Introduction to Alternative Media
(English 1091: Honors Composition)
Course Policies and Procedures

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Textbooks (many of our readings appear on the Internet; the following required books are available from EIU's Textbook Rental System):

The Blair Handbook, Fulwiler
The Progressive Guide to Alternative Media and Activism, Project Censored
Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy, Robert McChesney

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract,
and I will request your written agreement to them)

Goals: Because this is a composition course, we will focus on sharpening your writing and editorial skills. In this regard, our course has three main purposes--to continue the enhancement of your writing skills as developed in high school, to introduce you to the demands of writing at the university level, and to bring your writing up to the university level. In a writing course, we need something for you to research and write about; our topic this semester will be "alternative media," including Alternative Music, Alternative News, Independent Film, and the Internet. Also, because we have the privilege of spending half of our class time in a computer lab, you will learn how to use your own EIU web page, and you will publish your writing in this course on the Internet by linking it to your page. As you do so, you will also learn some of the basic techniques of web design, thereby acquiring a set of skills that is gaining increasing value in the marketplace for jobs.

More specifically, our goals include the refinement of skills in the following areas:

1. Constructing arguments: improve your ability to construct your own written arguments. One of our aims is to learn to distinguish between "opinion" and a "reasoned argument" based on carefully constructed points, evidence, and so on. This skill depends on your mastery of critical reading skills, which will enable you to discern and emulate the successful argumentative strategies of other writers. The better reader you are, the better writer you can be.
2. **Critical reading**: improve your ability to read critically by questioning and evaluating what you read. In order to be a more critical reader, you have to participate in what you are reading, actively deciphering the argument in all its parts, rather than passively receiving strings of words. Active participation in this course will help to improve your ability to summarize what you read and then to evaluate the claims and assumptions on which the argument is based. Go through your readings for this course carefully, highlighting or underlining when you can, writing marginalia, and taking notes. Although you will be given the chance to express your own opinions frequently in this class, the process of data collection and analysis that we will be learning is very different from simply "saying what you think" or even "presenting the facts." Good writing of all kinds is less about opinions and facts per se and more about "reasoned arguments." Knowing the difference between these two forms of discourse is key to success in our class, and in professional life.

3. **Online bibliographic research**: improve your knowledge of how online library resources work and how to use them. You will familiarize yourself in this course with library resources (including online catalogues and periodical indexes, electronic databases, and librarians) and other online information. Reasoned arguments are dependent upon knowing how to find, evaluate, and then use good information. In addition to learning how to find appropriate information, you will improve your skills in using such sources. You cannot make effective use of an article or essay if you cannot summarize its basic argument and identify how it is constructed. Therefore, using research means finding useful materials, and knowing how to read them and incorporate them into your own writing. (Incorporating research materials also includes knowledge of appropriate documentation styles. There are several of these standardized documentation styles; we will be using MLA, the widely preferred format for work in English Departments--more on this documentation style later.)

4. **Collaborative learning**: improve your ability to learn from others and to teach them about your own thinking and about writing. As in most professional spheres, much of your success in this course will depend on the process of drafting and peer critiques. You will practice forming honest, thorough, and constructive critiques of your own writing as well as your peers' writing, and how to make use of what you have learned from your own self-critique and that of others.

5. **Clean, smart prose**: improve your ability to write clear, concise, and meaningful sentences, to compose organized and developed paragraphs, and to identify and address recurring grammatical or mechanical problems specific to your own writing (these vary from writer to writer). We will spend time talking about why a grammatically correct, clear, efficient style is so important to your success in college and in professional life.

6. **Internet publishing**: learn how to build professionally presentable web sites. Although this is a writing course, an additional benefit at semester's end will be your mastery of basic web-publishing skills. This aspect of the course will be difficult at first for some of you, but I will be available for any questions or help you might need. I promise that ALL students who have patience with the computers will learn how to quickly publish and manipulate online documents. When you finally graduate from EIU, you'll be able to add a line to your professional resume asserting your skills in this
area. In fact, web-publishing skills are increasingly appreciated by employers. As Jo Allen points out in her book *Writing in the Workplace*, "Web pages have become an important way to present information to the public. Businesses use Web pages for advertisements and sales. Governments at all levels publish announcements, reports, research results, and much-used forms on Web pages. Educational and health institutions use Web pages to relay course work, report data needed by various departments, and provide access to research facilities. With the expanding use of the web, you are likely to be involved in designing Web pages as part of your job assignment." Again, publishing your work on the Web will give some of you headaches at first, but I promise that it will become second nature for all of you well before the semester is over. Particular web-publishing skills that you will learn include:

- Converting word-processed documents to a web-ready format
- Transferring material from a disc or a computer to the Internet
- Using your own EIU home page (which you already have)
- Creating links to other documents of your own, and to other sites
- Retrieving, placing and manipulating images
- Making internal links within a document

**Grades and Major Assignments:**

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- Paper One: 10%
- Paper Two: 15%
- Paper Three: 15%
- Paper Four: 20%
- Revised Paper: 10%
- Peer Reviews: 15%
- Participation, quizzes, daily writings, attendance: 15%

**Other matters:**

**E-Mail Activity:** Enrollment in this class requires an "EIU" e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to the course. I will subscribe you to our class listserv (also known as a "discussion list") with your EIU e-dress, so even if you've been using another e-mail service, you must use your EIU account for this course. You can use this account on the Internet, at www.eiu.edu/mymail. You will also use your EIU e-mail account to publish writings for this class on your own web site (as you'll discover, you already have a web site, courtesy of EIU). E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Again, using an e-mail account frequently is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by the beginning of class on Friday, August 30, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, 1) describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career...
aspirations; 2) list and describe at least two examples of "alternative media" that you are already familiar with, and also explain what they are an "alternative" to; and 3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the course policies and procedures that you are presently reading.

**Regarding the Writing Center:** Tutoring services at the English Department’s Writing Center are free, and students may drop in any time or schedule appointments during the Center’s working hours. If you have problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling, or other parts of the writing process, I strongly recommend that you make use of this free and valuable service.

**Classroom Environment:** In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade), and to attend regularly. The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader and writer is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Finally, you must also be willing to give and receive constructive, insightful, frank criticism! I’m sure that all of you will work very hard on your writing projects, but try not to let criticism of your work hurt your feelings, and don’t hold back from offering helpful advice because you think it might hurt someone else’s feelings. Also, a couple of smaller matters: please do not chew gum or eat food during class, activities which are too distracting to others—drinking beverages is okay. Finally, no caps, please, but if you want to wear one, turn it backwards so I can see your eyes.

**For students with disabilities:** If you have a disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, let me know; also, if you haven’t contacted the Coordinator of Disability Services (581-6583), do so as soon as possible.

**Attendance Policy:** I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily schedule.” If you have more than four absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond four. Also, missing a scheduled conference meeting without your prior notification will result in the automatic lowering of your grade for the current assignment by ten points. Call or write to me via e-mail if you have to miss a conference with me; I will do the same if I have to reschedule. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time because of other commitments, drop it and take another section. Finally, remember that you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone number of one or two other students in class so you can find out about any missed assignments before you come to class, or write an e-mail message to me asking about what you missed.

**Academic Honesty:** I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize
yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office." In a class like this one, which involves a great deal of reading and writing on the Internet, it is tempting to use the writings of others in inappropriate ways; if you have any questions about whether you are drawing on the writings of others correctly, don't hesitate to ask me about it.
English 1091 Daily Schedule
Fall, 2002
(this schedule may be subject to change, so be sure to check it regularly)

Mainstream Media

Week One (Discussion Room, Coleman 3130)

M AUG 26 Introduction to the Course:

• discussion of course policies and procedures
• after class, read the course policies and procedures for this course; if you have other questions or concerns, ask Dr. Engles by writing to him at cftde@eiu.edu

W AUG 28 In-class video-screening: "The Merchants of Cool"

• before class, familiarize yourself with your EIU e-mail account, which you must use to write the message to Dr. Engles described below (this is also the account that you will use to access and store information on your web site)
• to see your EIU login, EIU e-dress, and EIU web site, click here, then enter your name in the search box, and press Enter

F AUG 30 "The Merchants of Cool" continued; class discussion: does the mainstream really manage to absorb every alternative?

• before class, visit and click around the PBS web site for the episode of "Frontline" that we've been watching, and then write and bring to class answers to these questions: 1) how does this site add to your experience of watching the program on television? 2) read one part or section of the site and a) summarize this part or section's contents in one paragraph, and b) explain how this part or section added to or changed your opinions, beliefs, or knowledge about something
• also before class, send the required e-mail message to Dr. Engles--in your message, 1) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations; 2) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures; 3) describe a form of "alternative media" that you already use, and explain why it is "alternative"; also, what is it an alternative to?

Week Two (Computer Room, Coleman 3120)

M SEP 2 LABOR DAY: NO CLASSES

W SEP 4 Technology Workshop: Setting Up Your 1091 Disc

• bring a new, blank computer disc to class
F SEP 6 Working with Your EIU Homepage

- bring your 1091 disc to class
- work in class will include assignment of sections from Robert McChesney's book for summary--before the date of your presentation next week, prepare for the class, with your partner, copies of a one-page handout summarizing the main points McChesney makes in the section assigned to you; during class, lead class discussion of your section by referring to your handout

**Week Three (Discussion Room)**

M SEP 9 Robert McChesney, "Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy," 5-34

W SEP 11 McChesney, 34-54

F SEP 13 McChesney, 54-74

- discussion of Paper One topics

**Week Four (Computer Room)**

M SEP 16 Technology Workshop: Converting Documents to HTML

- bring at least one paragraph of a first draft of Paper One to class on a disc

W SEP 18 Peer Review Workshop

- a full rough draft of Paper One must be posted and linked to the appropriate section of your Assignment Index by the beginning of class
- Peer Review One (of a classmate's rough draft) must be linked to your Assignment Index by Thursday at noon

F SEP 20 Getting to Know *The Blair Handbook*

- Bring your copy of *The Blair Handbook* to class
- bring a one-page explanation of why you will probably find two particular sections or chapters of this book useful this semester for improving your writing

**Alternative Music**

**Week Five (Discussion Room)**

M SEP 23 What Is "Alternative Music"?

- Print out and read before class the following three online discussions of "alternative music," and write down brief answers to these questions about each one: 1) what does this person apparently consider "alternative music" to be? what are its general qualities? 2) are there other kinds of "alternative music" that this person excludes? list and/or describe any examples (bring your copies of these
T SEPT 24 The final draft of Paper One must be linked to your Assignment Index by noon today

W SEP 25 Andrew John Ignatius Vontz, "The Strange Triumph of Electronic Music" (read this article carefully before class, and bring your hard copy of it to class)

F SEP 27 Joe Hagan, "Untamed Sounds From Well Beyond the Margins" (read this article carefully before class, and bring your hard copy of it to class)

- Also read the online "Customer Reviews" of two CDs mentioned in this article, *Songs in the Key of Z* and *Innocence and Despair* (no need to print out the reviews)
- Discussion of Paper Topics

**Week Six (Computer Room)**

M SEP 30 Technology Workshop: Design Issues and Techniques

- in class: locate and download an appropriate image from the Internet, then publish it on your Assignment Index (we'll talk about how to do this during class--for directions, click here)
- work on your essay in class

W OCT 2 Peer Review Workshop

- a full rough draft of Paper One must be posted and linked to the appropriate section of your Assignment Index by the beginning of class
- Peer Review Two (of a classmate's rough draft) must be linked to your Assignment Index by Thursday at noon

F OCT 4 Writing Workshop: *Blair Handbook* reading TBA

**Alternative News Sources**

**Week Seven (Discussion Room)**

M OCT 7 Noam Chomsky, "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream" (read this article carefully before class, and bring your hard copy of it to class)

W OCT 9 Discussion of Chomsky and Mainstream Media continued

R OCT 10 The final draft of Paper Two must be linked to your Assignment Index by noon today
F OCT 11 Video Screening: *Constructing Public Opinion*. This film has six sections:

- Political perceptions
- Economic Forces
- Media Coverage
- The Phantom Liberal
- Military Omissions
- Democratic Ideals

By Monday (8/14) at 5 p.m., write a brief summary to our class listserv of two points made in this video, from two different sections (identify which section contains each point).

**Week Eight (Computer Room)**

M OCT 14 Alternative Media versus Mainstream Media

- Discussion of Paper Three topic, a "Comparison/Contrast" paper: compare and contrast the treatment of some aspect of September 11 and/or its first anniversary remembrance. Focus on at least four sources, two mainstream and two alternative.

W OCT 16 Open lab (work on your paper and your presentation by surfing the web in class for sources for these assignments)

- Bring one of our textbooks, Project Censored's *The Progressive Guide to Alternative Media and Activism*, to class

F OCT 18 FALL BREAK: NO CLASSES

**Week Nine (Discussion Room)**

M OCT 21 Alternative News Outlets: Print and Online Sources

- Project Censored, *The Progressive Guide to Alternative Media and Activism*: Choose the web sites of **two** "National Alternative Publications" listed in this book and **one** of the online sites listed [here](#); link to your Assignment Index **by Friday at 5:00** a written analysis of each of these three Internet sites that answers all of the 'reporter's questions' about it, as described in *The Blair Handbook*, 225-32. Also, answer this question in your writing on the one site that you will present to the class: How and why is this publication and/or web site outside of the mainstream, *according to ideas laid out in Chomsky's article*? Include a link to each site in your online version of this assignment.

- Give the class a 10-15 minute tour this week of two web sites that you will use in your paper, one that is "mainstream" and one that is "alternative"; explain also, in general, their contrasting opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about the events of September 11.

W OCT 23 Alternative News Outlet Presentations continued
F OCT 25 Alternative News Outlet Presentations continued

**Week Ten (Computer Room)**

M OCT 28 Grammar Workshop: How to Avoid Excessive Usage of Passive Voice Constructions (Special Bonus Lesson! "Sending and Opening E-mail Attachments")

- Read before class: *The Blair Handbook*, 432-36 (BE SURE to bring your book to class)
- Pairings for in-class passive vs. active voice exercise: TBA
- In-class exercise: (1) cut and paste a paragraph TWICE from a classmate's final preliminary report into a blank Word page (find your partner's page here); (2) in the second version of the paragraph, identify any "passive" verbs, and then change them to "active" verbs; (3) save the two paragraphs as a Word document on your disc; (4) open your e-mail account in web e-mail, and send the revised version to your classmate AS AN ATTACHMENT (not in the body of the message); (5) when you receive your partner's attached copy of two versions of your paragraph, open it in Word; (6) look over the changes, then write below the second paragraph a response to EACH changed sentence--do you think it sounds better, or not? also, write a couple of sentences in response to this question: do you think excessive use of passive voice is a problem in your writing? (7) Then send this entire document (which is probably 1.5 or so pages) to Dr. Engles as an attachment (cftde@eiu.edu)
- Deadline for all of the above: Tuesday, 9 p.m.

W OCT 30 Grammar Workshop: How to Use Commas Correctly

F NOV 1 Peer Review Workshop

- a full rough draft of Paper Three must be posted and linked to the appropriate section of your Assignment Index by the beginning of class
- Peer Review Three (of a classmate's rough draft) must be linked to your Assignment Index by today at 5 p.m.

**Independent Film**

**Week Eleven (Discussion Room)**

M NOV 4 What Is "Independent Film"?

- Before class, visit two of the three websites listed below and the links to their various sections; then write down a one- or two-paragraph explanation of how they seem to define or conceive of "Independent Film"; in what way or ways are the films they feature "independent"? (the second two sites seem to work better in Explorer than in Netscape)

*The Sundance Institute*
The Independent Feature Project
The Independent Film Channel

T NOV 5 The final draft of Paper Three must be linked to your Assignment Index by noon today

W NOV 6 In-class Film Screening: *American Movie* (Directed by Chris Smith, 1999)

F NOV 8 Film Screening continued

**Week Twelve (Computer Room)**

M NOV 11 Discussion of *American Movie*

- Before class, visit The Internet Movie Database; enter the words American Movie in their search box, then click on the title of the 1999 film; click on the "External Reviews" link on the left; print out two reviews to bring to class; read them and find one point that you strongly agree with, and one point that you disagree with, and be ready to explain these points (yours and those of the articles) to the class

W NOV 13 Handouts to read before class (handed out on Monday): James Schamus, "A Rant"; Tim Carvell, "Who Says They're Independent?"

F NOV 15 Handout to read before class (handed out on Monday): Wheeler Winston Dixon, "Twenty-five Reasons Why It's All Over"

- Discussion of Paper Four

**Week Thirteen (Discussion Room)**

M NOV 18 to F NOV 22 Open Lab (I'm hoping we can hold class in the computer lab this week--more details soon . . . )

NOVEMBER 25-29 THANKSGIVING RECESS

**Week Fourteen (Computer Room)**

M DEC 2 Peer Review Workshop

- a full rough draft of Paper Four must be posted and linked to the appropriate section of your Assignment Index by the beginning of today's class
- Peer Review Four (of a classmate's rough draft) must be linked to your Assignment Index by Tuesday at noon

W DEC 4 Writing Workshop

- before class: look closely at the writing style of your Paper Four Rough Draft; find two or three areas of your writing that you still need to work on, and bring to class two or three labels for these problems (passive voice, commas, choppy sentence
style, awkward sentence structure, wordiness, etc.); also, bring your Blair Handbook; before class, identify the sections in this book that offer advice on these particular problems; during class, write a message to Dr. Engles (cftde@eiu.edu) describing what these problem areas in your writing are, and whether you found the book's advice on these problems helpful, or perhaps, unhelpful

F DEC 6 Writing Workshop

• The final draft of Paper Four must be linked to your Assignment Index by the end of today's class (10 a.m.)

Week Fifteen (Discussion Room)

M DEC 9 and W DEC 11 No Class--Conferences on Revised Paper (in Coleman 3831)

• Bring to your conference TWO hard copies of the essay that you plan to revise
• be able to give Dr. Engles a detailed verbal explanation of your plans for revising it; also, identify during this explanation two problem areas in your writing that are present in this paper

F DEC 13 Last day of classes (no final exam)

• Meet in the Discussion Room for Final Instructions, Tearful, Heartfelt Good Byes, etc.
• the posted version of your Revised Paper must be published by the beginning of class; this is also the deadline for final fine-tuning of your web site