical pattern.
- ☞ Formulate sentences in an essay that demonstrate variety in length and emphasis.
- ☞ Obey the standard conventions of grammar and sentence structure.

The reading assignments, written assignments, and in-class discussions will enable students to realize these outcomes.