MC 112: Identity and Community, An Approach to Writing II

Spring 2011

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Office Hours:  Tue. 2:15-4:15 p.m. and Wed. 10-noon
   and by appointment

Section 10:  TTh  10:20-12:10  334a Case Hall
Section 14:  MW  8:00-9:50 a.m.  336 Case Hall

“The people of Michigan will take care of their own problem.”
Governor Wilbur Brucker, 1931

“No more critical situation ever faced the Negroes of America than that of today - not in 1830, nor in 1861, nor in 1867. More than ever the appeal of the Negro for elementary justice falls on deaf ears. Three-fourths of us are disenfranchised; yet no writer on democratic reform says a word about Negroes.”
W. E. B. DuBois, 1935

“What we need in Hillsdale is a federal officer to investigate the conditions of the unemployed. We have families who are starving...when they ask for help, the county officers reply, ‘there are no funds, the county is broke.’ Can you help us out? We need help at once for these poor people.”
Pearl Gibbons to FDR, 1933

America in the 1930s: Responding to Crisis

MC 112: Identity and Community: An Approach to Writing II focuses on particular periods of social change in American history (e.g. the Civil War, the 1920s, the Great Depression, or the 1960s) or on themes of transition and change in international or cross cultural contexts. Among the questions individual sections might address are: What are the causes and impacts of social, political, economic, and/or cultural upheaval? How do individuals and groups of people react to moments of stress or transition? How do literary and other artistic forms of expression represent cultural transitions and/or cross-cultural encounters?

In this MC 112 course, we will explore the 1930s by reading and writing about a variety of historical and literary sources. Americans experienced the worst economic depression in the 1930s, and faced the onset of World War II at the end of the decade. We will study the experiences of Americans during this time, and the responses that the depression prompted. Our present economic situation invites comparisons to this period, and we will explore the roots of many contemporary issues. The 1930s is not only a story of what role government in general should play, but also what level of government should address specific problems. The New Deal is thought by many to be a failed, radical experiment, but we will also explore its conservatism and the alternatives, often much more radical, offered at the time. Seen by many at the time as a period that threatened the survival of democracy, the 1930s prompted instead a rethinking of the government’s role in a democracy, and its responsibility to its citizens. The economic crisis reinforced exclusionary practices, both by institutions and groups, that limited the scope of the programs offered to alleviate the era's hardships. Harsh conditions and widespread unemployment and poverty...
prompted people to demand change, both individually and collectively. Americans did not accept the conditions without protest, and challenged leaders and institutions to respond to the crisis in unique and innovative ways.

Writing assignments in MC 112 may include the types of analytical and narrative writing required in MC 111, but the emphasis in the second semester is on learning the research process. In MC 112, students undertake original research incorporating primary and secondary texts. A series of shorter assignments takes students through the process of formulating research questions, finding the appropriate sources in a large, research library, preparing research proposals and/or annotated bibliographies, and writing an analytical essay based on extensive research. MC 112 also emphasizes public speaking skills; class assignments typically include speeches, interviews, and/or creative presentations.

During the semester students will learn the process of research, including the framing of a research problem, the identification and assessment of both primary and secondary sources, and the drafting and synthesis of those sources into a cohesive argumentative research paper. Rather than simply reporting what others have written, students will learn to use others' work to support their own argument and ideas. The semester will culminate in a major research project, which students will present in both oral and written form. The research project will require careful thought, attention and time. Do not underestimate the effort and time needed to produce a quality research project.

**Required Books:**
Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* (Harper Perennial, 2008)
Coursepack, Budget Printing Center, 974 Trowbridge Road, East Lansing, 351-5060.

**Recommended Books:**

**Grading:**
- Annotated bibliography: 15%
- Document analysis: 15%
- Research project proposal: 10%
- Research process grade (including research reflections, project description, research proposal rough draft and conference, research paper rough drafts, peer reviews): 5%
- Research paper: 25%
- Commentaries: 15%
- Class engagement and participation (including informal writings): 15%

*Students must submit a final research paper to receive a passing grade in the course.*

**Paper Format:**
All final papers must be either computer-generated or typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font with one-inch margins and pages numbered. Word count totals must be noted on the first page of the paper. Drafts may be handwritten, but if you do so, please write on every other line to permit revising and comments. Specific assignments will require the submission of a rough draft with the final paper. Students submitting papers without a rough draft (at least three quarters of the paper's assigned length) will see a .5 deduction in the paper grade. You must show process. All assignments (except commentaries and informal writings) should be posted on Angel in the appropriate drop box.

Papers that are one day late will be penalized by 0.5; papers submitted after one day will see a 1.0 deduction, unless you have received an extension from the professor before the paper is due. Please request an extension in advance if
you need one! Papers more than one week late receive a 0.0, unless prior arrangements have been made with the professor.

Computers in many ways expedite and assist in the writing process. They also can become a significant hindrance when your system has problems, perhaps due to power outages, hardware or software errors, viruses, etc. Plan for such delays; create a back-up of all work on a memory key or your Angel page (use the Files section to create folders for your writing), and make sure you allot enough time to address problems and finish your assigned writing on time. Remember that there are printers in most labs on campus! Save all work until you receive your final grade in May.

**Attendance and Participation:**
MC 112 is a seminar course, and a successful seminar requires the active, curious, and engaging work of all students. You should not only be prepared for class by completing the required reading and writing, but also must verbally engage in class discussion. Participation grades depend upon a student’s preparation for class, active and verbal participation, completion of in-class writings, and attendance. The quantity is not critical in participation, and students who attempt to dominate class discussions, who demonstrate a lack of respect for their peers’ comments, or who fail to listen to others, will see their participation grade suffer. Listening is a critical part of participation, and students cannot listen if they converse with those sitting near them. Interested, consistent and informed engagement is key.

Learning in this course is an interactive process; much of class will be spent in discussion or group workshops. Such work is often difficult to make up, and notes are usually a poor substitute. To succeed in this course, you must attend, be on time, and be prepared (always bring paper, assigned readings, and a pen or pencil). Missed classes and frequent tardiness will significantly lower your participation grade. Two absences is too many in a course such as this one. Students who miss more than that without a significant emergency will see their participation grade suffer. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Save your two absences for emergencies or illness.

Informal writing assignments - some on the syllabus and others announced in class - are part of the requirements for participation. If you miss class, check Angel for any announced informal writing assignments. Absences are not a reason for a late or missing assignment.

Peer review is a critical part of this writing course, and missing those sessions, or not being adequately prepared with a draft, will also affect your participation grade. Students will attend one required conference with the professor. Students should make use of office hours and appointments to seek help beyond this conference with the professor. Do not wait for a required conference if you need help or are unsure of your progress. If you email me for an appointment, please provide possible times/dates for the meeting, or simply see me before or after class to schedule one.

Computers can be a useful resource for students in class, but they should only be used for class purposes, such as taking notes. Students should not check email, search the internet, or do other activities not connected to the course work that day. Conducting research for a class assignment during class is not appropriate. Students who persist in doing this will see their participation grade suffer significantly.

All cellular phones, pagers and other electronic devices must be turned OFF during class. Students should not place or receive calls during class, regardless of the activity that day.

**Commentaries:**
Students will write several short commentaries (650-750 words) on the assigned reading. While content is the focus in these assignments, students should consider the conventions of good writing as well. **Analysis and serious engagement with the assigned text are key,** and, as the semester progresses, students should endeavor to make connections to other course material. The goal of these short writings is to foster your thinking about the material before class, and to raise questions and issues for possible discussion. You will also develop critical reading skills,
and learn to identify arguments and assess evidence which are crucial research skills. Commentaries should be typed and will be collected the day we discuss the reading. They will not be graded individually, except for comments, but will be graded collectively twice during the semester. Please keep your commentaries (the originals read by me) until I collect them for these grades.

Simply writing all the assigned commentaries is not enough; quality is paramount. Adequate commentaries that demonstrate some engagement with the reading, and show that the student has read, will receive a 2.5. Commentaries in the 3.0-range go beyond stating the obvious in the reading, and seek to identify and interrogate the issues and their complexities in the reading. A grading rubric will be distributed to detail expectations. Commentaries demand serious and careful reading and thinking, and should not be your first reaction to the reading.

Commentary topics are listed on the syllabus, and some will be announced in class or distributed via handouts. Commentary assignments announced in class will be posted on the Angel announcement page by 1 p.m. that day. If you must miss class, check Angel for such assignments. Absence will not be an acceptable reason for missing an assigned writing.

Writing Consultancy:
All students are encouraged to seek additional writing help from the James Madison Writing Consultancy in 230 S. Case Hall or the MSU Writing Center in 300 Bessey Hall and the Main Library. The web links to both writing centers are on Angel under Resources. Consultants work with students on any stage of the writing process: planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

Honors Option:
If enough students are interested, I will offer an honors option for this course. The text will be John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, along with a few other supplementary readings. All students are welcome to participate, and any student, regardless of Honors College status, may earn honors credit with a 3.5 or 4.0 in the course. Interested students should see me by January 20.

Plagiarism:
All work submitted for this course must be the original work of the student. Plagiarism is when a writer copies verbatim or paraphrases from the work of another author without documenting the source and thus crediting the original author OR when a person turns in work completed (even in part) by someone else. Using only a phrase written by someone else - from any source, including the Internet - but presenting it as your own is plagiarism. Plagiarism violates the university and college's code of academic honesty, and is remarkably easy to detect. Papers that contain plagiarized material automatically receive a 0.0 in this course, and multiple offenses will result in a 0.0 for the course. Inadvertent plagiarism - carelessness in documenting quotations or paraphrased material - is not acceptable as college work and thus falls below the criteria for a 2.0. Document your sources carefully!!

ALL work for this course (informal and formal) must be original work and grounded in the course material and content, and produced for this class. Any work found to be from an earlier era or other course will receive a 0.0.

Course Schedule

What follows is a tentative course schedule for the upcoming semester; changes are likely to occur. Schedule changes will be announced in class and posted on the course's Angel website. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day they are listed. Come prepared to discuss that day's assignments, and to turn in any required written work. CP refers to the coursepack available at Budget Printing. All written assignments must be submitted on hard copy; e-mail submissions are not acceptable.

Thur. Jan. 13: Read Watkins, foreword (xi-xvi), chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 37-72). Informal writing: focus on a question of interest from the reading and develop it using the text. How does Watkins frame that particular issue or question? How does he develop it, and what evidence does he use?

Tue. Jan. 18: Read Watkins, chapter 3; McElvaine, pp. 27-34, 36-37. Informal writing: select one major document from those assigned (do not use a margin document in the text). Identify the document (source and author) and analyze its purpose, argument and audience.

Annotated bibliography assignment distributed.


Thur. Jan. 27: Read Janis Appier, “We're Blocking Youth's Path to Crime,” CP 63-77. Commentary: Identify Appier's central argument and identify her key supporting points. Document all information and quotations using MLA format; please use the original article's page numbers, and not the CP page numbers in your citations.


Thur. Feb. 3: Read Dennis Nodin Valdes, “Mexican Revolutionary Nationalism and Repatriation during the Great Depression,” CP 51-62 and McElvaine, pp. 122-125 (“The Mexican-American Dream”). Commentary: Identify Valdes' central argument in this article and his key supporting points. Document all information and quotations using MLA format; please use the original article's page numbers, and not the CP page numbers in your citations.

Bring your sources collected thus far for the annotated bibliography. Workshop.


Thur. Feb. 10: Annotated Bibliography due. In-class presentations. Bibliographies must be posted on Angel (in Assignments and Rubrics folder under Content) by the beginning of class.

Tue. Feb. 15: Library Orientation Part Two: Finding Primary Sources. Meet in the Main Library.


Thur. Feb. 24: Read sample document analysis papers on Angel, and assess using the rubric and questions.

Tue. March 1: Drafts of your primary document analysis are due; peer review workshop. Bring two copies of your draft and a copy of your primary source.

Thur. March 3: Review Booth, CP 3-31 and read Booth, 32-49. Discuss research proposals.
Document analysis papers, with all required materials, are due in a two-pocket folder by 4 p.m., Friday, March 4.

March 8 & 10: Spring Break. No class.

Tue. March 15: Read McElvaine, “The Social Security Act,” pp. 54-56, and Alice Kessler-Harris, “In the Nation's Image: The Gendered Limits of Social Citizenship in the Depression Era,” CP 107-121. Students may write a commentary either on the Kessler-Harris article for March 14 OR chapter 13 of Watkins for March 16. The commentary must identify author’s central argument and key points, and is due the date the article is assigned. On the day students do not write a commentary, identify the argument and key points in an informal writing.

Thur. March 17: Read Watkins, chapter 13; McElvaine, pp. 69-77; and Detroit News interview with Henry Ford (Angel).

Tue. March 22: Read Sinclair, The Flivver King, 1-63 (up to and including chapter XLVII).


Research project descriptions due on Angel by 4 p.m. on Friday, March 25.

Tue. March 29: Discuss The Flivver King.

Thur. March 31: No class. Conferences on research proposals.

Tue. April 5: Research proposals due on Angel by the beginning of class. Film: To Be Somebody.


Tue. April 12: Read Wright, “Big Boy Leaves Home,” Uncle Tom’s Children, pp. 16-61.


Tue. April 19: Read sample papers posted on Angel. Assess using guiding questions and rubric.

Thur. April 21: Early rough drafts due for peer review. Bring one printed copy of your draft, and post your draft on Angel by 3 p.m.

Tue. April 26: Read Wright, “Fire and Cloud,” Uncle Tom’s Children, 157-220

Thur. April 28: Full rough drafts due for peer review. Bring one printed copy of your draft, and post your draft on Angel by 3 p.m.

Course evaluations.

Commentary portfolio due, with final research commentary, by 4 p.m. Friday, April 29, in my mailbox or office.
**Final Examination:**
Final research papers are due on Angel at the beginning of the exam period. Research colloquium and final discussion of papers and the research process. Commentary portfolios returned.

Section 10: Thursday, May 5: 7:45-9:45 a.m.