English 706: Literacy as a Civil Right

University of Wisconsin Madison
Department of English - Fall 2014
English 706: Special Topics in Composition Theory
Wednesdays 10-1pm, Helen C. White 7191

Instructor: Margaret Bertucci Hamper
Cell: 773.396.6183
Email: mbhamper@gmail.com
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3-5, Helen C. White 7130

Course Description

In Stuart Greene’s edited volume *Literacy as a Civil Right: Reclaiming Social Justice in Literacy Teaching and Learning*, the authors explore and envision alternatives to structural inequalities in the American educational system that distribute knowledge and opportunity unequally. This seminar takes up these questions at the college level, asking how understanding literacy as a civil right for college students might inform questions of access, intelligence, and deservingness at American universities.

The first half of this seminar, then, will provide an introduction to literacy studies, moving from the autonomous theorists and new literacy studies to more recent materialist critiques of new literacy studies. In the second half of this seminar, we will apply our knowledge of literacy studies to the central question of the course: How does understanding literacy as a civil right complicate our own beliefs about access to higher learning and college composition?

Specifically, this course will address the following questions:

- What is literacy? What does literacy *do*?
- What counts as literacy?
- What does it mean for literacy to be understood as a civil right?
- What does the principle of literacy as a civil right offer the study of composition and rhetoric?
Required Texts (available at University Book Store):


Greene, Stuart (Ed.) 2013. *Literacy as a Civil Right: Reclaiming Social Justice in Literacy Teaching and Learning*.


Participation

We are all expected to come to class each week prepared to discuss the readings with open and inquiring minds. This seminar is meant to be a place where we can bring our experiences and perspectives to a community of scholars who regard difference and diversity as assets. Likewise, this seminar is meant to be a place where we can explore nascent ideas and theories in a constructive and supportive environment.

9 Response Papers (20%)

Response papers should be composed of a brief summary and response (about 2 double-spaced pages) to the week's assigned readings. These short papers are meant to give you an opportunity to meaningfully reflect on the issues at play in the week's readings and how they intersect with your own research interests. You may choose which of the nine out of eleven class periods with substantial reading on which to write. Response paper should be submitted to Learn@UW before the start of class.

Final Project Proposal with Annotated Bibliography (20%)

You should plan to meet with me sometime before the due date of the final project proposal to discuss the intersections between the course content and your own area of research. The goal of the project proposal is to both ensure that work has begun on the final projects before the midpoint of the course and to allow time for feedback from myself and your peers before you begin writing.
Final Project (50%)
For the final project, you are strongly encouraged to address at least one way in which your own research interests intersect with the content of the course. While you are welcome to be creative in the form and content of your final project (though you should meet with me to discuss these plans), your final project may also take any of the following forms:

- A study design proposal or a small empirical study
- A literature review of literacy as a civil rights that builds on course readings, pointing to significant gaps
- An interdisciplinary review of sources that address literacy as a civil right
- A community project/grant proposal addressing a literacy-related project

Presentation of Final Project (10%)
In the third to last week of class, I will circulate to the class the first drafts of our projects. During the last two weeks of class, we will discuss these drafts much in the same way we have discussed readings over the course of the semester. The purpose of these discussions will be to enrich and complicate our work.

Grading
Grades will be based on timely and thoughtful completion of response papers, attendance in class, engagement in class discussion and workshop, at least one individual conference with me about the final project, timely completion of the proposal, attentiveness to peer and instructor feedback, and the quality of the final project.
Course Schedule

Part One: What is Literacy? What Does Literacy do?

Week 1: The Autonomous Theorists


Ong, Walter J. “Writing Restructures Consciousness” and “Print Space and Closure.” In Orality and Literacy: The Technologies of the Word. Routledge, 1982. 77-133.

Week 2: The New Literacy Studies


Week 3: Literacy and Orality


Week 4: The Material Consequences of Literacy


Week 5: Limits of the Local


Week 6: Literacy and Discourse


Week 7: Project Proposal Workshop

Week 8: What Counts as Literacy?


Part Two: Literacy as a Civil Right

Week 9: Literacy as a Civil Right

Greene, Stuart (Ed.) 2013. Literacy as a Civil Right: Reclaiming Social Justice in Literacy Teaching and Learning.


Week 10: Literacy and Dispossession

>>Project Proposals Due<<


Week 11: Literacy and Open Admissions


Week 12: Literacy and Cognition


Week 13: Literacy and Gatekeeping

>>First Draft Projects Due<<


Week 14: Workshop/Presentations

Week 15: Workshop/Presentations

Week 16: Final Draft Final Project Due