

Decolonizing America

Spring 2009 First-Year Seminar (FYS)

Tuesday & Thursday 10:10-12:25 in Hepburn 113

Instructor: Dr. John Collins (Associate Professor and Chair of Global Studies)

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Office hours: Tues. 2:00-3:00, Wed. 3:15-4:15 and by appointment

Course Mentor: Sandy Gates '09

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Office hours: TBA

Course overview

The United States is a colonial nation in two senses: it began as product of British colonialism, and it subsequently became a colonizing power within North America and beyond. We see the effects and the continuation of this colonization process all around us, whether in the exploitation of indigenous people and territory, the operation of a “prison-industrial complex” whose roots lie in centuries of slavery and white supremacy, or the violence associated with US military actions outside its own borders. This seminar will explore the United States from the perspectives of those who experience it today as a space of colonization, genocide, and resistance. In the process, students will research contemporary injustices as well as movements that have worked and are working toward a radical decolonization of the United States.

As the program documents at the end of this syllabus indicate, a primary goal of the First-Year Program is to help you develop your reading, writing, oral communication, and research skills. The spring FYS places special emphasis on research skills. Consequently, the central assignment for this course is an extended research project that you will pursue in several stages (topic selection, gathering and evaluation of sources, annotated bibliography, argument construction, functional outline, first full draft, final paper and presentation). Consultation with your instructor and mentor will be a crucial and required element of your work throughout this process.

In Decolonizing America, we will also pay particular attention to the fundamental, yet often overlooked skill of critical reading. To do well in this course, you will need to

make reading a central part of your everyday life, and you will need to commit yourself to developing the ability to read critically.

Required texts

- William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (Ig Publishing, 2007)
- Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and Native American Genocide* (South End Press, 2005)
- David Griffith, *A Good War is Hard to Find* (Soft Skull Press, 2008)
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual, 4th Edition*
- James P. Davis, *The Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources, 3rd ed.* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007)
- Additional readings to be distributed electronically or in class

Course mentor

Your mentor for this course will be **Sandy Gates**, a senior Global Studies major. In addition to being a strong writer, speaker and researcher herself, Sandy has been trained to help other students develop their communications skills. She will attend many of our class sessions and will be a great resource for you. I strongly encourage you to visit Sandy during her office hours for help with reading, writing, research, and critical thinking skills. You will benefit the most from your meetings with Sandy if you come with specific questions, or with a piece of work (e.g. an outline, paper draft, oral presentation) with which you would like her assistance.

The WORD Studio

In addition to the help you can receive from Sandy, the Munn Center for Rhetoric and Communication maintains **The WORD Studio** in ODY Library—a place to get feedback from peers on assignments in Writing, Oral communication, Research, and Design of visual projects. You can come for a consultation to plan a paper or presentation (you don't need anything but a blank piece of paper!); to find ways to improve the ideas, organization, and style of a draft; to videotape and review a presentation rehearsal; to practice a PowerPoint presentation, and more. Peer tutors are not proofreaders or editors who silently “fix” your work for you; instead, they are trained to have a conversation with you about ways you can fix problem areas yourself and become better overall communicators. You may use The WORD Studio for consultations on assignments for any of your courses, although for FYS assignments you should first

seek out Sandy during her office hours listed above.

The WORD Studio is open Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; and Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. You may also IM the Studio during regular hours with quick questions about grammar, citation, and style: *SLUword*.

Working Groups

Early in the semester the class will be divided into working groups of 3-4 students based on common research interest. While each student will pursue her/his individual research, each group will also be engaged in the collective work of researching a broad theme and will work collectively to identify key questions, sources, and approaches to the larger topic. You will receive regular feedback from the other members of your group at key stages of your research and writing process, and you will design and deliver a major research presentation with your group at the end of the semester.

General topic areas you might consider for your research include:

- US colonialism in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and other territories
- The prison-industrial complex
- US military intervention in Latin America, the Middle East, etc.
- Global US empire-building
- Contemporary issues in Native American society
- Legacies of slavery

Expectations

- You are expected to treat other members of the seminar respectfully, and to share the workload equally when doing collaborative work.
- You are expected to attend class. If you will miss class for whatever reason, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor before class, either in person, by e-mail or by telephone. Each unexcused absence will result in a .5 deduction from your Contribution to Collective Learning grade (e.g. from a 4.0 to a 3.5 and so forth).
- You are expected to turn all of your work in on time. Late work will not be accepted without prior approval from the instructor. You are also expected to turn in all required assignments. Failure to do so will result in an automatic grade of "0" for the course. No exceptions!
- You can expect occasional pop quizzes on the reading. These and other in-class activities may not be made up.

- You can expect that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The primary objective of the University is the promotion of knowledge. This objective can be furthered only if there is strict adherence to scrupulous standards of honesty described in the Academic Honor Code. All members of the University community have a responsibility to learn, understand, and maintain these standards. Additional information regarding academic honesty, plagiarism and academic dishonesty procedures and penalties can be found in the *Student Handbook*.
- If you have a disability and need accommodation, you can expect the instructor's full cooperation. Please see me as soon as possible to discuss the accommodation needed. For information on SLU's resources concerning various forms of academic support, visit the website of the Office of Academic Planning, Advising, and Services at <http://www.stlawu.edu/advising/>.

Assignments and Evaluation

NOTE: Full descriptions of all assignments will be provided in class.

1. Contribution to Collective Learning 10 percent of final grade

Our seminar will only succeed to the extent that each student takes an active role in our collective learning process. Given that we will be dealing with controversial issues and perspectives that often challenge conventional wisdom, it is especially important that you come to the class with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others. This part of your grade will depend on several areas: 1) attendance (see above for details); 2) preparation for class; 3) regular, informed participation in seminar discussions and other activities; 4) demonstrated ability to listen closely and respectfully to others; 5) responsible and full participation in group work; 6) willingness to voice opinions and interpretations that may be unpopular; and 7) completion of occasional homework, peer review, library, and other in-class exercises.

2. Reading Summaries 10 percent

Several times during the semester you will write short (500-word) summaries of assigned readings and generate a list of questions designed to spark class discussion. You will be evaluated on your ability to read closely, paraphrase the reading thoroughly and concisely, and create effective discussion questions.

3. Panel Discussion 10 percent

Once during the semester you join three or four other students as part of a formal panel discussion designed to explore in depth key topics covered in one unit of the course. Each panelist will offer a set of individual remarks, delivered from a one-page outline, and then respond to questions and comments from the audience.

Panel Discussion dates: February 3, February 17, March 3, March 12, April 9

4. Document formatting and citation quiz 5 percent

This quiz will test your familiarity with MLA document and citation style as described in Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*. You will use this style for all of your written work in the course, so it is essential that you learn the rules of proper formatting and citation. **Quiz date: February 12**

5. Annotated Bibliography 10 percent

As part of the process of writing your research paper, you will create an annotated bibliography offering brief summaries of at least ten reputable sources you have read as part of your research. **Due date: February 24**

6. Research Paper Functional Outline 10 percent

A functional outline consists of a clear, section-by-section outline of the paper along with information about which types of evidence and argumentation will be employed in each section. In other words, it serves as a detailed blueprint for a research paper. Please be aware that this is not a "preliminary" assignment. You cannot create an effective functional outline until you have already done your research and spent significant time constructing the argument for your paper. **Due date: March 12**

7. Research Paper (full draft) 10 percent

After creating your functional outline, you will transform this outline into a 10-12 page research paper that offers a clear, well-supported argument based on reputable sources. This is not a "rough draft." Rather, it is a full version of your paper that includes complete citations, introduction and conclusion. In writing it, you should carefully and thoroughly take into account the comments you receive on your functional outline. **Due date: April 14**

8. Research Paper (final draft) 15 percent

You will receive detailed comments on your research paper. These comments may include sentence-level issues related to proofreading, grammar, and citations; broader issues related to the construction of your argument; and suggestions about how to improve the paper with further research. The revised version of the paper should take all of these comments into account. Be aware that in many cases it may be necessary to make major structural changes to your paper as part of these revisions. **Due date: Tuesday, May 5**

9. Final Research Seminar 15 percent

During the last three weeks of the semester, your research working group will be responsible for leading a full seminar session devoted to the topic your group has been researching throughout the semester. The purpose of this session will be to teach the rest of your class as much as you can about the topic by drawing on each group member's individual research and integrating this research into a creative, effective lesson plan. Your grade for this assignment will include both an individual and a group component. **Presentation dates: April 21, April 23, April 28, April 30**

10. Final Portfolio (with reflective essay) 5 percent

At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio containing all of your work for the course. You should purchase a three-ring binder at the beginning of the course for this purpose. The final portfolio will contain a short essay in which you analyze your own learning experience throughout the semester. **Due date: Tuesday, May 5**

Schedule of class activities

The following is a general outline of our plan for the semester. It includes due dates for all major assignments. Specific readings for specific dates will be assigned as we go. You are responsible for keeping up with any changes to this schedule, including changes that are announced when you are absent.

Section 1: Colonization and Decolonization (January 20 – February 17)

Texts and activities:

- William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*
- Additional readings by Frantz Fanon, Martin Luther King, Jr. & others

- Film: *Battle of Algiers*
- James P. Davis, *Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources*
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual, 4th Edition*
- Attend MLK teach-in during class on Thursday, Feb. 4 in the Winston Room

Skills:

- Choosing a research topic
- Gathering and evaluating sources for research
- Using MLA style for document formatting and citation
- Paraphrasing and summarizing texts effectively

Assignments:

- Panel Discussion #1 on Tuesday, February 3
- Document formatting and citation quiz on Thursday, February 12
- Panel Discussion #2 on Tuesday, February 17



Section 2: The US Empire Within (February 19 – March 12)

Texts and activities:

- Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and Native American Genocide*
- Additional readings by Angela Davis, Patrick Wolfe & others
- James P. Davis, *Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources*
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual, 4th Edition*
- Film: *Trudell*
- Attend teach-in on returning war veterans on Thursday, March 26

Skills:

- Argument construction
- Developing and supporting a thesis
- Integrating sources into your writing

Assignments:

- Annotated Bibliography due Tuesday, February 24
- Panel Discussion #3 on Tuesday, March 3
- Panel Discussion #4 on Tuesday, March 12
- Functional Outline due on Friday, March 13



Section 3: The US Empire Without (March 24 - April 30)

Texts and activities:

- David Griffith, *A Good War Is Hard To Find*
- Additional readings by Arundhati Roy, Andrew Bacevich & others
- James P. Davis, *Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources*
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual, 4th Edition*
- Films: *Why We Fight* and *Meeting Resistance*

Skills:

- Reading and responding to critical feedback
- Presenting your research

Assignments:

- Research Paper (full draft) due Tuesday, April 14
- Panel Discussion #5 on Thursday, April 16
- Research Presentations on April 21-30
- Final Portfolio including Research Paper (final draft) due Tuesday, May 5

Appendix A: First-Year Program Philosophy and Goals

A residentially-based, interdisciplinary first-year program is an ideal environment for beginning the four-year process of developing the complex intellectual and social skills that are at the heart of a liberal education and the habits of considered values and engaged citizenship that such an education should produce. The First-Year Program (FYP) and First-Year Seminar (FYS) are the core of our institutional commitment to improving your ability to engage in critical inquiry and research, to design and deliver written, spoken and/or visual texts that demonstrate rhetorical sensitivity, and to be sophisticated readers, listeners, and viewers of the texts of others. We believe that these same competencies can help develop your ability to communicate across differences (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, political views) as you find ways to live and learn together in the residence halls and as engaged and ethically reflective citizens both during and after your college years. These goals should be understood as the first step in our work with you over a four-year process of helping you to meet the University's Aims and Objectives.

We hope to help you see that writing, speaking, research, and interacting with others are rhetorical endeavors. Effective communicators are, by definition, rhetorically sensitive. Rhetorical sensitivity means understanding that all communication, whether formal or informal, involves having to make choices about your messages, whether written, spoken, or visual. To become an effective communicator, you need to recognize that the creation of a meaningful and powerful message involves both a creator and an audience, and that therefore the voice you adopt in your communication, and the audience you imagine yourself communicating to, matter a great deal in creating your message. The choices you make in writing and speaking are central in determining how people read and hear your voice. Becoming conscious and reflective about those choices, and their ethical dimensions, is a central goal of the FYP and FYS.

Working with you so that you become more rhetorically sensitive means that you should be increasingly able to assess the requirements of a particular task and make intentional decisions about which mode or modes of communication and inquiry would be most effective in addressing it. To do so, you must develop specific writing, speaking, research, and technological competencies. To accomplish these goals, the FYP and FYS will present you with assignments that ask you to engage in a process that involves **recognizing** the rhetorical situation, **planning** communication strategies to address the task at hand, **composing and presenting** the message, and then engaging in **critical assessment** of your own work and that of others. The results of that assessment process will allow you to rethink, restructure, and revise your work. We further recognize that this process is not linear and that the effective creation of texts requires that you move back and forth among these four elements of the message creation process. This is why we require that your writing and speaking assignments be “projects” that include preparatory exercises and multiple drafts or rehearsals, all of which ask you to continue to reflect critically on the choices you have made in constructing your message.

This process of increased rhetorical awareness and skill development is at the heart of the philosophical and pedagogical perspectives that inform the work of the FYP and FYS. Because this process both transcends and integrates a variety of specific skills, the program has a philosophical commitment to designing assignments that ask you to integrate various modes of communication in furtherance of the higher-level rhetorical goals in which they are situated.

To ensure that the program is meeting its stated goals, all FYP and FYS syllabi are read by other faculty in the program to determine if they include a variety of assignments that forward the writing, speaking, research, and literacy goals of the

program. All FYP and FYS courses have to be approved by faculty in the program before they are offered.

Appendix B: First-Year Seminar Research Project Learning Goals

With respect to research skills specifically, our learning goals for the spring are that students should:

- Be introduced to ways of conducting productive and imaginative inquiry and research in order to become a part of the various conversations surrounding issues.
- Learn to differentiate among the various ways that information is produced and presented, between popular and scholarly journals and books, between mainstream and alternative publications, between primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to evaluate and synthesize information, whether gathered from traditional sources, e.g., books and journals, or from websites or electronic media.
- Begin to develop the skills of critical analysis in the interpretation and use of information gathered from any source.
- Be introduced to the ethical obligations that scholars have to both responsibly represent their sources and inform their readers of the sources of their information, as well as learning, and being held responsible for the proper use of, the conventions of scholarly citation and attribution.
- Present the results of your research in written, spoken, visual and/or other forms that demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using the conventions of the mode of communication adopted.