

**ENGLISH 110: COLLEGE WRITING
EVOLUTION, GENETICS, CULTURE
(Linked to Contemporary Issues in Science)
Tues/Thurs 4:30 – 6:20**

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In 2007, NBC launched “The Science of Love,” a reality TV show that set personal preference against ‘scientific expertise.’ The network invited former NFL player Adam Johnson to set a woman of his choice against the woman ‘science’ chose. The plotting was messy and the show failed, but the question was clear: does science know more about us than we do? That a primetime dating show could ask this shows just how pervasive scientific thinking has become in American culture. Dating. Insurance policies. *The Bell Curve*. Selective Abortion. Eugenics. The cultural reaches of this scientific discourse can certainly be silly, but they are often profound and at times disturbing.

All the while, these theories have remained the sites of contentious debate. Despite the tremendous cultural reach of evolutionary and genetic theory, scientists, educators and theologians continue to dispute the contours and terms of the discussion. We’re still arguing over what these theories mean, whether they’re right, and exactly how far they should extend. On one hand, evolution and genetic theory have become so ubiquitous that they’ve infiltrated our movies, our books, our schools, and our love lives; on the other hand, creationists have gained a foothold in American politics and schools claiming that evolution is still a “theory,” disavowing genetic proof and arguing we ought to be suspicious.

In this course, discussions of evolution and genetics will help us mine the intersection of science and writing: What is science writing and how does it work? How is it topically, structurally, linguistically, and syntactically unique? How does scientific rhetoric inform social rhetoric? What happens in that transfer? Examining “evolution” and “genetics” across a variety of media and fields (science, history, literature, education, cultural studies) will allow students to ask larger questions and begin making connections across disciplines – the foundation of a liberal arts education. Writing will be the linchpin of these discussions. As students learn to recognize and interrogate scientific discourse in its various modes and incarnations, they will also develop their own rhetorical expertise; an understanding of science-inflected textual strategies will grow in tandem with the students’ own writing skills. This course uses a variety of writing assignments to help students form coherent and articulate stances on these issues, developing skills that are both general in nature and specifically targeted at students interested in the sciences.

Learning Goals. By the end of this class, students should be able to:

- Recognize an argument (and specifically the thesis of that argument).
- Create solid arguments and theses of their own.
- Understand and apply the process of revision.
- Find and incorporate secondary source material into their own writing.
- Be able to speak about the conventions, possibilities, and limitations of writing in different disciplines (e.g. natural sciences vs. social sciences).

Assignments

Essay #1: Analyzing Scientific Rhetoric (4-5 pages)

Rough Draft Due: October 12

Final Draft Due: October 19

Essay #2: Analysis of Cultural Discourse (4-5 pages)

Rough Draft Due: Nov 2

Final Draft Due: Nov 9

Pre Essay #3 Assignment: The Literature Review (4 pages)

Due: Nov 30

Essay #4: Research paper (8 – 10 pages)

Due Dec 16

Required Texts and Supplies:

Bedford Basics: A Workbook for Writers [ISBN: 0 312 15457 7]

Understanding Scientific Prose by Jack Selzer

All readings that are not from these texts will be posted on blackboard or wordpress

Note about Linked Course:

This is a linked course. This means the themes and discussions in this course are specifically intended to intersect with and compliment the issues in your Contemporary Issues in Science class. This also means that if you want to drop this course, you also need to drop Contemporary Issues in Science.

Grading

• In-class participation (20%):

I will be assessing you on your in-class engagement, respectful engagement with texts, peers and me, active participation, and in-class assignments (free-writes, quizzes, mini-presentations, etc). You must also come with your homework (e.g. writing mechanics/grammar assignments) complete. I consider in-class participation a key element of your learning. In-class assignments cannot be made up at a later time. As such, I expect that you will attend class regularly.

Presentation on Writing Mechanics and Grammar (5% of the 20% in-class participation grade):

These will be short presentations in which you **creatively** present which ever aspect of grammar we are covering for the day. Your presentation will last **ten minutes with five minutes afterward for questions** (Note: ten minutes is both shorter and longer than you think. Plan well.). *Bedford Basics* is a good starting place for a discussion of your topic, but I encourage you to look online for other discussions. **Thinking about this some days ahead of time will be well worth your while.**

Things to consider when planning

- What are the most basic and important features of this topic?
- What are the most relevant applications? Where would you be likely to see these issues? In what kind of writing and at what point in an essay?
- Where does it get confusing? Why?
- What are the most difficult/unexpected aspects of this topic? Examples of trouble spots would be excellent for the class. Please come up with your own. They can be based on the ones in the homework, but shouldn't be exactly the same.

** Please *do not* simply use the examples from the book. I expect you to find your own examples either from your own understanding of the grammatical subject or from the web. This will show me that you really understand the topic.

What can I do?

BE CREATIVE. You can write a comic, come up with a skit, write a song, create a character who embodies the mistake, write very silly but instructive examples, create useful diagrams for how to navigate your way out of the problem, write a useful how-to, etc.

The more fun you have with this and the more thoughtful you are, the better it will be for both you and your classmates.

If you have an issue with any aspect of the in-class participation requirement, please come speak with me.

You are responsible for any work you missed due to absences.

• Homework (15%):

Some homework will be handed in as a hardcopy; some will be digital. When your homework is digital, it will be accompanied by a “(blog)” indicator. On blog days, you will post on our class website: <http://altschuler110evolution.wordpress.com/>. You will need to sign up for a wordpress account in order to post. Please use your full name: e.g. fscottfitzgerald so that everyone involved in the class can easily recognize you.

• First Essay (20%):

You must bring two copies of your essay on the day the rough draft is due or you will lose 1/3 of a grade from the final essay.

• Second Essay (20%)

You must bring two copies of your essay on the day the rough draft is due or you will lose 1/3 of a grade from the final essay.

• Third Essay (25%)

You must bring two copies of your literature review on the day it is due or you will lose 1/3 of a grade from the final essay.

Rules and Expectations:

- 1) Respect. The classroom must be a safe space in order for fruitful learning to take place. I absolutely expect you to respect the material, each other and me. If you are unable to do so, you will be asked to leave, and you will not be able to make up any assessments that occur during the rest of that class period.
(this *includes* turning off cell phones during class, not chatting with your friends during discussion, posting respectfully on blackboard, etc).
- 2) Plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when you use someone else’s ideas or words as your own. You must clearly indicate (through citation or reference) whose words you are using if you have not come up with the material or ideas yourself. This is also true for paraphrasing and summarizing. If you are confused, please ask me. It is always better to cite too much than too little. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students who plagiarize will automatically fail the paper and risk failing the class. Not only will your act of plagiarism be marked on your permanent record, but a second act of plagiarism could lead to a suspension or dismissal. Here is CUNY’s academic integrity policy: <http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>.
- 3) Late Papers. If you are having a personal problem and are worried you will not be able to complete a paper on time, please speak with me BEFORE your paper is due. Papers will be down-graded a half a grade for every day they

are late. Both papers must be turned in before you can receive a grade for the class.

- 4) Materials. I expect you to bring all relevant materials to class each day we meet. This includes your binder, paper, pen, and any book we will be using that day in class.

The Writing Center: Located in Kiely Hall 229, tutors there are trained to help you revise your writing at various stages. If you believe you need additional help with your writing, or if I ask you to set up a regular meeting with a tutor, you should make an appointment at least one week prior to when an assignment is due. You can also get online help by visiting their website at <http://qcpages.qc.edu/qcsw>.

Special Accomodation: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870 and please inform me.

Schedule:

* Subject to change*

The dates below indicate the days on which the texts and/or assignments are due. We may or may not get to discussing them that day, but it is my expectation that you will have read the texts, will have written your homework assignments, and will be fully prepared to participate in class discussion.

These selections are subject to change, and you are responsible for keeping up with these changes.

Tues, Aug 31 – Familiarization with the Discussion, Popular Science Writing
Introduction

Thurs, Sept 2

Excerpt from Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*

Read p. 83-86 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3 on p. 87-90.

Tues, Sept 7

Excerpt from Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*

Thurs, Sept 9 – No Classes –

Tues, Sept 14 – The Academic Debate

Excerpt from Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*.

Excerpt from Sternly, *Dawkins vs. Gould: Survival of the Fittest*.

Thurs, Sept 16

Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin. "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm" (in Selzer)

Write a 300 word description of Gould and Lewontin's rhetorical strategies using textual evidence.

Read p. 91-92 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 9-1, 9-2, 9-3 and 9-4 on p. 93-96.

Tues, Sept 21 – Analysis of Scientific Rhetoric, Thesis Statements

Read first article from Selzer

Write a 150-word summary of article. Please begin by identifying the thesis statement of the article and rephrasing it in your own words.

Thurs, Sept 23

Read second article from Selzer

Write a 150-word summary of article. Please begin by identifying the thesis statement of the article and rephrasing it in your own words.

Read p. 57-67 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 5-1 and 5-2 on p. 59-60.

Tues, Sept 28 – Analysis of Scientific Rhetoric, Thesis Statements, Argument

Read third article from Selzer

Write a 150-word summary of article. Please begin by identifying the thesis statement of the article and rephrasing it in your own words.

Thurs, Sept 30

Read fourth article from Selzer

Write a 150-word summary of article. Please begin by identifying the thesis statement of the article and rephrasing it in your own words.

Read p. 73-77 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 7-1, 7-2, 7-3 and 74 on p. 79-82.

Tues, Oct 5 – Cultural Rhetoric

Read first half of *Inherit the Wind*.

You will need to have decided by this day which two articles you're using for your essay. For those two articles, please write another 150 words identifying two elements that you thought were particularly strong about the essay and one or two that you thought were weaker, problematic, unhelpful, or wrong.

Thurs, Oct 7

Finish *Inherit the Wind*

Read p. 97-98 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 10-1, 10-2, and 10-3 p. 99-101.

Tues, Oct 12

**** ROUGH DRAFT OF FIRST PAPER DUE ****

Please bring two hardcopies of your rough draft

Thurs, Oct 14 – Cultural and Social Science Rhetoric, Uses of Evidence

Read excerpt from *The Bell Curve*

**** Class cancelled for individual meetings ****

Tues, Oct 19

****Essay #1 Due****

Thurs, Oct 21

Read excerpt from Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*

Read excerpt from *The Darwin Awards*

Read p. 103-4 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercises 11-1 and 11-2.

Tues, Oct 26

Excerpts from Jena Pincott, Nancy Etcoff, and Joe Quirk

Read p. 109-111 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercise 12-1 and 12-3.

Thurs, Oct 28 – Research, Inclusion of Secondary Sources

****Library Visit** Meet in the lobby of the library.**

Find and annotate a crucial passage from your chosen text for **Essay #2**; blog about your preliminary thoughts on the text you have chosen and the assignment. Come in prepared to share with the class.

Tues, Nov 2

****Rough Draft Essay #2****

Thurs, Nov 4

Excerpt *Which Tests for My Unborn Baby: Ultrasound and Other Prenatal Tests*

Read p. 117-8 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercise 13-1 and 13-2.

Tues, Nov 9

****Final Draft Paper #2****

Thurs, Nov 11

Excerpt *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights*

Excerpt *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*

****Begin thinking about final paper****

Tues, Nov 16 – Identifying the debate, how to find a topic

Excerpt *Sex and War: How Biology Explains Warfare and Terrorism and Offers a Path to a Safer World*

Excerpt *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters: From Dating, Shopping, and Praying to Going to War and Becoming a Billionaire-- Two Evolutionary Psychologists Explain Why We Do What We Do*

Thurs, Nov 18

Excerpt from Lewontin, R.C., Rose, S. & Kamin, L. [*Biology, Ideology and Human Nature: Not In Our Genes*](#)

Excerpt from [*The Gene Illusion: Genetic Research in Psychiatry and Psychology Under the Microscope*](#).

Tues, Nov 23 – Evaluating sources and relevance

Excerpt from *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*

****By this date, you should have picked a topic for your final paper and done some preliminary searching for research****

Spend time in class discussing “literature review” as a form.

Thurs, Nov 25 – Classes cancelled, Thanksgiving break –

Tues, Nov 30 – Finding your own intervention, building an argument

“Misbehavior: How Stephen Jay Gould is wrong about evolution.”

*****“Literature Review” Due.***** This will be part of your final paper. Please see instructions on how to write a literature review.

Thurs, Dec 2

“Why do some people hate evolutionary psychology?” by Edward H. Hagen.

Read Hagen’s Evolutionary Psychology [FAQ](#) which responds to criticisms of Evolutionary Psychology (online)

Tues, Dec 7 – Pulling it together

Write 500 words on how you are going to use the literature review to build your argument.

Read p. 131-2 and 137-9 in *Bedford Basics* and do exercise 15-2, 15-3, 16-1 and 16-2.

Thurs, Dec 9

Bring in a hardcopy of what you have so far.

Thurs, Dec 16

**** FINAL PAPER DUE BY NOON.****

No late papers accepted. Please slip them under my door