

Writing for Environmental Advocacy

COURSE DETAILS

Course Designator and Number: SDNY 3042W

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: Barbara Edelman

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on writing in response to the natural environment, primarily as a tool to raise awareness of environmental challenges and to advocate for ways to meet those challenges. We'll read a variety of voices and styles of advocacy writing, always with a strong focus on the craft of language: How does the writing reach its target and accomplish its goal? What makes the writing persuasive?

Students will practice several modes of advocacy writing, via several shorter assignments, and the writing will be a central text of the course; that is, we will investigate and critique student writing in much the same we do the assigned published pieces. Students will devote much of the second half of the term to researching and writing a first-person article and presentation focusing on a specific environmental problem and advocating for a potential solution/s.

Course Objectives

Students in this course can expect to:

1. address critical questions in public and professional writing;
2. learn how to use the forms and genres of particular professions or fields;
3. learn how to compose effectively on behalf of an organization or campaign;

4. learn how to create engaging documents and carry out inquiry projects for a particular audience;
5. compose using appropriate modalities and technology;
6. compose with awareness of textual forms and conventions;
7. conduct responsible and ethical research;
8. explore the history and politics of writing in specific contexts;
9. engage with public debates over language, globalization, education, and writing; and
10. compose as a creative and disciplined form of critical inquiry.

In this course students will hone their skills of analysis and critical thinking, expressed in both writing and speech, and will learn to compose effectively in a variety of modes to engage with specific audiences.

Methodology

This course blends classroom-based learning (lecture, student presentations, debate and discussion) with experiential learning through field trips and field research. Class participation involves critical engagement with set readings through group presentations, discussion, and debate. Students are encouraged to read further on the topics listed for each week.

Field Component(s)

CAPA provides the unique opportunity to learn about the city through direct, guided experience. Participation in the field activity for this course is required. Students will actively explore the Global City they are currently living in. Guidance on each of these components will be offered in class. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in co-curricular *My Global Cities* activities.

Required Readings/Materials

- *Writing to Change the World* by Mary Pipher
- Handouts, paper, or posted in CANVAS
- Online newspaper access

Additional Recommended Texts & Resources

- **Style manual:** The instructor recommends that students own a portable style handbook; for example, *A Pocket Style Manual* by Diana Hacker & Nancy Sommers (Bedford/St. Martins); however, a recent edition of any reputable writer's handbook will do.
- **Online style manual:** As a digital alternative, the instructor recommends owl.english.purdue.edu
- **A good dictionary**

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter grade	Score or percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of grade
Class participation including student-led discussions	20%
Blog posts	15%
First drafts and revisions of formal writing pieces	35%
Final project	30%
Overall grade	100%

COURSE CONTENT

Unit 1

- Intros, course Description; in-class writing
- Discuss: “Beyond Hope” by Derrick Jensen, from the *Orion* website (handout)
- Discuss “This. Here. Now. The climate catastrophe” by John Cook, from Best Australian Essays 2014 (handout or posting)
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Revised in-class writing

Unit 2

- Discuss: Chapter 2 from Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere “Contested Meanings: A Brief History” (handout/posting)
- Discuss: “Am I Blue?” by Alice Walker (handout/posting)
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Blog post 1—response paper to Walker

Unit 3

- Discuss: Op-ed assignment and examples
- Discuss: Rachel A. Akeny, “GM Modified Crops: to ban or not to ban? That’s not the question,” *The Conversation*, 23 August 2019, theconversation.com/gm-crops-to-ban-or-not-to-ban-thats-not-the-questin-122202.
- Discuss excerpt from *The Weather Makers* by Tim Flannery
- **Activity/Assessment**
 - Blog post 2—reflection on your relationship to the natural world

Unit 4

- Discuss “The ecomodernist gloss” segment from *Defiant Earth* by Clive Hamilton (handout)
- Discuss Eliza Griswold chapter from *Amity & Prosperity*
- Film TBA
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Op-ed via CANVAS (formal)

Unit 5

- Workshop op-eds
- Examine press release guidelines/examples
- Discuss “Preaching to the Choir” by Rebecca Solnit from *Harpers*, 11/11/2017 (handout)
- **Activity/assessment**

- Blog post 3—response to Solnit

Unit 6

- Workshop op-eds
- Discuss chapter 7 from *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* by Elizabeth Kolbert
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Press release via CANVAS (formal)

Unit 7

- Workshop press releases
- Discuss Mary Pipher, *Writing to Change the World* through p. 132
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Op-ed revision

Unit 8

- Field class: details TBC
 - Either tour of Australian Museum or Sydney Botanic Gardens

Unit 9

- Discuss: Interview assignment
- Discuss Mary Pipher through page 242
- Discuss: David Bowman, “Aboriginal Fire Management: part of the solution to destructive bushfires,” 23 February 2016, *The Conversation*, theconversation.com/aboriginal-fire-management-part-of-the-solution-to-destructive-bushfires-55032
- **Activity/Assessment**
 - Newsletter event report on field class (formal)

Unit 10

- Field class: details tbc
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Interview write-up (formal) via CANVAS

Unit 11

- Discuss final project guidelines
- Discuss “Chronicles of Ice” by Gretel Ehrlich
- Discuss annotated bibliography assignment
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Final project proposal (1 paragraph)

Unit 12

- Final week of classes will be devoted to student final presentations
- **Activity/assessment**
 - Final project annotated bibliography
 - Revision: press release or event report (optional)
 - Class presentations

POLICIES

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.