

SYLLABUS
Seminar in Composition: Gender Studies
University of Pittsburgh
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or by appointment



Carrie Mae Weems. The Kitchen Table Series, 1990.

Where did the definitions of what women are come from? We asked the question everywhere during the week and discovered that once you have changed the question you have changed the world. There was no way to un-see what we had begun seeing.

- June Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising"

I suppose that genre, like gender, with which it shares a root, is mostly a collection of lies we have agreed to believe.

- Eula Biss, "It Is What It Is"

What if instead there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other? What if the richest junctures weren't the one's where everything means the same thing?

- Eve Sedgwick, "Queer and Now"

In this composition course, gender is the lens, the glass that you will be peering through to gaze inward and to inquire outward. You will be expected to "read" many kinds of texts carefully (day-to-day conversations, personal essays, feminist criticism, queer theory, blogs, a graphic novel, news media, visual art, film, music, etc.), reflect critically, and then explore your observations in writing. You will learn to train your analytical eye, to ask hard questions, to inquire into the meaning(s) behind what you see. You will also learn by letting go of a single way of reading, by allowing yourself to consider how questions and ideas about gender might also intersect with necessary thinking about sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, etc.

The process of writing, too, requires care and reflection. So, you will be asked to simultaneously notice and question the choices you are making as a writer: What is an essay? How flexible is the essay as a genre? What, if anything, does this have to do with the relationship between language and gender?

Seminar in Composition differs from many of the courses you'll take at the University of Pittsburgh. For starters, this course is a seminar, which means it's relatively small—fewer than 20 students—which enables the teacher to give close attention to your writing, ask for your ideas in class, and meet with you individually during the term. Whereas some courses may leave you entirely on your own, with no obligation to attend or speak in class, this course requires you to be both present and prepared to participate. Rather than lecture, I will facilitate discussion, and the value of our class meetings will be determined in large part by the conversation you and your peers create each day.



Tammy Rae Carland. Masks and Nail Care, 1999.

Another difference between this seminar and other courses you may be taking lies in the amount and quality of writing that is expected of you. In this course, you'll be asked to write at home and in class every week of the term, and it's very important that you not fall behind. Many students who have performed well in English courses throughout high school are surprised by how challenging the writing assignments in this seminar can be and by the high standards set for achievement. The readings you'll be assigned are similarly difficult, and you'll need to read them more than once in order to grapple with their complexity. In other words, you should be prepared for a course that will require sustained effort, no matter what your previous record as a writer and reader.

Finally, Seminar in Composition differs from most other courses in that student writing is regularly presented in class. By the end of the semester, every student will have had at least one piece of writing (and probably more) distributed for full class or small group discussion. In other words, your writing for this course will address not only the teacher but also other members of the class. While you may occasionally ask your teacher not to share a particular piece of writing, for the most part you should imagine your writing as part of a public conversation.

In order to create a safe space for sharing writing and discussing difficult questions in this class, during our first few weeks together we will come to consensus about a set of community guidelines. This semester you will also learn about how to find language that is inclusive. Throughout the course, you will be asked to think consciously when speaking or writing about how to avoid the use of words that may disrespect or discriminate against another person (or group of people) based on their actual or perceived race, class, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion or any other distinguishing characteristics.

GOALS FOR FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSES at the University of Pittsburgh

Seminar in Composition—preceded in some cases by Workshop in Composition—is the course that most undergraduates take to fulfill the first of three writing-intensive requirements in the School of Arts and Science. While the readings and assignments in different sections of the course may vary, your section, like all the others, consists of a sequence of assignments that will require you to:

1. Engage in writing as a creative, disciplined form of critical inquiry.

In this course, you'll be asked to use writing to generate ideas as well as explain them. You'll form questions, explore problems, and examine your own experiences, thoughts, and observations. Investigating a multifaceted subject, you'll be expected to make productive use of uncertainty as you participate in sustained scrutiny of the issues at hand.

2. Compose thoughtfully crafted essays that position your ideas among other views.

In response to reading and discussing challenging texts, you'll write essays in which you develop informed positions that engage with the positions of others. You'll analyze as well as summarize the texts you read, and you'll compose essays that pay close attention both to the ideas voiced by other writers and to specific choices they make with language and form.

3. Write with precision, nuance, and awareness of textual conventions.

You'll work on crafting clear, precise prose that uses a variety of sentence and paragraph structures. You'll be required to learn the conventions for quoting and paraphrasing responsibly and adeptly, and you'll be assisted with editing and proofreading strategies that reflect attention to the relation between style and meaning. You'll also have opportunities to consider when and how to challenge conventions as well as follow them.

4. Revise your writing by rethinking the assumptions, aims, and effects of prior drafts.

This course approaches the essay as a flexible genre that takes on different forms in different contexts—not as a thesis-driven argument that adheres to a rigid structure. Much class time will be devoted to considering the purpose, logic, and design of your own writing, and you'll be given opportunities to revise your work in light of response from your teacher and peers, with the aim of making more attentive decisions as you write.

You must earn a “C-minus” in order to pass Seminar in Composition, and those who earn a “C” or above will have substantially progressed toward fulfilling the goals described above. Subsequent writing-intensive courses you take in any discipline should help you further develop your abilities as a writer and reader.

Writing

Given the extensive amount of written work you'll produce for this class, you'll find it useful to set aside regular times for writing. You should put these times on your schedule and treat them like classes, so that writing at particular times of the week is both habit and ritual.

Essays

You'll write essays of varying lengths, from 5-10 pages, with opportunities to revise specific work by the end of the semester. Essays will give you the chance to work at greater length on exploring various issues that arise in the reading and in-class discussion.

Evaluation of essays

An important aim of this course is to help you develop your ability to evaluate your own writing. After you write each essay, you'll read essays by those in your Writing Group (a small group of 3-4 students) and write an evaluation of your own work.

Reading Responses

This course includes an online Discussion space on the course website at *lore.com*, where you'll be asked to read what your classmates have written the night before a text gets discussed and post a response that contributes to the conversation.

In-class writing

You'll often be asked to do in-class writing intended to help you deepen your thinking and develop your facility with style and syntax—that is, with the way sentences are put together and how they create different effects depending on their form.

Reading

Required Books:

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Mariner Books, 2007.

Graff & Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*

Selected Readings (available to download in digital Library on LORE)*

"Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin

Excerpt from "Portrait of a Body" by Phillip Lopate

Selected essays by Adrienne Rich & Audre Lorde

"Queer and Now" by Eve Sedgwick

"The Ethics of Sexual Shame" by Michael Warner

Excerpts from *Gaga Feminism* by Jack Halberstam

Excerpt from *The Women* by Hilton Als

"The Compass" & "The Orient" by Kimiko Hahn

"Hagler-Leonard and the Limits of Speech" by Patrick Rosal & Ross Gay

Excerpt from "Strip Search" by Wayne Koestenbaum

Excerpt from "Deagelar Ma...Comere: Dispersed Daughterhood and Queer Desire—A Blue Airmail Letter" by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

**Course readings may be subject to change based on instructor's discretion.*

Required books are available in the University Book Center. Primary texts should be brought to class meetings. For further support with grammar, punctuation, and formatting, consult The Purdue Online Writing Lab, a free on-line resource: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu>

Policies

Attendance

Since this seminar focuses primarily on the work of you and your classmates, whose writing and responses to the reading are central to class discussion, attendance is mandatory. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation about the materials under study. You are allowed two absences, no questions asked, though it is strongly recommended that you strive for perfect attendance. More than that will begin to effect your grade – your grade will be lowered 1/3 for each additional absence (e.g. from a B to B-). I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If you come to class 10 minutes late, you will also be counted as absent. If you are tardy to class as many as three times, your tardies will be equivalent to an absence, which could then effect your grade. Missing more than six classes, for any reason, will result in a failing grade for the course. Students in this situation may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.

If an unforeseen situation arises, it's always in your best interest to communicate with me as soon as possible. *If you do miss a class, you must arrange for your assignment that day to be submitted on time*, either via email or by placing it in your teacher's mailbox in CL-501.

Writing Assignments

This course involves some form of writing every week, and it's important that you submit your work on time. *All writing assignments must be completed in order to pass this course.* It is especially important that you turn in your essays on time. *If you submit an essay late (without a documented excuse), your final grade for the semester will drop by one third (C+ turns to C, for example). More than two late submissions of any other assignment (including in-class writing) drops your final grade by one-third, and every late submission thereafter drops it another third.* Finally, any late assignment that isn't submitted by the following class will not receive teacher commentary.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by *a review of your essays and other class contributions twice during the course of the semester*—once at midterm and once during final exam week. In other words, rather than grading each and every paper individually, you will receive comments intended to help you revise your essays and improve your writing. In-class writing and Discussion Board comments will generally not receive individual response, but student responses to these assignments will often be discussed.

Twice during the semester, your teacher will schedule a conference with you to discuss your progress towards the four course goals. At midterm, you will be given a provisional grade. You should also feel free to visit your teacher during his or her office hours to discuss your work at any point during the semester. A final grade will be determined in response to your final folder. Your folder will include all your work for the term and be graded according to the following scale:

Essays & evaluations	60%
Disc. Boards, in-class writing, & all other homework	40%

Your teacher may also choose to raise your grade by one-third (e.g., B to B+) in order to recognize exemplary participation in class discussion.

Academic Integrity

plagiarize: to steal and pass off as one's own : use without crediting the source: to commit literary theft : present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

From Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2011.

Plagiarism is a serious offense. If you are discovered plagiarizing, you will receive an automate failure on the assignment in question. If you have questions, see “Avoiding Plagiarism” at: <http://www.english.pitt.edu/people/policyAndprocedure.php>

Course Website on LORE.COM

Resources for this course can be found online at:

<http://lore.com/Seminar-in-Composition:-Gender-Studies.1>.

Full directions on how to use & log-in to the class website will be given by the instructor.

Additional Assistance

The Writing Center

Located in 317B O'Hara Street (Student Center, 4024 O'Hara Street), the Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Although you should not expect consultants to “correct” your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. In some cases, your teacher may require that you go to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can decide on your own to seek assistance. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556). You can also make an appointment online at: www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/



Panel from **Fun Home**, by Alison Bechdel.

Composition Tutorial (an optional one-credit course)

After you've taken the placement exam during the first week of class, your teacher may recommend that you enroll (or you may already be enrolled) in a one-credit course called Composition Tutorial, which gives you the opportunity to meet once a week with a Writing Center consultant to examine your writing more closely and address problems with structure, grammar, and punctuation. If you are enrolled in Composition Tutorial, you'll need to attend all sessions and bring with you the material from this seminar (syllabus, assignments, drafts of papers, teacher's comments, etc.).

Other Services

Pitt offers a number of services to help students who are struggling either academically or personally. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890 / (412) 383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Seminar in Composition: Gender Studies

Course Schedule - Part I

*Note: Modifications to this schedule will be announced in class.
Students are responsible for recording and adhering to any changes.*

8/27	Survey, Syllabus, & Introductions	8/29	Discuss language choices/language mistakes, View Jay Smooth TED talk, In-class writing Due: Check out Diversity Style Guides
9/3	Placement Exam , Survey results, inquiries into feminism Due: hooks, Intro & 1-24 View Makers: Women Who Make America, Part I	9/5	Establish community guidelines & discuss readings Due: Arnold, 282-286 Gornick, 287-300 Lopate, 3-9 In Country, In City podcast Reading Response 1
9/10	Everyone participates in one of two fishbowl-style CR discussions Due: Collect topics for Essay 1	9/12	Discuss reading, Goals 1 and 2, listen to a podcast Due: Foss & Griffin, 362-380 Reading Response 2
9/17	Meet in Inquiry Groups Due: Research for Essay 1 Conversation 1 posted to LORE	9/19	Meet in Inquiry Groups Due: Conversation 2 posted to LORE <i>They Say, I Say</i> , Ch3
9/24	Meet in Inquiry Groups Due: Conversation 3 & 4 posted to LORE Essay 1 by Wed., 9/25 at 6 p.m.	9/26	Share/Reflect on Essay 1 View <i>Jollies</i> , Begin inquiries into queer theory Muholi film clip
10/1	Discuss selected readings, In-class writing Clip from "Green Porno" Due: Warner & Rubin Reading Response 3	10/3	Discuss selected readings, In-class writing, "Miranda July" Clip from "Lady Boys" Due: Sedgwick & hooks Reading Response 4
10/8	Discuss <i>Fun Home</i> as a model for inquiry Due: <i>Fun Home</i> , Ch 1-7 Reading Response 5	10/10	<i>Fun Home</i> discussion cont'd In-class writing, Punctuation exercises (Goal 3) Due: Bring four-panel comic drawing to class Read sample essay "Facebook: The New Normal"
10/15	No Class Conferencing this week.	10/17	No Class Conferencing this week.
10/22	Discuss Als & sentence variety, Goal 3 Due: Read excerpt from Al's <i>The Women</i>	10/24	Workshop Essay 2 Due: Essay 2 by Wed., 10/23 at 6 p.m.

**Seminar in Composition: Gender Studies
Course Schedule - Part II**

*Note: Modifications to this schedule will be announced in class.
Students are responsible for recording and adhering to any changes.*

10/29	Discuss Intersectionality in small expert groups View Audre Lorde clip Due: Read Lorde & Rich Reading Response 6	10/31	Discuss excerpts from <i>Gaga Feminism</i> Bring “gaga feminist” examples View Yoko Ono’s “Cut Piece” Due: Read Halberstam Reading Response 7
11/5	Paraphrase & close read quotes from <i>Cruising Utopia</i> Due: Read Munoz Reading Response 8	11/7	<i>Alien She</i> Museum Field Trip
11/12	Discuss selected lyric essays & essay as a flexible form (Goal 4) Due: Read Gumbs, Koestenbaum, Rosal & Gay, and Hahn	11/14	In-Class Writing Exercises Bring <i>They Say, I Say</i> to class
11/19	In-Class Workshopping Essay 3 Due by Sun., 11/18 at 6 p.m.	11/21	No Class -- Conferencing
11/26	Radical Revision Exercises Discuss revision of “Facebook: The New Normal” Due: Read <i>Revising In, Revising Out</i>	11/29	No Class – Thanksgiving Break
12/3	Revision Workshop, Final Class Discussion on Gender and Language Response 9	12/5	Last Day of Class Present! Due: Essay 4 & Final Folder