

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program

TYP 9a: Writing
Fall 2015

**WRITING CULTURE: THE INTERSECTION OF LANGUAGE,
RACE, AND ETHNICITY**

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Class Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday 6:30-7:50 PM
Location: Brown Social Science Center, Room 218



COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will explore writing in two complementary ways through the medium of *ethnography*, a term that combines the Greek roots for “people” and “writing.” This kind of writing critically examines the cultures, languages, and ideas of human communities, and we will both read and write ethnographic accounts to develop academic writing skills. On the one hand, we will study writing *about* cultures, first through a consideration of various dimensions of the “culture” concept and how to approach cultural difference, followed by a more in-depth examination of the socially charged and constructed categories of language, race, and ethnicity. We will see how these concepts intersect with, overlap, and depend upon one another with the help of anthropological tools that will help us understand the diversity and unity across the human experience. On the other hand, we will simultaneously consider the cultures *of* writing itself—that is, the social symbolism conveyed within formal academic English practiced at the university. We will develop the skills necessary to become more fluent in this variety of American English, including sound organization, insightful theses, extensive editing, and grammatical correctness. We will practice these skills by composing two of the three types of assignments characteristic of the Brandeis writing program: a close reading of a single text and a lens essay of two texts.

REQUIRED READINGS:

The following required books are provided by the program. All other required and optional readings will be available online via the course site on LATTE.

Norma Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 2008.

Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, Sixth Edition with 2009 MLA and 2010 APA Updates.
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2010.

William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*. Fourth Edition. London: Longman.
1999 [1918].

LEARNING GOALS:

By the end of this semester, you should be able to

- Communicate through a written medium in a well-organized way
- Produce written essays without substantial grammatical error
- Examine a single cultural text to construct a creative, non-obvious argument
- Integrate information from two sources to better understand a social issue
- Explore the cultural underpinnings of American academic English
- Explain different anthropological and popular notions of “culture”
- Interpret the social significance given to language differences
- Think critically about the concepts of “race” and “ethnicity”
- Analyze effects of racial and ethnic discrimination through different social scientific lenses
- Consider the social and practical importance of particular modes of writing (i.e., have well-motivated theses)

CLASS POLICIES:

In order to create the most effective learning environment possible and for the consideration of your fellow students, please follow these simple guidelines while in class:

1. Arrive on-time having read the assigned readings and completed any written work due that day. If you come to class after the designated starting time, you will have to produce a convincing excuse, on the spot, related to the day's readings (or the previous day's, if no new readings are due for that class).
2. Turn off all cell phones and other electronic communication devices. If you absolutely need to have your cell phone on (e.g., you are waiting for an important call), please let me know at the start of class.
3. Always have a notebook and writing utensil in front of you. We will be writing in *every class*, and having quick access to something with which to jot down notes will help cultivate a habit of writing, which will serve you well in other coursework.
4. Allow for an atmosphere of respectful academic discourse. This course—and anthropology in general—engages in potentially controversial themes on which many people (including me) have strong opinions. Try your best to debate respectfully and sympathetically, even when you disagree with your classmates or with me. We want to allow everyone to express his or her perspective in a safe yet academically critical setting. You may find it helpful to think of it this way: We are going to debate *ideas*, not other people.
5. Ask questions about anything (terms, concepts, history, etc.) you do not know or are unsure of. Even if it seems like a silly question, chances are other people have the same uncertainty.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Your primary requirements for this class include two major papers: the close reading essay and the lens essay. For the first assignment, you will conduct a close analysis of a cultural “text,” broadly construed. This essay of four to five double-spaced pages should engage deeply with the *language* of a cultural practice, work of literature, essay, or other cultural phenomenon that will be selected during class. For the second assignment, you will use one text as a lens through which to view/interpret a text concerning race and/or ethnicity. That is, you will use two written works, one of which will tell you something new about the other. This essay will be between six and seven double-spaced pages. More detailed guidelines for both of these assignments are available on LATTE and will be distributed in class.

Since editing is at the heart of good writing, the editorial process for each of these main papers will last longer than the initial writing of it. A first (albeit *complete*) rough draft will be due three weeks before the final version is to be turned in. After I provide feedback on the **ethnographic content** of your writing (including the organization of ideas, depth of argument, etc.), you will produce a second rough draft two weeks later. I will also be grading this second rough draft and returning it to you to correct **grammatical and mechanical errors**, after which you will submit a polished final version. Since there are only two major essays to write in this class and you will have a significant amount of time to work on each one, my expectations are high. I will provide support at each stage of the process to help you meet these expectations.

In addition to the two primary assignments, you will be asked to write four “mini-essays.” These one-to-two page assignments will be scrutinized less intensively than the close reading and lens essays. They are an opportunity for you to practice your writing skills and to reflect back on course themes. For those who have not written academic essays in a while, they may also serve as a way to get used to writing again. There will also be an in-class midterm exam covering the course material discussed in the first half of the term. You will have the full class period to complete a series of short-response and essay prompts.

PAPER FORMAT AND SUBMISSION:

The presentation of your written work is an important component of college writing that we will develop in this course. *All* written assignments (with the exception of in-class exercises and exams), even rough drafts, will be expected to conform to the following guidelines. These rules may seem arbitrary or complicated, but they will enhance the professionalism of your work. (We will discuss how to format each one in class.)

Papers must be typed and checked for spelling and grammatical mistakes to the best of your ability. Printed copies should be on white 8 ½-by-11 inch paper with **1-inch margins**, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, double-spaced, and in 12-point Times New Roman font. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word format (.docx or .doc). Even though Word automatically adds extra space after each paragraph, kindly remove these before submitting. Please also include your last name and the page number in the header of each page. All references to material not your own **MUST** be cited according to MLA format both in the text and at the end (i.e., a “Works Cited” list). Every submitted work should list at the top of the first page, in order, your name, your instructor’s name, the course number, the date you *finished* it, and a unique title. A sample of this format is available on LATTE.

The notation found in the class schedule tells how each draft ought to be submitted. The letter “P” indicates a hard, printed copy is required at the *beginning* of class. The letter “E” means that an electronic copy is **due to LATTE by 6:00 PM** that day. Note that this is one half-hour before class meets, so make sure you allow enough time to get it in punctually. If for some reason you have difficulty submitting through LATTE, send it to me by email. (Assume I did *not* receive it if you do not get a simple email confirmation back from me.)

For each day (or portion thereof) that your paper is late, your grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter (e.g., from B+ to a B). This rule applies to both the rough drafts and the final version. *Please* remember to read through your entire draft at least once before printing it. If I do not think you have spent a reasonable amount of time on a draft, your lack of effort will be reflected in your grade. Extensions are granted *automatically* for circumstances outside your control equal to the number of study days lost, provided you let me know ahead of the due date. If the new date falls outside our class meeting days and you need to submit a paper copy, you may (1) place it in my mailbox or (2) email it to me and submit a paper copy the next time we meet.

READINGS:

In this as in other college classes, you are expected to come to class having carefully read *all* the assigned materials. Due to our small class size, I expect everyone to contribute to discussion at each class meeting. If you have not closely read the materials for the day, it will be noticeable, and your participation grade will be affected. Since most of our readings will be available electronically on LATTE, many students find it helpful to print them out to annotate while they read and to refer to during class. While you are not *required* to print out all the readings, if you do not have them in front of you during class, I expect you to have taken notes on some of the important passages, and I may call on you to answer questions about them. On a lighter note, I want you to see the readings for this course not as a burden but as a chance to explore new worlds; ethnographic writing can be a lot of fun, and I hope you enjoy yourselves as we tackle fascinating topics!

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Attendance at all classes is expected as a basic requirement of the course. You cannot learn this material if you are not present in class, since the core of what we will be covering will be brought out through discussion and many important points are not covered in the readings. Each student will begin with an A in attendance. After the first missed class, each subsequent absence will result in lowering your attendance grade by one-third of a letter (e.g., to an A-, then to a B+, etc.). However, I realize that unexpected things may come up during the semester (e.g., illness, family concerns, etc.) that may prevent you from being in class. Therefore, if you come see me during office hours to talk about the course content that you missed, this reduction will be waived. Habitual absences will be addressed with Dr. Erika Smith, the MKTYP director.

Furthermore, while attendance will play a crucial part of your grade, there is more to being “present” than simply showing up. Your mental presence at and participation in each class period is a crucial component of this class and your participation grade, which will be determined separately from your attendance grade. You cannot earn an A for this component simply by showing up; you must earn it through consistent, careful, thoughtful, and enthusiastic engagement in class discussions. Careful

preparation does not necessarily exclude taking risks; feel free to try new ideas without fear of being wrong. Your participation grade is a function not of correctness but of intellectual boldness and effort exerted. Finally, I understand that outgoing conversation or debate is not a style suited to all learners. Therefore, if you feel you are not able to participate rigorously during class, please let me know so that we can figure out an alternative mode of participation, whether through office hour visits or other activities.

WEEKLY TUTORIALS:

Each student’s writing is unique, and to address your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, you will meet with the assigned tutor individually for a half-hour each week. This is considered part of the requirements for this course, and your absence at these sessions will be considered as an absence from class. If you must miss a meeting, you and the tutor can coordinate to reschedule for another time later in the week or the following week. However, multiple missed, rescheduled, or tardy meetings will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation grade. Please come to each session with copies of your recent and/or current assignments so that you will have material to work with.

GRADING:

You will be evaluated based on the quality of your assignments, the degree of improvement throughout the semester, and the value of your participation in class. Each component of the course will be weighted as follows:

Close Reading Essay	20%
Lens Essay	30%
Midterm Exam.....	15%
Mini-Essays and In-Class Assignments.....	15%
Attendance and Participation (including class <i>and</i> tutorials)	20%

Your final grade will be calculated based on the average score of all these categories and will fall on the following scale, as defined by the university:

A	High Distinction (for exceptional work)
A-	
B+	
B.....	Distinction (for good work)
B-	
C+	
C.....	Satisfactory (for acceptable work)
C-	
D+	
D	Passing, but Unsatisfactory (for poor work)
D-	
E.....	Failing Grade

EXTRA CREDIT:

The anthropology department offers an opportunity to explore the topics of our course in greater depth. The Brandeis Anthropology Research Seminar (BARS) is a weekly lecture series in which leading anthropologists are invited to campus to present cutting-edge research on a diverse variety of themes along with members of our own department. A chance for extra credit is being offered in conjunction with these events. You may attend one or more of the lectures and write a two-page reflection paper not just summarizing the speakers' points but analyzing and engaging them. If you have given serious thought to the topic, you will receive either four extra points on the midterm exam OR an increase of one-third of a letter grade on one of your mini-essays. You may also use this paper to excuse an absence in lieu of coming to office hours. The seminar meets most Fridays from 2:00-4:00 in Schwartz Hall, room 103. Here is a link to the complete list of speakers and dates:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/anthro/BARS%20Brandeis%20Anthropology%20Research%20Semina.html>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately at the start of the semester.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the university's policies on academic integrity and plagiarism (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions, including but not limited to failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

WRITING CENTER:

One of the best resources at Brandeis to improve your writing is the on-campus Writing Center, located in the Goldfarb Library, room 232 on the upper level. They offer free 45-minute sessions to help improve the organization, conciseness, and impact of your essays. (They will also work, to a lesser extent, on recurring grammatical concerns.) To register for a session, go to

<http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/register.html>

or stop by during their evening drop-in hours (Monday through Thursday). If you make an appointment, please be sure to keep it, since they have had problems with some students not showing up in the past. Students who attend a full session (remember to ask for a sheet of paper confirming you were there!) will receive an automatic 24-hour extension on ONE of their drafts (either rough draft or final). On a final note, you will occasionally find me working in the Writing Center. While you may sign up with me, note that this will not count for the 24-hour extension, and I discourage it. A big part of the Writing Center is to get as many *different* perspectives on your writing as possible. (Remember you can make an appointment with me whenever you would like.)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

<i>Class Unit</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Writing Due</i>
Week 1: Prologue – Approaching Cultural Difference	August 27	None	
<u>PART I: Writing about Cultures / Cultures of Writing</u>			
Week 2: Introduction – What is Culture and Who Has It?	September 1	Syllabus Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” David Jacobson, <i>Reading Ethnography</i> Robert Lavenda and Emily Schultz, <i>Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology</i> , Reading Ethnography (optional)	
	September 3 <i>NO CLASS, BUT READINGS STILL DUE</i>	John Monaghan and Peter Just, “Bee Larvae and Onion Soup: Culture” Bronislaw Malinowski, <i>Argonauts of the Western Pacific</i> Robert Lavenda and Emily Schultz, <i>Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology</i> , Chapter 1 (optional)	
Week 3: Representing Culture in Writing	September 8	Talal Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology” Ralph Linton, “100% American” Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , A2 and MLA-1	Mini-Essay – An Ideal Writing Course (E) <i>(you may take until Friday, September 11 to submit if you prefer)</i>
Week 4: Academic Writing as Culture	September 17	Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Introduction and Chapters 1-2	

		<p>Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i>, A1, C1, and MLA-2; skim MLA-4</p> <p>Mirco Göpfert, "Bureaucratic Aesthetics: Report Writing in the Nigérien Gendarmerie"</p> <p>Bernard A. Mohan and Winnie Au-Yeung Lo, "Academic Writing and Chinese Students: Transfer and Developmental Factors"</p>	
<u>PART II: Language</u>			
Week 5: The Scientific Study of Language (Introductory Linguistics)	September 22	<p>William O'Grady, "Language: A Preview" (recommended)</p> <p>Robert Lavenda and Emily Schultz, <i>Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology</i>, Chapter 3 (optional)</p>	
	September 24	<p>Franz Boas, "On Alternating Sounds"</p> <p>Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i>, B1 and B2</p>	Mini-Essay – Comparing and Contrasting Culture Concepts (E)
Week 6: The Social Dimensions of Language – Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology	October 1	<p>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i>, Chapter 7</p> <p>Janet McIntosh, "Mobile Phones and Mipoho's Prophecy: The Powers and Dangers of Flying Language"</p> <p>Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer's Reference</i>, C2 and C3</p> <p>Laura Ahearn, <i>Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology</i> (recommended)</p>	Mini-Essay – My Language Genealogy (E)

Week 7: Language and Thought	October 6	Benjamin Whorf, “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behaviour to Language” Richard H. Robbins, “How Does Language Affect the Meanings People Assign to Experience?,” <i>Cultural Anthropology: A Problem-Based Approach</i>	
	October 8	William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, <i>The Elements of Style</i> , Introduction, Rule 5, Principle 17, and p. 58 Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , E5	
Week 8: Language vs. Dialect	October 13	Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapter 6	Close Reading Draft #1 (E)
	October 15	<i>New York Times</i> , Dialect Map Activity Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , P3, P4, and P7	
Week 9: The Lived Experience of Language	October 20	Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i> , Chapter 10	
	October 22	MIDTERM EXAMINATION	
<u>PART III: Race and Ethnicity</u>			
Week 10: The Biological Fiction of “Race”	October 27	AAA Statement on Race Jared Diamond, “Race without Color”	Close Reading Draft #2 (P)
	October 29	Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , E3 and W5	
Week 11: Race vs. Ethnicity	November 3	Karen Brodtkin Sacks, <i>How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America</i>	Close Reading Final Draft (E, P)
	November 5	Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , S6 and S7	
Week 12: The Lived Experience of Race	November 10	Colin Gordon, “The Making of Ferguson”	Lens Essay Outline (E)

		<p>U.S. Department of Justice, <i>Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department</i> (excerpt)</p> <p>Victor M. Rios, “Stealing a Bag of Potato Chips and Other Crimes of Resistance”</p> <p>Philippe Bourgois, “If You’re Not Black You’re White: A History of Ethnic Relations in St. Louis” (skim)</p> <p>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i>, Chapter 3 (skim)</p>	
	November 12	<p>Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i>, G1 and G3</p> <p>Sample Lens Essay (final draft and original prompt)</p>	
Week 13: Alternative Racial Schemes	November 17	Michael Baran, “‘Girl, You Are Not <i>Morena</i> . We Are <i>Negras!</i> ’: Questioning the Concept of ‘Race’ in Southern Bahia, Brazil”	Lens Essay Draft #1 (E)
	November 19	TBD	
Week 14: Reconsidering the Race Concept	November 24	Diana Hacker, <i>A Writer’s Reference</i> , P1 and P2	
Week 15: Language, Race, and the Politics of Anti-Racism	December 1	<p>H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman, “A.W.B. (Articulate While Black): Language and Racial Politics in the United States”</p> <p>Norma Mendoza-Denton, <i>Homegirls</i>, Chapter 4 (optional)</p>	Lens Essay Draft #2 (P)
	December 3	Doug Bafford, “‘Only One Race’: Religious and Scientific Rhetoric of Anti-Racism among Young-Earth Creationists”	

Week 16: Conclusion – Prospects for Culture, Language, and Race	December 8	H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman, “Change the Game: Language, Education, and the Cruel Fallout of Racism” Franz Boas, “Race and Progress” (highly recommended)	
Final Exam Week: Epilogue – Wrapping Up	December 15 6:00 PM	None	Lens Essay Final Draft (E, P) Mini-Essay – Reflections on Writing Mid-Year (P)

*****NB: This schedule and syllabus are subject to change as we move through the semester.*****

Source for Image on First Page: Baran 395