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ENG 3001-004: Advanced composition

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Advanced Composition

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Spring 2008
Phone: 581.6302

Required Texts:

Jonathan Cohn, Sick: The Untold Story of America's Health Care Crisis
Laurence J. Kotlikoff and Scott Burns, The Coming Generational Storm: What You Need to Know About America's Economic Future
Thomas E. Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq

Additional assigned readings will also be available through Booth Library e-reserve system.

Before long, each of you will embark on your career as a professional writer. I don’t mean that you’re necessarily going to make a living writing novels, poems, or essays, though you may. I certainly don’t mean that you’re going to make a living writing essays about novels, poems, or essays (though if you follow a path like mine, you may do that as well). What I mean is that each of you is going to conduct your day-to-day life through various modes of written expression, and in many cases you’ll do this more than you’ll do anything else. You’re going to write e-mails, memoranda, progress reports, grants, press releases, proposals, affidavits, web sites, op/eds, notes to the principle, letters to parents, letters to the editor, letters to your boss. And since you’ll do this so much, the esteem with which others view you, as well as the level of professional success you enjoy, will have much to do with your powers of written expression.

And so this is a course intended to help you grow as a writer and a thinker. We’re going to do a lot of writing together, and in order to keep us all on the same approximate page, we will at first situate our writing around a common topic of vital importance to each of us: the question of who should be our next president.

Our semester together coincides with the Primary Election Season for the 2008 Presidential election. As of five days ago, things got more interesting politically on the Democratic side, with Illinois Senator Barak Obama winning the Iowa “Straw Poll,” where no actual electoral votes are at stake. A couple more showings like that, and things could be over for New York Senator Hillary Clinton. Even on the Republican side, the conversation has taken an unexpected turn: Mitt WHO? Rudolph WHO? Political analysts aren’t quite sure yet what to make of former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee’s decisive victory in Iowa, though most are confident that...
Mitt Romney’s start is definitely on the decline. But even now all that chatter is being replaced by new chatter, because the first day of our course is also the day of the New Hampshire primary, official Day One of the electoral race. So: Has Baraka Obama continued to “make history” as the first viable black presidential candidate? Has Hillary Clinton staged a second [or is it third, or fourth?] “Clinton comeback” by winning New Hampshire? Is former North Carolina senator John Edwards still in the race, perhaps having benefited from the battle between Obama and Clinton? And has southern, rural Mike Huckabee been able to translate his victory in Iowa into something concrete in New Hampshire, where there aren’t enough Baptists to fill a PTA meeting? As a northeastern state, is New Hampshire really either Romney or Giuliani country? Tonight we’ll know.

But of course, these are political questions—questions about how well a candidate has been able to spin themselves, how well they’ve tuned their political machine—and while I think there’s a value to conversations about such things, that’s not the kind of conversation I want for us to have over the next four months. (After all, within a month or so, we’ll know pretty well who the nominees for both parties will be; trust me.) Instead, I want to have a conversation about policy, a conversation—always with an eye toward producing compelling writing—about which of these candidates has the most sensible plan to move our country forward on a host of issues.

In order to help us do that, we’re going read some recent books that address three of the most pressing issues we face as a country: Health Care (or rather, our country’s lack of a system for delivering it to all citizens), Social Security (which will either disappear or bankrupt us in the next twenty years, if you take the experts seriously), and Iraq (where we have now lost more lives than on September 11—not counting the Iraqis we’ve killed—and where Congress has now appropriated over $300 billion). We’re going to read other pieces on these issues too, all in an effort to shape ourselves into savvy evaluators of the candidates’ stated positions. And repeatedly, this is what we will write about this semester.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Three major writing and research assignments will determine the bulk of your grade this semester. The due dates for the final drafts of these three assignments appear on the course syllabus, as do the due dates for preliminary drafts you will make available for your peers to review in class. These essays will all be written as guest editorials in which the writer will make an informed stand on a presidential candidate’s stated position on either social security, health care, or the war in Iraq. And in fact the essays will be submitted to a newspaper that accepts the work of guest columnists. Real writers write for a real audience, and that I have no interest in helping you become anything other than a real writer.

In addition to these written assignments, each member of this class will complete an oral report related to the election and either social security/Medicare, Health Care, or Iraq. During these brief (10-15 minute) presentations, students will provide the rest of the class with information on a candidates’ position relating to the topic we have been studying, and they will also provide documentation for this information. Since this election will remain in a state of flux for some time now, I will wait to determine those report topics until one week before they are given.
Grading Formula:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Essay #3</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Report</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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COURSE POLICIES:

Class Citizenship: I expect students to model strong class citizenship in this course. Among other things, this means working hard to make our discussion run well. To make the discussion run well: (1) you should read, and as you read you should form ideas, draw connections, raise problems, and take notes; (2) you should plan on participating—at least making a comments or asking a question—every day; (3) you should be careful not to dominate discussion (i.e., those of you who are not shy should give other students an opening to participate), and you should participate with tact and civility (take other people’s remarks and questions seriously, don’t interrupt, respond courteously, etc.). The grade for participation will depend upon meeting all these criteria. I will tend to lavish encouragement on students who engage as strong class citizens. I will tend to become annoyed with students who never have anything to offer or who seem feckless.

One last note on participation: Participating well doesn’t simply mean talking a lot—it means frequently making comments, and responses to the comments of others, showing that you are engaged in a process of careful, close reading. Idle talk—the kind that simply does not indicate close engagement with the materials we’ll be studying—does not help move the conversation forward, and hence does not qualify as participation.

I want to be utterly clear about this: Good participation does not require you to come to class knowing all the “answers,” but it does require you to understand certain things about the texts under discussion. For instance, one cannot participate competently if one does not understand the events that make up the plot of a work of fiction, the gist of a poem, or the literal argument of an essay. Many of the readings we will take on this semester will difficult, and on some occasions you won’t know quite what to make of what you’ve read. That’s perfectly acceptable. But I will expect you to come to class after having fought to understand as much as possible. The key to success in this class will lie in your refusal to become frustrated when faced with difficult concepts—instead, become challenged.

When we workshop essay drafts together, obviously, I expect you to be doing that. One way to convince me that you are a terrible class citizen is to be clicking away on a keyboard, checking your e-mail, surfing the web, or otherwise clicking away on a keyboard while class is underway. If I see you paying attention to a computer while you should be paying attention to one of your fellow students (or to me), expect a sharp and public rebuke.

Attendance will be taken for each class. With three absences, students will be considered overcut. Overcutting may result in the reduction of the final course grade by a grade or more, depending upon frequency. In the case of an excused absence (as defined by EIU university-wide policy), your excuse must be made in writing, accompanied by the appropriate documentation, and given to me no later than the first class meeting following the absence. In no case may a student accumulate more than five absences, either excused or unexcused, and still pass the course—if
illness or other extenuating circumstances cause you to miss more than five classes, you should petition for a withdrawal.

One last word related to attendance: I ask that students who have not read the text on the day it is to be discussed not bother coming. Such students cannot contribute anything valuable to the discussion, and in any case it is dishonest for them to benefit from the efforts of others by listening in on their conversations. Always read the assigned materials carefully, but if for some reason you have not, don’t bother showing up.

Students who habitually show up for class a few minutes after it’s started should find a professor who’s into that and take their course instead. This professor is irritated by it and reacts badly.

**Late assignments** will be penalized for their lateness. If they are very late, they may not be accepted at all. I am not unbending in this policy in the case of extreme circumstances, but in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me, with a compelling case to make, at least two days before the paper’s due date.

**Academic honesty:** Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department’s statement 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 own 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 assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify. Also, please make a point of noting the following: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. If I come to suspect misconduct of any kind, I will become dogged about rooting it out, and if my suspicions are confirmed, I will dispense appropriate penalties.

**Students are responsible for reading all of the material on this syllabus on the date assigned whether or not the work is actually discussed on that date.** Students are cautioned that many of the readings are lengthy. I urge you to begin these readings as soon as possible. Occasionally, I will pass out brief, photocopied materials not represented on the syllabus; these are to be read by the next class.

**Lastly, you are not welcome to e-mail me while you are a student in this course.** When you have a question, problem, or concern, I want to sit down with you and talk for as long as you need. That’s why I keep office hours. I also want to talk with you about interesting ideas you have this semester, just as I want to talk with you—personally—about the readings we take on. But too many students these days use e-mail as a way to avoid their professors, a practice I resist obstinately. When you need to communicate with me, attend my office hours, make an appointment for an alternative time, call me at my office (581.6302), or if it’s very important and the other avenues have not worked, call me at home (348.6144). We’ll talk.
Reading Schedule

I: Social Security and Medicare

Week 1
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 1/8: Introductions, course outline
Thursday 1/10: Kotlikoff and Burns, The Coming Generational Storm, pp. xi-39

Week 2
Class meets in Coleman 3120

Tuesday 1/15: The Coming Generational Storm, pp. 41-86
Thursday 1/17: The Coming Generational Storm, pp. 121-171
Report: Two op-eds on Social Security and Medicare

Week 3
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 1/22: Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Thursday 1/24: Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA

Week 4
Class meets in Coleman 3120

Tuesday 1/29: Bring complete draft of Essay #1 to class (print and thumb drive)
Thursday 1/31: Bring complete draft of Essay #1 to class (print and thumb drive)

Week 5
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 2/5: Bring complete draft of Essay #1 to class (print and thumb drive)
Thursday 2/7: Essay #1 due, beginning of class

II: Health Care
Week 6
Class meets in Coleman 3120
John Belleau teaches class

Tuesday 2/12: Cohn, Sick, pp. ix-85

Thursday 2/14: Sick, pp. 87-140

Week 7
Class meets in Coleman 3130
John Belleau teaches class

Tuesday 2/19: Sick, pp. 141-23
Report: Two op-eds on Health Care

Thursday 2/21: Sick, pp. 215-31
Report: Two more op-eds on Health Care

Week 8
Class meets in Coleman 3120

Tuesday 2/26: Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA

Thursday 2/28: Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA

Week 9
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 3/4: Bring complete draft of Essay #2 to class (print only)

Thursday 3/6: Essay #2 due, beginning of class

SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS MEETINGS

Week 10

Tuesday 3/18: Conferences in my office

Thursday 3/20: Conferences in my office

Week 11

Tuesday 3/25: Conferences in my office
Thursday 3/27: Conferences in my office

III: The War in Iraq

Week 12
Class meets in Coleman 3120

Tuesday 4/1: Ricks, Fiasco, pp. 3-111

Thursday 4/3: Fiasco, pp. 115-88

Week 13
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 4/8: Fiasco, pp. 311-429
Report: Two op-eds on Iraq

Thursday 4/10: Fiasco, pp. 430-51
Report: Two more op-eds on Iraq

Week 14
Class meets in Coleman 3120

Tuesday 4/15: Bring complete draft of Essay #3 (print and thumb drive)
Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA

Thursday 4/17: Bring complete draft of Essay #3 (print and thumb drive)
Report: Candidate(s) TBA
Report: Candidate(s) TBA

Week 15
Class meets in Coleman 3130

Tuesday 4/22: Bring complete draft of Essay #3 (print only)

Thursday 4/24: Essay #3 due, beginning of class