First Year Research Seminar: Language and the Political
FIRST-UG709; 4 CR; the Gallatin School, NYU
Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30–1:45 p.m., spring 2015
Gallatin Building, room 501
Instructor: Andrew Libby; e-mail: al260@nyu.edu

Course Description

How does language affect how we think about political possibilities? How have writers and activists sought to change society through changing how we use language? How is rhetoric used politically, in essays, law, oratory, propaganda, and poetry? We read arguments about the interplay of language and the political, think about political theory, examine political rhetoric, and study literary works. We write about the power of rhetoric to form and criticize political practices: movements for civil rights, human rights, rights for women, workers’ rights, and animal rights. We investigate in detail how language participates in our ideas about rights, ethics, political action, and social justice. And we examine the affective dimensions of this interaction of language, ideas, and values.

After familiarizing ourselves with various approaches to thinking political and social relations, you can then explore in depth an issue of social justice that animates you. This means that we will use the reading to focus your critical thinking capacities, expand your horizons, and communicate the results of these processes in writing that is persuasive, coherent, exhilarating, meaningful.

Learning Goals

1. To use close-reading and writing to evolve the ability to discuss and think critically about an array of texts;
2. To develop and carry out an extended research project;
3. To acquire a critical awareness of how political identity categories are never simply given or natural but are subject to a specific set of social-cultural conditions that change through time;
4. To synthesize this awareness so that it can inform your own personal life experience and broaden your scope.

Required Texts


Plato, and Marx and Engels, are available online at www.gutenberg.org.
Marx and Engels are also available at www.marxists.org.

In addition to the works above, I have also placed some required readings on the NYU Classes site for our course. These readings are indicated by an asterisk (*) in the schedule below.
Writing Practices: Formal and Informal Writing and Workshops

You will write three formal essays for the seminar: two 4-page papers and one longer project, a 7–10-page critical research paper on a topic that you develop. You will shepherd each of these formal essays through a process of peer-workshopping and drafting.

In addition to these three formal essays you will write a two-page thinking essay on each of the readings (six thinking essays in all). A thinking essay is a short analytical paper in which you take up an issue of interest to you and develop a pithy argument. I may, especially at the beginning, ask you to work on a specific topic. As the semester progresses I’d like you to develop your own topics, based on your own interests, passions, and critical proclivities.

We draft, and drafts of your essays in progress form an essential component of our workshops. I will give specific instructions on workshopping as each of our workshop dates approach.

The research essay should explore a topic or problem that is thematically related to the course. It should be about a topic you care about. In it you will present a strong, well-supported argument in seven to ten pages. In our student research conferences at the end of the term, you will present a distilled version (approximately 2 pages) of your research. We’ll discuss specifics of the presentation format as we proceed.

Final versions of all essays must be formatted as follows: double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, 12-point type. You must carefully proofread and edit your final drafts. Each of your essays must have a title. Final versions are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus.

**Submitting work.** All thinking essays may be submitted electronically by sending an attached Word file to my e-mail address: al260@nyu.edu. E-submissions are due by 10:00 a.m. on the due date of the thinking essay. Please label your file as follows: your first name, comma, name of the author you’re writing on. For example: Andrew, Plato.doc.

For the formal four-page essays, you should turn in all of your drafts on the due date for the essay.

Submitting hard copies of any essay is also fine. It should be typed/printed out.

**Course Requirements**

Our seminar relies on discussing and analyzing the readings together and on a regular series of writing workshops. This method will not succeed without your regular and timely attendance. You must attend class on a regular basis and arrive on time. If you fall ill or experience an emergency, please call Gallatin or e-mail me so that you can be prepared for the next class. Excessive absences (more than two) can jeopardize your final course grade.
Grading

Grades are based on your ongoing class participation, your responses to your colleagues’ writing, and the quality of your written work. Participation consists in regular attendance, punctuality, in-class work and contributions to discussions. The development you experience as you write improves the quality of your writing, so I will consider it when reckoning final grades. I am happy to read and evaluate any revisions of papers, provided they are submitted not later than one week after I have returned the final essay to you.

The anticipated numerical breakdown is as follows:

| Participation, in-class writing, homework | 10 % |
| Thinking essays                          | 25 % |
| First essay                              | 15 % |
| Second essay                             | 20 % |
| Third essay (research project)           | 30 % |

More than two absences will jeopardize your grade. Do not miss a workshop day; it is impossible to benefit from that experience if you are not there. Missing a workshop will jeopardize your grade.

Doing Honest Work

I follow the Gallatin policies on academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the use of work done by someone else and presented as one’s own work, without acknowledging the source. Examples include but are not limited to using material from books, articles, blogs, websites, reference works (including wikipedia), student or faculty papers, etc., that one did not write oneself without properly attributing the source of the material. This also includes purchasing or outsourcing written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism may be found in Hacker. Gallatin’s policies and procedures for handling such academic dishonesty are published in the Gallatin student handbook: [http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf).

I will go over proper documentation style in the course of the semester in conjunction with Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*.

Office Hours and Connectivity

My office is room 608 in 1 Washington Place. E-mail is the best way to reach me: al260@nyu.edu. The phone is 27772.

My office hours for the spring term are:

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and by appointment.

I may need to adjust this syllabus and course schedule to accommodate pedagogical needs as they arise. If I do, I will.
Course Schedule

You should read each assigned text by the dates indicated below. For instance, you have to finish reading all of Le Guin and Genesis before coming to class on Jan. 29.

Week 1

January 26
- Introduction.
- Writing assignment due next session: 99%/GNH.

January 28
- One-page essay due.
- Reading for discussion: Le Guin* and Genesis 1–2*.
- Writing assignment due next session: Write two pages analyzing how Le Guin’s protagonist uses language to make her point.

Week 2

February 2
- Two-page essay on Le Guin due.
- Reading for discussion: Plato, Apology.

February 4
- Reading for discussion: Plato, Apology and Crito.
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Plato.

Week 3

February 9
- Thinking essay on Plato due.
- Plato, conclusion; Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”*; Lakoff, “The Political Unconscious”* and “The Brain’s Role in Family Values”*.

February 11
- Discussion of topics for analytical essay (four pages).
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Orwell or Lakoff.

Week 4

February 16: No class. Presidents’ Day.

February 18
- Thinking essay on Orwell or Lakoff due.
- Writing assignment due next session: Analytical essay (four pages).

Week 5

February 23
- Workshop for analytical essay.

February 25
- Analytical essay (four pages) due.
- Reading for discussion: Marx and Engels, “Alienated Labor.”*
- Writing assignment due next session: Personal reflection on work.
**Week 6**

March 2
- Personal reflection on work due.

March 4
- Discussion of close-reading essay (four pages).
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on *The Communist Manifesto*.

**Week 7**

March 9
- Thinking essay on *The Communist Manifesto* due.

March 11
- Reading for Discussion: Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

**Spring Recess:** March 16 (Monday) through March 22 (Sunday)

**Week 8**

March 23
- Discussion of research projects and proposal.
- Reading for discussion: Sun Tzu (conclusion); Gandhi.
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Sun Tzu/Gandhi.

March 25
- Thinking essay on Sun Tzu/Gandhi due.
- Reading for discussion: Gandhi.

**Week 9**

March 30
- Writing workshop for close-reading essay (4 pages). Bring in two hard copies of your first version.

April 1
- Discussion of source materials for research essay.

**Week 10**

April 6
- Close-reading essay (4 pages) due.
- Reading for discussion: Sedgwick.
- Writing assignment due next session: A research-project proposal (one paragraph) with 4–8 sources.

April 8
- Each student brings to class a research-project proposal (one paragraph) with 4–8 sources.
- Reading for discussion: Sedgwick.
**Week 11**

April 13
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Sedgwick.

April 15
- Thinking essay on Sedgwick due.
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on *Meridian.*

**Week 12**

April 20
- Thinking essay on *Meridian* due.
- Discussion of Research Projects.
- Writing assignment due next session: Research Project, first version.

April 22
- Discussion of proper citation and documentation.
- Workshop research projects, first version.

**Week 13**

April 27
- Workshop research projects, second version.

April 29
- Presentations of research projects.
- You should have a two-page distillation of your research project to work from.

**Week 14**

May 4
- Presentations of research projects.
- You should have a two-page distillation of your research project to work from.

May 6
- Presentations of research projects.
- You should have a two-page distillation of your research project to work from.

**Final Week**

May 11
- Research projects due.
- Conclusion.