

Places of Rhetoric: Writing, Community, and Social Need

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Course Description

The aim of First Year Composition is to help you learn how to write scholarly essays for a university audience. The aim of Community Based Learning is to explore that goal as inseparable from our life in the community, which implies a unique opportunity to approach writing by one of the classic pillars in the study of rhetoric. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the art of finding the best available means of persuasion in any situation,” and this semester, we’ll consider several very tangible, immediate situations: what it means to write, not only at Notre Dame, but in South Bend, Indiana, at a crisis point in American economic life, and at a local crossroads between urban poverty, the Church, and the academy.

Through a partnership with the South Bend Center for the Homeless, our study of writing this term will be devoted to the themes of poverty, homelessness, and social justice. Our “community learning” with the Center will give those themes, and our writing about them, a reality unlike any other section of first-year writing. Not only will we be offering volunteer service to the Center for the Homeless throughout the semester, we’ll also be offering our “writing *as* service” by helping the Center in its effort to document the experience of homelessness in South Bend. Beginning in the middle of the semester, this exciting project will involve a communal effort as a class, and will result in material support for the Center for the Homeless as well as a chance for us to explore what it means to observe, document, archive, and even publish non-fiction writing attuned to the lives of others.

Good writing stems from good reading. The bulk of our in-class work will involve studying a handful of texts – classical, contemporary, and Catholic - that demonstrate various ways of talking about poverty and homelessness. Our writing assignments and in-class discussions will raise a host of questions: Can rhetoric ever do justice? Is spiritual poverty the same thing as real poverty, and does it matter how we look at, define, and imagine “homelessness”? What is the relationship of reasoned argumentation to the place we live? Rather than a class in sociology, theology, or economics, our point in asking these questions will be to consider what it means to think and write about a subject intimately. In the process, we’ll hone some of the basic skills of college-level writers: how to analyze written arguments critically; how to engage with other views in one’s work creatively but charitably; and how to craft original, thoughtful prose that speaks with style and precision.

Community Learning

The Community Learning component of our course will be two-fold:

1. As a condition of Notre Dame’s Community Based Learning, you are each asked to volunteer at the South Bend Center for the Homeless for a minimum of 16-20 hours over the course of the term (2 hrs/wk, 8-10 weeks). A range of volunteer opportunities (front desk, tutoring, childcare) will be available for you to choose from, following our orientation at the Center for the Homeless on Aug. 27. Your service will be an integral part of your own work as a writer in the course: you will be keeping a running “Service Blog” as a record of your experiences, and you will draw from your observations at the Center for future research in the course.
2. In the middle of the term, we will be researching and crafting “Narrative Biographies” of the Center’s residents, based on oral interviews you will perform with the Center’s residents in weeks 7-8 of the course. Your written work on this assignment will not only contribute to your final portfolio of writing for the course but will offer an important contribution to the work of the Center. As a class, we will be compiling and

publishing these written narratives in the latter part of the term as a web “archive,” designed in creative collaboration with the instructor and the class as a whole. Our hope will be to make something that is lasting, original, and unexpected, and an honest testimony to the specificity of homeless experience in South Bend.

Required Texts

Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research*, 2nd edn (Chicago, 2003) [CR]

Ehrenreich, Barbara, *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America*, 2nd edn (Macmillan, 2008) [N&D]

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say* (W. W. Norton, 2006) [Graff]

Hacker, Diana, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 5th edn (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008)

Fresh Writing, ed. C. Manley, et al. (Notre Dame, 2009) [FW]

Course readings posted on e-Reserve [Reserve] and/or Concourse [Concourse]

Assignments

A. Writing Portfolio

Your “writing portfolio,” which you will submit for a final grade at the end of the semester, will be compiled over the course of the term and will contain the following major essays and writing assignments (specific instructions will be provided in advance of each assignment in class):

1. Rhetorical Analysis (3 pp., due Sept. 8): The Rhetorical Analysis is a short summary and critical analysis of the argument, logic, and rhetorical appeals of a text of your choice that challenges what we consider “just” rhetoric. (Here, “text” includes any articles, ads or commercials, pieces of propaganda, works of visual art, etc.)

2. Reasoned Argument Essay (5-6 pp., due Sept. 29): Based on our discussion of the “types” of reasoned argumentation in weeks three and four, the Reasoned Argument asks you to write a formal essay on a topic and issue of your choice, pertaining to the evaluation, definition, or causes of “poverty” as it is portrayed in a film we will watch as a class. This essay asks you to polish several important skills: how to identify an arguable problem, or issue, in your writing; how to advance a strong thesis about that problem; and how to bring multiple viewpoints, including one library source, into “conversation” in arguing that thesis.

3. Narrative Biographical Essay (3-4 pp., due Oct. 29): The narrative biographical essay is unique to our Community Based Learning course. In weeks six to ten, each student will arrange an oral interview with a guest at the South Bend Center for the Homeless, and then transform the transcript of that interview into a narrative essay, or short biographical piece, that conveys the particular story of the individual’s experience with poverty and homelessness. This assignment asks you to think about how to craft an argument out of a narrative piece of non-fiction, how to do primary research effectively, and how to polish style and voice in your written prose.

4. Researched Proposal Essay (10 pp., due Nov. 25): The research essay asks you to draw upon your primary research for the narrative biography, as well as your own secondary library research, to craft a proposal or “solution” to any problem pertaining to homelessness and its misperception, construction, institutions, policies, etc., in the South Bend and Notre Dame community. The assignment can be analytical or argumentative in structure but should display your abilities in refining and articulating a thesis, creating scholarly conversation, and compiling an annotated bibliography.

B. “Service Blog” and Other Written Assignments

Occasional writing assignments include your ongoing “Service Blog” regarding your work at the Center for the Homeless, as well as smaller written homework assignments, as indicated in the syllabus. Daily writing assignments, such as summaries, evaluative responses, or bibliographies, will be awarded a point value out of your homework grade.

You are required to post at least six substantial, weekly entries throughout the semester on the “Service Blog” (which will be set up through a class-wide Blogger account). These responses will constitute not just a record of your service, but should be a venue for raising questions and identifying problems for further inquiry in the course. Specifically, you should see your Service Blog not as a journal, but as a chance to practice what W.H. Auden called that “eye on the object look” in your writing: the activity of documenting the concrete images, objects, experiences, and dilemmas that you discover while working at the Center for the Homeless, and to begin to conceptualize the problems or issues for analysis that they raise.

C. Web Archive Project

In lieu of a formal presentation of your research at the end of the term, our class will be undertaking an original, communal project to “publish” our written work in a “Web Archive”. In weeks thirteen through fourteen, we will construct, as a class, a web collection of both your written narrative biographies and select portions of your individual research projects. We will design and compile the “archive” as a class, with diverse opportunities for individual contributions (writing, editing, design, photography, etc.). Students will be graded on the consistency of their contribution to the collective effort.

Grading and Evaluation

First Year Composition at Notre Dame uses a “portfolio approach” for major writing assignments, which means that you have the opportunity to revise and improve your work prior to final and formal grades. With the exception of the first essay, the Rhetorical Analysis, each essay in this course will be written in draft stages, according to a schedule of peer review sessions in the syllabus. You will receive written comments for revision both from other students and from me during this process. Complete drafts of your essays are due on the dates listed above, which I will grade and return to you with detailed advice for revision for the final portfolio. Your letter grades for the assigned essays will not be official until the end of the term.

At the end of the semester, having made final revisions to each of the major assignments, students will submit a “final portfolio” consisting of the final drafts of all major assignments. *The final portfolio accounts for 65% of your final grade in the class.*

Participation comprises the remaining 35% of the final grade. Participation includes in-class discussion, full participation in peer review sessions, as well as daily writing assignments and Concourse postings, and the Service Blog of your work at the Center for the Homeless. Full participation in the peer review workshops means having completed and properly circulated your writing contribution for that day, as well as thoughtful and engaged participation in the process itself.

Daily assignments, such as Concourse postings and written responses, will be awarded ten points if completed in good faith, meaning that the assignment has been completed in full and the student shows evidence of having read the required material. Drafts for peer review sessions will be worth twenty points; full drafts of Good Reasons Argument essays will be worth forty points. Unless otherwise noted, all paper essays and assignments must be handed in at the beginning of class. Incomplete or late assignments will receive zero points.

Letter grades will be calculated using the university-designated system: A (4.000), A- (3.667), B+ (3.333), B (3.000), B- (2.667), C+ (2.333), C (2.000), C- (1.667) D (1.000), F (0.000).

Participation (35%):

In-class participation and peer review:	10%
Daily assignments:	10%
Service Blog and web archive:	15%

Final Portfolio (65%):

Rhetorical Analysis	10%
Good Reasons Argument	15%
Narrative Biography	15%
Research Paper	25%

Total: 100%

Additional Policies:

1. *Attendance:* Please arrive to class on time. Two late arrivals (five minutes late or more) will constitute one absence. Chronic or flagrant (more than ten minutes late) tardiness will not only receive a warning but will negatively affect the participation portion (30%) of your final grade. You are limited to two unexcused absences (i.e., one week of class). Three absences will result in the lowering of your final grade by a 1/2 letter grade. More than four absences will result in failure of the course.
2. *Writing Center:* The Writing Center (203 Coleman Morse) specializes in peer tutoring, offering students support as they navigate the academic writing process. *You are required to go to the Writing Center at least twice during the semester and at least once by the end of Unit 2.* Please note relevant dates on the syllabus and sign up as early as possible since other FYC sections also have this requirement.
3. *Conferences:* Every student should meet with me at least twice this semester during my office hours or by appointment. You should have met with me individually at least once by Fall Break. Please come to all conferences with a prepared list of written questions that you wish to discuss.
4. *Honor Code and Plagiarism:* Students are expected to uphold the honor code stipulated in the Academic Handbook. Procedures regarding proper documentation and citation of sources, as well as larger concerns regarding plagiarism, will be discussed and reinforced throughout the term. Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism will be strictly penalized and will result in failure in the course. Always feel free to speak to me if you have any concerns or questions about the proper use of a source. For additional information on plagiarism, see Hacker pp. 107-110, and <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/plagiarism>.
5. *Students with disabilities:* If you are student with a disability and will need accommodations for this course, please register with Disability Services (<http://www.nd.edu/~osd/>). After you have discussed your accommodation needs with the Coordinator of Disability Services, please speak with me to make whatever arrangements may be necessary.

Course Schedule

Date	Class	Assignment
Unit One – The Place of Rhetoric: Writing and Social Justice		
<i>Week One</i>		
T 8.25	Course Introduction: <i>Town and Gown</i> - Introductions and syllabus - <i>Logos, ethos, and pathos</i>	*Visit from Annie Kelly, Center for Social Concerns
Th 8.27	<i>Commonplaces: community and/ as argument</i> - Finding and defining arguments - Visit to the South Bend Center for the Homeless Class meets in lobby of Hesburgh Library at 8:15 AM	Read: Wendell Berry, “Higher Education and Home Defense” (handout); and Faigley and Selzer, “Finding Arguments” (pp. 30-33, 42-44) [Reserve] Due: In a short paragraph (four sentences or less), summarize one claim Wendell Berry makes about the relationship between education and “place” that you find questionable.
<i>Week Two</i>		
T 9.1	<i>Cooking with Socrates, or Can rhetoric ever do any good?</i> - Discussion of Plato - Claims, reasons, evidence - The relationship of rhetoric to argument	Read: Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (selection) [Reserve]; CR, pp. 152-69 Due: In 250-300 words, summarize Plato’s answer to the following question: Is rhetoric good for the “soul”? Why or why not?
Th 9.3	<i>Can rhetoric be just?, or More on language and food</i> - Discussion of Orwell - Writing a rhetorical analysis	Read: George Orwell, “Propaganda and Demotic Speech” and “The Politics of Starvation” [Reserve]; handouts on Rhetorical Analyses and logical fallacies Due: Make a list of at least three rhetorical appeals and logical fallacies Orwell either commits or identifies in his two essays. Bring to class an article, ad, or video clip for rhetorical analysis.
<i>Week Three</i>		
T 9.8	<i>Options for the Poor: Defining Poverty</i> - Discuss Gutierrez - Definition Arguments - Keywords, key concepts	Read: Gustavo Gutierrez, “Poverty: Solidarity and Protest” [Reserve]; Handout on Definition Arguments and Graff, pp. 1-13 Recommended: Raymond Williams, <i>Keywords</i> [Reserve] Due: Rhetorical Analysis (3 pp.)
Th 9.10	<i>Options for the Poor: Evaluating Charity</i> - Discuss Benedict and Cavanaugh: When is charity just? - Evaluative Arguments - Arguing <i>in utrumque partem</i>	Read: Benedict XVI, selection from <i>Caritas in Veritate</i> [Web Link]; and Cavanaugh, “Scarcity and Abundance” [Reserve]; Handout on Evaluation Arguments; Graff, pp. 17-27 Due: Write a short dialogue (250-300 words) between Gutierrez, Benedict, and/or Cavanaugh, on a criteria for evaluating or defining the Christian response to poverty on which they might disagree.
<i>Week Four</i>		

T 9.15	<i>Options for the Poor: Policy, Causes, and Rebuttals</i> - Causal and rebuttal arguments - Group conversation and rebuttal exercise	Read: "Poverty: Opposing Viewpoints" (selected readings per group); Ehrenreich, "Is It Now a Crime to Be Poor?" [Web link]; Graff, pp. 28-38, 51-63 Due: Rebuttal outline (instructions given in class) Film Viewing: "Roger and Me" (Date and time TBA)
Th 9.17	<i>Hesburgh Library Visit</i> - Class meets in the lobby of Hesburgh Library	Read: Craft of Research [CR], pp. 35-49
<i>Week Five</i>		
T 9.22	<i>Peer Review Session</i> - Policies for Peer Review - Best practices: Introductions and Theses	Read: CR, pp. 120-27, 232-48 Due: First draft of reasoned argument essay
Th 9.24	<i>Peer Review Session</i> - Peer review of second drafts - Best practices: Quotating and Creating Conversation - <i>Meet the Press</i> Exercise	Read: Graff pp. 39-47, 64-73 Due: Complete draft of reasoned argument essay; <i>email second draft to group members by 5:00 pm Wednesday</i>

Unit Two – Crafting a Written Archive: Narratives of Poverty and Homelessness

Week Six

T 9.29	<i>The Archive as Written Genre</i> - Discussion of Riis and Ehrenreich - What is "primary research"? - <i>The Catholic Worker</i>	Read: Ehrenreich, <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> [N&D], pp. 1-10; Riis, <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> (selections) [Reserve] plus web photos [Web Link] Due: Reasoned Argument Essay (final draft) Extra Credit: Midweek dinner at Catholic Worker House (date and time t.b.a.)
Th 10.1	<i>Written Narratives I: Asking questions</i> - Discussion of Ehrenreich, Ch. 1 - How to conduct an oral interview	Read: N&D, pp. 11-51 Due: Rough draft of 10 questions for oral interview; schedule interview with guest from SBCH by end of week

Week Seven

T 10.6	<i>Written Narratives II: The Ethics of Looking</i> - Discussion of Ehrenreich, Ch. 2	Read: N&D, pp. 51-120; Recommended: selection from Henri Nouwen [Reserve]
Th 10.8	<i>Written Narratives III: Argument as Story</i> - Discussion of Ehrenreich, Ch. 3	Read: N&D, pp. 122-92 Due: Oral interview should be conducted by end of week

Week Eight

T 10.13	<i>Peer Review Session: Narrative Biographies</i> - Workshop transcripts	Read: N&D, pp. 193-end Due: Bring a typed, rough transcript of the highlights and key quotations from your oral interview.
Th 10.15	<i>Peer Review Session: Narrative Biographies</i> - Workshop first drafts - Best Practices: Getting beyond "flow"	Read: CR, pp. 249-68 Due: First draft of narrative biographies (3-4 pp.)

10.17-10.25 **** No Class – Midsemester Break ****

Unit Three – Observe, Judge, Act: Researching Homelessness

Week Nine

T 10.27 *Introducing the Research Proposal*
- Arguable problems vs. book reports
- Negotiating primary and secondary research
- Workshop polished drafts of oral bios
Read: CR, pp. 51-83
Due: Polished draft of narrative biographies (4 pp.); *email draft to workshop group members by 5:00 pm Monday*

Th 10.29 *Roundtable: Urban Homelessness and South Bend*
- In-class roundtable discussion with representatives from SBCFH and ND
Read: Two *Fresh Writing* research essays of your choice
Due: List of three potential topics for research

Due: Narrative Biographical Essay (final draft)

Week Ten

T 11.3 *Forms of Scholarship I: Researched Analysis*
What not to do: Plagiarism overview
Read: Williams, “Meanings and Myths of Homelessness: Homeless Women Speak”; Graff, pp. 74-87
Due: Proposed topic and bibliography of five potential sources

Th 11.5 *Forms of Scholarship II: Researched Proposal*
Library Research Day – Meet in the lobby of Hesburgh Library
Read: Paul, “A Greener Approach to Groceries” [*Fresh Writing*]; Graff, pp. 88-97; CR, pp. 84-101
Due: Proposal Abstract (350-400 words) with bibliography of five sources

Week Eleven

T 11.10 *No class – student paper conferences*
Due: Annotated Bibliography (8 sources)

Th 11.12 *Peer Review Session*
- Workshop introductions
- Brainstorming the web archive project
Read: CR, pp. 187-200
Due: Draft of Introduction and “critical conversation”

Week Twelve

T 11.17 *Peer Review Session*
- Workshop first drafts
- Best Practices: Paraphrasing
Read: Graff, pp. 115-122, pp. 203-11, CR pp. 201-11
Due: First draft of research essay (7-8 pp.)

Th 11.19 *Peer Review Session*
Read: Graff, pp. 123-32
Due: Complete draft of research essay (10 pp.); *email draft to group members by end of Wednesday*

Week Thirteen

T 11.24 *Design Session: Mapping the Web Archive*
Due: Bring to class narrative biographies and one form of “other media” you’d like to see part of the archival project

11.25-29 **** No class – Thanksgiving Break ****
Due: Research Essay (final draft) (due Wednesday 11/25)

Week Fourteen

T 12.1 *Design Session: Publishing the Web Archive*

Th 12.3 *Design Session: Publishing the Web Archive*

Week Fifteen

T 12.8 *Class Presentation of Documentary Project* (with
visitors from University Writing Program, Center
for Social Concerns, and SBCH)

Final Portfolios due Wednesday, 4:30 pm, in English Department mailbox (356 O'Shaughnessy Hall)