PolS 100W: Writing for the Major
San Jose State University, Fall 2010
Kathryn L. Wood

Office: Clark Hall 406N
Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9am to 11:30am.
and by appointment

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Course Times and Place: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30pm to 2:45pm
Hugh Gillis Hall 116

Course Description
This course is a workshop, run similar to a seminar or a learning laboratory. The class as a whole will work together to improve each student’s writing and communication skills within the field of Political Science. The basics such as grammar, spelling and paragraph organization will be covered. You will be exposed to the variety of professions associated with the field in which a well-developed communication skill is a necessity.

This course meets the GE Area Z – Written Communication II – requirement. As such, it is expected that the students master the following skills:

• Writing with ease. The course is designed with a number of short essays so that students will develop the comfort level needed to able to do this.
• Writing with precision. There will be a strenuous emphasis on grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation in order for students to become naturally aware of the proper way of expressing themselves. Peer editing and quizzes will help students develop and demonstrate this skill.
• Communicate orally. Through the use of class discussion, group interaction and presentations, students will develop the ability to verbally communicate their thoughts and ideas in ways that best get those thoughts and ideas across.
• Familiarity with different types of writing in the field of Political Science. To this end, students will be exposed to a variety of modes of communications used in the professions associated with the field.
• Resource location. Students will be using a variety of research tools to assist themselves in producing their work. A visit with the resource librarian will be made to familiarize the students with the various online and hardbound resources.

Writing Assignments

Blog:

Students are required to start a blog and write in it at least once a week. If you do not know how to establish a blog, please visit the instructor and she will assist you in getting started. The blog must be established with the first complete post no later than 11:59pm, August 31. The instructor will visit your blog each week and evaluate the writing within it. At either the beginning or end of each weekly post, students are to include two new ‘vocabulary’ words that are new to the student. This is to assist the student in (1) critically examine the assigned reading the student may have in other courses, and (2) expand the student’s working language base.

This assignment is worth 15% of your grade.
Portfolio Assignments:

The students will select a topic of political interest to each of them and follow that topic through the various assignments to develop a portfolio to present at the end of the course. The subject of the students’ interests must be political at its base, and need not be solely a local concern. Any current political topic is allowable. For example, if a student is interested in the judicial system, that student may choose to take on the subject of the Three Strikes law but must address some current aspect of that issue.

All resources used to support the assertions made in the portfolio assignments must be scholarly primary or secondary sources. Scholarly means that the student will reference materials other than dictionaries and encyclopedias. As even the creator of Wikipedia admits, that reference site is a tertiary source and thus not a valid resource for any academic paper, in this course or any other. While internet sources such as JSTOR are acceptable and can be cited using standard notation, if you use websites created by reputable organizations then you must learn the proper citation method for such resources.

For the sake of uniformity, the essay portion of the portfolio must observe the following format: font, Times New Roman; size, 12; margins, one inch on all four sides; color, black ink; line spacing, double.

The forms of the assignments are as follows:

1. Initial background information. This essay is a 4-page assignment to assess the feasibility of the topic. The essay should address the following concerns: A) What is the issue you wish to explore?; B) Why is the issue currently being debated?; and C) What are the sides of the debated issue?

2. Scientific Information. This essay is a 5-page assignment to explore the social research that has been done on the issue. Students will be expected to find scientific data to support their contention that the issue is of great concern. If there is no data currently available, the essay can concern itself with a research design for creating the needed data.

3. Interview. The student will interview, in person or via written communication, a person of interest to the issue. The 4-page essay will summarize the interview and give insights as to what impact the interviewee has on the furthering of the issue under study. Any other pertinent information that comes up during the course of the interview should be discussed.

4. Proposal. Building on the ideas in the previous three assignments, the student will develop a Call to Action proposal. This 5-page essay will address what the student believes is the necessary next step(s) in the promotion/solution of the issue.

5. Press Release. As with all campaigns, it is necessary to involve the media in the process. Students will write a 2-page press release to announce some aspect of the issue. This could be a fictional gathering/protest or campaign kick-off.

6. Presentation. The final portion of the course will be the presentation of the portfolio project, which will last no longer than 5 minutes. Students will use Power Point, overhead projection slides, or other form of visual media to present on the issue to the class as though their peers were the decision makers who would affect the action desired. Thus, the presentation needs to be of a persuasive nature. Only original work is to be presented.

Each of these assignments is worth 10% of the final course grade, with the exception of the 5th assignment which is worth 5%. This totals 55% of the course grade.
Peer Editing:
You will be required to have at least two copies of the writing assignment at the beginning of the class time on the dates listed in the Course Schedule below. Your peers will be editing your work and giving feedback as to how you could improve your writing, as you will be doing the same for them. One copy will be turned in to the professor for preliminary assessment, and 1/5 of the assignment points will be awarded based on this draft; improved essays will then be turned in on the Revision dates for the remaining 4/5 of the assignment points.

In-Class Activities:
There will be a number of assignments that will be completed during class. They will cover a wide variety of skill sets and will require that you have your grammar handbook available. These activities will give you a combined total of 10%

Quizzes and Final Exam
Quizzes:
There will be three quizzes on grammar. These will then be graded and the answers discussed in class. The total percentage for these quizzes is 15% of your grade

Final Exam:
The final examination will involve a take home exam and will be worth the remainder of the percentage distribution. The topic will be handed out on the last day of class and the essay will be due on the university designated final examination date and time: December 14th, at 9:45 am, at which time the “Post-Test” will be administered. The grade will be based both on the grammar correctness, the fitness of the resources used, and the quality of the content.

Only those students who present excellent reasons why they must reschedule their final exam, and do so no less than three weeks prior (11/24/09) to the scheduled exam date as dictated by university rules (S06-4), will have consideration for alternative examination. Those same university rules dictate that no student should have to take more than two (2) final exams on the same day. As you must make your request in advance, it is to your advantage to assess as soon as possible when your finals for all your courses will be and make arrangements accordingly.

Grade Breakdown:
Blog: 15%
Quizzes: 15%
In-Class Activities: 5%
Portfolio: 55%
Final: 10%

Reading Material
There are no assigned textbooks for this course. However, students are to acquire a grammar handbook for use during the various exercises during class. As all contain the same basic information, any of the modern handbooks is acceptable. Here are a few books on grammar and syntax that students may wish to read to further understand the nature of the English language:

Attendance

Absences are not acceptable; however, you are all adults, so I will not be taking attendance and will expect you to get the day’s notes from someone who was in class should you miss a day. While attendance, in and of itself, is not used to determine part of your course grade, the notes you will take will be of assistance and if you are not in class, you will not have the benefit of the discussion that occurred. Likewise, as peer editing is often the key to improving your work, you will have put yourself at a disadvantage if you are not there on the days this occurs, especially as 1/5 of your portfolio assignment grades will be determined on work turned in on those days.

If you are unable to attend class on time, you are allowed to enter the classroom late. Please do so with the minimum of fuss and noise, elsewise you will have the undivided attention of the instructor.

Course Schedule

August 26: “Pre-Test”; Syllabus and Grammar Pet Peeves; Blog set-up
August 31: School House Rock: Grammar Basics

Due: Blog URL

September 1: Proofreading, Editing, and Rewriting: Editing marks
September 2: Spelling Matters
September 7: Sentence Basic Training
September 9: Quiz One. In-class correction and discussion.
September 14: Commas, (Semi) Colons, and other Punctuation Fun
September 16: Pronouns and Modifiers
September 21: Class discussion of possible topics for portfolio
September 23: Quiz Two: In-class correction and discussion.
September 28: Nothing but the Verb
September 30: Finding Sources: Visit with PoliSci Librarian
October 5: Avoiding Plagiarism: Legal concerns – Guest Speaker
October 7: Parallelism and other word parking problems
October 12: Quiz Three. In-class correction and discussion.
October 14: Assignment One due: Initial Background Essay; Peer Editing Day
October 19: Revision of Assignment One due
October 21: Assignment Two due: Scientific Information Essay; Peer Editing Day
October 26: Revision of Assignment Two due
October 28: Assignment Three due: Interview; Peer Editing Day
November 2: Revision of Assignment Three due
November 4: Assignment Four due: Call to Action Proposal; Peer Editing Day
November 9: Revision of Assignment Four due
November 11: Veterans’ Day [Campus Closed]
November 16: Possible Guest Speaker
November 18: Assignment Five due: Press Release Peer Editing Day
November 23: Visuals discussion
November 25: Thanksgiving holiday [Campus Closed]
November 30: Revision of Assignment Five due
December 2: Self Evaluation / Progress Assessment
December 7: Assignment Six: Presentations I
December 9: Assignment Six: Presentations II; Final exam topic handed out
December 13: Final Exam at 12:15 p.m. (“Post-Test”)

University Policy Information

The University desires it known that Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires that you be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions, no matter how minor, to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Any work that is done for another course, current or past, cannot be turned in for credit in this course. If you are unsure of the policy on Academic Integrity, please see the information on the university website:

http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_F06_1.pdf

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with the professor or visit her during office hours as soon as possible. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that student with disabilities requesting accommodations must be registered with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.

Disclaimer

All above information may be subject to change with fair notice from the University, the Department of Political Science and/or the professor. The professor reserves the right to administer pop quizzes should a severe lack of attendance become an evident trend.
Final Words

It should be remembered that what you get out this course is directly proportional to the effort you put into it.

Final Grades are not “given” but rather “earned”.

Finally, as I am wont to say: high schools give diplomas; colleges give degrees; an education is what you give yourself.

Source: http://www.cgu.edu/print/792.asp
Kathryn’s Top 35 Grammar Pet Peeves to Avoid

35. Puns are for children, not groan readers.
34. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
33. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction.
32. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
31. Avoid clichés like the plague (they’re old hat).
30. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
29. Be more or less specific.
28. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
27. Understatement is always the absolute best way to put forth earth-shaking ideas.
26. No sentence fragments.
25. Contractions aren’t necessary and shouldn’t be used.
24. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
23. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it’s highly superfluous.
22. One should never generalize.
21. Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
20. Don’t use no double negatives.
19. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
18. One-word sentences? Never.
17. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
16. The passive voice is to be ignored.
15. If you’ve heard it once, you’ve heard it a thousand times: Resist hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly.
14. Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.
13. Also too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
12. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
11. Kill all exclamation points!!!!
10. Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.
9. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
8. Use the apostrophe in it’s proper place and omit it when its not needed.
7. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
6. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
5. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.”
4. Who needs rhetorical questions?
3. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
2. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.

And the number one on Kathryn’s Pet Peeve list…..

1. Their are words that must be used for they’re proper meaning or there misused.