Course Descriptions: Spring 2019

English 1-4, First Year Writing

English 1 Expository Writing

*English 1 fulfills the first half of the college writing requirement for liberal arts students. For School of Engineering students, English 1 fulfills the English requirement.*

English 1 explores the principles of effective written communication and provides intensive practice in writing various types of expository prose, especially analysis and persuasion. Essays by contemporary and earlier authors will be examined as instances of the range and versatility of standard written English. English 1 is offered both semesters, with substantially fewer sections in the spring.

English 2 First-Year Writing Seminars

*English 2 fulfills the second half of the college writing requirement for liberal arts students. School of Engineering students are not required to take English 2.*

Like English 1, English 2 is a composition course designed to provide a foundation for writing in other courses. Unlike English 1, English 2 offers students the opportunity to choose among several seminar topics, all of which are approached in an interdisciplinary way. While drawing on various materials including fiction, essays, films and other visual and aural texts, English 2 puts the primary emphasis on students' own writing. English 2 is offered both semesters, with substantially fewer sections in the fall. English 1 (or 3) is a prerequisite for this course.

Conformity and Rebellion

How does one act on discontent? What are its consequences? Does conformity always imply a sacrifice of individuality? Does rebellion always lead to marginalization? We will examine the tensions between conformity and rebellion in a variety of contexts: political, social, familial, and religious. Readings will include novels, short stories, plays and essays, and we may also consider other media such as film or music. Discussion of these materials and the issues raised by them will provide the basis for the student writing that is at the center of the course.

Differences

What does it mean to be "different"—politically, religiously, racially or ethnically, sexually, or by reason of class or disability—from the social "norm"? How do those in the social "norm" react when they encounter those who are different? If the social norm is white, Protestant, male, heterosexual, and middle class, how do writers in other categories imagine themselves in relation to this "norm"? What are the special problems and opportunities for writers who are "different"? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this course which is devoted, primarily, to increasing proficiency in writing.

Digital Media Cultures

Is Google making us stupid? Would we all be better off if our brains were directly linked to the web? Should we legalize human-robot marriage? In this writing-intensive course, we will reflect upon, analyze, and argue our way through such questions, as we investigate the increasing presence and power of computers and networked devices in various spheres of daily life—education, commerce, political life, family life, sex, art, entertainment, and war. Course readings and viewings, as well as your own essays, will consider, for example, how digitization has transformed media industries as well as our own deep-seated habits of visual and auditory consumption; the extent to which social media has upended traditional modes of self-presentation, group formation, and civic engagement; and the ways in which notions of artificial intelligence—from the early days of robotics to recent representations of cyborgs and cyberpunks in film, literature, and pop culture—challenge us to reimagine what it means to be human and, even more fundamentally, what it means to be alive. Over the course of the semester, you will produce no fewer than thirty pages of polished, peer-reviewed writing explicating and evaluating the dynamics, stakes, and implications of our ever-evolving digital life.
Family Ties

This writing course explores the family as a locus for conflict, alienation and reconciliation, as a center for the formation of identity, and as a source of joy. We will hear the voices of mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons as they speak of the experience of being within a family; and we will ask how families are formed. Strands of shared DNA define some, while legal documents establish others. Often people who are unrelated by biology or law nonetheless consider themselves family. While the work of novelists, essayists, biographers, and filmmakers will be the basis of our inquiry into topics as ancient as sibling rivalry and as contemporary as the ethics of reproductive technology, we will focus most of our attention on students' own writing about family ties.

Love and Sexuality

In addition to examining love and sexuality both separately and with regard to one another, we will look at related issues such as gender, sex roles, sex, homosexuality, heterosexuality, narcissism, sadism, masochism, affection, marriage, marriage alternatives, divorce, adultery, pornography, prostitution, incest, and violence. Course materials will include some of the following: essays, theoretical writings, fiction, mythology, oral traditions, popular culture, and advertising. Students' ideas, interests, and experience will help guide the class, and students' writing will be the center of it.

Other Worlds

What is real? Who says so? The common theme of this course is the human urge to explore other dimensions of reality and create alternate representations of consciousness. Readings may address myths, the supernatural, fairy tales, medieval romances, underworlds, and futurist visions. We will share our own ideas about boundaries—or lack of boundaries—between worlds. A central concern will be students' writing.

Perceiving Environments

How we define "environment" impacts our perception of our place in the world. In this writing-intensive course, we will examine the intersection of language and environmental issues such as food justice, climate change, urban and industrial landscapes, water rights, toxic waste, and sustainability. Students will consider how communication influences others, creates community, and promotes environmental justice. Drawing on journalism, scientific research, essays, film, personal observations, and other sources, the class will analyze these pressing subjects through engaged discussion, creative and persuasive non-fiction writing, and in-depth research of a local issue. This course will focus on strengthening students' writing skills.

Road Stories

All writing involves exploration, but writing about travel has always provided people with a distinctive opportunity to explore, re-imagine and then represent themselves, other cultures and other natures. This semester, we will be writing about travel in the age of globalization and the information superhighway. How does tourism change tourists and the cultures they visit? Can a quest come from a brochure? Why go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or Mecca when many of us can see these sites on our computer screens every night? Indeed, why travel at all? To help us answer such questions, we will be reading a variety of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, and we will view at least one road movie. But the focus of the course will remain on our own writing. How do we explore and then represent our own insights into the meaning of travel today?

English 4 Writing Seminar
Lynn Stevens, Director

English 4 fulfills the second half of the College Writing Requirement for Liberal Arts students. Engineering students are not required to take English 4.

English 4 is designed for international students and for students who speak English as an additional language. As in English 2, the seminar topics of English 4 are approached in an interdisciplinary way. While drawing on various
materials including fiction, essays, films and other visual and aural texts, English 4 puts the primary emphasis on students' own writing. English 4 is offered in the spring semester; prerequisite is English 1 (or 3).

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