

**Who's Who, and Who Gets to Decide:  
Writing About Identity**  
Expository Writing 10, Summer 2015

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**Course Description:** When people pass you on the street, what do they see? How would you describe yourself to a stranger -- and how would your best friend, your mother, or your teacher describe you? In this course, we will explore our self-constructed and socially assigned identities, from ethnicities and sexual orientations to professions and hobbies. In order to expose ourselves to the widest possible variety of perspectives on identity, we will read works from many different genres, including autobiographical narratives, graphic novels, scientific articles, and popular journalism. In addition to writing experiments in each of these genres, you will also produce longer essays (see "Major Assignments" below) that will introduce you to college-level principles of rhetoric, organization, and style. By the end of this course, you will be able to write confidently in a number of nonfictional modes, produce a research paper that provides compelling evidence for an original argument, and engage with a diverse assortment of discourses about personal and social identity.

**Required Texts:** Course packet; see course schedule for specific texts.

**Major Assignments:** You will write every day in this class, but most of these assignments will be relatively short, involving spontaneous reflections or experiments with a particular style or mode. There are three more complex assignments that will require more foresight on your part:

Rhetorical Analysis (800-1200 words). Choose an object that has played a significant role in the development of your (or someone else's) group identity. Analyze the way this object works as a piece of rhetoric: what does it "say" to its owner? To other members of the group? To outsiders? How do the formal and physical features of the object help communicate this message? As you build and revise this essay, you will work on constructing a cohesive argument that develops from a central thesis statement.

Museum Exhibition (600-900 words). Curate an exhibition of visual art that relates to an identity category of your choice. The artworks may be selected from the De Young Museum, the Cantor Arts Center, or the online collections of other major museums. Choose 6-8 pieces and arrange them in a meaningful sequence: how would you like a museum visitor to encounter these

artworks? Does the exhibition have a narrative? Is it organized into smaller subcategories? Then write a paragraph (approximately 100 words) about each of the artworks, framing the visitor's encounter with the image: what is it most important for the viewer to know? The historical context of the work? The work's place in the artist's career? Its symbolic resonances? When you have finished putting together your exhibition, you will present it to your classmates.

Research-Based Argument (1500-2100 words). For this final essay, you will choose an identity-related topic or question that intrigues you and research what has already been said on the subject. More than simply reporting on the current state of your topic, though, you will construct a thesis that makes an original intervention into the field. The finished product will position your argument in the context of others' work, provide appropriate evidence (whether interpretive or empirical) for your claim, and establish your ethos as a writer through stylistic choices appropriate to your audience. The research portion of your argument will be supported through class trips to Green Library, while peer review and individual conferences with your instructor and TAs will help you perfect the style and structure of your essay.

**Conduct:** This is a discussion-based class, and our readings will often touch upon sensitive or politically charged subjects. It is therefore crucial that you treat your classmates and their arguments respectfully, generously, and thoughtfully. To engage fully in our conversations, you will need to reflect on the limitations of your own perspective (since each of us comes from a unique and bounded social position) and to expand that perspective by listening to others. This may be an uncomfortable process at times, requiring you to rethink your own cultural commitments and perhaps even your sense of self; I encourage you to keep yourself open to these changes. If, however, you ever feel unsafe because of something I, your classmates, or your TAs have done, please talk to me or an administrator so we can ensure that you have a positive experience at SPCS.

### **Schedule:**

June 22: What is identity? How do we talk about it in everyday contexts, and in scholarly contexts? Introduction to intersectionality. Reading: "The Combahee River Collective Statement."

Afternoon assignment: Write a short (2 pages max) personal account of an experience that made you reflect on or reconsider your identity categories.

June 23: Personal narratives of identity, part 1. Reading: selections from Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*.

Afternoon assignment: Retell a narrative (2 pages max) that your family tells or used to tell when you were a child. The narrative can be a myth, a fairy tale, a historical event, or a true

story from your family's history. Feel free to add your own elements in the retelling. Either during the story or in a separate section, speculate on why this narrative is so important to your family. How does it help to establish your family's identity?

June 24: Personal narratives of identity, part 2. Reading: selections from Bechdel, *Fun Home*.

Afternoon assignment: Write a dialogue between yourself as a child and your current self. How do you understand your identity right now? How is this understanding different from what you believed when you were, say, 5 years old?

June 25: Personal narratives, part 3: family identity and its intersections. Guest lecture: Vanessa Seals, Ph.D. candidate, Stanford University. Draft a thesis for your rhetorical analysis; what makes a good thesis?

Afternoon assignment: Complete a draft of your rhetorical analysis.

June 26: Rhetorical analysis workshop: small-group peer review of your drafts. What makes a well-structured essay?

Afternoon assignment: Revise and complete your rhetorical analysis.

June 29: Scientific rhetoric, part 1: race. Reading: selections from Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, and Feldman, "The Biology of Ancestry: DNA, Genomic Variation, and Race."

Afternoon assignment: Find a popular science article (in a major newspaper, in a newsmagazine, or on a major website) and write a Gouldian analysis (1-2 pages) of its social implications.

June 30: Scientific rhetoric, part 2: gender. Reading: selections from Brizendine, *The Female Brain*, and Fine, *Delusions of Gender*.

Afternoon assignment: Read Quenqua, "They're, Like, Way Ahead of the Curve" and write a short (1-2 pages) description and analysis of a linguistic feature (a word, a grammatical feature, an accent) that helps to define a particular identity group.

July 1: Scientific rhetoric, part 3: psychology. Reading: Allen Frances, "DSM 5 is Guide Not Bible" (*Psychology Today*); Ian Hacking, "Lost in the Forest" (*London Review of Books*)

Afternoon assignment: Take a personality assessment and write an essay about the results. How does the test implicitly categorize identity? How do its categories intersect with the personal and cultural understandings of identity we've encountered so far?

July 2: Excursion to the Cantor Arts Center. Be on the lookout for pieces to include in your exhibition!

Afternoon assignment: Decide on the artworks to include in your exhibition, and begin drafting the text for each piece.

July 3: Finish writing and sequencing your exhibition.

Afternoon assignment: Peer presentations and feedback; individual conferences with instructor.

July 6: Structured brainstorming to generate a thesis and preliminary outline for your research-based argument. Mini-workshop on finding and evaluating sources.

Afternoon assignment: Visit Green Library and find at least three sources for your final paper. Write a paragraph summarizing each source and how it will be useful for your paper (annotated bibliography).

July 7: MEET IN RESIDENCE. Revise your outline to incorporate the evidence you found yesterday, and complete a draft of your paper.

Afternoon assignment: Pair work: read your partner's draft and play devil's advocate with his or her argument. What counterevidence can you offer? What holes can you poke in his or her claims? Make detailed notes about any revisions you need to make.

July 8: Mini-presentations on your papers so far. What is your argument right now? What do you still feel is missing or incomplete? Group discussion of strategies for revision.

Afternoon assignment: Fill out camp evaluations (30 mins) and revise your paper.

July 9: MEET IN RESIDENCE. Final reflections. How has your understanding of identity changed over the last three weeks? What has remained the same? How will you apply your new writing skills, and your new conceptual framework for identity, over the coming year? Individual conferences with instructor. Make any last touch-ups to your paper, and turn it in.

Afternoon assignment: Select a piece to include in our course collection. Congratulations: you're done!