8600 :: Seminar in Writing Studies: Writing Assessment :: Dr. Nikki Caswell
Mondays | 6:30-9pm | Bate 2006

Office Hours: Mondays 5-6pm, Tuesdays 1-2pm, Thursdays 3-4pm, and by appointment
caswelln@ecu.edu | 440-570-9211 (cell – texting is fine)

Required Texts
Race and Writing Assessment Book
And additional readings accessible through Joyner Library or provided as PDFs

As a course, Writing Assessment (Seminar in Writing Pedagogy) is designed to offer you a study of writing assessment as it is used, theorized, and researched both within and outside the classroom. Although the systematic study of writing as carried out in various fields is a project that can trace its roots to the late 1960s or early 1970s, the evaluation of writing in America (examinations using writing go back over a thousand years to Ancient China) can be traced 150 years ago to the call of Horace Mann for written examinations to replace oral recitation as means to evaluate student ability in school. Entrance examinations initiated by Harvard in 1874 and imitated by many other schools emphasized the importance of assessing writing. In the early 20th Century, assessing writing became the concern of the fledgling field of intelligence testing that grew dramatically after laws for universal education were passed, and families and communities who had never sent children to school began sending their children to public schools which were not equipped or experienced to teach these new learners. When the SATs replaced written exams in 1942, English teachers put up a rousing protest that forced the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) to offer the English Composition Test. Unfortunately, efforts by the CEEB and the Educational Testing Service to produce reliable methods for assessing writing during the 1950s failed and by the 1960s, writing was routinely assessed “indirectly” through multiple choice tests of grammar, usage and mechanics.

¹ “Indirect” is a euphemism if I ever heard one. I no longer consider editing tests or grammar tests as writing assessment, though you will regularly encounter this term.
With the resurgence of direct writing assessment in the 70s, writing assessment became linked with the emergent field of rhetoric and composition. Unfortunately, writing assessment continues to be something English teachers want little to do with. Although most writing assessment outside of the classroom has remained the province of testers, the 1990s saw a renewed interest among teachers, rhetoric and composition scholars and practitioners and writing program administrators, especially in the use of portfolios. The first decade plus of the 21st Century has witnessed a wealth of scholarly activity, producing more books on writing assessment than in the preceding two decades. The public discourse on writing assessment has also taken on some interesting and radical characteristics in the last several years. The last decade has brought a wealth of writing assessment scholarship with more books published on writing assessment in the 21st century, than all the writing assessment books published since Paul Diederich’s NCTE monograph, *Measuring Growth in English* from NCTE in 1974. In the last couple of years several essays and reviews have been published (Gallagher; Condon: B&E, among others) heralding the advent of writing assessment as an emergent field of study. Part of our chore in this class is to ask questions about the current state of the field and to support, challenge or do both to the current literature about the state of the field of writing assessment. This course recognizes that any study of writing assessment issues needs to be interdisciplinary and to revolve around the context of the teaching and learning of writing. The class readings attempt to combine a variety of viewpoints through which the richness and complexity of the various issues can be studied and understood. Without considering multiple viewpoints and voices, there is no way to theorize, design and implement the best possible means to assess our students’ abilities to write in and outside the classroom. Clearly, writing assessment, with its political and social implications is an important subject for any of us who desire to work as English language educators, administrators or researchers.

**Requirements**

*Readings*

The required readings for this course are listed on the syllabus below. You will be able to find them either through ECU library databases or PDF form in the course blog.

*Weekly blog writing*

Each week, students are expected to write on the course blog (guidelines are open so you can explore ideas freely, but on average think 600-100 words). Some weeks you’ll be provided a prompt (for example, create a timeline based on the week 2 readings) and other weeks you can write on topics in the readings that interest you. A few key points:

- Your response to course readings should be *written prior to class discussion*. Writing prepares you to participate meaningfully in class discussions of readings and demonstrates your understanding of the ideas presented in course texts. Responses
might reflect on arguments presented in course texts, articulate alternative conceptions from your perspectives, develop lines of thought that the articles raise, and position you in respect to texts.

- Your posts could include relevant thoughts and ideas from sources not on the course syllabus. As any researcher does, you will be drawing together what you know with what you are discovering.
- Your posts can be a detailed response to a classmate.

I’d rather you spend time focusing on ideas, concepts and relationships between them. I am interested in what you have to say more than how you say it. Run spell check, but don’t worry too much about missing commas or the occasional run on sentences.

**Position Statement**
See separate handout for a complete description of requirements for the position statement. As an overview, you will pick a topic an articulate a stance on it. You’ll support your stance with research. NCTE and WPA have sample position statements we will review together. The topics are up to you. We will meet to discuss your topic a few weeks before the assignment is due.

**Seminar Paper**
You are responsible for negotiating your own seminar project for this course. Individualizing assessment reflects the theoretical position of the course itself. As well, it allows you to choose projects that have meaning in an attempt to relate the subject to your course of study and to use this seminar as a way to prepare yourself as a professional. It is also hoped that the projects completed for this class will allow you to publish in the scholarly literature. Individual negotiations should be completed and finalized by week 11. As a general guideline, I suggest a seminar paper (20 pages or a multimodal equivalent) to be submitted for publication that focuses on a specific writing assessment, writing program or the creation of a proposal to assess writing in a specific context. However, I’m willing to negotiate a writing assessment final project to be something different. Just make an argument for it.

**Final Exam**
A take-home, essay-style final exam will be emailed to you the night before our final exam period. You’ll have at least 24-hours to complete it.

**Attendance, participation & late work**

Regular attendance in this course is crucial to a good participation grade. You can only be excused from class and receive permission to turn in work late if you present me with a valid, documented excuse. Otherwise, Late work is not accepted. If you must be absent, it is important that you notify me as soon as possible. Two weeks of unexcused absences is
grounds for the alteration of your final letter grade; three weeks of unexcused absences is grounds for failure of the course.

The course discussions will be guided by your responses, contributions, and work in preparation for class meetings. As such, class participation is an essential element in creating a successful learning environment for this class. Although I may launch into lecture as the situation and need demands, all participants will be equally responsible for the development of the discussion. In my years of teaching, I’ve discovered that when students are engaged, interested, and pedagogically supported, their class discussions will end up being as productive or more productive than any lecture I might plan ahead of time. I see part of my role as a graduate educator as setting up a class structure (i.e., providing relevant and important texts, setting ground rules for class activity), then guiding class discussion when it needs prodding to move into more productive directions (or directing conversation away from what I can foresee as a dead end) and speaking (as a contributor or as a lecturer) when my professional knowledge and experience can move the conversation in productive and necessary directions.

Because class participation is such an integral part of the learning that takes place in this course, you will receive a grade for participation in conjunction with your blog post (since that is also a form of participating). Participation grades will be based on both the quantity and quality of your participation. This means you need to participate regularly and responsibly. If you feel comfortable speaking in large group settings, then you might find that you need to monitor yourself so that you don’t dominate the conversation and unintentionally silence others. If you have difficulties speaking in front of large groups or taking positions on issues in discussion, you should think of alternative ways that you can contribute to the class.

How you participate is not only vitally important to your success in this course this semester; how you participate this semester can lay important foundations for your identity as a scholar and as a researcher. As a scholar, you will be called upon in numerous forums to take a stand on issues and articulate the details of that perspective.

**Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Final grade breakdown:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25% Weekly blogs and participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>20% Final Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>30% Seminar Paper</td>
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<td>25% Position Paper</td>
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Policies

Academic (dis)Honesty
Academic Integrity is the expected standard. Cheating, plagiarism (poaching someone else’s work without attribution and presenting it in bad faith as your own effort), falsification (statement of untruth regarding your work), and any attempts of these academic violations are intolerable offenses in an academic community. Any student who commits academic integrity violations on any portion of the course will receive an F for this course. For more information, go to http://www.ecu.edu/cs-studentlife/policyhub/academic_integrity.cfm

Accommodations
East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 ((252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY)). For more information, go to http://www.ecu.edu/cs%2Dstudentlife/dss/

Weather and other Emergencies:
University emergency information can be found on the ECU homepage. It is usually highlighted with a red bar that will specify the alert. http://www.ecu.edu or go to http://www.ecu.edu/alert. Emergency hotline: 252-328-0062

Submission of assignments
I am a Mac user and have an updated version of MS Word. It is best for you to submit your work as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf files. I don’t have a preference for MLA or APA, but whichever one you follow, you should follow their page set up guidelines. This typically means Times New Roman font, 12pt, 1in margins, double spaced text. Cover pages do not count toward page requirements.

Schedule

[I recognize these are a cited as a strange mix of MLA and APA, but the information is there!]

Week 1: Jan 12th | Introductions, Course Overview
Huot, B. (Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning

Week 2: Jan 26th | Historical Contexts
Elliot, N. On a Scale: A Social History of Writing Assessment in America
**Week 3: Feb 2nd | Educational Measurement (Validity)**

Sometime between week 4 and 6, schedule a meeting with me to discuss your topic for your position paper and brainstorm seminar paper ideas.

**Week 4: Feb 9th | Educational Measurement (Validity continued)**
Humphry, Stephen and Sandra Heldsinger. “Common structural design features of rubrics may represent a threat to validity” *Educational Researcher* 43.5 (2014): 253-263

**Week 5: Feb 16th | Educational Measurement (Reliability)**
Moss, Pamela A. “Can There Be Validity Without Reliability." *Educational Researcher* 23.2
(1994) 5-12.

**Week 6: Feb 23rd | Portfolio Assessment**
Callahan, “All Done with the Best Intentions: One Kentucky High School After Six Years of State Portfolio Tests.” Assessing Writing 6 (2000): 5-40

**Week 7: March 2nd | Standard (State) Writing Assessments**
Spring Break

Week 8: March 16th | Developing Theories Writing Assessment | Position Statements Due – post on blog

Sometime before week 11, meet with me to discuss what topic you’ve decided on for your seminar paper.

Week 9: March 23rd | Teaching and Learning
Adler- Kassner and O’Neill. *Reframing Writing Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning*

Week 10: March 30th | Classroom Assessment

Week 11: April 6th | Classroom Assessment Continued


**Week 12: April 13th | Machine Scoring**


Herrington, Anne and Charles Moran. “Writing to a machine is not writing at all.” In Elliot, Norbert and Les Perelman (Eds) *Writing Assessment in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Edward M. White.* Pg. 219-233


**Week 13: April 20th | Race and Writing Assessment**


Selections from: Race and Writing Assessment

**Week 14: April 27th | Moving Assessment Forward**
Behizadeh, Nadia and George Englehard. “Historical View of Influences of Measurement and Writing Theories on the Practice of Writing Assessment in the United States. 189-2011.” Assessing Writing 16 (2011):189-211

**May 4th | Final exam period | Final Paper due | Out of Class Final Exam**