

Writing 105PD: Writing for Public Discourse

Prerequisites: Writing 2 or 2E or 2LK; upper-division standing.

Catalog Description: Introduction to writing and public discourse in local, regional, national, and global contexts through analysis of writing in civic contexts, political activism, and public policy. Students reflect on and produce written research in a related area of inquiry.

Course Description: One might argue that at no other time in our history have we been a more connected, more global, more *publicly oriented society*. However, as Composition scholar Bruce Herzberg writes in “Service Learning and Public Discourse,” time and time again, students researching contemporary public issues discover that “by and large, public policy follows popular, not academic opinion” (395). Therefore, since educating young people in their role within civic life has been traditionally understood as one of the responsibilities of a public liberal arts education, this course seeks to investigate the relationship between academic and public discourse. Topics of inquiry in this course include investigating public policy as it affects those with whom students routinely interact; how individuals, communities, groups, organizations, and political entities engage in a dynamic of power relationships, on a global scale, and across disciplines; the function of writing as an agent of action, on whatever scale; what it means to be a member of a public; and how writing works in various public contexts.

At its core, Writing 105PD is an action-oriented course. Instructors in this course encourage students to cultivate cross-disciplinary perspectives of how areas of inquiry in the university are mapped onto real-world issues. Student writing in this course can range from a variety of digital, print, and oral methods of engaging public audiences. In this way, students in this course learn to critically investigate their responsibilities and rhetorical capacities as publicly engaged democratic citizens.

Curricular Premises: Writing 105PD offers upper division students instruction and practice in writing as it applies to issues of civic engagement, community literacy, political activism, and/or the creation of public policy. Like other upper-division courses in the Writing Program, Writing 105PD focuses on developing advanced writing skills, which include adapting structure and style to particular genres, modes of communication, and rhetorical contexts; integrating and citing print and multimodal texts, and refining grammatical, mechanical, and stylistic abilities. This course asks students to investigate critically theories of the public and write critically about topics of interest while also considering how writing, in the public sphere, can serve as a vehicle for building relationships and engaging a world outside the classroom. Writing 105PD is relevant to students interested in studying and getting involved in important issues facing their communities, or for those pursuing public service, professional writing, or non-profit careers.

Course Requirements:

Texts: Readings in this course include academic articles, essays from popular publications like newspapers and magazines, and pieces of legislation.

Assignments: The course typically involves 1) short, weekly writing assignments that synthesize in-depth course readings; 2) in-depth analyses of specific public issues; 3) civically oriented writing assignments that engage outside audiences; 4) analyses of how writing works in public contexts; 5) reflective writing about what it means to be a publicly engaged citizen. In the culminating assignment, most sections of Writing 105PD ask students to conduct sustained research, using a variety of source materials, to produce writing on a specific, related area, and present on their findings.

Outcomes:

- learn how writing works in public contexts through analysis of a variety of texts across a range of public genres
- learn to critique and apply theories of the public sphere
- produce writing for public audiences that makes use of rhetorical concepts and terms common in many civic, public, and/or professional contexts
- conduct independent research, drawing on primary and secondary sources from a range of resources and media
- use evidence to support theories, arguments, or explorations in written, oral, and electronic discourse
- refine and develop a clear, concise, and mature style of writing
- tailor writing to meet the requirements of academic, professional, and/or specialized audiences