

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

Instructor
Office Location
Phone number
email address
Office Hours

English 102: Semester, Year

Course Description

This is a course about research and writing, but not in the ways with which you are most likely familiar. You will not be asked to take a position on an issue like gun control or welfare reform, then conduct library research on that issue to support that position, which you finally "write up" and call a research paper. Instead you will be reading about and arguing both with and against a large (but focused) academic question (presented in a series of readings offered in *Literacies in Context*, 2007), discover and refine your arguments (*not* in a pro/con sort of way), which you will then examine again through your own *primary* research (interviews, field observations, surveys) and further flesh out via more traditional library research.

The kind of "research" paper you develop will not be a rehashing of ideas already presented elsewhere. *Your* research paper will contain data that exist nowhere else because *you* will be the one to collect, analyze, and present this research. We call this kind of research--the process by which we conduct it, the methods we use to analyze the findings, and the text we write to present that research--[*ethnography*](#). Ethnography, according to Bonnie Stone Sustein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, is "the study of people in cultures" *and* "the text that is written based on that study." That is what you will learn to do here.

The primary purpose of this course is to further develop your skills as a reader and writer, but we will do that via means that may seem strange and even a little confusing at first. Stick with it, though. We believe you will be excited, surprised, and even a impressed by what you and your classmates come up with. I know I will.

Objectives

(1) an understanding and ability to make use of primary and secondary sources within a focused, academic argument; (2) an awareness of context and how audience and context affect a writer's rhetorical choices; (3) the rhetorical flexibility necessary to negotiate a variety of academic tasks (research, interviews, close reading) leading to a sustained argument that is convincing, informative, and well-researched; (4) an awareness of context and how our own subject positions as writers might affect our findings—and how to work through potential biases toward more effective arguments; (5) an ability to effectively report research findings in writing (via a well-researched and articulated essay) and in person (via a poster presentation at the end of the semester—Celebration of Student Writing)

Required Materials:

Carter, Shannon. *Literacies in Context*. Southlake, Texas: Fountainhead Press, 2007.

Sustein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Three-ring binder that will serve as your [Research Portfolio](#) (see below)

Disk or other means of storing digital versions of the essays and other written material you generate
(*always, always keep a backup of everything you turn in!*)

A valid, working email address that you check often (everyday)

Assignments

The ethnography is a semester-long project, completed in several stages throughout the semester and *in constant revision*, focusing on a study of a single community/subculture and exploring larger issues of literacy, texts, how texts mediate culture, and related activities.

We are working here from the assumption that undergraduate researchers—even in their first-year of college—can make meaningful contributions to the scholarly conversation. Informing this approach is also the assumption that the subject of a writing course should be *writing*—what we know about how writing works and what literacy means (literally, politically, within our society) and, perhaps even more interestingly, what we don't yet know.

You will depend on your classmates, tutors in the Writing Center, and me as readers who will help you make decisions about how to present material and how best to interest your audience, but ultimately you will be the expert on your particular study of your chosen group.

Five major writing assignments will form the core of your ethnography, and at the end of the semester those five assignments--revised and organized (and developed with additional information and insights you gain through your research) to reflect the texture of your own specific group of study (and what that specific study tells us about larger issues of literacy and literate practice)--will become one long (approximately 12-15 pages, if not more) single text.

Rather than be assigned a grade on the initial due date for each discrete piece of writing, you will have the opportunity to revise as much and as often as you need to make your writing stronger. With a complex assignment like the ethnography, you will be free to add information and observations gained over time instead of feeling that earlier assumptions and conclusions are set in stone. You can spend a lot of time developing and revising, working on certain aspects of your writing, and all of this effort and expertise will be reflected in your final project and your grade. That means that your attention to revision and your awareness of your own work habits, strengths and weaknesses will become a very important element of your writing process.

Your final course grade will be based primarily on the quality of work you include and submit in your Research Portfolio (more on that below) and your Final Ethnographic Essay (12-15 pages). The remaining items include various informal writing assignments, and your participation in the culminating event, a "Celebration of Student Writing" (more on that below, as well).

Grading Policy

Your final course grade will be based primarily on the quality of work you include and submit in your Research Portfolio (more on that below) and your Final Ethnographic Essay (10-15 pages). The remaining items include various informal writing projects and your participation in the culminating event, a "Celebration of Student Writing" (more on that below, as well).

Final Ethnographic Essay (20%): You will be working toward this final "research" paper throughout the term. Everything you read, write, collect, discuss, analyze, report, and reflect on will build up to this important and complex project. Most of the "behind the scenes" materials documenting and allowing your research and writing processes throughout the development of

your Final Ethnographic Essay will be housed in your "Research Portfolio" which, by the very end of the term, will be revised again in preparation for a much larger audience: *the entire school!* (see "[Celebration of Student Writing](#)" below). Don't be too concerned about this. When it is time, you will be ready. That's what we're here for!

[Research Portfolio \(20%\)](#): The Research Portfolio will "house both the process and the product of [your] fieldwork. . . . As you assemble and revise your portfolio, you'll develop a behind-the-scenes account of the story of your research, which you'll want to share with others. Naturally, the research portfolio will include your final ethnographic essay, but your selection will also show artifacts from the thinking process that led to this project. You'll want to represent selections from the reading, writing, and materials you've relied on along the way: writing exercises, fieldnotes, interview questions, charts, methods of analysis, and whatever helped you think your way through final written project" (*FieldWorking*, 56-57). "To keep track of your project," Sustain and Chiseri-Strater suggest, "you'll move back and forth among four key activities: collecting, selecting, reflecting, and projecting" (57). See *FieldWorking* for much more about how (and why) to begin this process and negotiate these activities (56-58; 112; 167-168; 220; 300; 352; 412; 463)

Writing Assignment 1 (10%): Making use of Deborah Brandt's concept "Sponsors of Literacy" (Chapter 2, *Literacies in Context*), this essay calls upon you to reconstruct key moments in your literacy history by identifying the agents sponsoring this literacy and narrating the way literacy has "pursued" you in a variety of contexts (see *Literacies in Context*, 39, for full description).

Writing Assignment 2 (10%): Making use of the readings presented in Chapter 3 of *Literacies in Context*, this essay calls upon you to describe literacy practices as they function in a particular place (in your church, at your workplace, in your home, in a store you frequent, or someplace else). (see *Literacies in Context*, 113, for full description)

Writing Assignment 3 (10%): Making use of the readings presented in Chapter 4 of *Literacies in Context*, this essay calls upon you to examine not only your own literacy practices as you've experienced and developed them but to compare these experiences with what formal literacy instruction often asks of writers and readers. (see *Literacies in Context*, 213, for full description)

[Research Proposal \(10%\)](#): Before you get too far with your ethnographic project, you will be expected to articulate your research plan--that is, what do you want to know, why is it important, what research methods will you use to obtain the information you need, why is the proposed research site the most appropriate one for your project's goals, and how will your research project--as proposed--extend/resist/otherwise make use of the readings and key arguments presented in *Literacies in Context* (refer again to WA1-3). Don't forget about those [important permissions](#) (which we will discuss at some length later).

Informal Writing Assignments (10%): You will be expected to develop several informal writing projects, including **Reflective Memos** (through which you reflect on your data collection process and/or plans for your Final Ethnographic Project and/or your Research Portfolio) and journal and other freewriting exercises.

[Celebration of Student Writing \(10%\)](#): At the end of the term (during finals week), you will bring your ready-for-presentation Research Portfolios and an outline of your Final Ethnographic Project to one of several tables making up the presentation area of this Celebration. There during your scheduled hour, you will share your hard work with faculty, students, and administrators throughout our university. Modeled after the celebration by the same name held at Eastern Michigan University (see <http://www.emich.edu/english/fycomp/celebration/index.htm>), our own "Celebration of Student Writing" at Texas A&M-Commerce will serve as the culminating activity for many sections of English 102 and even a few sections of English 100 and 101.

Writing Center

The Writing Center (or the “Communication Skills Center”) offers writers free, one-on-one assistance. We welcome all writers, majors, and disciplines—undergraduate and graduate students alike. In fact, we work from the premise that all writers, no matter their ability level, benefit from the feedback of knowledgeable readers. The Writing Center staff is trained to provide writers with just this service. In short, we are here to help you help yourself. In order to ensure the most effective session possible, we offer visitors the following suggestions: (1) Get started on your writing project early, and visit the Writing Center at least one day before your final draft is due. You will need time to work with the ideas and suggestions generated in your tutorial sessions. (2) Bring a written copy of your assignment, any relevant readings, and one or two specific questions or concerns you would like to discuss with us. We are located in the Hall of Languages, Room 103 (903-886-5280) and online at <<http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/litlang/CSC/index.htm>>.

Academic Honesty

The official departmental policy: “Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b [1,2,3])

If you ever have any questions about a particular use of a source, always ask your instructor. They want you to avoid plagiarism, too, so they will help you do so whenever and wherever they can. Do what you can to take advantage of this support—to look innocent in addition to being innocent when it comes to charges of plagiarism.

On University-Sanctioned Activities

To accommodate students who participate in university-sanctioned activities, the First-Year Composition Program offers sections of this course at various times of the day and week. If you think that this course may conflict with a university-sanctioned activity in which you are involved—athletics, etc.—please see me after class today.

Additional Official Statements

Student Conduct: All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. In addition, you are requested to turn off your cell phones before entering the classroom. Common courtesy says you do not receive or answer calls during class. If there is an emergency that requires you to leave your phone on, talk to me about it beforehand and switch the phone to vibrate so you don't surprise me when you leave class to take a call and you don't interrupt class when the call comes in. Also, Instant/Text Messaging is off limits.

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement: Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee. For more information, please contact the Director of Disability Resources and Services, Halladay Student Services Building, Room 303D, 903.886.5835.

Tentative Schedule

<i>This schedule is subject to change. Read your syllabus daily. It is the key to knowing where we are.</i>

Schedule

Literacies in Context (LC); FieldWorking (FW)

Week 1: Gee, “Literacies and Traditions”

Week 2: Brandt (LC); Before You Read Questions

Week 3: Discuss Brandt via After You Read Questions; Literacy Sponsors via Brandt’s script

Week 4: Assign WA1(Sponsors of Literacy); discuss plans for writing

Week 5: Peer Review WA1; Barton and Hamilton (LC)

Week 6: WA1 due; Read Moss (LC); Read Mirabelli (LC)

Week 7: Assign WA2; Read Resnick (LC); Read Smith and Willhelm (LC); Groundwork Activity on page 55 in FW; **introduce ethnography**

Week 8: Peer Review WA2; Read 1-24 in FW; Assign WA3; Box 1 (pp. 6-7), Box 2 (p. 15) in FW

Week 9: Read 56-64 in FW; Research Proposals; Box 5 (p. 84 in FW); WA2 due; first set of fieldnotes due (fieldnotes will be turned in every other week); Read 25-55 in FW

SPRING BREAK

Week 10: WA3 due; 93-115; 175-208 in FW; Box 17 in FW

Week 11: 307-333; 335-338; 340-341; and 350-357 in FW; Assign Entry Narrative; 143-155 in FW

Week 12: Read 209-220; 220-236 and 280-286 in FW; Box 25 in FW; Assign Layers of Culture Essay

Week 13: Read 292-300 in FW; Box 24; Entry Narrative Due; Read 412-414 in FW

Week 14: Read 419-431 in FW; questions on page 429 (FW); Read 432-439; questions on page 432 (FW); Layers of Culture Essay due

Week 15: Prepare Research Portfolio for Presentation (Celebration of Student Writing); Peer review final papers

Finals Week: "Celebration of Student Writing" Research Portfolio, including final paper, due