Issues in Disciplinary Studies: Literature, Medicine, & Biotechnology

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Western Illinois University, Spring 2017, Mondays 5:30-8
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Office hours M 11-1, W 10-11, Th 10-11 in QCC 2209 (plus M ~3-5 in Macomb on dates in schedule)
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General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

In-depth examination of an issue or topic relevant to English studies in relation to other disciplines such as film, philosophy, psychology, or science.

Specific Description & Goals

This course explores intersections between twenty-first-century medicine and biotechnology and contemporary autobiography, fiction, cinema, poetry, graphic narrative, and television. US medical schools now routinely feature courses in the “medical humanities,” recognizing how fictional and nonfictional narratives can help health care providers to empathize more fully with patients and make more holistic decisions. In recent years, similar courses have emerged in colleges of arts & sciences and especially English departments, where students and faculty have found compelling reasons to examine these stories from non-practitioner perspectives. To my knowledge, this is WIU’s first such offering.

The two parts of this course overlap heavily, but also contain distinct foci. The first half of our semester more closely matches other literature and medicine syllabi, though paying more attention to film and comics than most. Engaging a wide range of genres, we will ponder the structures of authority and cultural dynamics involved in doctor-nurse-patient-family relationships; we will think about what it means to live in light of death, to struggle with depression or bipolar tendencies, and to be disabled by one’s environment. In the course’s second half, we turn to science fiction—broadly defined—as a lens on emerging biotechnological interventions, keeping an eye out for both blessings and curses. Via two novels and a television thriller, we will consider the bioethics of new genetic testing and editing tools as well as their influence on the very shapes of stories we tell about the “self” and the “soul.”

My hope is that this course proves of deep interest even for someone not immediately captivated by questions about neurosurgery, cancer, psychiatric care, Down syndrome, autism, laboratory research, or genetic biology. Eventually, each of us must face bodily frailty; we will all find ourselves categorized by superficial conditions or traits (though there are very real and troubling patterns in the judgments that are most pervasive); we will wrestle with epistemological questions about subjectivity, objectivity, intuition, faith, and knowledge. One of narrative art’s many values is approaching such situations and issues through vicarious experience and thought experiments. Our aim is to benefit from these stories and the conversations they generate on many levels, ultimately demonstrating that impact in the course’s seminar papers especially. The semester’s most significant outcomes, these essays will represent a wide range of connections between students’ individual areas of interest and our group conversations, and considerable time will be dedicated to their gradual evolution.
Reading & Assignment Schedule

PLEASE NOTE:
~“VIEWING,” “READING,” or “ONLINE” = watch, read, or complete in full BEFORE class
~“IN CLASS” = no preparation required beyond accessing texts (print or bring electronically)
~“(EH in Macomb)” = Everett teaching from Macomb (& available for office hours ~3-5 pm)

Part One: Medicine in Autobiography, Graphic Narrative, & Film

1st WEEK, JAN 16th: NO CLASS (Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday)

2nd WEEK, JAN 23rd: MY BRAIN, MY SELF, & PATIENT-DOCTOR RELATIONSHIPS

READING: ~Paul Kalanithi, When Breath Becomes Air

~Course overview, using Kalanithi, Atwood, & Warren to start generating key questions
~Introductions (using introductory survey handout)
~Syllabus review and discussion of goals and assignments; signups for annotations

3rd WEEK, JAN 30th: MEDICINE, KNOWLEDGE, & INTERDISCIPLINARITY

VIEWING: ~Wit (2001) (based on Margaret Edson play) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0PPvlGqL8

~Annotation, discussion: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
~Annotation, discussion: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
~Annotation, discussion: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
~Annotation, discussion: __________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

IN CLASS: ~Generating and revising key course questions: what interests us most?
### 4th Week, Feb 6th: Getting Graphic (EH in Macomb)

**Reading:**
- Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, & Me* ch 1-4
- M.K. Czerwiec et al., *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* intro, ch 1-3

**In Class:**
- Group jam comics (bring a good pencil/pen or two …) and individual comic drafts

### 5th Week, Feb 13th: No Class (Lincoln Holiday)

**Reading:**
- Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, & Me* ch 5-9
- M.K. Czerwiec et al., *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* ch 4-6, conclusion

**Online:**
- Quiz #1 (available online at least 48 hrs before the class meeting)

**Writing:**
- Individual comics project due online (under “Discussions”) by Friday 2/17
- For further inspiration, check out [http://www.graphicmedicine.org/](http://www.graphicmedicine.org/)

### 6th Week, Feb 20th: Ability & Disability

**Viewing:**
- *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007)

**Reading:**
- Michael Bérubé, *Life as Jaime Knows It*, ch 1-4
- Annotation, discussion for CH 1-2: __________________________
- Annotation, discussion for CH 3-4: __________________________
- Michael Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories*, introduction
- Annotation, discussion: __________________________

**In Class:**
- Down syndrome vs. paralysis: defining and achieving “ability”

### 7th Week, Feb 27th: Health & Disease (EH in Macomb)

**Viewing:**
- *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013)

**Reading:**
- Michael Bérubé, *Life as Jaime Knows It*, ch 5-7 + Afterword
- Annotation, discussion: __________________________
- Annotation, discussion: __________________________

**In Class:**
- Down syndrome vs. HIV/AIDS: defining and achieving “health”
### Part Two: Biotechnology in Slipstream SF Novels & Television

#### 8th WEEK, MAR 6$: SLIPSTREAM & THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

**READING:**
- Elizabeth Moon, *The Speed of Dark*, pp. 1-169
  → Annotation, discussion

**WRITING:**
- Paper, Step 1: an initial, very rough mess of brainstorming about what texts & questions interest you most and about paper possibilities, due online under “Discussions” by 4 p.m. Mon 3/6

**IN CLASS:**
- Mapping the history of SF and fiction about biotechnology

(SPRING BREAK)

#### 9th WEEK, MAR 20$: THE RISK & APPEAL OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION (*EH in Macomb*)

**READING:**
  → Annotation, discussion

**IN CLASS:**
- Implications of cognitive difference

#### 10th WEEK, MAR 27$: SCIENCE FICTION, DISABILITY, & DISEASE

**VIEWING:**
- *Do You Really Want to Know?* (2012) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUqTu7eLMX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUqTu7eLMX0)

**READING:**
  → Annotation, discussion

**ONLINE:**
- Quiz #2 (covering material since Quiz #1)

**WRITING:**
- Paper, Step 2: a much sharper prospectus for the course’s final paper that (a) describes key texts and questions, (b) offers a tentative thesis, and (c) lists at least 5 secondary non-course texts that you may engage, due online by 4 p.m. Mon 3/27

**IN CLASS:**
- Writing groups: constructive critique of each prospectus
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<tr>
<th>11th WEEK, APR 3rd: GENOME TESTING &amp; THE EXPERIENCE OF EXCEPTIONALITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>annotation, discussion ____________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING: ~Paper, Step 3: at least three pages of very rough draft toward your paper, due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/3</td>
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| IN CLASS: ~Margaret Atwood, “Heart Test With An Echo Chamber.” *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring 1984): 19-20. 
~How to expand and tighten a thesis—at the same time 
~The appeal, logistical questions, and ultimate meaning of personal genetic testing |

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<th>12th WEEK, APR 10th: PREDISPOSED AGENCY (<em>EH in Macomb</em>)</th>
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<td>annotation, discussion ____________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING: ~Paper, Step 4: at least six pages of very rough draft toward your paper, due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/10</td>
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<td>IN CLASS: ~Writing groups: constructive critiques of each half-draft</td>
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<th>13th WEEK, APR 17th: BEYOND THE CARBON COPY CLONE CATASTROPHE</th>
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<td>VIEWING: ~<em>Orphan Black</em> season 1, episodes 1-3 (free with Amazon Prime, also free via Daily Motion, e.g. <a href="http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3go58b">http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3go58b</a>)</td>
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<td>WRITING: ~Single Page Screenplays insertable into <em>OB</em> episodes 1-3 due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/17 ~Paper, Step 5: <em>Three</em> 300-word annotations for carefully selected, especially valuable works of theory and/or criticism that your final paper will engage (aim for roughly 1/3 summary and 2/3 analysis), due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/17</td>
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<td>IN CLASS: ~The value of reverse outlining</td>
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<th>14th WEEK, APR 24th: ABOMINATIONS, SACRED CHILDREN, &amp; BIOMETRIC SURVEILLANCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>VIEWING: ~<em>Orphan Black</em> season 1, episodes 4-6 (see access note for week 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING: ~Single Page Screenplays insertable into <em>OB</em> episodes 4-6 due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/24 ~Paper, Step 6: full-length draft due online by 4 p.m. Mon 4/24</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN CLASS: ~Writing groups: constructive critiques of each full draft</td>
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FRIDAY, APR 28th: QC STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE (PROPOSAL DEADLINE TBA)
15th WEEK, MAY 1st: GENE PATENTING & BIOTECH UNBOUND (*EH in Macomb*)

VIEWING: ~Orphan Black season 1, episodes 7-10 (see access note for week 13)

WRITING: ~Paper, Step 7: significantly revised full-length draft due online by 4 p.m. Mon 5/1

ONLINE: ~Quiz #3 (covering material since Quiz #2)

IN CLASS: ~ Macomb students: dinner out, including brief paper presentations & course evals
~ QC students: optional group writing consultations, revision help

FINALS WEEK, MAY 8th: PAPER PRESENTATIONS

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: final version due online (under “Assignments”) by class time

IN CLASS: ~ QC students: dinner out, including brief paper presentations & course evals
~ Macomb students: finish papers, then relax (go watch Orphan Black seasons 2-5)

Course Texts

PLEASE NOTE:
*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (try bookfinder.com).
*I am happy for students to use complete electronic versions of texts so long as they use appropriate citation methods when writing papers and can accept occasional challenges in finding a given passage.
*All texts not listed here will be available for free under “Content” on Western Online.

~2 films to borrow/rent/stream/buy, as you prefer: The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (currently free with Amazon Prime) and Dallas Buyers Club (currently $4 rental, Amazon).

A Far-From-Comprehensive List of Recommended Texts (much potential paper material here)

SHORT STORIES
Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter”
Ursula K. Le Guin, “Nine Lives”
Raymond Carver, “A Small, Good Thing”
Steve Tomasula, “Self Portrait(s)” and “The Risk-Taking Gene,” in Once Human
Richard Powers, “Genie”
NOVELS
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine, The Island of Dr. Moreau*
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood’s End*
Ira Levin, *The Boys from Brazil*
Pamela Sargent, *Cloned Lives*
Kate Wilhelm, *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*
Octavia Butler, *Xenogenesis/Lilith’s Brood, Fledgling*
Richard Powers, *The Gold Bug Variations, Orfeo*
Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain, Beggars and Choosers, and Beggar’s Ride*
Greg Bear, *Blood Music, Darwin’s Radio, and Darwin’s Children*
Robin Cook, *Chromosome Six*
Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*
Michael Crichton, *Next*
Brian Vaughan, *Y: The Last Man* (graphic narrative)
Michael Byers, *Long for this World*
Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*
Elizabeth Moon, *The Speed of Dark*
Jennifer Rohn, *The Honest Look*
David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*
Kim Stanley Robinson, *2312, Aurora*
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood, and MaddAddam*

FILMS
*The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*
*Lorenzo’s Oil*
*Away from Her* (based on Alice Munro short story, “The Bear Came over the Mountain”)
*The Savages*
*My Left Foot*
*Adam*

NONFICTION & SCHOLARLY BOOKS
Misha Angrist, *Here is a Human Being at the Dawn of Personal Genetics*
Alice Wexler, *Mapping Fate: A Memoir of Family, Risk, & Genetic Research* and *The Woman Who Walked into the Sea: Huntington’s and the Making of a Genetic Disease*
Karla FC Holloway, *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, & a Cultural Bioethics*
Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative*
Jackie Stacey, *The Cinematic Life of the Gene*
Bill McKibben, *Staying Human in an Engineered Age*
Barbara A. Koenig, Sandra Soo-Jin Lee, & Sarah Richardson, eds., *Revisiting Race in a Genomic Age*
Karen-Sue Taussig, *Ordinary Genomes: Science, Citizenship, and Genetic Identities*
Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism*
Susan Merrill Squier, *Suffering Bodies, Suffering Subjects: The Making of a Cultural Disease of Modernity*
Jonathan Glover, *Choosing Children: Genes, Disability, and Design*
Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*
Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*
Judith Roof, *The Poetics of DNA*
Robert Pollack, *Signs of Life: The Language and Meanings of DNA*
Richard Lewontin, *The Triple Helix: Gene, Organism, and Environment*
Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*
José Van Dijck, *Imagenation: Popular Images of Genetics* (ch. 5 on Human Genome Project)
Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*
Jon Turney, *Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture*
Nathaniel Comfort, *The Science of Human Perfection*
Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline & Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*
Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee, *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as a Cultural Icon*
Melissa Littlefield & Jenell Johnson, *The Neuroscientific Turn: Transdisciplinarity in the Age of the Brain*
Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Gene: An Intimate History*
Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe*

**Grading Criteria**

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/ minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

- **30%** Quizzes (3 x 10% each)
- **10%** Annotation & Discussion Facilitation
- **10%** Individual Comics Project
- **10%** Single Page Screenplay
- **40%** Seminar paper

**Assignment Descriptions**

**Quizzes:** These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned reading and viewing with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one and will focus more heavily on primary than secondary texts. Students sometimes worry about the quizzes initially, but generally agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and ensure higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. My advice is to get the reading and viewing done well in advance, then go back over it, your journals and in-class notes, and any “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful. *These quizzes will be available online under “Assessments” during three weekends: up until 5:30 pm on Mon 2/13, which has no in-person meeting, Mon 3/27, and 5/1. Once begun, this closed-books/notes quiz will allow 30 min. to complete, though most students will only need 10-15 min.*

**Annotation and Discussion Facilitation:** Sometime during weeks 3-12, you will submit before class (by 4 p.m.) an “annotation” of a secondary text, then take the lead in generating class discussion about it. Sign up on the website under “Discussions” for your preferred text asap (first come, first serve; there are 17 students and 17 slots). Your job is then to write a 700-800 word essay (due in the same spot under “Discussions” before the class in question) that (a) spends roughly a third of its space very specifically summarizing the article or chapter’s argument (in your own words as much as possible); (b) uses the next third-plus to respond to and evaluate that argument (Where is it most illuminating? How might we apply its insights to other texts we’ve engaged or will engage?); and (c) concludes by offering 3-5 multi-sentence, evocative, *open-ended* questions that it has made you more interested in answering.

Once in class, your task is to use the annotation to describe the article’s claim and your response (know what you’re saying here well enough that you can talk us through it, not just read your annotation verbatim), then cultivate group discussion of the questions you have prepared. In determining grades on this assignment, I will focus mainly on the written component, but keep in mind how the group discussion goes. Mechanics matter, but the accuracy and specificity of your representation of the article and the provocativeness and insight of your response and questions will be the biggest factors.
Individual Comics Project: The first of two creative projects in the course, your task here is to compose a very short autobiographical comic that conveys both an experience and an “implicit thesis” about medicine, health care, and related topics raised in the course so far. As much as possible, *show, don’t tell.* I will evaluate these comics not according to your drawing skills, but as follows: ½ for the extent to which the comic invites its audience into and says something non-obvious about a recognizable experience, whether as patient, family member, provider, or otherwise; ½ for the polish of the comic’s presentation (clarity, neatness, and purposeful organization across panels). Have fun with this!

Single Page Screenplay: This second creative project comes near the course’s conclusion, and like the individual comics project, should not take you more than a few hours’ work. Your task is to sign up for either week 13 or 14, and on that date, post by 4 p.m. a single-page screenplay for an additional scene you would find intriguing to add somewhere within *Orphan Black* episodes 1-3 (wk 13) or 4-6 (wk 14). You will find the show’s screenplay for season 1, episode 1 on our course website under “Content”; imitate its format as much as possible; feel especially welcome to emulate its combination of intelligent thriller and outlandish situations. I will grade this assignment as follows: 1/3 for the extent to which your insertable scene both fits the show’s aesthetic and plot; 1/3 for the creative intervention imagined by your scene (how does it meaningfully engage the show’s implicit theses?); 1/3 for overall polish.

Seminar Paper: An extensively revised and carefully polished 3000+ word (12+ pp.) argumentative research paper that grows out of our course materials and conversations. While very open to discussing a wide range of proposals, I will require the following elements be included in each paper: (a) at least one page of close reading/analysis of at least one primary text from the course; (b) at least one page of close reading/analysis of a primary text *not included* among the course’s required texts; (c) at least one page of argument about a specific question related to health care, the medical humanities, and/or biotechnology that we discussed at length during the semester; (d) specific engagement with at least two secondary texts from within the course and at least four secondary texts from outside the course. The Seminar Paper should unfold gradually across the course’s second half, in which the reading load progressively lightens the closer we move to finals week. Starting with week 8, there are separate due dates for various elements that build toward the final version. Former Hamner-course undergrads especially, please note that for graduate students, *these are not optional.* While preliminary elements will not be graded, late completion beyond a single instance will automatically lower paper marks by 1/3 grade per occurrence. (I am going to be firm about this because it’s *critical* for good writers to learn the practice of setting and meeting intermediate deadlines; I am yet to meet an excellent professional writer who has not developed this ability.) I will respond online to on-time submissions for Steps 1, 2, 4, and 6 and will welcome conversations in person in both Macomb and the QC; there will also be substantial class time for group feedback, particularly in weeks 10, 12, and 14.

I strongly encourage you to make this project serve your larger interests and to strategize throughout the semester’s first half about how your individual passions might be related to some element of the course. The sooner you begin tossing around a proposal with me, the more time there will be for it to cook, and we all know that’s how you bring out the juiciest flavors. And what I said about the “creative” assignments applies just as much here: *have fun with this,* and the result will be better for it.
PLEASE NOTE:
The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keep its generality in mind.

My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other responsibilities, but my roles include challenging you beyond your comfort zone and honestly assessing your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even one semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and your entire college/grad school GPA will never convey those as fully as the recommendation letters you enable professors to write about you. Those usually matter far more.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. You show you are ready for that with your simultaneous investment. In short, what you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond classtime.

Attendance & Participation

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.

Classroom Courtesies

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and electronics should not be used during in-class quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

Communication

While there are occasional errors, I do my best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments. Please read it thoroughly; it answers most routine questions. Also, keep in mind that unless you expect to be gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other ordinary challenges. When you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, please ask after class or in office hours. If that isn’t possible, email is the next best option (far faster than voicemail). My goal is to respond within 2 business days, but if my answer is detailed, I may ask to shift the chat to office hours. Finally, be aware that I sometimes use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.). In this course, no: the 3 quizzes will be available online for at least a 48-hour period, and you should be able to take them in those windows barring extreme emergency, in which case please consult me.

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually post these on the website (under “Content”) soon thereafter, if not beforehand.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and others who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (=.80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. At the course’s conclusion, when consistent effort and other contributions to the class’s success warrant it, I sometimes bump up a borderline grade.

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be inaccessible as a deadline approaches, emailing the paper and then posting it the next day is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers usually take longer; please alert me of such submissions with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a docx, doc, or rtf file.

The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”
Late Work

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course. In many of my courses, I briefly review proper citation, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic dishonesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

Sex Discrimination/Title IX

“University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php.”

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php.
Dr. Hamner’s Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Does your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or abrupt?

2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?
   - **Strengthening your thesis:**
     - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
     - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
     - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g. too-short/disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
   - **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):**
     - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
     - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
   - **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:**
     - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
     - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
     - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
     - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?