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

2021-22 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 (Associate Director, Writing Program)

Term Lecturer
Monica Cohen (Term Lecturer in First-Year Seminar)

Term Associates
Nina Sharma
Francesca Ochoa

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

Adjunct Lecturers
Kristi Cassaro
Maureen Chun
Maxine Krenzel

Linn Cary Mehta
Jennifer Rosenthal
Michael Shelichach
Elizabeth Weybright

Adjunct Associates
Elizabeth Auran
Quincy Jones

Every Barnard first-year student is required to take a First-Year Writing course during their 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.

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.
FYWB BC1101 From Wyfman to Womxn: What is a Woman?. 3.00 points.
In this section of FYW, we will analyze and interrogate the representation of “woman” as seen in a set of significant literary texts of various genres, epochs, and continents. We will begin by exploring the constructed, scapegoated Eve canonized in Milton’s Paradise Lost; subsequent readings will demonstrate how women writers attempted to resist and redefine this “self” inherited from Milton. Finally, we will look at contemporary texts that further re-construct and complicate received notions about gender, race, femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. In addition to Paradise Lost, literary texts may include excerpts from the Mayan Popul Vuh; Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina; Kristen Roupenian’s “Cat Person”; Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl”; excerpts from Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior; selected poems of Emily Dickinson; tales from Ovid’s Metamorphoses; selected stories of Luisa Valenzuela; and Maggie Nelson’s The Argonauts. Theoretical texts may include writings by Simone de Beauvoir, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; Sara Ahmed; Judith Butler; Audre Lorde; bell hooks. We may also connect our readings to current issues/problems in 21st century culture. (Readings subject to minor changes.)

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 Mokkedem and Mohsin Hamid, among others, as well as documents relating to the current migrant crisis in western Europe. 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 and 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 delight us and to reflect moments when the actual feels unreal. Reading works by such authors as Lewis Carroll, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel-Garcia 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 this First-Year Writing course, we will read and write about texts that use unreliable narrators, dramatic irony, and flawed protagonists to engage complex issues of identity, voice and perspective. Our literary and critical texts demand attention to the ways in which power shapes narrative, and narrative shapes power. We will think especially about how Eurocentric, colonial, and white supremacist texts have rendered Black and indigenous perspectives silent or unintelligible, and how Black and indigenous writers speak to, through, and against such erasure. The readings 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. The only book length work you will need is Toni Morrison’s Jazz (around $15 new)

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 From Wyfman to Womxn: What is a Woman?. 3.00 points.
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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 BC1109 Wild Tongues. 3.00 points.
In this course, we'll examine storytelling and language through the lens of gender. How are constructions of gender used to police what kinds of stories are told, who can tell them, and who is believed? What forms and strategies of narration are available and to whom? Our focus on tongues—both linguistic and anatomical—allows us to ask questions about the forms that language takes and the relationship of narrations and language to the body. How have women engaged and re-deployed existing myths and narratives? How is the self both constructed and policed through narratives of gender, race, class, sexuality, family? In our analyses, we'll work to challenge fixed or binary understandings of gender and power by asking how these writers engage and challenge the various ways in which the category of "women" is constructed within culture. Readings are subject to change but may include The Hymn to Demeter, selections from Ovid's Metamorphoses, selected poems by Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Yvette Christianisie's Castaway, and/or selections from Cherrie Moraga's Loving in the War Years and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictee and critical conversation texts by authors including Gloria Anzaldúa, Sara Ahmed, and Audre Lorde

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 Bossypants. Course costs will not exceed $30

FYWB BC1111 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 wretes 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 gesture of bearing witness. Units will feature "fallen women" plots, plots of economic injustice, plots of racial injustice, and vigilantism. Texts may include the "Hymn to Demeter," Sophocles's Antigone, Eliza Haywood's Fantomina, Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market, Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton, Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Emerald Fennell's Promising Young Woman, examples of the American Western, the limited TV series Watchmen, and theoretical work by Ahmed, Fricker, Hartman, Ortner, Solnit, Spillers

FYWB BC1112 Identity on the Move. 3.00 points.
In this course we encounter characters who undergo a profound change of identity. For some, this change is punishing; for others, their new identity sets them free. Our task will be to analyze the ways in which identity is constructed; gain a deeper understanding of the role of race, class, and gender in its construction; and investigate the boundaries of community. We will accomplish this through close reading of the texts and critical conversation. Readings may include literary works by Franz Kafka, Mariana Enriquez, Edwidge Danticat, Virginia Woolf, and Danzy Senna

FYWB BC1113 Bodies and Desires. 3.00 points.
In this First-Year Writing course, we'll examine a series of questions centered on bodies and desires. How is the body both constructed and policed through narratives of gender, race, class, and sexuality? How are bodies and desire mediated through and represented in language? We'll consider how bodies become not just sites of objectification or of power but also of pleasure. We'll think about the politics of respectability, in questioning who can be a subject, rather than object, of desire. In our analyses, we'll work to challenge fixed or binary understandings of gender and power. Readings are subject to change but may include: Nella Larsen's Passing, Eliza Haywood's Fantomina, short stories by Luisa Valenzuela, Carmen Maria Machado and/or Ir'ene lara Silva, poems by Sally Wen Mao and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz and conversation texts by Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, John Berger, and/or Judith Butler

FYWB BC1114 Women of Color in Speculative Literature. 3.00 points.
"The Future is Female" except in science fiction, where it still looks pretty white and male. What happens when women of color take on such tropes as space exploration, cybernetics, superpowers, and the end of the world? How can women of color change the way we not only think of the future, but think of the present as well? In this class we'll look at how speculative literature looks at the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, technology, and environmental concerns. Readings will include work from such authors as Octavia Butler, Franny Choi, Sam Chang, G Willow Wilson, and Tananarive Due with potential critical readings from Lisa Yaszek, Charlotte E Howell, and bell hooks
FYWB BC1115 MODERNITY. 3.00 points.
"All that is solid melts into air," So wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, registering the astonishing pace with which daily life was being transformed around them. For them, and for many of their contemporaries, the central feature of the modern world was its ceaseless change. Under the pressure of political, scientific, and economic revolutions, traditional ways of living and thinking might disappear almost overnight, to be replaced not by a new order but instead with an unending experience of instability and dislocation. This course reads a set of writers who both respond to and participate in that process of constant transformation—in what we have learned to call modernity. Should culture try to protect timeless values from the shock effects of modernization? Or should it find, in change, an opportunity for new forms of life and new styles of expression? If—as Marx and Engels did—we imagine modernity as a distinctively European event, how might writers outside of Europe make use of and respond to a modernity that excludes them? Is modernity something that happened, and is over—or are we today still swept up in it? Readings may include: literature from Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Douglass, Woolf, Kincaid; philosophy and criticism from Montaigne, Kant, Marx, Weber, Du Bois, Kracauer, Chakrabarty

FYWB BC1116 METAMORPHOSIS. 3.00 points.
Our focus in this course will be metamorphosis—bodies and their transformations. In the process, we will think through a number of questions, among them: How is the body connected to the self? (Indeed, is there such a thing as a “self” distinct from one’s body?) If one’s outer form changes, what remains? How is the body shaped (and reshaped) by external perceptions, by power structures, by history, by violence, by words? Over the course of the semester we will explore these questions as we discuss bodily ambiguities; analyze bodies as they change in form and nature; examine the dissolving boundaries between humans and other creatures; and think critically about issues of race, gender, class, and power in relation to the body. Readings are subject to change but will likely include short literary texts by Ovid, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Alice Fulton, Nalo Hopkinson, Carmen Maria Machado, Sofia Samatar, Roxane Gay, Keah Brown, Jennine Capó Crucet, and Gabrielle Bellot. Alongside these readings, we will engage with film, visual art, and theoretical frameworks for thinking about bodies in flux. All required texts will be distributed by the instructor. Note: A number of the readings for this class discuss different forms of sexual and identity-based violence. I believe these texts are important for understanding the relationships between power, self/identity, and the body—all key to thinking about the concept of metamorphosis. We’ll talk as a class about how to work through these challenging texts in thoughtful and generative ways

FYWB BC1117 READING THE BODY. 3.00 points.
In this course, we’ll think of the body as a text we can read—one that both represents and creates intersections between the body, science, and identity formation. We’ll read literary texts that reveal how scientific authority gets mapped onto the body and embedded in ideas of race, gender, class, sexuality, family, and nation; we’ll also analyze how writers in turn investigate and play with these scientific scripts. How do literary depictions of the body both represent and resist scientific authority? What do they teach us about the "factness" and fluidity of identity and belonging? Readings are subject to change, but will likely include literature by Ovid, Octavia Butler, Amy Bonnaffons, Isabel Allende, and Nella Larsen, as well as select texts from feminist science studies, critical race studies, and queer theory

FYWB BC1118 TOPICS OF CONVERSATION. 3.00 points.
What and how do we learn from talking to other people? In this seminar we will explore the role of conversation in primarily Western philosophy and culture. How has the idea of dialogue shaped understandings of aesthetics and ethics, metaphysics and psychology, race and cosmopolitanism, and gender and sexuality from classical times to the present? More specifically: How does the art of conversation arrive at metaphysical truths? What do we bring to our encounters with people of different backgrounds, and what can we take away from conversations with those of disparate political views? How does talking to another person help us to uncover psychic meaning, and why do we need another person to understand our psyches? What do the dialogues in our selected works tell us about the interpersonal construction of meaning and the nature of friendship and erotic experience? Our primary texts will take conversation—as well as the silences and tacit subtexts, ambiguities and ironies embedded within—as one of their structuring principles and predominant subjects of concern. These may include Plato’s dialogue on love, metaphysics, and rhetoric in Phaedrus; Teju Cole’s Open City, a documentary-like novel about, among other things, talking to strangers and meeting people in the haunted cities of Brussels, Lagos, and New York; and Sally Rooney’s exploration of friendship, sex and sexuality, and the role of ideas in our lives in Conversations with Friends. Other theoretical and primary texts may include excerpts from Bakhtin’s The Dialogic Imagination; Freud’s writings on psychoanalytic technique, including “Remembering, repeating, working through”, Montaigne and contemporary philosophers on friendship. We will also spend time with a number of the dialogue-centered films, including the seminal My Dinner with Andre by Louis Malle, Before Sunrise by Richard Linklater, and Ten by Abbas Kiarostami

FYWB BC1119 CROSSING BORDERS: THE AMERICAS. 3.00 points.
This course cuts across the borders between North, South and Central America and the Caribbean, in a search for the ways in which literature illuminates different aspects of American identity. We step outside of a North American perspective to see the Americas as active historical and aesthetic agents, acting and interacting with each other. We emphasize the minority voices—immigrant, African, indigenous, Latinx, working class, gender non-conforming—that are essential to the evolution of literature in the Americas, which is characterized from the beginning by its freedom from tradition. We look at the development of Modernism, Post-modernism and Post-colonialism in the 20th and early 21st centuries through the study of key novels, short stories, essays and poetry from North and South America and the Caribbean, including works by Martí, DuBois, Hughes, Hurston, Eliot, Neruda, Césaire, Borges, García Márquez, Junot Díaz, Audre Lorde, Joy Harjo, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Valeria Luiselli. By looking at these works in their historical, political and aesthetic contexts, we can grapple with the multiple formations of American identities
FYWB BC1120 NEW YORK CITY IN LITERATURE. 3.00 points.
Discover New York City! Beginning in the 19th century and moving to the present day, this course employs NYC as a lens through which we focus on the exploration of the ways race, class, gender, and religion play parts in defining America. Our readings alternately imagine and challenge the idea that NYC is a locus of freedom and the American dream, a place that welcomes immigrants and refugees. Traveling back in time, we explore the city that Walt Whitman idealized as inclusive and democratic and that Frederick Douglass, escaping slavery, knew as a place of precarious freedom. Moving forward, we explore Edith Wharton’s city of the 1880’s Gilded Age, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes’ city of the 1920’s Harlem Renaissance. We explore Alan Ginsberg’s city of the 1950’s Beats and the contemporary city of international immigrants and newcomers. In plays, poems, novels, and short stories — and in excursions throughout the city — we explore the diverse and startling ways NYC becomes home for our authors and for us. Writers may include Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass, Horatio Alger, Edith Wharton, Edgar Alan Poe, Israel Zangwill, Shaun Tan, Langston Hughes, Alan Ginsberg, Frank O’Hara, Edwidge Danticat, and Colson Whitehead.

FYWB BC1121 LIVES IN TRANSLATION. 3.00 points.
This class focuses on the theme of translation and what happens when texts and people cross national, cultural, linguistic, racial or gendered borders. Through our classroom discussions and essays, we will explore the following questions: Why or how do texts lend themselves to or resist translation? How do encounters with dominant discourses necessitate acts of self-transformation or resistance to translation, especially for people of color, immigrants or queer communities? How do narratives (both fictional and personal) change when translated across cultures and time to fit with local discourses? What is the role of the translator in these acts of remaking? Drawing on postcolonial and translation theory, we will consider how writers have pushed back against dominant narratives through texts that cross and complicate linguistic, cultural and national borders. Readings are subject to change but will likely include a selection from following: literary texts by James Baldwin, Sappho, Marjane Satrapi, Ocean Vuong, Fatimah Asghar, Irena Klepfisz, as well as various English translations of the 1001 Nights; and scholarly texts by Gloria Anzaldúa, Edward Said, bell hooks, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Jorge Luis Borges. Course costs will not exceed $20; access to books can also be made available to students who need them.

FYWB BC1122 PASSING, PERFORMING, BECOMING. 3.00 points.
While the premise of most “passing” literature involves a character covering or concealing an identity, this literature can also reveal transgression of identity categories themselves, allowing us to see identity as fluid, evolving, unstable, and relational. In this First-Year Writing course, we will read and discuss texts that confront and destabilize binary understandings of identity—including race, gender, sexuality, and class—to reveal more complex ways of thinking and knowing. Texts may include works of literature by James Baldwin, Octavia Butler, Charles Chesnutt, Catalina de Erauso, Eliza Haywood, Nella Larsen, and Danzy Senna; critical theory texts by Frantz Fanon, Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, and bell hooks; and episodes of the television shows Lovecraft Country and The Good Lord Bird. The only book you’ll need to buy is James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room (ISBN: 0345806565, ~$10 paperback).

FYWB BC1123 WRITING AND THE ENVIRONMENT. 3.00 points.
Beginning with the Popol Vuh, the Mayan myth of creation, which records the first contact with the Spanish conquistadors about 1555, we will construct a history of American nature writing up to the present. Description and interpretation of nature has shaped artistic representation from the very beginning of human history, and we will focus on texts and images from the Americas with reference to selected European texts: beginning with selected Native American writing, we will move from the 18th century to excerpts from Wordsworth’s "Prelude" in England (1798), which in turn influenced Emerson’s essay "Nature" (1836) and Thoreau’s writing in Walden and "Civil Disobedience" (1851). In the 20th century, we will look at the environmental impact of writing and images of nature, drawing from Rachel Carson’s "Silent Spring" (1962) and John McPhee’s "Encounters with the Archdruid" (1971). This will lead us to look at activist organizations including NRDC and the work of Greta Thunberg and, finally, we will both write and analyze contemporary environmental journalism, including Bill McKibben’s "The End of Nature" and Liz Kolbert’s "The Sixth Extinction.

FYWB BC1124 HAUNTED AMERICAS TEST. 3.00 points.
In this course, we will encounter ghosts and hauntings in the fiction of Latin American and Caribbean writers. A Cuban immigrant is haunted by the life he left behind; when a young woman in Argentina explores her queer identity, she is met by the ghosts of state violence; a Caribbean plantation, a paradise corrupted, is haunted by the specter of slavery. We will look to hauntology to investigate the ways in which the characters in these stories reckon with, or fall prey to, legacies of colonialism, war, and migration. Readings may include literary works by Mariana Enriquez, Edwidge Danticat, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Jean Rhys, Ana Menéndez, and Daniel Alarcón.

FYWB BC1125 UNRULY BODIES. 3.00 points.
In this class, we will explore—to quote Roxane Gay—"what it means to live in an unruly body in a world that is always trying to control, discipline, and punish women’s bodies." Thinking and theorizing the ways in which the body figures as a site of power, we will discuss the rules that are imposed upon women’s bodies and the ways in which women’s bodies, in turn, defy those rules. Turning our attention to bodies that are too fat, too sick, too black, too promiscuous, too queer, and more, we will read and think about bodies that resist: bodies that resist binaries, bodies that resist understanding, bodies that resist and rebel against the rules imposed upon them. Readings will include literary texts by Ovid, Jhumpa Lahiri, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Carmen Maria Machado, and Akwaeke Emezi. All required texts will be distributed by the instructor. Note: readings for this class include references to and representations of various forms of violence. We’ll talk as a class about how to work through these challenging texts and topics in thoughtful and generative ways.

FYWB BC1126 READING THE FUTURE. 3.00 points.
How do we think about the future? Why do we develop the hopes and predictions that we do? How do present conditions and discourses inform, influence, or limit our sense of personal and political possibility? In this First-Year Writing course, we will explore conceptions of the future in 19th through 21st-century literary fiction. We will begin by close reading 20th-century short stories that evoke fears of the future on individual, social, and global scales. We will then turn to H.G. Wells’ classic novella The Time Machine and attempt to place its portrayal of the future in the context of late Victorian science and socioeconomics. Finally, we will consider how Jeff VanderMeer’s recent novel Annihilation reflects and responds to the accelerating climate crisis, and explore fiction’s role in helping us apprehend the potential for radical environmental disruption.
FYWB BC1127 WRITING ACTS: LITERACIES AND STORYTELLING. 3.00 points.

In this course we will explore how writers across cultures and histories use storytelling to theorize and describe the place of literacy in our lives. Literacy refers to so much more than just the skills of reading and writing; literacy, as noted by scholar Gabriel Rios, is rather an embodied form of knowledge and action that signifies “acts of communication and interpretation.” Rethinking the “literacy myth,” or the common belief that literacy functions to promote individual social and economic mobility, we will pay attention to writers who activate storytelling—particularly in the genres of life writing and memoir—in order to reinterpret how literacy entangles us in ongoing histories, embodied knowledges, communities, and places. Readings will likely include works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mike Rose, Leslie Marmon Silko, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and others. Theoretical texts might include works by Gabriel Rios, Harvey Graff, Shereen Inayatullah, Kate Vieira, Jo Hsu, Barbara Christian, Aja Martinez, Eric Darnell Pritchard, and others

FYWB BC1128 MUSIC IN NARRATIVE. 3.00 points.

How and to what ends does literature represent musical form or the feeling of musical encounter? In this course, we will discuss narratives in which music plays a significant role, whether through musical allusion or its sustained thematic presence, or through principles of musical composition and gesture that play in the background, informing a text’s structural flow. We will consider complex resonances between literary narratives and histories of music culture and aesthetics, asking how writers use music to world-build, to characterize, and to situate a text culturally and politically. Throughout the semester, we will pay particular attention to narratives that showcase the musical lives of characters belonging to historically marginalized groups. In doing so, we will question how race, gender, and sexuality intersect with musical histories of aesthetic power. Literary readings may include works by Jane Austen, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and James Joyce. Secondary readings may include selections from sound studies and philosophies of musical aesthetics by Jennifer Lynn Stoever, Fred Moten, Jacques Attali, Theodor Adorno, John Cage, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and others

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, 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.

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

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

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
FYWB BC1503 (WORKSHOP) UNRULY BODIES. 4.00 points.
In this class, we will explore—to quote Roxane Gay—“what it means to live in an unruly body in a world that is always trying to control, discipline, and punish women's bodies.” Thinking and theorizing the ways in which the body figures as a site of power, we will discuss the rules that are imposed upon women's bodies and the ways in which women's bodies, in turn, defy those rules. Turning our attention to bodies that are too fat, too sick, too black, too foreign, too queer, and more, we will read and think about bodies that resist: bodies that resist binaries, bodies that resist understanding, bodies that resist and rebel against the rules imposed upon them. Readings are subject to change but will likely include literary texts by Ovid, Toni Morrison, Helen Oyeyemi, Carmen Maria Machado, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. All required texts will be distributed by the instructor. Note: readings for this class include depictions of eating disorders and identity-based violence. We'll talk as a class about how to work through these challenging texts and topics in thoughtful and generative ways.

FYWB BC1504 (WORKSHOP) SEEING, SURVEILLING, PERFORMING. 4.00 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, "The Husband Stitch" by Carmen Maria Machado, 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 BC1505 (WORKSHOP) REMAKING THE FAMILY. 4.00 points.
This class explores literary depictions of the family—family we are born into, family we choose, and family roots we seek. With a special focus on the intersections of gender, race, and reproduction, we'll investigate how literary texts both call attention to and reimagine the cultural and scientific scripts we inherit vis-à-vis notions of the family. How do the stories we read define and redefine family? What do they tell us about the social dimensions of DNA, the fictions and "factness" that shape identity and belonging? What liberatory possibilities do these texts invite us to see, and what are their limits? Readings may include literature by Carmen Maria Machado, Ovid, Octavia Butler, Amy Bonnaffons, and Nella Larsen, as well as select texts from feminist science and technology studies, critical race and ethnic studies, and queer theory.

FYWB BC1506 (WORKSHOP) HAUNTED AMERICAS. 4.00 points.
In this course, we will encounter ghosts and hauntings in the fiction of Latin American and Caribbean writers. We will analyze the ghosts in these texts as manifestations of historical memory. This will lead us to investigate hauntology, and the ways in which the characters reckon with, or fall prey to, legacies of colonialism and war. Readings may include literary works by Mariana Enríquez, Edwidge Danticat, Roberto Bolaño, Jean Rhys, and Daniel Alarcón.