“For us, the underlying structure of effective academic writing—and of responsible public discourse—resides not just in stating our own ideas, but in listening closely to others around us, summarizing their views in a way that they will recognize, and responding with your own ideas in kind.”
~Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, They Say/I Say

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Welcome to EWP 190! This course provides an introduction to writing and reading on the college level, using scientific and environmental issues as topics of inquiry. This particular section of EWP 190 is coordinated with ESF 296 ("Integrated General Chemistry and General Biology Laboratory," instructed by Dr. Neal Abrams and Dr. Greg McGee), and students must be co-enrolled in ESF 296, FCH 150 ("General Chemistry I Lecture," instructed by Dr. Kelley Donaghy) and EFB 101 ("General Biology I Lecture," instructed by Dr. Melissa Fierke). The skills, practices, and learning objectives of EWP 190-03 are identical to those of other EWP 190 sections, and you will be producing the same kinds of formal projects and evaluated using the same criteria. However, given that this section of the course is populated with Environmental Biology, Environmental Science and Chemistry majors taking the same lab and lecture courses, we have the unique opportunity to make more direct connections to the reading, analysis, and writing you’ll be doing in your other courses and in your major fields of study.

During our first unit, we’ll be exploring the process of scientific inquiry by interrogating your experiences in your lab and lecture courses and reading several texts that challenge some of our conventional ideas and assumptions about sciences, and you will engage the ideas and information you encounter across the unit in a 4-6-page synthesis essay that showcases your new understandings of how science works. In the second unit, we’ll analyze the rhetoric surrounding the issue of climate change, investigating how climate change is represented by particular media outlets, politicians, scholars and other stakeholders, and you will explore the implications of that rhetoric in a 5-6-page analytical essay. During the third and final unit, we’ll research various debates associated with local green infrastructure initiatives, and you’ll be asked to weigh in on at least one debate that emerges from our collective research by giving a collaborative oral presentation and composing a 6-page argumentative essay that persuades a particular audience to adopt a stance on the proposed initiative(s). In addition to these formal assignments, you will engage in a number of informal “invention” activities (readings, class discussions, brainstorming sessions, analytical exercises, brief writings, drafts, peer review workshops, etc.) that prepare you for and lead into the unit essays.

You won’t be in this alone; after all, the practices of reading and writing are learned in communities. As Borges contends in the epigraph to the right, a book—and I would extend this to any piece of writing—"is not an isolated being; it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships." Readers, writers, and texts are always in dynamic interaction with each other and their environments. In order to learn how to best connect with, inform, persuade, or mobilize a given audience, it is imperative that a writer knows something about the context and community in which s/he is writing. The experience, knowledge and skills that each of you brings to the class will help educate your peers about a diverse range of cultures and communities, and make every single one of us (myself included) more sensitive and self-aware, aiding us in our effort to establish a critical and responsive community of readers and writers.

“...
**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:** EWP 190 focuses on writing practices and rhetorical strategies appropriate to a course in college composition: writing for a variety of audiences; a variety of purposes; and in a variety of genres, which includes both print and electronic forms of discourse.

Students who successfully complete EWP 190 will demonstrate the ability to:

- Write and support an argument that demonstrates skills of analysis.
- Enact basic research strategies and methodologies that reflect an ability to evaluate and integrate a range of sources in writing.
- Read, analyze, and interpret challenging and complex texts.
- Engage in a writing process (inventing, drafting, revising, editing, reflecting) that includes revision and feedback from both peers and instructors.
- Prepare, present, and evaluate an oral presentation.

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**Course Texts**

*(Available at the Syracuse University Bookstore)*

- *The Reader for ESF First-year Students* (provided at orientation; please note that I refer to this as “the Common Reader” in the course calendar)

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**Course Requirements & Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Essay Title</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Critical Synthesis Essay* (15%):</td>
<td>A 4-6-page essay in which you put Stuart Firestein’s <em>Ignorance</em> into conversation with a selection of other texts and your own experiences as a student of science.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Analytical Essay* (25%):</td>
<td>A 5-6-page essay in which you analyze the rhetoric of climate change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Argumentative Essay* (25%):</td>
<td>A 6-8 page essay in which you enter a debate and assert an argument about a proposed green infrastructure initiative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oral Presentation (5%):</td>
<td>A brief collaborative presentation on your group’s assigned topic.</td>
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**Course Invention Work (30%):** All the daily informal work of the semester, including annotations of the readings and short writings about the readings, brainstorming and heuristic activities, drafts, peer review responses, reflections, etc. While you will be receiving both numerical and letter grades for all major assignments, the course invention work will be graded on a “check” system where a “✓+” is worth a 100%, a “✓” is worth an 85%, a “✓−” is worth 70%, a “½” is worth 50%, and a “–” is worth 25%. These grades will comprise 30% of your final grade. If, at any point in the semester, you’d like to know where your invention work grade stands, just let me know and we’ll set up a meeting to review your progress in the course and calculate your tentative grade.

*Students must submit all formal essays in order to pass the course.*

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“...I would encourage you all to read, read, read. Just keep reading. ...[And t]he more you write, the better you get. Drafts—our kids are learning the first draft means nothing. You’re going to do seven, 10 drafts. That’s writing, it’s not failure, it’s not the teacher not liking you because it’s all marked up in red. When you get to be a good writer, you mark your own stuff in red, and you rewrite, and you rewrite, and you rewrite. That’s what writing is.”

~Michelle Obama on advice she and Obama give their daughters (qtd. in Kaplan)
ON LATE WORK: I expect all work to be submitted on time (i.e. at the start of class-time on the due date), but I do understand that extenuating circumstances may at times prevent a student from submitting work in a timely manner. If you have good reason for requiring additional time to complete an assignment, please make an effort to communicate your concerns to me, so that we can negotiate an alternative deadline and—if warranted—discuss potential penalties for the late submission of your work.

Please note that you are expected to bring hardcopies of your work—both informal homework assignments and formal essays—to class when they are due. Do not email them to me unless you have legitimate, unforeseen circumstances (such as illness) that necessitate you to provide them to me digitally.

ON PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE: Because the efficacy of this course relies heavily on in-class discussion, excessive absences, disruptive behavior or a lack of participation will negatively affect your invention work grade. Likewise, punctuality, regular attendance, productive class behavior, and energetic participation will positively affect your invention work grade.

Given that this is a studio course, there is simply no way that I can recreate the complexities of class activities and discussions over email, so it is likely that I will not respond to emails asking me to re-enact our class in writing. If you must miss class (due to illness or to observe a religious holiday), please swing by my office hours or contact another member of the class to find out what you missed. Please note that you are responsible for all work assigned, including in-class activities, whether or not you are in class.

If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of classes (or more) without any official excuse (documented through Heather Rice’s office), you will not be able to pass the course. I don’t anticipate any of you will be in that position, however, so let’s all agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

ON EMAIL ETIQUETTE: In a 2006 New York Times article entitled “To: Professor@University.edu Subject: Why It’s All About Me,” Jonathan D. Glater investigates some of the ways email communication has complicated the relationships between some professors and their students:

At colleges and universities nationwide, e-mail has made professors much more approachable. But many say that is has made them too accessible, erasing boundaries that traditionally kept students at a healthy distance. These days, they say, students seem to view them as available around the clock, sending a steady stream of e-mail messages—from 10 a week to 10 after every class—that are too informal or downright inappropriate.

While I find that the vast majority of my students tend to be respectful when it comes to communicating with instructors over email, I do think it’s worth reiterating some of the basic expectations of email etiquette at the university. First, keep in mind that some issues are more easily and productively discussed in person. When you do see fit to email your instructors, remember that you should include an informative subject line, a salutation and closing (with your full name) and use a polite, professional tone (complete with capitalization!). See pp. 20-21 in the Common Reader for more tips on email etiquette.

I will check my email at least once a day, and will try to respond to your communications within 48 hours. In return, I ask that you do the same. And if, by chance, I forget to respond to one of your emails in that two day period, please send me a polite reminder; I don’t expect that to happen often, but given the number of emails I receive on a daily basis, it’s possible one might get lost in the shuffle!

ON ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS: Students wishing to utilize academic accommodations due to a diagnosed disability of any kind must present an Academic Accommodations Authorization Letter generated by Syracuse University’s Office of Disability Services. If you currently have an Authorization Letter, please present this to me as soon as possible so that I may assist with the establishment of your accommodations. Students who do not have a current Academic Accommodations Authorization Letter and feel you are eligible for accommodations, please contact Heather Rice in the Office of Counseling and Disabilities Services, 110 Bray Hall, (315) 470-6660 or counseling@esf.edu as soon as possible.

ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: SUNY ESF’s Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty. Further details are available here: http://www.esf.edu/students/handbook/integrity.pdf. My addition to that statement: Anytime one borrows the words or ideas of others, the borrowed material must be properly acknowledged or documented. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty. Throughout the semester you will be learning legitimate techniques of documentation that will enable you to engage in important academic and civic conversations in ethical and transparent ways. Please note that the university’s academic integrity policy extends to any work you submit or bring to class throughout the semester (not simply final formal essays).
Our course is loaded on blackboard, a University on-line teaching support system. The url for blackboard is http://blackboard.syr.edu. Once you access the main page you will be asked for your user ID and password. I will teach you how to access our section of EWP 190 on blackboard, and will then expect you to be able to locate, download, and link to a range of course materials with some regularly throughout the semester. I will also contact you regularly via the blackboard course listserv which has already been created using your “syr” email addresses. Please check your syr account at least once daily throughout the fall.

Experienced consultants are trained to work with you one-on-one during all stages of your writing projects. Consultants are usually not available for drop in hours; time slots fill quickly, especially during peak times in the semester. Sign up in advance on the schedule located in the Academic Success Center in 109 Moon Library (look for the green sign) for a 30 or 50-minute weekday, weeknight, or weekend session in the Center. Tuesday/Thursday evening hours will be available in Centennial Hall. This is a free resource to all students and recommended for all writing assignments in this class.

Day One Activities

A.) On the provided index card, jot down your name (including any preferred nicknames), esf.edu email address, major, hometown, a quick note about any concerns you have about this course or Project SYNAPSE, and five things you’re passionate about. Be mindful that you’ll be sharing these with your peers, as well as your teachers!

B.) Read the quotations below and consider (and be ready to share) your response to the prompt that follows:

“. . . America is now ill with a powerful mutant strain of intertwined ignorance, anti-rationalism, and anti-intellectualism. . . . This condition is aggressively promoted by everyone, from politicians to media executives, whose livelihoods depend on a public that derives its opinions from sound bites and blogs, and it is passively accepted by a public in thrall to the serpent promising effortless enjoyment from the fruit of the tree of infotainment.”

~ historian Susan Jacoby, The Age of American Unreason

“I think we’re in the midst of a literacy revolution, the likes of which we haven’t seen since Greek civilization.”

~ composition & rhetoric scholar Andrea Lunsford, quoted in “Clive Thompson on the New Literacy”

As the two epigraphs above illustrate, there seem to be two competing narratives about literacy in America today. On the one hand, critics like Jacoby bemoan the fact that many Americans have become passive readers of information, consumers who’ve been hoodwinked by the corporate/political machine. Others such as Lunsford, however, champion the revolutionary (even democratizing) impact new technology has on our ability to write and share information, even going so far as to suggest that we’re experiencing a literary renaissance. Where do you stand in this debate and why?

Is American culture largely “anti-intellectual” as Jacoby claims, and what does that mean for our collective literacy skills? Are the challenges and delights of the digital age leading to a “literacy revolution” as Lunsford argues?

References: