
**AL 331: Writing in the Public Interest
Spring Semester 2004**

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The Professional Writing Program at MSU

Professional Writing is a major in the College of Arts and Letters offered by the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures. The major prepares students for careers in professional writing and graduate work in rhetoric, writing, technical writing, the teaching of writing, and the study of culture.

The Professional Writing program emphasizes the organizational, disciplinary, and cultural contexts for writing. Students specialize in one of three advanced writing tracks: (1) technical writing and writing in digital environments, (2) public, civic, and cultural writing forms and contexts, and (3) professional editing and publishing.

AL 331: Writing in the Public Interest

AL 331 is one of the core courses in the Writing in Communities and Cultures track. In AL 331 students explore various forms of public writing and their roles in democracy and public culture. Students practice rhetorical conventions used to deliberate and argue in democratic community. One of the important goals of AL 331 is to understand how language shapes community and democratic practices and how, in turn, social processes and democratic traditions influence language.

Community Partnerships and Active Learning

Students in AL 331 practice forms of public writing in active learning placements with civic and community-based organizations. During Spring Semester 2004 AL 331 students will research and design Web-based opinion polls for the Michigan House Civics Commission (www.civicscommission.com). These polls will provide college students throughout the state of Michigan a new venue to understand and express their opinions on proposals

that have been introduced in the state legislature. In addition to posing polling questions, AL 331 students will frame alternative positions on the proposals, prepare comprehensive background information, and analyze polling results for Michigan legislators.

Public Research Projects

Spring Semester 2004 students will select a local nonprofit or public advocacy organization and investigate that organization's writing and public literacy practices.

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Required Books for AL 331, Spring 2004

Available at the Student Book Store, Grand River Ave.:

1. Gary Layne Hatch, *Arguing in Communities*. Hatch emphasizes argument as a means of rational persuasion within communities. He explains how communities argue different kinds of claims. The anthology presents selected readings on controversial civil liberties topics, from concealed weapons to global issues in the 21st century.

2. Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue*. From the classroom and courtroom to the bedroom, metaphors of battle have become so pervasive in U.S. culture that we often forget that argument, opposition, and critique are not the only paths to truth and understanding. Tannen covers examples of "argument culture" in the media, politics, litigation, gender relations, and on the Internet. She reviews techniques various cultures (mainly non-Western) use to manage or modulate conflict. She offers "a broader repertoire of ways to talk to each other and address issues vital to us."

3. Elizabeth Ervin, *Public Literacy*. In addition to an introduction to all forms of public writing (press releases, grant writing, writing for nonprofits, etc), Ervin poses crucial questions about writing in the public interest: Who, what, and where is "the public"? What does it mean to be literate "in public"? How does public literacy differ from other kinds of literacy?

4. *Making Choices Together: The Power of Public Deliberation*, by David Mathews and Noelle McAfee. This book explains public deliberation, a process—and an art—in which citizens weigh the costs and consequences of various approaches to solving public problems. It also provides tips for developing programs in deliberative democracy for local communities.

5. *What Citizens Can Do: A Public Way to Act*. A collection of a dozen stories about everyday people who have changed the way politics is practiced in their towns. They share a commitment to the idea that in a democracy citizens take responsibility for dealing with community problems.

Recommended:

6. *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* by Michael Schudson. A comprehensive history of civic culture in America, from the Colonial origins of American political practice to the way the "Rights Revolution" of the 1960s has come to dominate social movements and public culture at century's end.

Course Requirements, Objectives, and Expectations

AL 331 is designed as a learning community that *practices* its subjects: public creation, community action, and democratic decision-making. As such, AL 331 students and the instructor are expected to thoroughly prepare for and attend classes and thoughtfully participate in class activities, be responsible participants in shaping an evolving course syllabus and calendar, fulfill all requirements of class assignments and research projects, work collaboratively in planning groups, and practice a learning ethic that stresses obligations to all members of the AL 331 learning community, including other students and the instructor, community partners, visitors, and clients.

AL 331: Writing in the Public Interest Spring 2004

Course Calendar Version #4—3/22/04

	Mondays	Wednesdays
1	1/12 Introduction and Course Overview Assign Planning Groups: 1. Civics Commission 2. Public Research Projects	1/14 Karen Casey, Director of the Service-Learning Center, briefs class on Michigan House Civics Commission Project Visit www.civicscommission.com before class
2	1/19 MLK Day—No Class	1/21 Flesh Out Course Calendar Report from Civics Commission and Public Research Project Planning Groups
3	1/26 Tannen, Chap. 1 MHCC Planning & Review of Contract	1/28 Tannen, Chaps. 2 & 3 MHCC Planning Deadline
4	2/2—Discussion Set up MHCC Writing Teams Tannen, Chaps 2 & 3 (Prof. Cooper) Tannen, Chap 4 (Danielle/Chris) Chap 5 (Liz/Michelle) [2/2-2/3 Prof. Cooper in Ann Arbor for Kellogg Meeting]	2/4—Discussion & Editing Drew Buchholz, Coordinator, MHCC Rev. & Editing Critique of Senate Bill No. 411 (Jessica Barcenas) Tannen, Chap. 6
5	2/9—Research Meet in Computer Center Rm 403: Writing Teams research legislation for student Polls (www.michiganlegislature.org) Tannen, Chaps 7 & 8	2/11—Discussion, Review, & Planning MHCC Format & Documentation deadline & review (Marley/Kim) Tannen C.7 (Cristina), C.8 (Todd), C.9 (Lauren) Calendar Planning
6	2/16 Ervin, <i>Public Literacy</i> , Chaps. 6 & 7	2/18 Checklist of MHCC Impact/Publicity suggestions (Shannon, Emily, Sarah) MHCC Press Releases due (first drafts)—Group editing

7	2/23 MHCC Press Releases due (final drafts) MHCC Writing Team planning	2/25— MHCC Deadline (4 polls) Ervin, <i>Public Literacy</i> , Chaps 1 & 2 [2/24-2/27 Prof. Cooper professional travel]
8	3/1 [Class visit: Terry Denbow (VP Univ. Relations)] Public Research Projects (PRP): Overview (Matt & Liz) Ervin, <i>Public Literacy</i> , Chap. 3	3/3 [Class visit: Terry Denbow (VP Univ. Relations)] Ervin, <i>Public Literacy</i> , Chaps. 4 & 5 MHCC Portfolios Due
9	3/8 Spring Break	3/10 Spring Break
10	3/15 Hatch, Chap. 1: “Arguments in Context” What is a “rhetorical situation”? MHCC Press Releases Issued	3/17 PRP: Choose Organization Deadline How do you analyze a rhetorical situation?
11	3/22 Analyzing & evaluating examples of rhetorical situations: Michelle, Liz, Danielle, Jashawnai Hatch, Chap 2: Analyzing & Evaluating <i>Ethos</i> (pp, 67-73)	3/24 Hatch, Chap. 3: Analyzing & Evaluating <i>Pathos</i> (pp. 109-113) and Chap. 4: Analyzing & Evaluating <i>Logos</i> (pp. 139-163)
12	3/29— MHCC Deadline (4 polls) The Art & Practice of Public Deliberation <i>Making Choices Together</i> , pp. 1-21	3/31 PRP Progress Reports <i>What Citizens Can Do</i> , pp. 1-51
13	4/5— MHCC Portfolios Due PRP Research deadline Deliberation: Study Circle Planning http://www.studycircles.org/index.html	4/7 Deliberation: Study Circles
14	4/12 Deliberation: Study Circles	4/14 Deliberation: Study Circles

15	4/19 Deliberation: Study Circles	4/21 Deliberation: Study Circles PRP Progress Reports
16	4/26 Public Research Project presentations	4/28— MHCC Deadline (4 polls) Public Research Project presentations
	Finals Week Public Research Project presentations	PRP Reports/Portfolios Due MHCC Poll Portfolios Due