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ENGL 110-28 (1200)
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Classroom: KY 148
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Writing Our Biology

Course Description

In Writing Our Biology, we will consider how our knowledge of biology depends on what we write about science. To test the hypothesis that writers are responsible for creating images of biological "reality" that pass as pure "fact," we will seek to understand our society's idea of health. Since we often assume that the study of the human body works towards the goal of healthiness, examining how we decide what healthy means can help us understand how our understanding of biology shifts and changes. In our quest to determine how writing shapes what we call "health," we will examine writing that ranges from arguments for eugenics to sports literature.

Our exploration of writing and biology will provide the exercise that will promote the health of our own writing. Some of the questions that will propel our reading this semester include: on which common metaphors and images do writers of biology depend? How do biology writers change their tone and style to suit different audiences? What are the motives of the writers we study and what do they tell us about our motives?

Course Objectives

- 1) To introduce students to the conventions of academic writing.
- 2) To familiarize students with academic research methods and resources.
- 3) To equip students with the tools of critical assessment, close reading and critical thinking.
- 4) To impart an understanding of writing as a process of careful choice, construction, articulation and revision.

Required Readings

Most of the readings will be available through our course blog, writingbio.qwriting.org. You are responsible for printing out these readings and bringing them to class. You also must provide your own copy of *The MLA Handbook* (7th edition) and *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy. These books will be available at the campus bookstore. All readings are due in class on the date they appear on the syllabus. Pop quizzes occur at my discretion.

Essay Expectations

All essays are due **IN CLASS** at the beginning of class unless you have a documented

emergency or previously made other arrangements with me. **I do not accept late work** without prior permission; all extensions must be merited and arranged at least **48 hours in advance** (though the "documented emergency" clause applies here as well). Some examples of appropriate documentation for emergencies include a letter from a physician or psychiatrist, a notarized death certificate, or a newspaper article about the complete devastation of your house, your printer, and every notebook you own. Inappropriate documentation: a note from Mama, a fake memorial website for poor Aunt Gladys, getting your possibly mobbed-up third cousin to send me a postcard of a cemetery.

Your essays must be in **doublespaced Times New Roman, size 12**. Margins must not exceed 1 inch. I will notice if you increase the size of all the punctuation marks in an effort to take up space or if you triplespace. As always, I expect you to behave with the integrity of scholars instead of resorting to cheap dodges to avoid required work.

Essays

ESSAY #1: Where Have All the Muscular Christians Gone? (4-5 pages)

Since our class discussions have made you an authority on the philosophy of muscular christianity and how it influenced popular fiction of the 19th century, *The Guardian's* Sport editors have asked you to write an article that explores whether or not traces of the ideas of muscular christianity still show up in our culture today. Use *Chariots of Fire* to make the argument that the philosophy of muscular christianity remains an influence on depictions of health in contemporary sports narratives.

Audience: the readers of *The Guardian*. In keeping with their style, your essay should be thoughtful as well as engaging.

Advice: Remember that this isn't a film review. You will need to give some information on the movie to illustrate your points, but the body of your paper should focus on making your argument. The best essays will not just demonstrate that one of the characters is a Christian with muscles, but will thoughtfully consider how the film depicts his religion in relationship with his athleticism. They will also draw on our class readings and discussions about muscular christianity in the 19th century.

Pre-draft assignment #1: After viewing *Chariots of Fire* in class, post 300 words that evening on the class blog that record your impressions of the film.

Pre-draft assignment #2: Understanding Characterization (see attached Pre-Draft Assignment page).

Writing lessons: developing a thesis, finding evidence, analyzing

Readings:

Thomas Hughes. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*

William Winn. "Tom Brown's Schooldays and the Development of Muscular Christianity"

Clifford Putney. "God in the Gym." *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*

Chariots of Fire

ESSAY #2: Conference Presentation (5-6 pages)

In George Lawton's 1939 article "Mental Hygiene Through the Study of Literature," he gives a list of discussion questions that he hoped would spark the growth of hygienic minds in budding scholars. Use *Woman on the Edge of Time* to answer five of his discussion questions. Then draw on your results to make an argument about the demerits (and merits, if you see some) of discussing texts in a "hygienic" way.

Audience: your classmates

Advice: While Lawton's questions may seem awkward and/or mawkish, you'll achieve better results if you attempt to answer them sincerely. Keep your eye on the bigger picture here; this is your chance to seriously consider the assumption that literature can tell us something about health.

Pre-draft assignment: Post a short response (one or two paragraphs) to the class blog in which you react to one of the hygiene films detailed by Ken Smith. In your response, focus on how the film creates an idea of what health is.

Writing lessons: challenging published writers' arguments, understanding motive, analysis

Readings:

George Lawton, "Mental Hygiene Through the Study of Literature"

Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Better Living Through Classroom Films 1945-1970*

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

ESSAY #3: Annotated Bibliography (5-6 pages)

After reading your article about muscular christianity, a group of scholars impressed with your understanding of how we as a society reward and cherish health have asked you what you think of debates about eugenics. Because this isn't your area of expertise, you run to the library to prepare an annotated bibliography that will help you understand the topic more comprehensively.

Advice: Your annotated bibliography should consist of six citations (three pro-eugenics and

three anti-eugenics); only one of these citations can be an internet source. The remaining five must be journal articles, book chapters, and books. Two of these sources must be in print form. If possible, try to find sources that emphasize the health benefits of eugenics (or the unhealthy effects of eugenics) to our society.

Pick the four strongest of these sources. Then prepare one-paragraph annotations for each of them. These annotations should consist of:

- A) 2-3 sentences that summarize the source's contents
- B) 2-3 sentences that cite and explain the relevance of important quotations
- C) 2-3 sentences that demonstrate why this source contributes to an argument for and against eugenics.

Audience: someone who needs to learn more about academic arguments about eugenics

Writing lessons: secondary research, MLA style conventions, using quotations

Pre-draft assignment #1: Consider the annotated bibliography I just gave you. Identify the different components of the annotations as outlined into the assignment.

Pre-draft assignment #2: library visit

Sources: CUNY+, JSTOR, EBSCOHost, Project Muse, Rosenthal Library

ESSAY #4: Brave New/Old World (4-5 pages)

Now that you've researched the pros and cons of eugenics, use the sources you cited in your annotated bibliography to analyze Agar's *Liberal Eugenics*. Make an argument about whether or not "liberal eugenics" are an acceptable way of trying to keep people healthy.

Advice: The best papers will not just offer your political opinion; they will think through the pros and cons as presented by the writers you researched for your bibliography. They will then apply these thoughts to their argument about Agar.

Audience: the same scholars who so rapturously read your piece on muscular christianity.

Pre-draft assignment: Divide into groups of four. In your groups, make a list of Agar's main arguments for liberal eugenics. Then report back to the class so we can make a master list.

Writing lessons: understanding theory, incorporating research into an argument, deploying evidence

Readings:

Nicholas Agar. *Liberal Eugenics: In Defence of Human Enhancement* (excerpt)

D. Fox. "The Illiberality of Liberal Eugenics."

Grading

20%: Class participation. Class participation demands that students thoughtfully respond to readings and their classmates in discussion, ask questions, and otherwise demonstrate their engagement with the class. It also includes in-class writing assignments, for which you should always be prepared.

20%: Pop quizzes.

30%: First three essays. While the first three essays assignments are individually important, students should also see them as learning opportunities that can be applied towards the final paper.

30%: The final paper.

Grading Criteria (by Professor Jason Tougaw, Queens College, Dept. of English)

When I evaluate your formal assignments, I am looking for inventive ideas expressed in engaging prose. Your writing should both please and enlighten readers and give them a sense of why your project is important—why what you have to say needs to be said. I evaluate the words on the page, rather than potential, improvement, or effort. The work you put into an assignment will most certainly be evident in the completed essay. The grading criteria below reflect the general standards to which I hold essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference. However, no description can capture the full range of elements that make a piece of writing strong (or weak). My feedback on your writing will give you both more concrete and more thorough explanations of the standards by which I evaluate it.

An “A” range essay is both ambitious and successful. It presents and develops focused and compelling set of ideas with grace, confidence, and control. It integrates and responds to sources subtly and persuasively.

A “B” range essay is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. A “B” essay must contain focused ideas, but these ideas may not be particularly complex, or may not be presented or supported well at every point. It integrates sources efficiently, if not always gracefully.

A “C” range essay has significant problems articulating and presenting its central ideas, though it is usually focused and coherent. Such essays often lack clarity and use source material in simple ways, without significant analysis or insight.

A “D” range essay fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment. A “D” essay distinguishes itself from a failing essay by showing moments of promise, such as emerging, though not sufficiently developed or articulated ideas.

“D” essays do not use sources well, though there may some effort to do so.

An “F” essay does not grapple with either ideas or texts, or does not address the expectations of the assignment. It is often unfocused or incoherent.

Writing Center

Located in Kiely Hall 229, tutors there are trained to help you revise your writing at various stages. If you believe you need additional help with your writing, or if I ask you to set up a regular meeting with a tutor, you should make an appointment at least one week prior to when an assignment is due. You can also get online help by visiting their website at <http://qcpages.qc.edu/qcsws>.

Note about Special Accommodation

If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870 and please inform me.

Note about Electronic Devices

No laptops, no ipads, no ipods, no phones, no pagers, no walkie-talkies, no e-book readers with non-limited internet capability, and no electronic devices of any kind that will prevent me from receiving your rapt attention. I would love to profit in class from these amazing technological advances, but it appears that everyone else just loves to check Facebook. I have better things to do than call out texters in class, but your rudeness will be noted when I calculate your participation grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves passing off someone else's work as your own. We will discuss plagiarism and methods of avoiding it in class. You will fail any assignments in which you plagiarize, so please make sure to ask if you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism.

Course Calendar

8/30: Introduction

9/1: Putney, "God in the Gym."

9/6: Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days* (excerpt)

Bring a copy of Winn's article, "Tom Brown's Schooldays and the Development of Muscular Christianity" to class

9/8: In class: *Chariots of Fire*

9/13: Pre-draft assignment #1 for Essay #1 due. Bring a copy of your post to class.

Writing Workshop: Understanding Characterization

9/15: Chapter 1 of *The MLA Handbook*. Make sure to take notes.

9/20: Rough draft of Essay #1 due.

Writing Workshop: Constructive Critique and Peer Workshops

9/22: Revised copy of Essay #1 due.

Writing Workshop: Revisions and Plagiarism

9/27: FIRST ESSAY DUE

9/29: NO CLASS

10/4: NO CLASS

10/6: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

10/11: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

10/13: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

10/18: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

10/20: Smith, "Better Living Through Classroom Films" (excerpt)

In class: Mental Health Films

10/25: Conference Presentation Pre-draft #1 due

Writing Workshop: Preparing Effective Conference Presentations

10/27: Bring a draft of your conference presentation to class.

Writing Workshop

11/1: CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS DUE

11/3: (2nd day of conference presentations)

11/8: Prepare a definition of eugenics and bring it to class

In class: The Great Library Scavenger Hunt

11/10: No new reading due.

Writing Workshop: Annotated Bibliographies

11/15: Bring an outline of your bibliography to class.

Writing Workshop

11/17: ESSAY #3 DUE

11/22: Agar, *Liberal Eugenics* (excerpt)

11/24: NO CLASS

11/29: Fox, "The Illiberality of Liberal Eugenics"

12/1: MLA Handbook, Chapter 4.

Writing Workshop: Using Sources Wisely

12/6: Bring a draft of your essay to class.

Writing Workshop

12/8: Writing Workshop: Those Last Minute Concerns

12/13: LAST DAY OF CLASS. FINAL PAPERS DUE

Note: I reserve the right to alter this syllabus if need be.