

English 246: Advanced Composition

Course Syllabus

Spring 2013 Section 03: MW 2:00-3:15 STV 250B
Kristi McDuffie, STV 201A, kmcduff@ilstu.edu
Office hours: M 3:30-4:30pm and by appointment

Course Description:

How does our writing construct our social norms? In this section of 246, we will investigate how normalcy is constructed through personal essays. Specifically, we will investigate how our writing constructs our social norms about race and gender. Thus, we will read and discuss essays on the social construction of race, whiteness, gender, and sexuality, along with personal essays on those same topics. Our investigations will be driven by the following questions: What is normative in our society? What is normative in our personal essays? What is a “normal” personal essay? What role do personal essays play in constructing our social norms? How, why, and when do authors subvert those norms?

Learning Outcomes:

In this course, you will:

- Learn about the genre of the personal essay
- Learn about the social construction of race, whiteness, gender, and sexuality
- Analyze how authors write about their personal experiences with race, whiteness, gender, and sexuality
- Demonstrate in-depth critical writing by crafting essays analyzing normalcy in personal essays
- Demonstrate understanding of these concepts through your own personal essay and corresponding reflection

Course Materials:

- Bill Roorbach’s *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: The Art of Truth* (2001)
- Additional readings that you will need to PRINT from our course ReggieNet site

Overview of Semester:

Here is an overview of the assignments, with descriptions below.*

Project	Points	%
Participation	60	13%
Homework	60	13%
Workshopping	40	9%
Essay 1	100	22%
Essay 2	130	29%
Essay 3	60	13%
TOTAL	450	100%

*The exact number of small assignments and points is subject to change.

The grading scale for the final course grade is as follows:

90-100 = A 80-89 = B 70-79 = C 60-69 = D Below 60 = F

Participation: This classroom is a learning community and everyone must participate in order for it to function as one. Participation includes but is not limited speaking in class. It also includes paying attention, not texting or checking Facebook, listening and engaging with your peers in group and small group work, not engaging in side conversations, and so forth. Attendance will not be tracked separately from participation – if you are late or absent from class, you will be unable to participate. Students who arrive late repeatedly will not be welcome as it is disruptive. Workshopping essays are included in this component of the overall grade.

Essays: There are two major critical essays and one major personal essay this semester: a 6-8 page essay analyzing normalcy in a personal essay, a 8-10 page essay analyzing normalcy in numerous personal essays, and a 4-6 page personal essay with a 2-page accompanying reflection (2 pages). Assignment sheets will be provided closer to the due date.

Late work: Late work is not accepted. Contact me immediately with any problems or requests for extensions, as failing to turn in large assignments on time could result in failing the course.

Plagiarism: Work you submit for this course must have been written by you for this course. You may not submit work in this course and in another, and you may not submit under your name work written entirely or in part by someone else. Provide sufficient citations for any ideas or quotations used from another source. ISU requires that all cases of plagiarism be reported to the office of Community Rights and Responsibilities.

Technology: We will use ReggieNet, ISU's current course management system, for this course; all course materials, including assignments and supplementary readings, will be uploaded there and you will upload homework and essays there. Be careful to save all of your work often (in .doc or .docx format – **I cannot open .pages or .wps documents!**) and in multiple locations (personal computer, email, USB drive, etc.). Technological problems, especially ones that occur at the last minute, will not excuse you from an assignment that is due (so contact me immediately about any problems). Please use ReggieNet's CourseMail to email me about the course so that all of our communication is kept in one place, although my personal email can be used for items that need emergent responses.

Accommodations: The classroom should be as accessible as possible, so students who desire consideration because of any disability or situation should come see me as soon as possible. Any student needing to arrange an accommodation for a documented disability should also contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 309-438-5853 (voice) or 309-438-8620 (TTY) as soon as possible.

Julia N. Visor Academic Center: Free outside writing assistance can be found at the Visor center, which offers consulting in almost all subjects. Call 309-438-7100 to make an appointment or visit <http://ucollege.illinoisstate.edu/about/visor/> for more information.

Student Counseling Services (SCS): Free, confidential counseling services can be obtained from SCS, from topics ranging from feeling overwhelmed and lost to experiencing anxiety and depression to struggling with relationships and low self-esteem. SCS is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors. Find out more at Counseling.IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-3655.

Schedule:

Weeks 1 & 2 – Introduction to Personal Essays

Mon, Jan 14

Introduction to the Class

“The Personal Essay” p. 191 in class

Wed, Jan 16

“That’s Old-Time Religion” by Shirley Abbott p. 211

“How to Write a Personal Essay” by Stanton Michaels p. 299

In class writing: What are the genre features of these essays? What do they have in common? What is different?

Mon, Jan 21

No Class – MLK, Jr. Birthday

Wed, Jan. 23

“Country Matters” by Hayden Carruth p. 217

Reading response 1: What do you think a personal essay is? What do you think it should be? Use examples from the readings so far to support your answers (note: this means you must quote from the readings in your response!). (2 pages)

You can also use Phillip Lopate’s “Introduction” as a reference, available on ReggieNet.

Be prepared to discuss your response in class.

Week 3 – Introduction to Normalcy

Mon, Jan. 28

“Constructing Normalcy” by Lennard Davis (ReggieNet)

“Welcome to Cancerland” by Barbara Ehrenreich (ReggieNet)

Wed, Jan. 30

From “Broken Vessels” by Andre Dubus p.135

“Body in Trouble” by Nancy Mairs p. 254

In-class writing: What is “normal” in each of these authors’ lives? What is “normal” in the essays themselves (topic and form)?

Week 4 – Constructing Race

Mon, Feb. 4

“Constructing Differences” by Tracy Ore (ReggieNet)

“On Being the Target of Discrimination” by Ralph Ellison p, 206

Wed, Feb. 6

“Racial Formations” by Michael Omi & Howard Winant (ReggieNet)

From “Colored People” by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. p. 264

In-class writing: How is race constructed in these essays? What is constructed as normal?

Weeks 5, 6 & 7 – Writing about Race

Mon, Feb. 11

“How Jews Became White Folks” by Karen Brodtkin (ReggieNet)

Homework 2: Connect the readings on normalcy to at least one of the readings on race. What is “normal” in or about the reading on race? What about race is constructed as normal? (2 pages)

Read Palmer’s review of Avatar

Discuss sample essay

Wed, Feb. 13

“Color-Blind Racism” by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (ReggieNet)

“How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America” by Kiese Laymon (ReggieNet)

Discuss Essay 1

Discuss sample essay

Mon, Feb. 18

Class Online: Complete the in-class writing by Monday at 3pm.

Wed, Feb. 20

“Making Systems of Privilege Visible” by Stephanie Wildman & Adrienne Davis (ReggieNet)

“I Don’t See You” by Timothy Taylor (ReggieNet)

In-class writing about privilege

Mon, Feb. 25

“Peculiar Benefits” by Roxane Gay (ReggieNet)

“I Don’t Know How to Write About Race” by Roxane Gay (ReggieNet)

Upload a draft of your essay to the discussion forums. We will have some in-class work time.

Wed, Feb. 27

Upload a full draft of your essay to the discussion forums and come to class prepared to work on it. We will discuss writing techniques and have in-class Q&A and work time.

Fri, Mar. 1 by 5pm – Upload a draft of your essay to ReggieNet (under Discussion Forums). *Over the weekend, read your group’s essays, write notes, and be prepared to discuss during your workshop day.*

Week 8 – Workshop Essay 1

You will sign up for one of the workshop times on Mar. 4 or Mar. 6

Friday, March 8 - Essay 1 Due by 5pm (submit on ReggieNet)

Week 9 – No class (Spring Break)

Mon, Mar. 18

No Class (I will be traveling for a conference)

Weeks 10, 11, 12 & 13 – Constructing and Writing about Gender

Wed, Mar. 20

“This Is What You Need for a Happy Life” by Jane Shapiro p. 275

Midterm Feedback

Mon, Mar. 25

“The Social Construction of Gender” by Judith Lorber (ReggieNet)

Wed, Mar. 27

“Oranges and Sweet Sister Boy” by Judy Ruiz p. 156

Mon, Apr. 1

“No Name Woman” by Maxine Hong Kingston p. 106

Homework 3: Analyze the social construction of gender in one of the personal essays we have read. What is constructed as masculine or feminine? How does this construction affect the author’s experiences and/or how the author writes about the experiences? How does the essay itself participate in the socialization process? Include textual support in your response (summarize, paraphrase, and quote from the text).

Be prepared to discuss these responses in class.

Discuss essay 2

Wed, Apr. 3

“A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid p. 250

Write a discussion forum post about your plan for the essay and we will discuss them in class.

Mon, Apr. 8

Upload as much of your paper as you have to the discussion forum by class time on Monday. I will be walking around to give you feedback during class.

Wed, Apr. 10

In-class work day. Bring your in-process drafts and questions. We will be talking specifically about introductions and thesis statements.

Weeks 14 & 15 – Essay 2 Workshop

**Before workshop begins, upload your feedback on your peers’ papers to the discussion forum.*

Mon, Apr. 15

Workshop – 1, 2, 3

**Upload your draft to ReggieNet by Sat., Apr. 13th at Midnight*

Wed, Apr. 17

Workshop – 4, 5, 6

**Upload your draft to ReggieNet by Mon., Apr. 15th at Midnight*

Mon, Apr. 22

Workshop – 7, 8, 9

**Upload your draft to ReggieNet by Sat., Apr. 20th at Midnight*

Wed, Apr. 24

Workshop – 10, 11, 12

**Upload your draft to ReggieNet by Mon., Apr. 22th at Midnight*

Weeks 16 – Essay 3 (Your Personal Essay)

Mon, Apr. 29

Essay 2 Due on ReggieNet

Discuss Essay 3

Sign up for conferences

Course evaluations

Wed, May 1

No class (for conferences)

Fri, May 3

Individual conferences

Week 17 – Finals Week

Mon, May 6

Essay 3 due

Due online – we will not meet as a class. Thanks for a great semester!

Essay 1

DUE DATES: Come to class with a draft on Mon, Feb. 25 and Wed, Feb. 27. By Fri, Mar. 1 at 5pm, upload your full paper to the ReggieNet discussion forums so that you can read your group's essays for workshopping. We will workshop the essays on Mar. 4 and 6 and the final draft is due Fri, Mar. 8 by 5pm (on ReggieNet assignments).

POINTS: 100

LENGTH: 6-8 pages

FORMAT: MLA format with a Works Cited page and a title, double-spaced, 12-inch Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, uploaded to ReggieNet.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this assignment is to develop sophisticated writing skills that demonstrate close textual reading, understanding of theoretical material, and critical analysis of a personal essay.

AUDIENCE: In addition to your instructor and your peers, write this paper for someone who has not read the texts that you will be describing. In addition to this being a valuable skill, it is also my hope that you seek an audience for this paper beyond this class (Sigma Tau Delta publications, other undergraduate journals, etc.).

TASK: In this essay you will apply a theoretical concept of normalcy and/or the social construction of race to one of the personal essays we have read so far. (Note: If you want to use a different theoretical concept or a different personal essay, please seek approval in advance.) The goal is to "read" the personal essay through the lens of the theoretical concept and make some kind of claim about that essay. To help you in this process, I have listed some questions that you can use to begin your analysis, although you do not have to use these:

1. How does the idea of normalcy appear in the essay? What has society constructed as normal and how does it affect the author's life? What is "ideal"? What is "average"? What institutions participate in the construction (family, state, education, media, government, businesses, and more)? How does the author react to this construction? Does he or she rebel against that construction? What is the result of that rebellion?
2. How is race or disability socially constructed in the essay? What are the material realities of that construction on the author's life? How has the author been enculturated to that norm? How do these norms shape the author interpersonally and/or internally?

Include the following in your essay:

- A clear stated purpose. For example, you may be investigating how the concept of normalcy has shaped an author's experiences and his or her reactions to the experiences.
- An introduction to the concept (use a source!).
- An introduction to the essay you will be analyzing.
- Numerous points supported by textual examples. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from the text(s) in order to demonstrate your points.
- Implications or conclusions that result from your analysis (which might be, but don't have to be, your thesis).
- Clear organization with strong paragraph unity (each paragraph should have one central purpose) and corresponding transitions.
- Few mechanical or spelling errors.

Evaluation: This essay will be evaluated based on adhering to the assignment requirements, including the format and length specifications, and on how well you have addressed the guidelines outlined above in a manner consistent with an advanced writing course.

Essay 2

DUE DATES: By Fri, Apr 12 at 5pm, upload your full paper to the ReggieNet discussion forums so that you can read your group's essays for workshopping. We will workshop the essays on Apr. 15 and 17 and the final draft is due Mon, Apr. 22 (by class time) (on the Assignments tab).

POINTS: 130

LENGTH: 8-10 pages

FORMAT: MLA format with a Works Cited page and a descriptive title, double-spaced, 12-inch Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, uploaded to ReggieNet.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this assignment is to develop sophisticated writing skills that demonstrate engagement with the course material, close textual reading, understanding of theoretical material, and critical analysis.

AUDIENCE: In addition to your instructor and your peers, write this paper for someone who has not read the texts that you will be describing. In addition to this being a valuable skill, it is also my hope that you seek an audience for this paper beyond this class (Sigma Tau Delta publications, other undergraduate journals, etc.).

TASK: In this essay you will need to engage with the material of the course; however, you have some latitude in how you do so. At a minimum, you should use at least one thing that we have read for this course (if not more). Based on this requirement, your essay can take a number of forms. Here are some ideas below, although you are not limited to these ideas:

1. Apply one of the theoretical concepts we have learned about, such as Davis's use of normalcy or the social construction of race (multiple theorists) or the social construction of gender (Lorber) to (a) text(s). The text(s) can be personal essays we have read in here, other personal essays, a movie, a novel, blog posts, news segments or articles, and more. For example, how does Davis's concept of normalcy influence either the material presented in the text or the way the text is composed?
2. Write a paper exploring some of the theoretical contexts we have read about. How might they inform the other? What other theories have you learned about that seem related? For example, how are the social construction of race and the social construction of gender related? You could put several theoretical texts into conversation.
3. Perform a critical analysis of one or more of the personal essays we have read in class. You have some latitude about which lens you want to "read" them through.
4. Perform a critical analysis of one or more readings (theoretical or personal) with the aim of understanding the writing. What are the rhetorical strategies used by the author? What are the organizational structures? And so forth.

A note on research: Although you are not required to do outside research for this assignment, I can envision many topics and arguments that would benefit greatly from a bit of outside research (which could be historical, contemporary, informal or formal). Just be sure to use what you consider to be credible sources (not askyaho.com or something like that) and cite your sources appropriately (failing to do so would be plagiarism).

With any option that you pursue, include the following in your essay:

- A clear stated purpose. For example, you may be investigating how the concept of normalcy has shaped an author's experiences and his or her reactions to the experiences.
- A thesis statement that indicates some kind of argument that results from your analysis.
- An introduction to the concepts you are utilizing (use a source!), if applicable.
- An introduction to the text(s) you will be analyzing.
- Numerous points supported by textual examples. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from the text(s) in order to demonstrate your points.
- Implications or conclusions that result from your analysis (which might be, but don't have to be, your thesis).
- Clear organization with strong paragraph unity (each paragraph should have one central purpose) and corresponding transitions.
- Few mechanical or spelling errors.

Evaluation: This essay will be evaluated based on adhering to the assignment requirements, including engaging with the course material, following the format and length specifications, including all of the required aspects of the essay in your paper, and how well you address the guidelines outlined above in a manner consistent with an advanced writing course.

Essay 3

DUE DATES: Mon, May 6 (end of day) on the Assignments tab of Reggienet. Earlier submission is encouraged so that you can find your grades out ASAP and be done with the work for this course!

POINTS: 60

LENGTH: At least 1000 words (approximately 2 pages single-spaced)

FORMAT: Any format is acceptable. Include at least your name, a title, and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this assignment is to enact what you have learned in this course by writing your own personal essay. This assignment also provides the opportunity for you to personally work through some of the issues that we have been discussing.

AUDIENCE: **WRITE THIS** for yourself. Of course, you are writing it for me, because I need to look at it. But write about something that you want to explore and write it in a way that makes it useful for you. You are welcome to share it with others, but that is not required.

TASK: In this essay, you will be writing your own personal essay. This needs to be something that you write originally for this course, so here are some ideas to help you brainstorm out of our course content:

- What is “normal” in your life and how has that affected you? Did you have an experience being treated as an “aberration” or “deviation” that you could write about? On the other hand, in what ways do you fall into what is normalized in our society? Have you become aware of a particular privilege that you have? How has that privilege affected an experience that you had?
- Can you remember a particular experience that you have had that has socialized you according to race or gender? Is there an event where you have participated in the socializing of someone else? Also, remember that normalcy and social construction apply to more than just race and gender—they also apply to (dis)ability (invisible and visible), class, sexual orientation, religion, and much, much more.
- Did one of the readings make you think of something that you want to write about? For example, did “That’s Old-Time Religion” by Shirley Abbott make you think about your own indoctrination into a church?

*If you end up writing about something that will NOT be easily seen as connected to the class, add an explanatory paragraph telling me what made you write about your topic. (Do not include the paragraph in your minimum 1000 words.)

Although personal essays *seem* to be more relaxed, there are certain standards that you should have:

- Personal essays are focused. Thus, pick one event or experience to write about—you cannot write about your “childhood” in 1000 words.
- Personal essays include details. It is ok to make some details up—those memoirists surely do not remember exact dialogue from twenty years ago. We have creative license to recreate scenes.
- Personal essays are reflective. This is not only a personal narrative—it is also an essay, which means reflecting upon that narrative. (Often, personal essays will include some insight after the fact of the incident described.)

- Personal essays demonstrate sophisticated writing skills, including organization, strong paragraph unity, transitions, and so forth. For example, although the essay does not have to be structured chronologically, it still needs to be structured in some way that made sense. Each paragraph should still have one main focus. Transitions should still be used to tell your reader where you are going and to make connections between your thoughts.
- Personal essays are still proofread and checked for mechanical and spelling errors.

Evaluation: This essay will be evaluated based on adhering to the assignment requirements, including the connection to the course (or explained if not), meeting the length specifications, and following the above guidelines of personal essays.