FIRST-YEAR WRITING

417 Barnard Hall
212-854-2116

Mission
First-Year Writing (FYW) courses invite students into the vibrant scholarly life of the college. Working in small, discussion-based seminar classes over the course of one semester, we read challenging literary texts and critical scholarship, helping students to develop fundamental skills in analysis and academic writing that allow them to take their place in vitally important scholarly conversations. Students may choose from a variety of special topics that focus on a particular literary tradition, theme, or phenomenon (see course descriptions for details).

Student Learning Outcomes
Students who successfully complete this one-semester course should be able to:

closely analyze evidence to develop persuasive claims
develop claims into sophisticated, consequential ideas
communicate ideas clearly through well-organized, lucid writing
develop skills in critical reading and academic writing that transfer to courses across the curriculum
conduct interdisciplinary research to ground literary works in different contexts (historical, theoretical, etc.)
document sources and incorporate scholarship into original analytical arguments
avoid plagiarism and other academic violations of Barnard’s Honor Code
gain confidence in speaking as well as writing skills in a small seminar setting

2020-21 Faculty
Director
Wendy Schor-Haim (Senior Lecturer in English)

Associate Director
Cecelia Lie-Spahn (Lecturer in English; Director, First-Year Writing Workshop Program)

Lecturers
Meredith Benjamin
Benjamin Breyer
Vrinda Condillac
Andrew Lynn
Alexandra Watson

Post-Doctoral Fellows
Duygu Ula (Post-Doctoral Fellow in First-Year Writing)
Penelope Meyers Usher (Post-Doctoral Fellow in First-Year Writing and First-Year Writing Workshop)

Adjunct Lecturers
Kristi Cassaro
Monica Cohen
Mary Helen Kolisnyk
Linn Cary Mehta
Jennifer Rosenthal

Adjunct Associates
Elizabeth Auran
Francesca Ochoa

Nina Sharma

Every Barnard first-year student is required to take a First-Year Writing course during her first or second semester at Barnard.

Transfer students who did not pass a satisfactory course at their previous institution are not required to take First-Year Writing, but must take ENGL BC3103 The Art of the Essay or ENGL BC3104 The Art of the Essay or a 3-point literature course (not a creative writing course) from the Barnard English department offerings.

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First-Year Writing: Critical Conversations

First-Year Writing (FYW) courses invite students into the vibrant scholarly life of the college. Working in small, discussion-based seminar classes over the course of one semester, we read challenging literary texts and critical scholarship, helping students to develop fundamental skills in analysis and academic writing that allow them to take their place in vitally important scholarly conversations. Students may choose from a variety of special topics that focus on a particular literary tradition, theme, or phenomenon (see course descriptions for details).

A “critical conversation” is a conversation about ideas. It is sophisticated and thoughtful rather than one-sided and simplistic; it’s not about finding one right answer but rather about closely analyzing all of the evidence at hand and discovering something meaningful. By communicating what you discover clearly and cogently, you add to the broader scholarly conversation. When engaged in a critical conversation with other scholars, you consider their ideas in ways that help you develop your own thinking, rather than merely agreeing or disagreeing with what others have to say. The critical reading, discussion, and academic writing skills we focus on in First-Year Writing provide a foundation that crosses disciplinary boundaries and will help you in all of your courses.

FYWB BC1100 Field Too Large: War, City, System. 3.00 points.
How does one represent things that seem too large, or too complex, to understand? What rhetorical strategies of compression, exemplification, typification, or visualization do we need to make such events or objects comprehensible? And what sorts of risks - aesthetic, ethical, political – do we run in trying to do so? In this course, we’ll move through a number of writers who have grappled with these basic problems of representation, focusing our attention on three particular kinds of excessively large objects: wars, cities, and economic systems. Objects in this course may include: literature from Caryl Churchill, Teju Cole, Arthur Conan Doyle, Amitav Ghosh, Patricia Highsmith, Homer, Jamaica Kincaid, Edgar Allan Poe, and Virginia Woolf; maps from Charles Joseph Minard and John Snow; criticism and theory from Jane Jacobs, Immanuel Kant, Georg Lukács, Franco Moretti, Georg Simmel, Susan Sontag, and Raymond Williams. Course costs will not exceed $30

Fall 2020: FYWB BC1100

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FYWB BC1101 From Wyfman to Womxn: What is a Woman?. 3.00 points.
Our class conversations will consider the reductive, often polarized ways in which ‘woman’ has been constructed in both our literary history and culture as well as how she has resisted these constructions; we will also interrogate the very categories of ‘women’ and ‘culture’ themselves. Our readings of our texts will expose and trouble traditional dichotomies that essentialize, marginalize, and consign women to a fixed place. Together we will explore a more diversified range of intellectual and experiential possibilities and discover how literature and theory can help us reconstitute and complicate received notions about gender, race, femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. Topics will include reproductive power and the body, courtship, literary and voice, consent and bodily autonomy. Texts are subject to change, but will likely include a selection from the following list: works by Jamaica Kincaid, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, Kristen Roupenian, Eliza Haywood, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ovid, Luisa Valenzuela, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. Critical scholarship sources may include Sara Ahmed, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Nancy Chodorow, Mary Ann Doane, Judith Butler, and Kate Bornstein. All course materials will be available in PDF and are free of charge.

FYWB BC1102 Leaving Home. 3.00 points.
Globally speaking, natural disasters, long-term climate change, war, religious difference, and economic hardship have forced tens of millions of people to leave their homelands in the last hundred years plus. This class will examine the ways that writers have depicted the refugee and émigré experience as it pertains to settlement in the Mediterranean region during this time period. Course readings will include Ali Fitzgerald, Malika Mokeddem and Mohsin Hamid, among others, as well as documents relating to the current migrant crisis in the European Union. Some of the themes that we will discuss using the class readings are cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, multiple identities, and transnationalism.

FYWB BC1103 Global Tales of Magic and Wonder. 3.00 points.
How does the imagination allow us to escape, transcend or express the outsized truths of reality when we are in crisis? In this course, we will read novels and short stories and explore the ways writers use magical realism both to depict us and to reflect moments when the actual feels unreal. Reading works by such authors as Lewis Carroll, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Marquez, Cynthia Ozick, Haruki Murakami, Italo Calvino, Erin Morgenstern, and Ben Okri, we delve into global tales of magic and wonder. We discover how these authors use magical realism to better express the truths of their cultures and nations; how a form that escapes the boundaries of the real can allow authors to challenge their societies’ political and social restraints; and how magical realism allows us to better understand the depth of others’ experiences and to imagine divergent, liberating realities. Writing essays, students will hone their analytical skills and, in writing short works of magical realism, students will discover creative ways to reflect their own experiences.

FYWB BC1104 Subverting the Script. 3.00 points.
In this course we will read texts by feminist and queer authors that complicate and subvert mainstream and dominant “scripts” about gender, sexuality, race, nation, class and migration. What kinds of narratives do mainstream ideas regarding these categories leave out? How have authors resisted erasure through queering and subverting mainstream categories? How might we, as readers and critical thinkers, “queer the script” through our scholarly practice? Drawing on queer and feminist scholarship that calls for a radical restructuring of the ways we see and shape our worlds, we will consider how authors push back against dominant ideologies through literary, nonfiction, scholarly, artistic and cinematic works. Texts are subject to change, but will likely include a selection from the following list: works by Virginia Woolf, Carmen Maria Machado, Maggie Nelson, Audre Lorde, Jeanette Winterson, N.K. Jemisin, Celine Sciamma and Cheryl Dunye, and critical theory by Laura Mulvey, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. Course costs will not exceed $30; access to books/texts can also be made available to students who need them free of charge.
FYWB BC1105 Resisting the Single Story. 3.00 points.
In her TED Talk 'The Danger of a Single Story,' novelist Chimamanda Adichie challenges us to confront the power of stories: while centering a 'single story' engenders stereotypes and simplistic thinking, acknowledging many stories compels empathy and complex thinking. In this section of First-Year Writing, we will read and write about texts that use unreliable narrators, dramatic irony, and flawed protagonists to engage complex issues of voice, perspective, and narrative. These texts will include literary works by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Herman Melville, Nella Larsen, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, and Layli Long Soldier; and critical works by Frantz Fanon, Judith Butler, bell hooks, and others. You'll need two books for this class: Toni Morrison's Jazz, and Layli Long Soldier's Whereas; costs will not exceed $30.

FYWB BC1106 Seeing, Surveilling, and Performing. 3.00 points.
In this course, we will read texts that raise questions about how gender, race, class, and sexuality are performed under the surveillance of culture. We will discuss not only how performance helps to create and stabilize categories that include and exclude, but also how performance can disrupt and destabilize these categories. Literary texts will include Passing by Nella Larsen, Fantomina by Eliza Haywood, poems by Ovid, and the film Paris is Burning. Secondary texts will include Sara Ahmed, Talia Bettcher, Judith Butler, Mary Ann Doane, W.E.B Dubois, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Jack Halberstam, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Laura Mulvey, and James C. Scott.

FYWB BC1107 American Exceptionalism. 3.00 points.
In this course we probe the ideology of American ‘exceptionalism.’ We treat the literary history of this idea as a transtemporal conversation involving its founding architects, experimental reformers, and ardent critics concerned with the question of what should be valued on the American continent and within American experience. We become cartographers of this conversation and interlocutors within it, as we explore how habits of conceiving truth, power, and the relationship of human beings to the natural world have controlled what counts as exceptional and what ordinary. Where should we direct our awe? We approach our subject through a theoretical lens that combines elements of pragmatism, ordinary language philosophy, and feminism. Core readings will include James Baldwin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Audre Lorde, and Henry David Thoreau. Cost of materials will not exceed $30.

FYWB BC1108 The Body as Border. 3.00 points.
In our course, we'll examine the legacy of the body as a boundary that defines and separates categories like self and other, sanctioned and forbidden, and male and female. How and why has the body become the site of difference and distinction? What happens when a body crosses boundaries and collapses categories -- what is threatened, what made possible? Readings will likely include John Milton's Paradise Lost, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Nella Larsen's Passing, Akwaeke Emezi's 'Who is Like God?', and essays and articles by scholars including Susan Stryker, bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen.
FYWB BC1110 Women and Comedy. 3.00 points.

'What a language it is, the laughter of women, high-flying and subversive. Long before law and scripture we heard the laughter, we understood freedom.' -Lisel Mueller 'I'm not funny, what I am is brave.' - Lucille Ball

This course focuses on the intersection between comedy and gender, race, class and sexuality. We will explore laughter as a subversive act and how the identity of a 'funny woman' can be both dangerous and liberating. As Margo Jefferson writes, 'Given the history of social restriction and sexual regulation, how many women have been in a position to -- or been willing to -- take these risks?' We will explore how the tools of comedy can be used to make mischief, to transgress the bounds of genre and form and to contest popular ideas about difference and power. How can humor be illuminating? How can humor be feminist? How can humor be intersectional? How can humor help us tell the hard truths? Can we laugh at oppression without laughing it off? This is not a course on humor writing or one that exclusively focuses on humorists. Rather than 'funny,' we focus on 'fun,' explore playfulness as it occurs in myriad ways across a diverse variety of texts. As we do, we will find models, key writerly moves, to adapt into our own writing. Readings will include work by Tina Fey, Audre Lorde, Patricia Lockwood, among others. We'll also be viewing performances, from stand up to sketches to sitcoms, that speak to themes we are exploring. You need one book for this class: Tina Fey's Bossy Pants. Course costs will not exceed $30

FYWB BC1110 Imagining Social Justice. 3.00 points.

While George Orwell may have been right when he remarked that 'history is written by the winners,' imaginative literature is almost always preoccupied with the losers. This course investigates how representational writing (a poem, a play, a novel, a short story, a theoretical essay) wrests its central themes and rhetorical strategies from imagining the voices of the disenfranchised. We begin from the premise that such acts of representation substitute as forms of redress, whether a justice of retribution and restoration or simply a caring premise that such acts of representation substitute as forms of redress, from imagining the voices of the disenfranchised. We begin from the theoretical essay) wrests its central themes and rhetorical strategies from imagining the voices of the disenfranchised. We begin from the premise that such acts of representation substitute as forms of redress, from imagining the voices of the disenfranchised. We begin from the premise that such acts of representation substitute as forms of redress, from imagining the voices of the disenfranchised. We begin from the premise that such acts of representation substitute as forms of redress. Readings may include the 'Hymn to Demeter,' Euripides's Medea, Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market, Toni Morrison's Beloved, Ira Levin's Rosemary's Baby, Luisa Valenzuela's 'Out of the Corner of One Eye,' Nathan Englander's 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank.'

First-Year Writing Workshop

First-Year Writing (FYW) Workshop is a four-credit course designed for students who feel they would benefit from extra preparation for the critical reading and writing that you will do at Barnard. FYW and FYW Workshop are equally rigorous -- both courses have the same critical reading and writing goals, and both courses satisfy your First-Year Writing requirement. FYW Workshop, however, meets 3 days per week instead of 2; it is worth 4 credits instead of 3; and the class sizes are smaller. NOTE: FYW Workshop is only offered in the Fall (not in the Spring).

Students who are interested in one of the limited number of spaces in FYW Workshop should select 'First-Year Writing Workshop' on the First-Year Experience Course Request Form (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd_AvpkQklmJiS6FZmu4dn1XzTUDpNGawOG4twpq_8D2woalw/closedform/), but please be aware that placement cannot be guaranteed. You will receive an email (in your Barnard inbox) before the first registration period letting you know if you have secured a spot. Read about students' experiences in FYW Workshop here. (https://firstyear.barnard.edu/firstyear/student-perspectives/)
FYWB BC1500 (Workshop) Reading the Body. **4.00 points.**
In this course, we’ll think of the human body as a text we can ‘read’—one that represents, responds to, and negotiates the world(s) it inhabits. Tracing literary depictions of the body from ancient Rome, the Harlem Renaissance, witnesses to los desaparecidos (‘the disappeared’) in Latin America, and recent feminist sci-fi and speculative fiction, we will ask: What do these writers tell us about and through the body, particularly about histories of colonialism, knowledge, resistance, and identity formation? How do the literary and scholarly texts we read both define and reimagine the body? What ways of thinking do these texts resist and inspire? Through our readings and class discussions, we will unpack how literature about the body both scripts and resists inscription, produces culture and yet is borne from it. Readings are subject to change, but will likely include literature by Ovid, Octavia Butler, Isabel Allende, and Nella Larsen, as well as select texts from feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race studies. All required texts will be available in the library and for purchase at Book Culture (not to exceed $30). Note: Many of the readings for this class depict different forms of sexual and identity-based violence. I believe these texts are important for understanding the relationships between power, identity formation, and the body. We’ll talk as a class about how to work through these challenging texts in thoughtful and generative ways.

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FYWB BC1501 (Workshop) Metamorphosis. **4.00 points.**
The theme guiding our discussions in this section will be bodies, and what happens when they change. The process of metamorphosis raises the questions: What is a body? How is the body connected to the self? Indeed, what is the ‘self’ and where are its edges? If your outer form changes, what remains? What does it mean to have thoughts and emotions trapped inside a changeable body? Over the course of the semester we will explore these questions as we discuss bodily ambiguities; analyze bodies as they change in shape, state, and nature; and examine the dissolving boundaries between humans and plants and animals. Readings are subject to change but will likely include literary texts by Ovid, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nalo Hopkinson, and Marcia Douglas, as well as film, visual art, and theoretical frameworks for thinking about bodies in flux. All required texts will be distributed by the instructor.

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FYWB BC1502 (Workshop) The Beauty Problem: Difference and Identity. **4.00 points.**
People who love fiction or poetry or the theater often say that they do because it expands their emotional lives, allowing them to understand the experiences of others without needing actually to undergo those experiences. But when this happens, does it happen because these people are already predisposed to different experiences, or does fiction provide us with true insights into others’ realities? And if it does provide insight, does it change anything in the world? How can fictional texts help us see the lives of others in new ways? This course aims to build on your current writing and interpretative skills as we examine how writing changes minds. We will read literary texts that explore the power of beauty to prompt violence (Hawthorne, Balzac), and the conflicts that can arise when personal loyalty conflicts with the law (Morrison, Sophocles). We will also work with theories drawn from philosophy and anthropology (Butler, Behar) that will help guide our critical interpretations of these fictional texts. Our writing and research assignments will all be designed to assist you in addressing problems of difference and identity that we uncover in these readings, as we work together to prepare for the increasingly complex inquiries college will open up.

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