

## **Writing Seminar for PhD students (1 credit)**

I&L 3016 (web-based; see Canvas course)

Wednesday 11:00 – 12:00 (March 24, student self-care day no class)

Instructor: Rick Donato

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*The average writer explains complexity;  
The gifted writer reveals simplicity*

### **I Course Description**

**Part-two of this course** is intended to continue to provide support for academic writing for doctoral students in the process of completing milestones and projects in their respective PhD programs. Because our work will depend on the types of writing concerns that are raised each week as we analyze written texts, we will have a ‘living syllabus’ that will take shape based on what you need and when you need it. The contents of this course are derived, therefore, from the TEXTS that YOU create and your specific needs for the improvement of your writing. By collectively examining our texts, we may establish by the end of the course a set of operating principles to keep in mind when writing to convey concepts, explain procedures, document observations, and raise critical issues of interpretation.

### **II Course Goals: mechanics and meaning making**

In Part 2 of the writing seminar, we will *review* areas of the *mechanics* of writing that were discussed in the fall and *only if the need arises*:

Thematic progression (3 types themes and rhemes)

Nominalizations (pros and cons)

Transitional words (multiple functions)

Economy of expression (avoiding wordiness)

Consistency of terminology (elegance)

Word choice (semantics)

This semester, we will **1)** continue with improving the quality of writing through close reading of texts and **2)** experience writing is a *social process* that contributes to the *meaning* of texts.

### **III Reactions to last semester on course evaluations**

1) The need for more student discussion and less ‘teacher talk.’ Copy that!

2) The idea to divide the course into two parts:

Part 1 short texts for close reading **Jan 20- March 3**

Part 2 longer texts **March 10 – April 21**

#### **IV Class procedures**

Each week we will focus on a text written by a student in the class for a writing conference (see dates above). Specific procedures for text sharing are:

- 1) By Sunday night at the latest, your text should be send (in canvas) to the entire class for discussion during our class meeting.
- 2) From Jan 20 to March 3 send short texts of 2-3 pages that you have written.
- 3) From March 10 to April 21, you may send larger texts, e.g., a complete section of a chapter an article.
- 4) In the canvas message (announcements?), if needed, explain briefly to the class in a few sentences the context of the writing.
- 5) Ask any questions about what you have sent that you would like the class to consider. For example, is the concept clear and understandable? Are my word choices accurate for the topic? Is there anything confusing in the text? Etc.

#### **V Writing as a social process: An idea for your consideration**

Think of writing as an *information gap* between the writer and the reader. Writers have *meanings* that they want to communicate to an audience. Conversely, readers bring to the reading pre-conceived expectations and questions about the topic.

To address this interaction of reader and writer, each week:

- CLASS DISCUSSION about the TOPIC of the text with the individual who has agreed to present a short text *the following week*. *What are you writing about?*
- CLASS DISCUSSION about the TOPIC might include curiosities you might have about the specific topic, the expectations you will bring to the text, your anticipation about what you think you might learn, etc. *What do readers want to know about the topic?*
- BASED ON THIS DISCUSSION, the writer will take note and make use of the issues raised in the discussion and either:
  - a) write the new text, or
  - b) review writing to determine if the text responds to audience expectations.

What this procedure requires is that you *all* need to think about what you will share with the class two weeks in advance of text sharing and presentation. That is, two weeks before presenting your writing for discussion, you will have an opportunity to hear about what readers might want to know, i.e., a pre-writing discussion.

Each class, at least for now, will have two parts:

- REACTIONS to the TEXT that has been shared by *Student A*, followed by
- A DISCUSSION of the TOPIC of the text that will be presented by *Student B* the next week.

Each class will, therefore, include a TOPIC DISCUSSION and a TEXT DISCUSSION. Topic discussions and text sharing will be determined each week as the course moves forward. For example, each week we will decide for the next week who will present the TOPIC and who will present the TEXT.

***As a class, you can let me know if this procedure is a useful way to help you write clear and coherent texts that communicate what you want readers to know, what arguments you are trying to make, what meanings you are trying to communicate, and what story you are trying to tell. If not helpful, we can return to our previous procedure.***

**VI Additional ideas:**

How to give an accessible presentation about your research and projects.  
Scientific writing as storytelling  
Alternative views of quantitative and qualitative research traditions

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**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT:**

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy.

**DISABILITY SERVICES:**

Disability Statement – If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services by the end of the first week of the term. The office of Disability Resources and Services is located in 140 William Pitt Union (412-648-7890 [voice or TDD]), and their website is at: [<http://www.drs.pitt.edu>]. If you

have a physical, learning, or emotional disability, please let me know as early as you can so that I can accommodate you.