

PORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE –CASCADE Spring 2006

WR 123 ENGLISH COMPOSITION

MW 11:30-12:50 TH204

Three Transfer Credits

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<<http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/wr123.htm>>

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Office Hours: MW 1-2 pm and by appt.

WR 123: WR123 allows you to further develop your substantial skills in writing and reading (not to mention thinking and creative problem-solving) by confronting the task of doing a long research project. The course will show you how to set up a search strategy, articulate a research question, locate and evaluate sources, analyze and synthesize information from them, write at length and in depth, and format research papers. A real emphasis will also be placed on what to do with sources once you've located them: how to summarize their contents, how to pinpoint their most important ideas, how to synthesize their information into your own paper. These are skills which will be enormously useful to you in your academic career (and beyond).

In this course you will learn to become an info-detective, using your curiosity to ferret out more and more information on your topic, becoming conversant with all kinds of info/opinion sources—in print, online, and in person. We will also work hard at helping you to write your paper so that your reader will share in your curiosity and enthusiasm about this topic.

You should know up front that this course will have a unique wrinkle. Everyone's project will have something to do with "Education." Within that restriction, you will be free to bring your own interests to bear. Whatever your interests--world affairs, politics, education, business, economics, health care, counseling, music, law, art, literature, film--you'll find rich terrain to explore. Having a somewhat restricted range will make it easier for me to provide you with reserve material and allow us to work somewhat collaboratively in assembling sources. Also, you'll find that this common focus will help you to work as a team of researchers, learning and growing together, feeding one another sources and other discoveries.

This project will be an opportunity for you to go beyond the popular media's rather superficial treatment of educational issues, issues that really do touch all of us in one way or another. It will give you the chance to dig deep, to get in touch with the experts on the subject that you choose, and to understand the complexity of the problems that we face. By the end of this term, you'll be amazed at how much you've learned, both from your own research and from others in the class. I myself am looking forward to reaping the fruits of your work.

PROJECT: Your ultimate goal in this course is to produce a magnificent research paper (on some aspect of education) that is relatively long: 15-20 pp. of double-spaced text, as well as Works Cited, Bibliography, and any Appendices. If you've never written a successful paper of this length, the prospect can be daunting. Fortunately, you'll have the whole term to work on it, I'll be showing you how to break it down and make it manageable, and we'll start work immediately. By the time you've completed this course, you'll have learned skills that will free you from ever again fearing a research paper assignment.

I'll want you to show me that you've used a range of sources: books, articles from professional journals, articles from popular journals, newspaper articles, items from the internet, films, videos, and interviews. You will also show me evidence that you have done database searches. I'll want to see the final paper accompanied by notes, outlines, and rough drafts. Your final draft should be impeccable, your very best product.

The big danger in a project like this is the horrible "P-" word: PROCRASTINATION. But there are two other P-Words that you can rely on to help you out: PACING, PROCESS, and steady PROGRESS. To be successful, you must break the process down to a series of manageable steps, set up a reasonable timetable, and stick to it. I'll help you to do that by establishing certain fixed deadlines. Here they are:

- April 12 Decide irrevocably on your research topic. Submit research proposal. You will refine the topic and get some advice from me in a conference during the first two weeks.
- May 1 Annotated Bibliography due (approx. 20 entries), together with notes taken up to that point.
- May 8 Outline and Initial Notes due (We'll go over these during conference #2).
- May 24 Draft Due (as complete as possible)
- June 7 Completed final draft due, with abstract.

As you can see, you'll spend the first half of the course assembling, reading, taking notes on sources, refining your research question, and creating an annotated bibliography; you'll use the second half of the course taking more notes, synthesizing the information, coming up with a manageable and effective structure, writing and revising the paper, and producing the final version with the conventions of proper presentation in mind. At the very end of the course you'll share your findings with the class as a whole.

You'll be graded separately on each of these milestone accomplishments.

Except for your notes, and roughest drafts, your work should be typed on a computer. PCC-Cascade and the other campuses have many computers available for your use.

RESEARCH: This is not a course in library skills, but I do want you to feel comfortable in a library and to be motivated to take advantages of the resources libraries can offer. You have three primary library resources available to you: the PCC Library and its various inter-library loan and database services, the Multnomah County Public Library, and the Portland State University Library. In addition, you will have a plethora of electronic resources at your disposal, most of which can be accessed right in this room. I will expect you to use each of these facilities over the course of the term.

I'll also try to assemble relevant materials for the class website. As you discover interesting sources that will help others in the class, we'll add them to the site.

TEXTBOOK: *The Curious Researcher* (Fourth Edition, 2001) by Bruce Ballenger is the only book you need to buy. (I'm assuming that you already own a handbook.) It is a good background resource for the research-writing experience, and I really like his approach--it's practical, level-headed, and personal, and even passionate--just what research-writing should be. Do the readings as assigned in the schedule. I'll occasionally ask you to do exercises from the text. If I don't ask you to do an exercise, you should read it over, but you needn't actually do the exercise.

I'll also be giving you handouts to help with questions of style, technique, and format, and I'll be steering you towards relevant resources on the internet. I'll also be giving you copies of student work from previous courses that you can use for models of things to emulate, or to avoid. Most of what you'll learn this term will be from the hands-on process of actually doing the research and writing the work.

SERVICE LEARNING OPTION:

I am hoping that you will be supplementing your traditional library research with some volunteer time working directly with an organization—either on campus or off—providing service in the area that you are researching. Doing volunteer work will provide you with a number of practical reference points for your inquiry, will help you to test the accuracy and legitimacy of the conclusions provided by the "experts" that you encounter in your reading. It will also give you access to working professionals in these areas, who will become great interview sources. In addition, if you haven't done much volunteering, you'll find it a great experience in and of itself. As we discuss your research topic, I can help to connect you with an appropriate agency. You can start to check out some of our off-campus partners by going to <http://www.pcc.edu/resources/service-learning>.

While doing a volunteer service project is not required, I do recommend it and hope that as many of you as possible will choose to do so. If you do a volunteer project (minimum of 10 hours of service) and successfully incorporate it into your paper, you'll be rewarded by an additional 10% of "A" grade factored into your final grade.

You'll need to decide on a project and commit to it by the end of Week 2. Once you have made a commitment, I'll expect you to stick to it (or your grade risks being lowered).

PROGRESS REPORTS: Everyone will be giving me (either by email or hard copy) a progress report each week, in which you bring me along on your adventures in doing research this term.

I'll want you to tell me what you've done that week, what you've **DISCOVERED** (about your topic and about the research process), any new **CONNECTIONS** that you can make, and any **QUESTIONS** that you continue to have (about the topic and about the research process). Each entry should be at least 200 words long and must be emailed to me by class on Monday.

In addition, for those of you who are doing service projects, one of the primary resources that you will be using for your project will be the notes that you keep on your volunteer experience. I'll show you examples of such a journal, and ways in which you can incorporate these entries into your paper.

ATTENDANCE: We'll be spending lots of class time discussing research strategies and techniques; doing online research individually and as a group; doing exercises related to summarizing, synthesizing, and documenting; and providing you with information to use in your papers. So, regular attendance really is essential. Absence from class will not excuse you from the penalty of turning something in on time (each day late will adversely affect your grade for the assignment). In other words, **DO NOT MISS CLASS SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE AN ASSIGNMENT READY ON TIME.** See me, and we'll work things out.

Four absences may automatically result in a lowered grade. Five absences, and I may ask you to withdraw from the class.

Remember--if you find yourself slipping, losing your grip on reality (i.e., this course)--**AND YOU PROBABLY WILL**--come and see me immediately. That's the easiest way to work things out.

CONFERENCES: Individual conferences are extremely important in this class, so I'll be asking each of you to see me in my office at least twice in the term for a 30-minute conference. (I'll be circulating sign-up sheets so that you can make an appointment ahead of time.)

But if you have ANY questions that you don't want to ask during class, please do not hesitate to ask me after class or come to my office during office hours or at other times if I'm available. Also, feel free to phone me at 503-978-5213. If I'm not there when you call, you can leave a message on my voice mail

and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. I check my email several times a day, so that's also a good option.

EXAM: The final exam is scheduled for Monday, June 12, 11-1 (but it will not take all that time). This will be a chance for us to "debrief" on the research experience. You'll be writing a brief essay that will synthesize what you've learned about doing research.

GRADES: This is my plan for the grade breakdown at this time. This is of course subject to change if events require.

- 20% weekly progress reports
- 20% Annotated Bibliography
- 10% Notes
- 10% Rough Draft
- 30% Final Draft
- 5% Final Exam/Presentation
- 5% Class Participation

If you need to drop the class, please be advised that you must do so by the end of Week 2 if you want a refund. You can drop after that point (through Week 8), but you will lose your tuition payment for the class.

If you would like to take this class pass/no pass, please let me know by Week 5. (Be advised that P/NP grades cannot be used to fulfill the writing requirement at many colleges and universities.) If you are planning to audit the class, please let me know immediately; regular attendance will be expected.

If you have any special needs that I should know about, please let me know after class. PCC students requesting formal accommodations for a disability must provide documentation of disability and work with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) at 503-977-4341.

NOTE: I mentioned above that Procrastination is the great danger when doing a research project. This is certainly true. However, there is another dangerous P-Word to watch out for: PLAGIARISM. Plagiarism, whether conscious or unconscious, is the presentation of the words or even ideas of others in such a way that the reader might think they are yours. I should caution you that you will automatically fail the course if your paper includes plagiarism. However, we will be spending lots of time helping you to avoid this problem. If you are ever unsure about whether or not something you have written would constitute plagiarism, PLEASE come and ask me for my opinion in advance.

For more information about PCC's position on plagiarism, see our "Academic Integrity Policy":
<<http://spot.pcc.edu/academ/mlsyl/eml/integrity/integritymain.html>>