

# WRPG 200.01: WRITING THE PAST

**WRPG 200.01**  
**M/TH 1:30-2:45**  
**ALTHOUSE 110**

Lisa Vanian Wolff

Office hours: Tuesday 2:00-4:00 and by appointment

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

During their academic careers, students must develop their analytical and writing skills to match the growing complexity of subjects that they are required to investigate. This course will assist students who are nonnative speakers in developing their critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through the topic of recording history. We will look at memoir, microhistory, and interpretations of history to see how individuals have understood and explained events. Students will read texts critically to recognize the choices writers make in presenting their versions of history, and they will analyze and synthesize information to produce meaningful thesis statements and original thought. Students will also improve their writing and editing skills through practice, peer review, and revision.

## **COURSE GOALS**

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- read with a critical eye and recognize writers' choices in creating text
- develop their ideas by analyzing and responding to texts
- produce meaningful thesis statements
- express complex ideas through clear and convincing prose
- confidently revise and edit their writing, controlling the text through their choices
- accurately use MLA format in their research essays

## **COURSE TEXTS**

*The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Maxine Hong Kingston

*Cod: A Biography of the Fist That Changed the World*, Mark Kurlansky

*History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, Eds. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt

*The Well-Crafted Sentence: A Writer's Guide to Style*, Nora Bacon

*A Writer's Reference*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Diana Hacker

Reading handouts

## GRADING

All assignments will be evaluated on a point scale; these points will be weighted and converted into letter grades, according to the following distribution:

Class participation/attendance/peer review	20%
Homework/reading responses	20%
(Auto)Biography essay	20%
Microhistory essay	20%
Interpreting history essay	20%

On Thursday, March 8, I will submit roll call grades which will give you feedback about your progress in the course. However, you should ask me immediately if you have any questions about your grade. Remember that grades are not negotiable, and if you're concerned about a particular assignment, you need to talk to me before the assignment is due.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- Class participation: This segment of your grade covers your constructive involvement in class discussions (which requires that you complete the reading assignments), active participation in in-class writing, attendance in class, contribution in peer-review workshops, and willingness to seek additional help through office hours. Note: Although I expect and welcome differing and disagreeing opinions, I do not tolerate insults or contempt for others' ideas.
- Homework: I will assign reading and/or writing assignments for every class. For many reading assignments, I will require a short reading response to the text. This is an informal piece of writing which should delve into an area of the text that you thought was difficult, intriguing, or even wrong. The point of this exercise is for you to reflect upon your reaction to the text and find meaning in it. Your writing will serve as a jumping off point for class discussion as we analyze our texts. These assignments will not be graded on form or grammar but on the complexity of your insights. Each will be worth 10 to 20 points, depending on the assignment.
- (Auto)Biography essay: In this paper, you will record the history of yourself or another individual in a creative essay. In the process of telling the story, you should describe the event(s), the individual, and the context of his/her society. Although these essays should be based on events that happened, you are free to use interviews, dialogues, myths, related stories, and other devices that can help you make connections to larger themes and illuminate the meaning of your (auto)biography. This is an inventive essay (about 5 pages), and your writing should go beyond a straightforward relating of facts.
- Microhistory essay: In this essay, you will consider how a small thing can have a large impact on the world. You will take a recent invention and study its history and development and examine how it has changed the way people live and/or perceive the world around them. This paper will require research and should be 6-8 pages. The tone of the essay can be more informal, but your arguments should be well researched and persuasive.

- Interpreting history essay: For this essay, you will investigate a historical event that has multiple interpretations. You will describe the different explanations (if they changed over time or according to the group interpreting the event) and present your interpretation as a result of your study. This paper will require extensive research and should be 6-8 pages.

For the three essays there will be two phases: the first submission and the final draft. On the date assigned, you will email copies of your essay to your peer-review group. Your peer-review group will complete a peer-review worksheet for each essay and will discuss their comments in class. Your final draft, which will be graded, should take the comments from your peer review into consideration.

## **REVISION**

An important part of the writing process is revision. We will devote class time to critically reading and revising your writing and the writing of other students through peer-review workshops. If you wish to revise any of your essays for a higher grade, you must give me a revision plan within a week of getting your paper back. That revision plan should include the date you'll hand in the revision, along with (more importantly) how you plan to revise. I will average the two grades together for the final grade. Note: Revision is much more than simply "fixing" the sentence-level errors, moving a few paragraphs, or adding some sentences; it involves significant reworking of the essay.

## **WRITING CENTER**

At any point in your writing process, you can take advantage of the services available at the Norman M. Eberly Writing Center. Writers of all levels and abilities need feedback in order to develop their ideas and grow as writers. Dickinson's trained writing tutors can help you generate ideas, begin drafting, revise a rough draft, figure out a preferred documentation style, understand and respond to professor feedback, edit your writing – among other things. You can walk in or call and make an appointment at (717) 245-1620. You can also request a writing tutor in your major if one is available. For more information about hours and procedures, visit the web: <http://www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/writing-program/content/Writing-Center/>.

## **FORMAT FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

All writing assignments, including homework, must be labeled with your name, course section, date, and assignment name; in addition, your essays should have a title. Please don't use a title page. All pages after the first page should have your last name and a page number. Assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Selected writing assignments will be accompanied by an "end page" that analyzes your essay and writing process. This is an informal discussion that can focus on the difficulties you had, things you attempted to do in the essay, things you think you did well, what you learned from this essay, etc. The purpose of this end page is to encourage you to be a more reflective writer.

## **DUE DATES AND LATE WORK**

All work is due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. I will deduct ten percent of the assignment's value for each calendar day (note: not each class day) that the assignment is late. If you are absent, send your work to class with a classmate, or submit it through email before the start of class. Work that is submitted in person or through email after class has started will be considered a day late. Failure to complete work on time due to computer problems is usually the result of procrastination; therefore, computer malfunctions are not a sufficient excuse for late work.

## **WEATHER DELAYS AND CLOSURES**

In the event that school is delayed or closed due to weather, check your e-mail and Moodle that day for information on make-up work and classes.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is required for this course, and I take attendance at the beginning of every class. Being absent or late to class will result in a lower participation grade. Absences are excused only if I am notified in advance and given appropriate written documentation: proof of participation in a school-sponsored activity, religious holiday, or doctor's note. More than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade, and two tardies (more than five minutes late) will equal one absence.

If you must be absent, note the policy for work that is due: all work is due at the beginning of class, whether you're in class or not. You are also responsible for finding out if any work is due for the next class. You should contact me for updated assignments if you are absent.

## **MOODLE**

Course information, homework assignments, and writing assignments are posted on Moodle. Be sure that you can access the Moodle site for our class, and check your e-mail regularly. You are responsible for getting any information e-mailed or posted to Moodle.

## **PLAGIARISM**

Since the purpose of this class is to improve your writing and train you in the practices of academic writing, I consider plagiarism a serious issue. It is necessary for you to give proper credit to all of the resources you use in your research papers. Plagiarism is a violation of Dickinson's Student Code of Conduct and is a specific form of cheating defined in the code as follows:

- 1) To plagiarize is to use without proper citation or acknowledgment the words, ideas, or work of another. Whenever one relies on someone else for phraseology, even for only two or three words, one must acknowledge indebtedness by using quotation marks and giving the source, either in the text or in a footnote.
- 2) When one borrows facts which are not matters of general knowledge, including all statistics and translations, one must indicate one's indebtedness in the text or footnote. When one borrows an idea or the logic of an argument, one must acknowledge indebtedness either in a footnote or in the text. When in doubt, footnote. (Academic Standards Committee, November, 1965)

If you have any uncertainty about whether you have relied too much on another person's ideas or writing, please see me before a paper is due.

### **IF YOU NEED HELP**

Please see me during my office hours or make an appointment with me if you don't understand an assignment's requirements or purpose, if you can't find research sources, if you don't understand my comments or grading, if you're having problems with the reading or other work, or if you're simply "stuck" while trying to write an essay. You can e-mail or call me, but remember that some writing problems are best solved through discussion. In addition, the Writing Center can help you at any stage of the writing process. You can make an appointment with me or with other trained writing consultants at the Writing Center by calling x1620.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES**

In compliance with the Dickinson College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be recommended for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester (except for unusual circumstances) so that timely and appropriate arrangements can be made. Students requesting accommodations are required to register with Disability Services, located in Academic Advising, first floor of Biddle House. Please contact Marni Jones, Coordinator of Disability Services (at ext. 1080 or [jonesmar@dickinson.edu](mailto:jonesmar@dickinson.edu)) to verify their eligibility for reasonable and appropriate accommodations.