FIRST-YEAR WRITING

417 Barnard Hall
212-854-2116

Department Administrator: Sarah Pasadino
Department Assistant: Julissa Acosta

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

2022-23 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
Duygu Oya Ula
Alexandra Watson (Associate Director, Writing Program)

Term Assistant Professor
Nathan Gorelick (Term Assistant Professor in English)

Term Lecturer
Michael Shelichach
Elizabeth Weybright

Term Associates
Quincy Jones
Francesca Ochoa

Post-Doctoral Fellows

Andrew Ragni
Penelope Meyers Usher (Post-Doctoral Fellow in First-Year Writing and First-Year Writing Workshop)

Adjunct Lecturers
Safia Jama
Linn Cary Mehta
Jennifer Rosenthal
Sarah Schwartz

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.

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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 BC1109 Seeing, Surveilling, and Performing. 3.00 points.
In this course, we will study the way culture influences how we make sense of what we see. We will examine how power is exercised by making people feel as though they are always being seen, how this surveillance polices the way gender, race, class, and sexuality are expressed, and how people perform their identities to reinforce or push back against this policing. Literary texts will include Passing by Nella Larsen, "The Husband Stitch" by Carmen Maria Machado, Fantomina by Eliza Haywood, and the films Paris is Burning and Portrait of a Lady on Fire. Secondary texts will include John Berger, Talia Bettcher, Judith Butler, W.E.B Dubois, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Jack Halberstam, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Laura Mulvey.

Spring 2023: FYWB BC1106
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1106 | 001/00550 | M W 10:10am - 11:25am | Viinda Condillac | 3.00 | 14/15
FYWB 1106 | 002/00551 | M W 11:10am - 2:25pm | Viinda Condillac | 3.00 | 15/15

Fall 2023: FYWB BC1109
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1106 | 001/00693 | M W 10:10am - 11:25am | Viinda Condillac | 3.00 | 1/15

FYWB BC1110 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 Christianes'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.

Spring 2023: FYWB BC1114
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1114 | 001/00553 | T Th 1:10pm - 2:25pm | Quincy Jones | 3.00 | 15/15
FYWB 1114 | 002/00554 | T Th 4:10pm - 5:25pm | Quincy Jones | 3.00 | 15/15

Fall 2023: FYWB BC1114
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1114 | 001/00693 | M W 10:10am - 11:25am | Viinda Condillac | 3.00 | 14/15
FYWB 1114 | 002/00694 | M W 11:10am - 12:25pm | Viinda Condillac | 3.00 | 15/15

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 Chanse, G Willow Wilson, and Tananarive Due with potential critical readings from Lisa Yaszek, Charlotte E Howell, and bell hooks.

Fall 2023: FYWB BC1121
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1121 | 001/00696 | M W 11:40am - 12:55pm | Duygu Ula | 3.00 | 0/15

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-translation 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.

Fall 2023: FYWB BC1121
Course | Section/Call Number | Times/Location | Instructor | Points | Enrollment
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FYWB 1121 | 001/00696 | M W 11:40am - 12:55pm | Duygu Ula | 3.00 | 0/15
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 explore the history of American nature writing up to the present, with particular attention to problems of environmental justice. Description and interpretation of nature has shaped artistic representation from the very beginning of human history, and we will read both texts and images from the Americas in relation to selected European texts: from Crévecoeur's “Letters from an American Farmer” (1765) 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). We will also consider both texts and contexts from John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath (1939); Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962); John McPhee’s Encounters with the Archdruid (1971); and international reports and organizations including the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and COP28. Engaging with activist organizations, we will both write and analyze the impact of contemporary environmental journalism such as Bill McKibben’s The End of Nature, Liz Kolbert’s The Sixth Extinction, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals.

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’s 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 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 in performance studies and musical aesthetics may include selections by Jennifer Lynn Stoever, Judith Butler, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Maria Edgeworth, and others.

FYWB BC1129 SPECULATING THE PAST. 3.00 points.
Recent works as diverse as The New York Times’s Overlooked Project and Netflix’s Bridgerton raise questions about what records we keep, how we narrate history, and the ways in which the previous two determine what stories we can tell. In this class, we will probe the question of the official record by reading literary works that turn to a speculative mode to make sense of history, past and present. As we enter the critical conversation about the historical record, we will explore how authority and value are assigned to different texts and accounts. In so doing, we will also develop our ability to read texts’ and documents’ own theorizations of truth and fact. Readings may include work by Virginia Woolf, Marlene NourbeSe Philip, Carmen Maria Machado, Adrienne Rich, and N.K. Jemisin alongside critical texts by Saidiya Hartman, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and others. Course costs will not exceed $15.
FYWB BC1130 TALKING BACK. 3.00 points.
Inspiried by bell hooks's assertion that "moving from silence to speech is for the oppressed...a gesture of defiance that heals," we read and write with attention to the power dynamics of speech and silence, of talking and talking back. 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 the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, speak to and against erasure; and also how the marginalized create community by talking and talking back. The readings include literary works by 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)

Spring 2023: FYWB BC1130

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Fall 2023: FYWB BC1130

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FYWB BC1132 ATTENTION. 3.00 points.
Attention is the foundation of investigation, action, and intention. It means concentration and deliberation. It can also mean distraction and confusion. Quietly reading a difficult work of literature, puzzling over a math problem, revising a paper for class, or cooking an elaborate meal are forms of attention. So is endlessly scrolling through social media, binge-watching a television series, or strolling aimlessly through the city. Where and how we use our attention is the foundation, the bedrock, of nearly everything we think and do. It is therefore unsurprising that gathering and directing our attention is also an enormous, lucrative industry. In this course we will study the science and philosophy of attention alongside the history of the "attention economy" and evolving techniques and technologies of attention harvesting. We will explore these subjects while reflecting upon and writing about our own habits of paying attention. By paying attention to attention, we will nurture a brighter awareness of the many interests vying for our time, mental engagement, money, our very lives, and of our abilities to scrutinize, critically examine, or resist our entrapment within the modern attention industry.

Fall 2023: FYWB BC1132

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<td>001/00702</td>
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<td>Nathan Gorelick</td>
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FYWB BC1135 CONTESTED TRUTHS: MEMORY, AUTHORITY AND HISTORY. 3.00 points.
This class examines the ways that a historical event can be remembered and described differently by direct participants, and how personal biases, such as race, gender and class, affect the process of recollection and narration. Some of the texts that we will read and discuss include Sara Collins’ The Confessions of Fannie Langton, Ian McEwan's Atonement, and Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse Five, among others. Our analysis of these texts will be augmented by theoretical works drawn from psychology, literary studies and trauma studies.

Spring 2023: FYWB BC1135

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<td>FYWB 1135</td>
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<td>Benjamin Breyer</td>
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FYWB BC1138 LETTERS. 3.00 points.
Dear student: I write to you, who now read these words. Or, perhaps, I don't: perhaps I never had you in mind at all; perhaps you are just someone passing by, who has taken these words as though meant for yourself. This course examines how writers have made use of the privacy of letters in their public writing. What happens when we address our written words to a particular other? How, on the other hand, do we read words meant for someone else? What intimacies does the letter form make possible, or violate? And what might the special case of the letter have to tell us about writing in general? Objects in the course may include: fiction by Goethe, DeWitt, Diderot, Poe, West; epistolary poems by Ovid, Dickinson, Rankine, Shockley; paintings of letter-reading by Vermeer and Greuze; letter-memoirs by Baldwin and Vuong; criticism and theory by Althusser, Barthes, Benveniste, Fried, Howe, Jackson, Reed

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<td>Andrew Lynn</td>
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<td>FYWB 1138</td>
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<td>T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 405 Barnard Hall</td>
<td>Andrew Lynn</td>
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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).

Read about students’ experiences in FYW Workshop here.