English 496 – Capstone: Senior Thesis

Prof. Gwen Bergner  *  T/Th 11:30-12:45  *  WDB–D109  *  Spring 2013
Office: 239 Colson  Hours: T/Th 1:00-2:30, & by appt.  gbergner@wvu.edu  304.293.9705
Mentor: Mike Buso  M/W 10:15-11:15  Colson G19  mbuso@mix.wvu.edu

In the major capstone course you get to delve into a literary subject of your choosing in order to write an original, creative, and meaningful research paper. The 20-page research paper is the end goal, and this course will help you reach it by breaking the process into manageable chunks. We will spend the early part of the semester brainstorming topics, strengthening your ability to conduct literary research, learning to incorporate sources into your writing, and honing your subject into a thesis. In the latter part of the semester we will address how to organize your ideas, select the best sources, check your documentation style, and revise drafts. Toward the end of the semester, you will present your research to the class. The course will strengthen your ability to analyze materials, compose compelling essays, and present your ideas effectively.

Required Text
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

This course helps you meet the Program Goals for the English major through a series of assignments linked to a set of Learning Outcomes:

English Program Goals—Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:
Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts:
- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects.
- Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity.
- Locate texts in social / economic / political / literary history.
- Connect texts to other literary or cultural texts.

Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Learning Outcomes—By the end of the course, students should be able to:
- demonstrate awareness of academic discourse and research on a particular topic.
- conduct, analyze, and synthesize research on a topic.
- compose academic prose using appropriate tone, style, and sentence structure.
- quote, cite, and document research according to conventions of academic writing.
- construct a unified, coherent, supported, and critically thoughtful original essay.
- present orally the results of research and argument with clear proficiency.
Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>3 absences allowed; additional absence triggers failing grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial prospectus</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of critical sources</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-page research paper</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised prospectus</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-page research paper</td>
<td>40 points</td>
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Grade Scale

A+ (98-100); A (97-94); A- (93-91); B+ (90-88); B (87-84); B- (83-81); C+ (80-78); C (77-74); C- (73-71); D (61-70); F (60 or below)

Note: You must complete all assignments and attend class regularly for a passing grade.

Grading Criteria for evaluating your writing will be the following:

- A five-page, ten-page, and twenty-page draft that engages with a difficult, original, or complex question.
- A final revision that clearly demonstrates a reworking of the drafts in terms of argument, content, style, and organization.
- A clear thesis or insight, which is suitably complex and provides a blueprint for the essay
- Smooth and grammatical integration of primary and secondary sources.
- Solid evidence from literary works (in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries) to support your interpretations.
- Helpful information from secondary sources to locate your primary text within literary, cultural, and/or political history.
- Appropriate (balanced, comprehensive, concise) use of secondary sources to locate your argument within a larger critical context or academic conversation.
- Strong transitions that move the essay forward logically and thoughtfully.
- A polished final essay free of grammatical and surface errors. **Proofread several times.**
- Consistent use of MLA style for documentation.

Criteria for grading annotated bibliographies, summaries of critical sources, and oral presentations will be based on assignment guidelines handed out separately.

Writing Resources

- WVU Library Guide for Engl 496: [http://libguides.wvu.edu/english496](http://libguides.wvu.edu/english496)
- Purdue’s fabulous Online Writing Guide (OWL) on MLA style: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/)
- “Basic in-text citation”: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/)
- “Basic Works Cited”: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/)
- The Writing Center in Colson G02 is available for writing assistance. You can drop in or call for an appointment: 304.293.5788.
Policies

Attendance Policy
Consistent class attendance helps students succeed academically and enriches our class dynamics. Therefore, attendance is required. **You are granted three absences without penalty.** Use these for school trips, illness, family emergencies, etc. You do not need to clear these absences with me. If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the course.

If you have an emergency or serious health problem during the semester, please contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me and authorize arrangements for you.

Late Work
One full letter grade will be deducted per day for late submissions unless you make **prior** arrangements with me. Assignments will not be accepted by email without prior permission or unless specified on the syllabus or in assignment guidelines. You must complete all assignments and attend class regularly for a passing grade.

Electronic “Handouts,” Assignment Guidelines, and Supplementary Course Materials
I will often distribute assignment guidelines and other materials by email and on eCampus. You MUST have access to these materials in **class**, in either electronic or hard copy format.

E-Mail
Please check your MIX e-mail account regularly for course news and announcements. Although email etiquette has relaxed with the advent of smart phones, please be courteous and clear in your communication so that I can help you. No texting in class, please.

Academic Integrity
The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at [http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code](http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code).

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me **before** the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Social Justice Policy
West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.
Schedule

Week 1

Tue., Jan 15
What is a senior thesis? And why write one anyway?

Thur., Jan 17
How do you create a topic?
**Bring to class:** Two typed paragraphs reflecting on meaningful courses or literary works.

Week 2

Tue., Jan 22
Discussion of topics. What is a research prospectus?
**Bring to class:** List of possible topics (minimum of three topics).

Thur., Jan 24
Research workshop: Annotated bibliographies

Week 3

Tue., Jan 29
Research workshop: **Meet in the Downtown Library, Room 136**

Thur., Jan 31
Library Research Day

Week 4

Tue., Feb 5
**Due:** Annotated bibliography (7 sources minimum)

Thur., Feb 7
**Due:** Summary of two sources

Week 5

Tue., Feb 12
**Due:** Initial Prospectus
Writing Workshop: theses, introductions, paragraph structure

Thur., Feb 14
**Due:** Draft of intro. & body par. for 10pp. essay (2 copies)
Writing Workshop: quotations and peer editing with Mike Buso

Week 6

Tue., Feb 19
No class: Writing Day

Thur., Feb 21
**Due:** Draft of 10-page research paper
Oral presentation strategies

Week 7

Tue., Feb 26
No class—individual conferences

Thur., Feb 28
No class—individual conferences

Week 8

Tue., Mar 5
No class—individual conferences

Thur., Mar 7
No class—individual conferences
Week 9
Tue., Mar 12  
Due: 10-page research paper

Thur., Mar 14  
Oral presentations

Week 10
Tue., Mar 19  
Oral presentations

Thur., Mar 21  
Oral presentations

Spring Break

Week 11
Tue., Apr 2  
Due: Revised prospectus

Thur., Apr 4  
Due: Rough draft of introduction & outline of 20pp. paper

Week 12
Tue., Apr 9  
No class: Writing Day/Optional Office Hours
(Required individual conferences with Mike Buso)

Thur., Apr 11  
Writing Workshop—Bring to class 2 copies of paper draft
(Required individual conferences with Mike Buso)

Week 13
Tue., Apr 16  
No class: Writing Day/Optional Office Hours
(Required individual conferences with Mike Buso)

Thur., Apr 18  
Writing Workshop—bring to class 2 copies of paper draft
(Required individual conferences with Mike Buso)

Week 14
Tue., Apr 23  
Due: Rough draft of 20-page paper

Thur., Apr 25  
No class: Individual conferences with instructor and mentor

Week 15
Tue., Apr 30  
No class: Individual conferences with instructor and mentor

Thur., May 2  
No class: Individual conferences with instructor and mentor

Due: Senior Thesis on Tuesday, May 7, Noon, my mailbox in Colson Hall