WRT 302: Writing Culture is an upper-level elective in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island (URI). As part of a group of four 300-level courses, Writing 302 draws many junior and senior majors in Writing and Rhetoric, English, and other majors who are looking to add creativity and experience with design to their skill sets. Writing 302 and its counterparts (Public Writing, Writing for Community Service, and Travel Writing) are a cluster of courses that can fulfill any student’s general education requirement in the category of English Communication/Writing. The course’s unique approach offers students the chance to write a range of genres not immediately associated with culture qua text, art, or artifact; that is, students in Writing 302 study and create the kinds of writing that surround a cultural milieu and support it as an institution, such as descriptive art museum placards. The production of these types of documents, what I refer to in the course as “unsung” or “overlooked” genres, is the main focus of the students’ writing after a process of (1) library and field research into a cultural milieu (which range from the large and well documented to the local and obscure); (2) scouting of real-life models of documents that are necessary or important to sustaining the milieu; and (3) application of rhetorical concepts and principles in both the analysis and production of documents of the students’ choosing. The aim is action through writing.

Alongside turning their attention to “culture” through collections of objects up for interpretation as one might expect in an English or Cultural Studies class in which students write analytic essays about culture, students in Writing 302 also examine the materiality of culture in its capacity to emerge as institutions—places, events, performances, and rituals. The course poses this scenario: you’ve got an interest in, understanding of, and perhaps a role in some cultural milieu with rich and interesting histories and points of view. In order to propagate this interest in the world at large, what might you need to write? Who is your audience? How will you deliver it? As students immerse themselves in four cultural milieus throughout the semester and face these questions, they create projects not easily listable or categorizable, but which I will exemplify and explain further throughout this course description. The course catalog description attempts to summarize the course products as: “noncanonical writings that sustain or reshape culture.”

Institutional Context

With a combined undergraduate and graduate population of about 16,000, URI’s main campus is located in the rural town of Kingston, Rhode Island.
The creation of a freestanding Department of Writing and Rhetoric, a major institutional change at the university, occasioned a boom in writing course offerings and influenced the design of upper-level writing courses including Writing 302 nearly a decade ago. Departing physically, financially, and curricularly from the English department, Writing and Rhetoric built major and minor programs of study inspired by foundational arguments for writing’s worthiness as a field of study for undergraduates. Such arguments sprouted where they live, documented by URI faculty members Robert A. Schwegler’s and Linda K. Shamoon’s contributions to the 2000 volume *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum.*

In “Curriculum Development in Composition,” Schwegler calls for the righting of a “curricular imbalance” perpetuated by the simultaneous devaluation of writing/production and valuation of literature/analysis (25). Explaining that writing’s role in curricula has ridden (some unpleasant) waves over time, Schwegler forecasts writing’s next role in a wave of “the growing sense that the things that should be studied and practiced in writing courses—the processes of composing; discourse genres; contexts; readers; media; links among texts, knowledge, power, and action—form clusters distinct enough to deserve courses of their own, yet related enough to constitute a discipline and a curriculum” (29). Additionally, Shamoon considers the practical results of such a discipline and curriculum, articulating what students need to become professional writers of all sorts: “the best education for the profession must include […] active knowledge of the historical foundations of the profession along with an array of critical approaches with which to encounter the always-changing economic and technical conditions of production [and] guided practice in the public and social roles of the writer as an agent for good in society” (50).

Why the emphasis on career, on professionalization? Alongside the disciplinary movement toward independence, the growth of the Writing and Rhetoric major at URI is also a practical reaction to the role higher education currently plays in the economically troubled U.S. and Rhode Island in particular, where the unemployment rate in August 2011 was 10.6% (Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training). A survey study posted on The Chronicle of Higher Education’s Web site reports that 77.6% of undergraduates indicate that the most important reason to attend college is to train for a specific career (University of California at Los Angeles). Likewise, URI’s Office of Institutional Research Fall 2010 report lists university’s top eight majors, none of which are in the humanities and all of which constitute professionally focused fields: Nursing, Communication Studies, Psychology, Kinesiology, Human Development and Family Studies, Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design, Biology, and Accounting.

Attendant to students’ expectations that their educations will lead them toward reliable career paths is the encouraging rise in the number of Writing and Rhetoric majors since the first graduating class of three students to almost eighty majors in only a handful of years. Both the department
and the College of Arts and Sciences promote the usefulness of the major in students’ pursuits of “careers for the digital age.” Therefore, Writing & Rhetoric offers writing courses from the first year to a Senior Capstone informed by rhetorical theory and composition research with an emphasis on rhetorical knowledge and the production of writing. This “vertical curriculum” builds on rhetorical and writing process knowledge introduced in the 100- and 200- levels and reinforced throughout a student’s education up to the 300- and 400- levels. Such a curriculum offers opportunities for students to practice a range of genres in many different rhetorical situations and with various writing technologies, as Jeremiah Dyehouse, Micheal Pennell, and Linda Shamoon have recently described in “Writing In Electronic Environments: A Concept and A Course for the Writing & Rhetoric Major.” It also emphasizes revision and reflection in a portfolio-based assessment model drawn on the work of Nedra Reynolds and Rich Rice. Like the other electives for the major and Gen. Ed. courses, Writing 302 supports the following Learning Outcomes (specific criteria of which can be found online):

- Rhetorical Knowledge
- Composing, Revising, and Editing Processes
- Collaborative Production and Evaluation of Texts
- Reflective Learning
- Conventions and Craft

The major itself requires 30 credit hours grounded by five required courses (15 credits) and a minimum of 15 elective credits, five credits of which are drawn from the 300+ levels (Writing 302 and its counterparts as previously listed comprise the elective choices.) The required courses include:

- WRT 201: Writing Argumentative & Persuasive Texts
- WRT 235: Writing in Electronic Environments
- WRT 360: Composing Processes and Canons of Rhetoric
- WRT 490: Writing and Rhetoric
- WRT 495: Capstone in Electronic Portfolios

Graduating seniors demonstrate their knowledge of and practice in writing via an electronic portfolio suitable for such audiences as potential employers or writing agents. The variety of courses in the curriculum doesn’t ask what students should write about, but what students should write, to whom, and for what purpose (i.e., rhetorically).

This is a key point in support of a vertical curriculum. Students in URI’s Gen. Ed. and major writing courses write in the arenas around which the course is focused (such as community service, culture, electronic environments) and not only about them. The opening lines of the Writing 302 syllabus help to distinguish between these two prepositions: “Rather than writing about culture (like in an essay), you will write to help shape, create,
sustain, or alter the direction of a cultural institution, activity, performance, or event.” As a three-credit elective, the course holds a relatively low-stakes position in the curriculum and on students’ schedules. This has allowed for the course’s design and near-constant revision by each instructor to whom it is assigned to approach it quite differently. Though each section of the course follows a roughly similar four- or five-project structure, with each project following a two to three week writing process, the end product of each unit can differ significantly.

For instance, another instructor with whom I have collaborated in plans for Writing 302 has, based on his own interest in and love of punk rock, assigned his class to produce a collaboratively written ’zine, or low-budget, small-circulation magazine written by fans. His students write their ’zine on a topic of interest on campus (the music scene, for instance). However, having no personal interest in or experience with ’zines, my ideas for what students can produce are drawn from other cultural topics also worthy of exploration such as cuisine or couture. For example, last fall, students in my class wrote publishable recipe articles modeled on the trial-and-error style write-ups of recipes in publications like Vegetarian Times or Cooks Illustrated. In other units, students made use of free and user-friendly floor-planning software (such as Google’s SketchUp 8 or floorplanner.com) to conceive of and design museum galleries dedicated to the work of, in one instance, the designer Alexander McQueen.

Without belaboring the distinction, to those of us teaching the course, writing in/for is a matter of institutional history and differentiation from curricula whose primary focus is analysis. I feel it’s necessary to emphasize the course designers’ strength of conviction that Writing 302 and its counterparts be necessarily distinct from writing-heavy literature courses at the university in which students read about a topic (cultural or otherwise) and respond to it—critically, persuasively, expressively, what have you—in an essay. David Beard has recently described the expansion of rhetorical purposes for students’ writing in a similar way: “Further, because we are interested in a broader array of writing and reading activities, we can focus on a greater variety of sociocultural effects of writing. We can be interested in the ways that a variety of writing forms sustain institutions, generate communities, and enable (or domesticate) individual and social cognition” (par. 2, emphasis added). In the philosophical move away from English/analysis as a basis of the curriculum at the University, Writing 302 was designed to focus more on teaching types of contextual writing that the participants in various cultural milieus actually use (like ’zines in punk rock culture or recipes in foodie circles) than on content for acontextual/for-teachers’-eyes-only essays.

This perspective is shared by others in the field whose major programs take similar shapes for similar purposes. Contributors to the 2010 volume What We Are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors by Greg Giberson and Thomas Moriarty present an array of examples. Although sometimes a bumpy road, writing major programs are working within many
an institution for reasons similar to those at URI. For one example, Rebecca de Wind Mattingly and Patricia Harkin suggest that “what a rhetoric and composition major can do is introduce students to a broad range of situations that call for what Bill Hart-Davidson characterizes as ‘solving problems by writing.’ These situations require conscious attention to audience and context in ways technology-sphere natives may not otherwise encounter” (16). Rodney F. Dick suggests similar opportunities for the students in his institution to gain rhetorical knowledge and writing practice: “Students are exposed to a wider variety of rhetorical situations for analyzing and producing texts; students can professionalize as writers and gain more practical and varied experiential knowledge than studying literature alone can afford” (125).

Dick’s mention of the study of literature in comparison to the study and practice of writing invokes the continuous tension between the work of analysis and the work of production. Schwegler historicizes the division:

From the end of the nineteenth century through most of the twentieth, the definition of literary study as a subject matter acted as an expansive ideology, encouraging division and development and enabling literary study to occupy considerable curricular space [in budgets, catalogs, and physical space in institutions]. In contrast, the definition of writing as a skill that is largely impervious to scholarly analysis led to the restriction of its curricular development. (26)

While we know the attitude toward writing as a skill has become far more nuanced and the subjugation of writing as an inferior field of study has abated (in lots of places, though certainly not everywhere), the problem of analysis versus production is still a chief subject of concern within the conversation regarding the development of undergraduate writing curriculum.

For instance, the approach to first-year writing referred to as Writing About Writing (WAW) offered by Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle in their 2007 article, “Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies,’” has gained traction and drawn criticism. Contending that “our own research and theory about the nature of writing has done little to influence public conceptions of writing,” Downs and Wardle draw on the considerable body of research and knowledge in the field to “[teach] students what we as a field have learned about writing as an object of study. Thus, the course acquires an attainable goal and a clear content while continuing to help students understand how writing works in the academy so that they can succeed there” (578). Todd Ruecker’s account of a successful attempt at this model was published in this journal last spring. Echoing Barbara Bird’s defense of students’ ability to participate in disciplinary discourse, Ruecker recounts Libby Miles et al.’s critique of Downs and Wardle’s placement of sophisticated disciplinary texts in the first year (Ruecker 90). Miles et al.’s main problem with WAW is its focus on FYW as the appropriate place to impart writing theories; that is, Miles et al. believe it serves the field more
appropriately to use writing theories to build a full curriculum rather than deliver writing theories as course material in a readings model of a composition course (Miles et al. 508).

This debate persists: On the one hand, including disciplinary work as course content, as texts up for analysis, provides students with an introduction to a field, practice in academic discourse, and opportunities to practice writing-as-learning with reflective writing. On the other hand, this model gives rhetorical concepts short shrift with its emphasis on essay writing. However, to serve undergraduate students whose chief concern is preparing themselves for the job market, upper-level writing electives such as Writing for Community Service or Travel Writing tip the balance between academic writing and practical writing, of analysis and production. Writing Culture stands, then, as a sort of extreme experiment in completely prioritizing production.

Theoretical Rationale

While the previous section presented a local rationale for upper-level writing curricula in the institution, this section explains the theoretical rationale for Writing 302 as a writing course generally speaking. The theoretical rationale exemplifies the idea that the rhetorical theories and composition research developed and articulated in Writing Studies should inform writing curricula, not only be presented as course content. Therefore, Writing 302 is inspired by theories of language in general and writing in particular that account for connections between institutions, discourse, and people, or what is sometimes termed “material” or “materialist” rhetoric. The scholarly conversations concerning writing that intervenes into unfair systems or changes material conditions frame the course products and serve as a point of departure for the students’ research and writing processes.

The introduction of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish serves as both a powerful example of the link between institutions, discourse, and people, as well as an eye-opening first reading for the course. With Leon Foucheur’s timetable of a Parisian prison as an example of the post-Enlightenment move on reliance from brute force to rhetorical force, Foucault suggests that discipline is enacted through “tactics,” or “the art of constructing, with located bodies, coded activities” (167). As the “highest form” of disciplinary practice, coded activities such as a timetable to manage a daily routine elevate the material and interpretive aims of the code-maker (writer); that is, in this case, the timetable increases efficiency of the punitive system and attends to the former lack of humanity and dignity (of torture, a gory description of which mostly comprises the piece). Given codes-makers’ attention to “located bodies” (167), or the audience to whom the code is directed and the situation in which it is expected to work, such tactics are rhetorical in nature. Excise the punitive aims of the prison timetable, and the theory—that rhetorical forms can be deployed to direct the behavior of people within institutions—is extendable to and productive within contemporary cultural institutions.
Many examples of Writing Studies scholarship demonstrate this. The well-known work of Ellen Cushman exemplifies personal intervention into the documentary bureaucracy on behalf of her neighbors who are less literate than she is. This iteration of rhetorical intervention changes the material conditions of peoples’ everyday lives (13). Similarly, Carl Herndl, in his “Tactics and the Quotidian,” looks to the subversive rhetorical moves a biologist makes on the job to combat the institutional discursive limits of report writing, which reduce complicated and sensitive environmental issues to quantifiable data and thus allows his employer to ignore them (par. 21). Herndl uses Foucault’s word, “tactics,” to describe the moves the biologist makes such as “sneaking” clauses into documents that open up the interpretation of regulations (such as the phrase “the letter and the spirit of the law”) and suggests that the writer’s “action takes advantage of the institution’s procedures to increase the amount of information available and to force it into wider circulation, effectively resisting the institution’s attempt to silently extend its control of information” (par. 27).

Tactics, perhaps a little ironically, are effectively constructed only within an institution. That is, when code-makers write, they are resisting through measures of compliance—changes in or additions to existing codes that will sustain the institution, making it more habitable for its members. The change, in other words, doesn’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. The writers in the particular examples above rely on writing tactics that undermine, but that also work within the structures of their institutions: writing on someone’s behalf, revising policy, and generally making the best use of resources at hand. Working within the system this way is less risky, according to Herndl, though perhaps no less effective than working against it: “highly charged action makes resistance such a dangerous and costly project that it becomes practically impossible” (par. 6). The “double logic” that Kristie Fleckenstein articulates of discursively constructed institutions constitutes, on a basic level, trading a measure of freedom for a measure of justice (762). In such a system, a freedom one loses includes expediency, as the discursive road to institutional improvement is neither easy nor exciting. As Herndl describes, “resistance can be understood as a social agent’s conscious attempt to put her expanded discursive knowledge of structural properties [of an institutions] into action, thus attempting to make incremental social change” (par. 12).

Admittedly, this theoretical framework asks for a bit of a leap from serious considerations of implementing social change within material circumstances to creating art and fashion shows.

However, this pedagogical extrapolation of rhetorical theories constitutes an appropriate level of reading, understanding, and application for Gen. Ed. undergrads and contrives to make accessible to majors and non-majors in the classroom the possibility of rhetoric described in the work of James Porter et al.: if institutions (of all stripes) are rhetorically constructed and rhetorically alterable, students themselves can be the types of writers prepared to face them (631). To do that, students in Writing 302 embark on
a process of learning about and using rhetoric that begins with becoming aware of connections between institutions, discourse, and people. Stefanie, a student in an online section, makes some early connections based on her understanding of the timetable as a controlling force:

Foucault uses the timetable as an example of a new form of power that the newly instituted penal code was now enforcing. Instead of compelling the body to endure physical torture as a form of punishment, these codes seek to control the body and conform it to the desired “discipline” of the institution.

This kind of recognition of the power of a simple document (in juxtaposition to the power of violence, which had previously done the job of punishment) is important to encouraging students to analyze the interpretive, not just the functional or formal, aspects of institutional documents. Another reading selection, “Civil Disobedience: A Case Study in Factors of Effectiveness” by Courtney Dillard in the journal *Society and Animals*, takes the students to this next step of acknowledging the values and agendas of institutions who create such documents.

In her piece, Dillard describes a failed protest by the animal rights group Fund For Animals during a traditional pigeon shoot in Hegins, Pennsylvania. After some protestors display violent behavior towards participants in the pigeon shoot, the organization reflects on its values and agenda and is moved to dictate appropriate behaviors for protestors at the next rally through a circulated list of rules. Emphasizing the group’s leaders’ reflection on the group’s values in order for their writing to direct bodies in the way the group wishes, Dillard writes: “They wanted to demonstrate their sympathy more accurately for the birds and encourage others to adopt their position concerning the shoot […] in doing so, they tried to better understand their audience and more clearly represent themselves” (53). Consequently, the next rally is far more successful, non-violent, and gains positive attention from the media. The piece exemplifies well that “coded activities” sustain the group itself and the larger institution of animal activism by preempting damage to its image generally, and it also manifests the articulation of values that is critical to using rhetoric, but not always apparent. This works to help students balance their eagerness to design a cool Web site with the challenge of determining the values of the community they are imaginarily serving and the audiences to whom their writing is directed. Another student in an online section, Justin, posts his realization about the articulation of values in this way:

Because the activists changed to a nonviolent and peaceful approach, rather than involving themselves in unproductive and hostile behavior, their cause became much more transparent and well-understood. In this manner, people could identify with what their aim was and the essence of civil disobedience was in itself a constructive means.
This particular piece, as a relatable case study, bridges the more esoteric and extreme Foucault piece to students’ own possible contexts for writing; it also, incidentally, provides a model of the types of projects students might consider creating. The class, with burgeoning rhetorical and design knowledge, moves on to produce documents that work within institutions such as museums, events, performance spaces, and publications.

To prompt the writing process, the course assignments provide a general scenario and lists of possible documents, demonstrated by the below unit centered around “Parks, Monuments, and Memorials” (see Syllabus below). Such prompts have kick-started a range of research endeavors and unusual-for-the-classroom genres: posted rules and information for a state park hiking trail; plans for an Oktoberfest event with a descriptive beer menu; revised placards for a fishermans’ memorial in a coastal town park; an informational Web site on loose-leaf teas with brewing instructions and tips; a proposal and the specifications for arranging a flash mob on campus—to name a few examples of students’ recent work. With these types of projects, students discover and contribute to the discursive construction of institutions recognizable and enjoyable to them in one semester. However comfortable scholars are claiming that cultural institutions are “constructed,” students often believe in a definition of culture absent of their own local knowledge and personal involvement. Here, students practice the idea that cultural institutions are constructed and changed by code-makers—real people like them—who have been prepared during their rhetorical educations to recognize, understand, and respond to the needs or interests of a niche audience within a specific cultural milieu, and by extension, other institutions to which they belong, through writing and rhetoric.

Critical Reflection

In considering the successes and failures of teaching Writing 302, some logistical problems persist alongside the pipedream-ish quality of the hope of linking material rhetoric into writing curricula.

Logistical Problems

The idea of leaving campus to conduct field research makes students nervous at the outset of the course. In the first semester I taught Writing 302, the number of panicky e-mails from students concerned about traveling off-campus was alarmingly high. Therefore, I lightened the expectations of the students’ field research by limiting the number of off-site visits required to two visits among four projects on the syllabus. I also tried to make the field research a more collaborative portion of the course by providing a space on our Sakai site for students and me to share interesting and potentially useful events, activities, links, and locations with each other. Finally, to prepare the students to seek out real-world models of such things like art museum placards, show posters, and menus on their own later in the
semester, I’ve worked in mini-field trips around campus to visit outdoor monuments and memorials and our small but lovely Fine Arts Gallery early in the semester. One spring semester, the trajectory of a project corresponded with students’ Spring Break plans, which allowed some students to visit an array of cultural institutions in our own and neighboring states, finding a number of useful and inspiring milieus and models.

Another logistical problem arises in the non-standard assignments of the course. While fun and liberating for instructors and some students, they cause other students anxiety, especially in regards to experience with design. Comments in student evaluations suggested some helpful way that these early concerns might be dispelled:

- “If you introduced the class with a sample prompt and a sample that answered the prompt featuring very different documents, it might help make your expectations clearer.”
- “The only problems I initially struggled with were understanding (generally) what the documents were—I was nervous in my first assignment that I wasn’t fulfilling the expectations. But after the first go-around I definitely felt more comfortable with the material.”
- “At first I was a little confused by the whole concept, and the idea that we had such a wide range of documents we could create. In other classes we usually have certain guidelines to follow. When describing what the assignment is, it might be helpful to provide an example of what a document may look like. I think it would help better explain what you are looking for.”

Models are, of course, necessary in writing classes to help students understand rhetorical patterns and then produce their own responses using appropriate conventions, tone, and the like to address a particular audience. While the syllabus offers lists of possibilities for each project, students seem to want something more concrete (see Syllabus for examples). Considering the students’ feedback in light of the theoretical foundation of the course, the power of documents to model behavior as “coded activities” is especially robust in an educational context. I believe that, in this case, the code has the potential to limit students’ imaginations, perhaps tamping down their curiosity to try out a genre new to them or preventing individual understandings of how mundane, easily overlooked documents really can play a part in sustaining cultural institutions. The final, polished semester’s worth of work of another class may also be too impressive in an invention sense. For instance, consider the project of another student, Grace: after researching and visiting her hometown beach, she determined the need for and created mock-ups of historical markers that memorialize the infamous Hurricane of ‘38. This project is so interesting and well executed that it would have induced a number of replications (all potentially great, I’m sure, but still not inspired by students’ own interests and processes). I am therefore
hesitant to share previous classes’ work. My response to the panicked has been to listen to their worries with kindness and patience. I have seen some success, despite the lack of models, with the emphasis on finding models through field research together early in the semester, exemplified by this end-of-the-semester comment: “I do believe the course description sounds much scarier than it truly is. I loved this class and loved the opportunity to write different documents, not just boring old essays.”

Two more logistical problems go unsolved: peer review remains a largely chaotic show-and-tell session with lots of impromptu opening of files and on-the-spot revision that sometimes distracts peer review groups’ attention from each person in the group. While it is exciting to work amid twenty-odd students who really are workshopping—discussing the merits of their choices, listening to advice, and making new rhetorical and design choices right there in class, by the third and fourth projects, the class’s comfort with the routine can railroad any specific instructions or prompt I might provide.

Grading is also a challenge. To overcome any tendency to downgrade students without a natural aesthetic sense or over reward students with design software experience (since experience is not required to enroll in the course), grades are determined mostly by students’ participation in the writing process through drafts and peer review, as well as the quality of students’ research on each topic around which they produce documents. To that end, I use a four-part research heuristic to shape students’ research efforts, blending their own interest in and knowledge about the topic, library research, and field research: “What You Know,” “Read More,” “Ask Somebody,” and “Go There.” Alongside the documents the students produce for each assignment (four altogether, themed around a broad topic such as “Parks, Monuments, and Memorials”), they also write a Field Analysis Report, an accounting of the research they conduct on each topic. These reports are simply arranged by the four headings that make up the heuristic. Additionally, this is the appropriate space for students to cite their research sources, since the genres the students write such as art museum placards or brochures often preclude conventions of typical researched writing assignments.

Pipedreams

To exemplify the support that a production-focused upper-level curriculum could lend to students’ efforts in becoming professional writers, I share a happy instance in which the imaginary scenarios in Writing 302 led to “real” writing for a real audience. This instance highlights the fruitful interaction of the main elements of the course—the production of unsung genres in the writing class, a multi-method research heuristic, and a constructed, contextualized understanding of “culture.” Imagine the excitement of reading the following e-mail from Aly, a senior Writing and Rhetoric major, in late Fall 2010:
Hi,

I wrote in my post-write that Nancy Martini was going to post the profile I wrote on her blog. She posted it today so I thought I would send you the link to her blog so you could see it there, too (in addition to the paragraph I wrote about myself as a guest blogger on her page)!

http://nancymartini.blogspot.com/

—Aly (D’Amato)

As part of their research for a collaborative project on green art, Aly and her groupmates interviewed a Florida-based artist known for using reclaimed materials in her sculptures, Nancy Martini. Their project resulted in an informational Web site for budding green artists that included do/don’t lists, how-to instructions, and, at my suggestion, a profile on the artist herself. The group had been unusually proactive in seeking out research sources, and I encouraged them to make the most of their interview experience by writing the profile, responding to Ms. Martini to say “thank you,” and offering to share the project with her. Aly, having taken ownership of this portion of the project, was thrilled when Ms. Martini replied with a request: would Aly mind featuring the profile she wrote on the artist’s professional blog? As an aspiring freelance art and music writer, Aly was thrilled to add to her credentials a project written for a real site with a real audience. (Note: the link is live; you can search for Aly’s piece by its posting date: 19 November 2010.)

However, since Aly’s writing is the sole instance such as this in three years of teaching Writing 302, it is clear that other pedagogies in our field such as service learning are better platforms for creating a variety of documents that actually contribute to institutions or organizations. David Coogan, in “Service Learning and Social Change: The Cast for Materialist Rhetoric,” describes such an arrangement, a course focused on learning the rhetorical history of a real-life organization, analyzing its needs and audience, and providing pieces of professional writing for public use. Coogan argues for a materialistic rhetoric to create service-learning programs that don’t rely on the standard approaches of teaching students to be good citizens and try to enact social change (such as critical consciousness, community literacy, or community-based organizations). He writes: “[it is] not just a case for rhetorical activism in service learning but a case for rhetorical scholarship in the public sphere: a challenge to test the limits of rhetorical theory in the laboratory of community-based writing projects in order to generate new questions for rhetorical theory, rhetorical practice, and rhetorical education” (670). Coogan’s pedagogical heuristic—Discover, Analyze, Produce, Assess—under the term “Materialist Rhetoric” attends nearly perfectly to the question at hand: how does rhetoric lead students to produce documents that make a material impact on its audience or constituents? The ideal circumstance—an arrangement with willing constituents from whom
the students can learn and for whom they can write—frames Writing 302’s counterpart, Writing for Community Service. Those types of experiences are invaluable for students and make an excellent rhetorical fit given the civic roots of the discipline, as Coogan points out.

The connection to culture is yet another, distinct way to consider what “institutions” can be and how writers/rhetoricians can participate discursively in them; yet, perhaps it seems less important without the connection to civic or community action. Since clients for such projects are in demand, students must gain practice in this materialist rhetoric model of Writing 302 by learning to conduct field research and analyzing the contexts of imagined audiences to whom their writing is directed.

As long as preparing students for their civic and professional futures has been the goal of public higher education, writing teachers, with their ability to impact so many college students each semester, have been interested in how best they can contribute to this preparation. Writing 302, and the vertical writing curriculum generally, contributes to career goals of writers in a unique way. The course asks students to take a gamble when they enroll in the course, but the risk has paid off in some cases when students have stretched out of their writing comfort zones, learned to incorporate design elements and principles into their work, used software useful to them in other courses and extracurricular interests, and delivered documents from Writing 302 projects to real audiences. Aly’s “real” writing, albeit an unusually exciting result of a writing assignment, speaks not only to the ways teachers see writing as potentially useful to students, but, perhaps more importantly, it also speaks to the ways students see our writing courses: useful to them as writers.

Works Cited

D’Amato, Alyson. Message to the author. 19 Nov. 2010. E-mail.


Welcome to WRT 302! The first thing to know about this course is that it is unique among writing courses at our university or anywhere for that matter. Rather than writing about culture (like in an essay), you will write to help shape, create, sustain, or alter the direction of a cultural institution, activity, performance, or event. The aim is action through writing. I think you will enjoy the creativity, energy, and collaboration that this class requires.

This course fulfills a Gen. Ed. requirement for English Communication (ECw). Upon its completion, you will have:

- conducted both textual and field research
- read and discussed critical and popular sources
- found, studied, and rhetorically analyzed documents that shape, create, sustain, and alter culture
- created a host of practical documents
- engaged in all steps of the writing process
- sought feedback from classmates and instructor to revise, edit, and polish writing
- reflected on your learning and writing

**Course Texts**

Note: not all books and readings are required to be purchased; some are available as PDFs posted on Sakai.


Other readings drawn from various popular publications.

**Course Technology**

*Computers for writing*

Our classroom is equipped with laptops for use with writing. You may bring your own if you’d like. Please save files in formats compatible across old and new Mac and PCs (such as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf).
Sakai
Our course documents, including the syllabus and assignments, are housed on Sakai. In addition, responses to readings in the Forums section on our Sakai site are a main element of the class. Please check into Sakai regularly.

Design Software and Production Technology
Writing 302 benefits from the technology available in the Writing & Rhetoric Production Lab in Roosevelt 320. As this class might require the use of computer software that may be new to you such as Web site-building software, MS Publisher, Photoshop, and floor-planning software, we will rely mainly on free online software or those available in the Lab. You may also print your documents in black and white and in color there, as well as laminate and bind your work.

Technology for Field Research
You might spend a bit of money on your field research this semester, for such things as gas, bus fare, or other costs associated with travel; however, you can borrow equipment such as digital cameras, voice recorders, and tablet PCs from the Production Lab to conduct your field research. A lab monitor is available to help you when you’re there.

Requirements:
1. Completion of all assignments on due dates (including readings, on-time submission of drafts, thoughtful revision between drafts, workshop, and postwrites).
2. Completion of a Final Portfolio including a Reflective Essay and three revised, edited, and polished documents.
3. Active and consistent participation in individual and collaborative work.
4. Responsible communication with instructor.

Grading
• Four Unit Projects, for process and potential: 40 pts (10 each) (An acceptable project includes all drafts, workshop responses, genuine revision between drafts, and a postwrite)
• Good citizenship, class participation, and careful feedback: 10
• Research (showing a variety of sources and high level of energy): 10
• Final portfolio (showing evidence of significant revision on three chosen pieces): 40
• Total: 100 points available

University Grade Chart
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68</td>
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Writing Projects and Workload

Projects
Each project is a collection of documents that you submit at the end of a unit. I don’t assign a paper; you produce a group of four documents.

The contents of your project will differ from the contents of others’. You will decide what kinds of documents you write according your topic, research, audience, technologies, and the feedback from me and others in the class.

The projects are judged on five components at two points each:

- the writer’s participation in the writing process and workshop
- the documents as a response to the readings and discussions in each unit they represent
- the documents as a performance; that is, an aesthetically appealing rhetorical delivery
- a properly formatted and cited Field Analysis Report
- a thoughtful and detailed postwrite

A note on delivery: present your documents as a mini-presentation on the day it is due by including in the presentation any interesting visuals, props, or other artifacts that illuminate your topic.

Field Analysis Report
In order to produce documents, you will spend much of the three units conducting field analysis by researching your topic in the four ways described below. Then, as part of your project, you will write a Field Analysis Report. These reports will describe your research efforts in four activities for knowledge-making:

What You Know: Jumpstart your invention by recording recollections, personal experience, examples in popular culture, common knowledge, folklore, stories you’ve heard, etc.

Read More: Reading comprises much of a writer’s process. Readings should include a wide variety of sources, including personal/popular, professional, academic, and functional texts. This effort will be complemented by class readings as they are listed on the syllabus, but you must also read other articles and sources on your own to fit your topic for each unit. Proper MLA citation is required in Field Analysis Reports.

Ask Somebody: Having conversations with people is integral to field analysis. Like a reporter, you’ve got to be curious and confident. This can mean formally
requested interviews or on-the-street fact-finding.

Go There: To enhance your invention and drafting, as well as jar your memory about your field when you’re writing, you’ll go to places that are relevant to your topic, take photos, collect artifacts, draw sketches, and record all pertinent details for your inquiry. At least two “Go Theres” are required in WRT 302.

A 3-4 page Field Analysis Report is due alongside each bundle. Remember, it’s a report, not an essay; consult Designing Writing for genre conventions. Include photographs and artifacts where relevant.

Forum Posts
According to our class schedule, you will read course materials and write responses or “Forum Posts” on Sakai by class time that day. These responses should be thoughtful and well crafted, questioning, citing, and analyzing evidence from whatever the required material. As well, to foster our conversations about these readings, you will be required to comment on at least two of your peers’ posts. While these comments may be more informal than original posts, they must add something to the conversation at hand, rather than just agree with or repeat information. So, one original post per reading and two responses per unit.

Unit One: Parks, Monuments, & Memorials
The first unit will draw our attention to the big, public presence of Parks, Monuments, and Memorials as well as to seemingly mundane, everyday aspects of such institutions. As we read, talk, and draft, we will consider such questions as: Who makes parks, monuments, and memorials? Who ruins them? Who funds them? Who really funds them? Who are their intended audiences? Who are their real audiences? Where are they? Where aren’t they? We can ask these types of questions of a range of outdoor spaces from Mount Rushmore to roadside memorials to the statue on the statehouse to home altars.

Documents
Depending on your topic, the documents you write will probably vary greatly from your classmates’. But, here’s an example to get your own ball rolling. Say my topic is the newly refurbished Vietnam Memorial Park in my city. What could I possibly write? A short list might include:

- a letter to the editor of the local paper suggesting the ways in which the city could have and should have consulted citizens during the park’s planning and construction
- a personal essay about the connection between one’s visit to the park, a Vietnam vet near and dear to one’s heart, and oneself
- a proposal and blueprint for an addition to the park in 2015. Try a free floor-plan/layout program such as Google’s SketchUp8 (awesome for 3D stuff) or
Floorplanner.com
- a placard listing the park's rules upon entering (and perhaps some clever graffiti for the placard)
- a photo essay emphasizing its beauty and pride in the city's veterans, we well as championing the city's continued commitment to municipal spaces
- a descriptive entry for a travel guide with a photograph

Unit Two: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry
This unit will ask you to consider food and drink as cultural activities. Here, our attention to national and ethnic differences, as well as reading a range of haute and low media, will reveal the relationships between food, its ingredients, the tools necessary to prepare it, its cooks, the stomachs it ends up in, and, of course, writing.

Documents
Depending on your topic, the documents you write will probably vary greatly from your classmates'. But, here's an example to get your own ball rolling. Say my topic is a single ingredient, the chickpea, a food that has recently become central to my and my family’s diet. What could I possibly write? A short list might include:

- a friendly letter sharing my fondness for a certain recipe, along with a recipe card
- a brief, animated history (it's the oldest food, some say) of the chickpea (Web site or timeline suitable for a popular forum)
- a critique of food trends (like clean eating, organics, low-carb, etc.)
- a menu for a Middle Eastern restaurant

Unit Three: Writing a Gallery Exhibit (A Group Project)
For this unit, your group will create a gallery exhibit of a visual art. Your purpose can range from exhibiting a specific artist, or a specific medium across a range of artists, or a specific time period across a range of media. In reading about and discussing visuals and images, visiting the university's Fine Arts Gallery, and conducting fieldwork, you will attempt to link rhetorical conceptions, design elements, and beautiful works of art with writing.

Documents
Depending on your topic, the documents your group writes will probably vary greatly from other groups. But, here's an example to get your own ball rolling. Say my group’s topic is Dadaism, an anti-WWI cultural movement partly comprised of a style of art closely related Surrealism and Cubism. A well-known example of Dadaist art is Marcel Duchamp’s LHOOQ, or the Mona Lisa with a mustache. During its heyday, Dadaism was written off as foolish and derivative, though it gets more respect and attention today. My gallery exhibit will acknowledge the changes in its status in the art world. What could I possibly write? A short list might include:

- a proposal for such a show, demonstrating its relevance to your audience, a
logistics plan, and a budget
- a letter of inquiry to secure grant funding for your show
- descriptive placards annotating the pieces chosen for the show
- an introduction for the program with sections such as “Brief History,” “Major Artists,” “Exhibits in the Late 20th Century,” “The Future of Dada”
- a review of the show for the paper
- a profile of a Dadaist (living)
- a companion Web site with a selection of the works exhibited
- an event poster

Unit Four: Writing a Public Performance or Event
Consider this unit a grand finale. Since our readings suggest that people’s interests lie in making the most of their time with their families, humans and animals alike, your task is to put on an enjoyable show or event—“something for the whole family,” as they say.

Documents
Depending on your topic, the documents you write will probably vary greatly from your classmates’. But, here’s an example to get your own ball rolling. Say my topic is a festival to promote the concept: “Our State Recycles.” What could I possibly write? A short list might include:

- a proposal for such an event, describing the features of the event, a logistics plan, and a budget
- a leaflet promoting the event including directions and parking info
- an informative pamphlet to hand out at the event, including the day’s schedule and map
- a logo and slogan for the festival with prototypes of a t-shirt, banner, and bumper sticker
- a script for a puppet show at the festival

Final Portfolio
The final assignment of the course is a Final Portfolio, worth 40% of your grade, which includes:

- Three of your documents, revised with peer and instructor feedback, polished and delivered as final products
- A reflective essay (3-4 pages) outlining your rhetorical and design choices for each, as well as the relevant contributions from your field analyses, feedback from classmates, the readings, or other aspects of the course. This essay should be organized around a theme or central feature of the chosen pieces.

Final Portfolio Presentations will be held during finals. Students will read aloud a section of their essays or describe a document of which they’re particularly proud from any project.