

## **Seminar in Composition Studies**

**ENGL 259-01**

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**Office Hours:** Monday 12-1, Thursday 2-4, and by appointment  
**Class Days/Time:** Thursdays 4:00-6:45 p.m.  
**Classroom:** Sweeney 229

English 259 is a graduate seminar in Composition Theory. This semester, you will learn all about the history and current state of the field of Composition Theory. In particular, the course objectives are:

- to analyze and evaluate competing descriptions of the writing process;
- to recognize and evaluate the range of approaches to teaching composition;
- to examine assumptions underlying current theory and practice in writing instruction;
- to explore assumptions and implications of composition and rhetorical research;
- to identify key problems and issues surrounding current research in composition and rhetoric.

The main questions guiding our reading and discussions this semester, and some of the fundamental questions motivating research in this field, are:

- How do people write?
- How do people learn how to write?
- How should we teach writing?
- What are the consequences of teaching writing one way versus another?
- What are the consequences of writing in the world? In other words, what do texts “do” in the world? Why are they important?

And by the end of the semester, you will develop tentative answers of your own to these and many other questions.

### **MA in English Program Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Students will demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research.
3. Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion, b) formulate and defend original arguments, c) employ effectively the language of their discipline and d) write under time constraints.
5. Students will demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

This course engages students in outcomes 1, 2, and 4. They will acquire an appropriate level of expertise in Composition Theory, they will learn how to conduct and synthesize research in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, and they write a variety of formal and informal papers that will develop their command of written academic English.

## **Required Materials**

Berlin, James. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900 – 1985*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U. P., 1987.

Tate, Gary, Amy Rupiper, Kurt Schick. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Oxford, 2014.

Villanueva, Victor. and Kristin Arola. Eds. *Cross Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. 3rd edition. Urbana: NCTE, 2011.

## **Assignments**

### **Discussion Leaders**

Each graduate student will serve as a discussion leader which requires you to: 1. provide the class with handouts that includes a detailed summary of the readings (all of them), 2. Come to class with at least five discussion questions per reading and one synthesizing question that groups all of the readings together.

You will help lead the discussion in small teams of three and your job is to set the tone for the readings and the discussion, and your questions will be used in addition to the questions provided by the professor. Please work together on your handouts and your discussion questions and plan to lead the discussion as a group – please don't simply break up the work and have one person talk about one reading and another person talk about the other. Your job, in a lot of ways, is to be the core of that day's conversation. So talk with each other and with us.

### **Exams**

You will take 2 exams which will consist of the identification and explanation of key concepts, figures, and movements in Composition.

### **Researched Seminar Paper**

The research paper is a thesis-driven, researched argument will demonstrate your theoretical and pedagogical interests in the field of composition and rhetoric. There should be a theoretical and pedagogical component to each argument. The theoretical component presents your argument about your topic and the research and logic to back up claims you are making. The pedagogical component is the manifestation of your idea, or "what this would look like in the writing classroom." Topics include but are not limited to:

- arguing your pedagogical position and best approaches to teaching writing
- exploring a pedagogical theory or approach that you find compelling, (or even problematic)
- predicting future trends in Composition based on its history
- researching the history of Composition
- "mapping" or exploring fully a particular key word or theory in composition and rhetoric
- theorizing about the relationship among technology, rhetoric, and the teaching or writing
- exploring the "divide" (or what I like to call the relationship) between rhetoric and poetic
- If you have ideas/topics that you would like to explore, please see me, and we will work out an assignment that fits both your interests and the goals and expectations of the course.

You must have a controlling idea or argument, and you must include a pedagogical application in your argument. (You may integrate the two, or you may have a theoretical section and an application section, but your theoretical grounding should be the bulk of your paper.)

All papers must be between 12 and 15 pages and include composition research consisting of at least 10 sources (at least half of your sources must be different sources from the assigned course readings).

### **Weekly response papers**

Respond to the readings for the week. That means don't just summarize them – grapple with the ideas presented in them and think about how they respond to or challenge (or don't) some of the fundamental questions that motivate inquiry and research in composition theory. Also, from time to time, talk about your sense of the field and where *your* thinking is trending in regards to the field's concerns. Each response should be 1-2 pages long.

### **Participation**

Participation is an important part of the work of this seminar. You are expected to be prepared for class each week, which means doing all the reading, even if you are not presenting that day. You are also expected to fully participate in our discussions, which means sharing your own ideas and listening to and responding to the ideas of your classmates.

### **Grades**

Weekly Responses: 10%

Leading Discussion: 20%

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Seminar Participation: 10%

Final Seminar Paper: 20% (failure to attend and participate in workshops will deduct up to 15 points from your final grade)

### **Online Resources**

The CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric 1984–1999

<http://www.ibiblio.org/cccc/>

CompPile: An Ongoing Inventory of Publications in Post-secondary Composition, Rhetoric

<http://comppile.tamucc.edu/>

Modern Language Association International Bibliography

The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing (5th ed.)

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/bb/>

The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/basicbib/>

*College Composition & Communication*

<http://www.ncte.org/cc/>

*College English*

<http://www.ncte.org/ce/>

*Rhetoric Review*

<http://www.rhetoricreview.com> and JSTOR

*JAC*

<http://jac.gsu.edu/>

*Peitho*

<http://www.unm.edu/~cwshrc/peitho.htm>

*Composition Studies*

<http://www.compositionstudies.tcu.edu>

### **Classroom Decorum**

The way that you conduct yourself in has direct bearing on your ethos as a student and on the climate of the class. I expect you to behave in a courteous and respectful way to your classmates. We will be conducting a lot of class discussions, peer workshops, and presentations, and I expect you to give your classmates full attention, participate in discussions, and be an active member of the class. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to ask one of your classmates what you missed. Please turn off your cell phones and put them away until after class.

### **Academic Integrity**

No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. Sanctions range from receiving an “F” on an assignment to permanent expulsion from the University. If you have any questions whatsoever about how to document any sources you use, see me. Keep a hard copy of your paper as well as all notes, rough drafts, computer files, and research materials for at least six months after the conclusion of the class. Here is the recommended greensheet statement from the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development: “Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The policy on academic integrity can be found [online].”

## Tentative Schedule

Please note: Schedule is subject to change at professor's discretion.

Key:

Guide: *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*

Berlin: *Rhetoric and Reality*

Cross: *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*

Week	Date	Readings for Discussions / Day's Activities	Discussion Leaders
1	Aug. 28	Introduction to Class, syllabus, books. Introductions of each other. Introduction of Response Papers (expectations). Introduction of Discussion Leaders (expectations and sign ups). The "flow" of the class: first half is history and a broad survey of what the writing class can look like; second half of class (and your paper) is a chance to go deeper into areas of interest. Short exercise on how people write and how people learn how to write.	
2	Sept. 4	Guide: 1-19 (what is Comp. Pedagogy?), Berlin: 1-57 (history of writing instruction to 1920).	(3)
3	11	Berlin: 58- end (history of writing instruction to 1985).	(3)
4	18	Guide: 212-230 (process), 111-127 (expressive), 37-54 (collaborative writing), 20-36 (basic writing)	(3)
5	25	Guide: 128-145 (feminist), 55-76 (community-engaged), 231-247 (researched writing), 248-265 (rhetoric and argumentation)	(3)
6	Oct. 2	Guide: 146-162 (genre), 163-175 (literature and composition), 266-282 (second language writing), 283-300 (WAC and WID)	(3)
7	9	<i>Exam #1</i> Decide on reading list for second half of semester from <i>Cross-Talk</i> book (areas to go deeper)	
8	16		(3)
9	23		(3)
10	30		(3)
11	Nov. 6	<i>Brief, informal proposal for Final Paper due.</i>	(3)
12	13		(3)
13	20	<i>Exam #2</i>	
14	27	No Class. Thanksgiving.	
15	Dec. 4	<i>Drafts of Final Papers due. Feedback.</i>	
Finals	Tues., Dec. 16, 2:45- 5:00	<i>Final Papers due. Informal presentations of projects.</i>	

