WRITING ARGUMENTS

EngCmp 0560-1020 (30933) | Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:45am | Cathedral of Learning G16
Moriah L Kirdy, MFA, PhD | moriah.kirdy@pitt.edu | Drop-in Hours Wed 9-11am CL 617U

Contents

Course Description

The idea of argument as a conversation is a popular metaphor in the fields of composition and rhetoric. Stuart Greene, whose article "Argument as Conversation" will frame the opening gesture of this course, writes that "[the] idea of writing as dialogue--not only between author and reader but between the text and everything that has been said or written beforehand--is important. Writing is a process of balancing our goals with the history of similar kinds of communication, particularly other's arguments that have been made on the same subject" (11). The concept is that one's ideas are never created in a vacuum; rather, arguments respond to ongoing discussions that are always already happening.

In this section of Writing Arguments, we'll explore the viability of this metaphor within and beyond academic writing. In other words, we'll consider the metaphor itself as an argument. By the end of term you should be equipped to address whether it is salient and, if not, how the notion might be revised, extended, or complicated. To do so, we'll explore three case examples made up of a pair of essays that can be read as in conversation with each other in some way. We'll move through these case examples rather slowly so that we can attend carefully both to content and how the writers craft their arguments. We'll look at a pair of academic articles, two popular media blog posts, and you'll choose a pair of essays derived from your own intellectual interests as a third case. Through these examples we'll explore the writerly moves of argument in various media and you will practice responding to them with arguments of your own.

We'll invest a significant amount of our time in writing workshops making use of working or final drafts of your essay projects. We'll intervene early in the process to get the flow of writing started, and we'll engage in "post-mortem" workshops after projects are due for feedback to help you think about what you might want to do in revision for a final portfolio of your work from the term. Ultimately, your own crafted arguments and informal exploratory writing are as much the texts and subject of this course as the case examples we'll explore.

Course Materials & Technologies

- **Our course Box folder** will have our course readings and assignment prompts and will also be where you turn in assignments. Some assignments you will share publicly and others you will submit to an individual folder I will set up that only you and I can view and edit, which is where I will return feedback to you. I will send you share links via email (check your Pitt inbox directly, as Box sometimes doesn't like links followed from forwarded messages).
- **All readings will be provided** via PDF (in our Box "Readings" folder) or hyperlink (accessible via this Syllabus&Schedule.pdf file, also in Box). There are no required purchases for this course.
- **Laptops or Chromebooks (you'll need a keyboard).** We'll do a lot of in-class work that requires accessing digital copies of our readings, short writing you'll do for homework, and/or working drafts of your projects, so you'll need your laptop with you. Please see the "Responsible Use of Technology" policy below.
- **A PDF annotation software program and/or a bound or loose-leaf binder to keep handwritten notes together.** I expect you to take notes on and annotate our readings and your own writings so that significant passages, places you have questions about, and/or things you want to bring up in class discussion are easy to find. I will not collect these notes, but I do expect to see you participating in notetaking activity and to see that you have marked up our readings. If you prefer to print readings rather than read and annotate them as PDFs that is entirely up to you.

Goals and Objectives

- **To explore argument as critical readers,** engaging in thoughtful contemplations of argument from a variety of writers and a variety of media.
- **To explore argument as critical writers,** as a means of developing a way of thinking about an issue/problem/point of inquiry, and to engage with the thinking of others as interlocutors and provocateurs.
- **To compose arguments with the rhetorical situation in mind;** to compose with attention not only to one's own position but with regard to exigence, audience, disciplinary and genre convention, and the broader socio-cultural context.
- **To revise with the aim of rethinking, challenging, and complicating the assumptions and aims of prior drafts,** to use the implementation of new parameters and constraints to reimagine an argument with greater complexity and from new angles.

Your Responsibilities for this Course

Active Engagement & Preparedness (Participation)

This is a discussion-oriented seminar and engagement in class conversation and activities is mandatory. Individuals who are actively engaged arrive on time, take notes, ask questions, and interact with others and the ideas of others with curiosity and respect (including your peers as well as the texts we engage with). Engagement is evidenced in the body (sitting attentively, taking notes, etc.) as much as through verbal contributions. **If you do not appear engaged, I will assume you are unprepared for class. If you are not prepared, you cannot participate fully.** Being prepared means you are present, you arrive on time to class, and that you have completed the work necessary for us to do that day's work.

Class Commons

In advance of most classes, you will post short writing pieces that will help you prepare for class in some way which you'll contribute via a BoxNote (like Google doc) so that everyone has access to each other's ideas and thoughts (sometimes I'll even have you write/respond to each other within this document). I encourage you to read each other's posts and learn from others' perspectives. Posts are due by 11:59pm the night before class so that I have time to read them and incorporate your interests and concerns into our class plan for the day. See "Assignments & Instructions" in Box for details on logistics and how the Commons will be evaluated.

Response Essays

After each case example you will craft arguments of your own in response, taking care to consider the style, genre, audience, and contexts of the case example your projects respond to. These essays will be substantive pieces of writing, so please plan well in advance to dedicate time for writing them. While we will address working drafts in class workshops do not wait for those deadlines to begin writing. You will have the opportunity to revise these essays for reevaluation at the end of term (see Final Portfolio, below)

Introductory Rationale

Each time you hand in writing for feedback from me you will write a companion essay wherein you explain the logic behind your approach to each project and your decision-making process, including how the project you turned in has progressed from earlier plans and drafts. Rationales should include examples of how course readings, activities, peer work, and workshops contributed to your approach and any other factors contributing to how the project has evolved. The rationales are your opportunity to teach me about how your essay came together, to inform me about what I cannot know from reading the essay alone.

Final Portfolio

At the end of term, you will turn in a final portfolio with revisions of at least two of your three projects, a final introductory rationale, and a short essay on argument as conversation. All grades assigned to essays prior to this point are provisional and may be improved (see How Your Work Will Be Evaluated, below).

My Responsibilities for this Course

Fostering a Fun and Safe Collaborative Environment

As a discussion-based seminar, my role in this course is to design activities that have you engaged in applied learning through collaborative problem-solving (working together to figure something out), critical analysis (analysis by inquiry and interpretation) and critical making (aiming to understand a thing by making that thing).

Facilitating Workshops

As you'll see on the schedule below, we will spend a great deal of our time in writing workshops. I try to design workshops that will intervene in the writing process at a moment when you have critical questions

and are most likely to get stuck. We'll also have a "post-mortem" workshop after projects have been submitted so that we have practice looking at full drafts. I will decide on the topics for these workshops when I see what's happening in the working drafts, so please work on these with due diligence. The purpose of workshops is not to critique each other; rather, the idea is that you'll learn something about your own composing practices by looking at works-in-progress and working through challenges you might face in collaboration with others.

Making Myself Available to You Outside of Class

Every week unless otherwise noted I will make sure to be in my office (617U in the Cathedral of Learning) for drop-in one-on-one or small group conversations. While it's often helpful if I know you're coming by, feel free to stop in on a whim for questions, to look at essay drafts together, or to discuss really anything at all. I will not have office hours September 4, October 2, or November 6. I will try to figure out alternative drop-in hours those weeks.

I am also available over email (moriah.kirdy@pitt.edu), though keep in mind that my schedule is packed with teaching, meetings, and other responsibilities so I may not be able to respond immediately (I'll try to be as prompt as a I can, especially if the question is brief). If you'd like to troubleshoot moments in your drafts give me a bit of time to respond, but I'm happy to use email for this purpose. I try to keep regular "business hours" and do not typically respond to emails past 6pm unless the matter is urgent.

Providing Feedback and Evaluating Your Work

Your grade for this course is based on your sustained commitment to improving as a writer and in coming to a more robust understanding of argument as it operates in several genres of writing. If you show up and turn in projects on time and demonstrate a sustained and active engagement in course work and a desire to improve, you should do just fine in this course. If you hope to do exceptionally well, take note that I encourage and reward those who stretch themselves and are ambitious with their writing, even if your ambitions don't fully pay off in a final draft.

Having an awareness of what you are trying to do is often more important than whether your attempt was successful in the long run. For this reason, I consider what you tell me in your Introductory Rationales very seriously, and I take what you say into consideration when I evaluate your work. I will respond to your essays with your rationales in mind, so that I am always reacting to your own concerns for your writing. While I may have additional notes, questions, and suggestions, you'll often find that our concerns will be in sync.

Breakdown of Your Grade
- Active Engagement and Preparedness (15%)
- Commons Posts (10%)
- Final Portfolio (75%)
    - Final Introductory Rationale (5%)
    - Short essay on argument as conversation (10%)
    - Three Projects (20% each)

How Active Engagement and Preparedness are Evaluated

Students present and prepared for every class session who are actively engaged and respectful of others' ideas will receive full credit (an A). Occasional lapses in preparedness will lower this grade slightly (to a B/B+). If you consistently show up to class unprepared and/or are unwilling to engage in class activities your participation grade will be substantially lower (a C). If you actively disrupt the class environment (e.g. you're openly disrespectful, fall asleep in class, arrive dramatically late without notice or apology, etc.) or are often absent without good reason your participation grade will be *dramatically* lowered (to a D or F).

How Course Projects are Evaluated

Letter grades given to projects throughout the semester are provisional and are meant to give you a sense of how you are doing along the way. Provisional grades will be replaced with new letter grades based on the revisions you submit with your final portfolio (see the revision policy, below). Letter grades equate to the following:

A **Superior Attainment.** This work impresses. It is ambitious and the student pursues an idea with nuance and complexity. The writer's ambitions generally pay off or are very close to being fully realized. Writing at the sentence-level is logically sound, polished, and proofread.

B **Meritorious Attainment.** Compositions evaluated at the "B" level meet most of the expectations for the task and are moving toward nuance and complexity but may still be working something out. Some messiness at the logical and sentence levels remain.

C **Adequate Attainment.** Compositions evaluated at the "C" level reach expectations to some degree but are lacking robustness of response or a lack of adventurousness (the writer tried an "easy" approach/did the bare minimum) and need work at the sentence-level.

D **Minimal Attainment.** Compositions evaluated at the "D" level have met some expectations but have delivered something without the appropriate depth and breadth required of the task at hand, have "phoned it in" etc.

F **Failure.** Compositions evaluated at the "F" level were incomplete to the point of unreadability in relation to the assignment or were turned in dramatically late.

Grades will be assigned per following scale: A = 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 88-89, B = 83-87, B- = 80-82, C+ = 78-79, C = 73-77, C- = 70-72, D = 60-69, F = below 60.

Note: I often find that Pitt students who receive a final grade at the C level or lower can produce work at a higher level, but either don't put in the work or something else gets in the way. If that something else is a difficulty you're facing in your life, please speak with me (see "Accommodations" below) and seek the appropriate resources available to you. If you are not turning in work because you are disinterested in it, consider withdrawing. Students who receive lower than a C- must repeat Seminar in Composition.

Course Policies

Attendance

If you have prepared for class the best you can but are unable to attend for a reason outside of your control (e.g. you are very sick or some other emergency) you must communicate with me as soon as possible to let me know prior to the class you will miss or as soon as you can. While you cannot "make up" the in-class work you missed, you can always inform me in writing or during my office hours how you

continued the work of the class session even though you were not able to be there in person. Keeping me informed will always help my impression of your active engagement! If you do not communicate with me your reasons for being absent and miss four or more class sessions, you risk failing this course.

Due Dates, Extensions, and Late Work

All assignments must be turned in by the date and time they are due. For lower-stakes work penalties for late or missing work are detailed in the assignment prompts/instructions (see Box). For major projects I understand that on occasion circumstances outside of your control prevent you from turning in a project on time or from doing your best work. If you have a draft that is incomplete or not as polished as you'd hoped, explain why in your Introductory Rationale and revise (see below). Work turned in past the initial or extended due date will lower your final portfolio grade.

If something has happened/is happening (e.g. a family emergency has occurred, or you've been so sick you can't focus), you may request an extension. Extensions are not guaranteed. Extension requests must be made formally via email as soon as possible (extension requests made close to a due date will not be granted except in extenuating circumstances). New due dates will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Revision/Reevaluation

All grades provided on essay drafts throughout the semester are provisional and may be revised for the final portfolio for an improved grade. Revisions must reflect a thoughtful, ambitious, and substantive evolution of your ideas and your proficiency with the writing moves we discuss in workshops. Changes to essays that merely correct or polish sentences or respond only to my marginal feedback may be assigned the same grade as the provisional grade.

Respectful Use of Technology

Most days in this course we'll be using laptops and digital tools. Please bring your laptops to every class. Please put phones away at the start of class. If I notice you're using your computer for reasons unrelated to class work, your participation grade will be lowered (I tend not to call people out on this behavior unless you're being exceptionally disruptive, but trust me, I notice!).

Institutional Policies & Resources

These statements are furnished by the University of Pittsburgh for inclusion on all syllabi. I have included text in italics where I felt it was necessary to add to these policies from my own perspective and practice.

Accommodations

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout. *I am committed to making sure the class is accessible to all learning styles and abilities. If you have a specific concern apart from a documented disability that you believe may impact your ability to successfully complete this course, please communicate with me as soon as possible and we may be able to discuss accommodations to increase your potential for success.*

Writing Center

Located on the third floor of the O'Hara Student Center, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for undergraduate students. Although consultants do not correct, edit, or proofread papers, they can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a consultant once or regularly over the course of the semester. In some cases, your teacher may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services they offer or make an appointment by visiting www.writingcenter.pitt.edu.

Academic Integrity

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, from the February 1974 Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz or exam will be imposed. View the complete policy at www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

E-Mail Communication Statement

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (*username@pitt.edu*) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to http://accounts.pitt.edu, log into your account, click on **Edit Forwarding Addresses**, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html.)

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. I will announce changes in class and will update the Syllabus file in Box. Refer to that schedule for our most current plans. **Specific details for how to focus your attention and prepare for class will be delivered at the start of class during announcements.** If you are absent, drop me an email and I'll fill you in. If you are late, ask a fellow student on your own time. **See "Assignments & Instructions" folder in Box for assignment details.**

Tuesday, August 27 • Introductions & Syllabus	Thursday, August 29 • Read Greene, "Argument as Conversation" • Take notes and/or annotate important passages to identify both interesting content (what he's trying to say) and writerly moves (how he's saying it). • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, September 3 ● Read Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" ● Take notes on and/or annotate significant passages for key claims and the overall argument. ● Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	Thursday, September 5 ● Reread Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" ● Take notes on and/or annotate his article on writerly moves. How does he craft and structure his argument? ● Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday. *Note: add/drop ends September 6th!*
Tuesday, September 10 • Read Edbauer, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies" • Take notes on and/or annotate significant passages for key claims and the overall argument. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	Thursday, September 12 • Reread Edbauer, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies" • Take notes on and/or annotate writerly moves. How does Edbauer craft and structure her argument? • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, September 17 • Working drafts of Project 1 due to your individual course Box folder by 11:59pm Monday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59 Monday.	Thursday, September 19 • Working drafts of Project 1 due to your individual course Box folder by 11:59pm Wednesday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.

Tuesday, September 24 • Read Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains" • Take notes on significant passages for key claims and the overall argument. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, September 26** • Reread Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains" • Take notes on key writerly moves & also consider how the piece being published on the Internet impacts the argument. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, October 1 • Read Johnson, "The Glass Box and the Commonplace Book" • Take notes on significant passages for key claims and the overall argument. • Post to the Commons by 11:59 Monday.	**Thursday, October 3** • Reread Johnson, "The Glass Box and the Commonplace Book" • Take notes on and/or annotate key writerly moves. How does he craft and structure his argument (incl. for the web). How do you imagine the piece worked as a speech before Johnson reposted it on his blog? • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, October 8 • Turn in Project 1 with an Introductory Rationale to your individual course Box folder. • Do some research to flesh out your understanding of the rhetorical situation behind Carr & Johnson and think about how they are in conversation with one another. • Post to the Commons by 11:59 Monday.	**Thursday, October 10** • Reread your own Project 1 and take notes on/annotate your own effective content moments and writerly moves. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, October 15 • Working Drafts of project 2 due to your individual course Box folders by 11:59pm Monday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59 Monday.	**Thursday, October 17** • Working Drafts of project 2 due to your individual course Box folders by 11:59pm Wednesday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, October 21 • Save the two articles you plan to use for your independently researched case example to your individual course Box folder by the start of class. • Reread and take notes on and/or annotate the first article for significant passages for key claims and the overall argument. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm on Monday.	**Thursday, October 24** • Reread the first article in your chosen case and take notes on and/or annotate key writerly moves. How do these moves relate to those we've seen already in our previous case studies? • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm on Wednesday. • *Note: Monitored withdrawal requests due to the Deans office by 10/25*

Tuesday, October 29 • Reread and take notes on and/or annotate the second article you've chosen for your case example for significant passages for key claims. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, October 31** • Reread the second article in your chosen case and take notes on and/or annotate key writerly moves. How do these moves relate to those we've seen already in our previous case studies?
Tuesday, November 5 • Turn in Project 2 with an Introductory Rationale to your individual course Box folder. • Reconsider the articles you've chosen for your independently-researched case example. Do some research to flesh out your understanding of the rhetorical situation and begin thinking about how you want to craft your response. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, November 7** • Reread your own Project 2 and take notes on/annotate your own effective content moments and writerly moves. • Post to the commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, November 12 • Working Drafts of project 3 due to your individual course Box folders by 11:59pm Monday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, November 14** • Working Drafts of project 3 due to your individual course Box folders by 11:59pm Wednesday. • Post to the Commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Tuesday, November 19 • Turn in Project 3 with an Introductory Rationale to your individual course Box folder. • Working draft of short essay on argument as conversation (preface of portfolio) due by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, November 21** • Reread your own Project 3 and take notes on/annotate your own effective content moments and writerly moves. • Post to the commons by 11:59pm Wednesday.
Thanksgiving Break (Nov 24-30)	
Tuesday, December 3 • Working revision of the project you feel needs the most help due by 11:59pm Monday.	**Thursday, December 5** • Working revision of the project you feel needs the most help due by 11:59pm Monday.
Final Portfolio will be due during finals week (turn-in dates are negotiable, within reason)	