

Land of the Free: Liberty, Justice, and Imprisonment in the United States
Writing 101: Academic Writing
Fall 2015

Professor Matt Whitt

A profound tension runs through the public culture of the United States. On the one hand, the U.S. declares itself to be a “land of liberty,” in which individual freedom is cherished and protected. On the other hand, the U.S. has historically denied freedom to large sections of its population, and today it imprisons more people per capita than any other nation. What do we make of this? How do we reconcile the ideals of liberty affirmed by U.S. public culture with the realities of bondage and imprisonment that shape U.S. society?

In this class, we will use political theory, philosophy, and academic writing to explore this important issue. Writing is an especially deft tool for examining the apparent disconnect between political ideals and social realities. Effective writing demands that we clarify our thoughts, evaluate our commitments, and genuinely consider opposing views. In your own writing, you will connect philosophical theories of individual freedom, punishment, and justice to concrete issues of imprisonment, policing, and legal reform. This work will help you see how seemingly abstract ideals can have tangible and weighty impact in the real world.

In the first half of the course, we will examine philosophical theories of liberty and punishment, focusing on when, how, and why the state should be able to deprive individuals of their liberty in response to a crime. Through brief blog posts, students will evaluate these theories in connection to current events surrounding policing, criminal justice, and imprisonment. This half of the course culminates in a formal analytic essay, which students will draft and revise several times, gaining feedback from their peers, their instructor, and a writing tutor.

In the second half of the course, we will examine incarceration in more detail, with emphasis on the use of solitary confinement within prisons, and the disparate racial impact of policing in the United States. Students will construct an independent research project that explores, in great detail, any theme of the course that interests them. A series of workshops, peer review, and revisions will culminate in a final seminar paper suitable for publication in print or online.

I am especially excited to offer this course this semester, because you will have a chance to talk with visiting experts on race and imprisonment, the death penalty, and solitary confinement. In order to delve deeper into these issues, you will be expected to attend at least one additional “enrichment event” and one special lunchtime workshop. Details below.

Objectives

The course has five main objectives, which reflect the aims of all WR 101 courses:

- Students will learn to engage the thoughts of others in charitable, critical, and self-reflective ways.
- Students will learn to carefully and confidently take a position in conversation and writing.
- Students will situate their writing in specific contexts.
- Students will transfer their writing knowledge into situations beyond this course.
- Students will develop open-ended inquiries and practice setting intellectual goals.

We will pursue these objectives through:

- research;
- workshopping;
- revising;
- editing; and
- sharing our work.

Expectations

This seminar is based around open discussion and student writing, which means that we are *all* directly responsible for the quality of the course. I expect you to actively prepare for and attend each class, complete readings on time, turn in projects when due, and participate fully in class workshops. Throughout the semester, you will challenge yourselves, each other, and me, and I expect you to do so reflectively and respectfully. This means open and collective inquiry, without intimidation or under-informed sermonizing (viz.: bullshitting).

This course examines very difficult aspects of U.S. history and contemporary society, and it asks philosophical questions about issues such as racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression and inequality. Some of the readings and discussions are likely to make us *uncomfortable*. I want to alert you to that now, and suggest that discomfort is essential to thinking critically about society and our place in it. I hope that you will take on that discomfort as you wrestle with the questions posed by our class. However, if you feel unable to do this, let me know so that we can discuss alternative ways to engage the material. It is our collective responsibility to make the classroom a safe space for difficult conversations and brave thinking.

Class Texts

The only required text for this course is *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander. All other readings will be posted to Sakai. You are free to annotate them digitally or in hardcopy, but you *must print a hardcopy of every reading* to use in class. Special exceptions aside, you will not be able to use a laptop in class (and never a tablet or phone), so you must have a hardcopy. If you do not have a hardcopy text for class, I may ask you to leave and mark you as absent. I suggest you keep a binder of all of the readings and your notes.

Major projects

You will practice writing in a variety of forms. Although specific guidelines will be distributed with project assignments, this overview will help you plan your semester.

1. Blog Posts (Four posts, 250-500 words each)

Over the course of the semester, you will submit *four* thoughtful blog posts in response to assigned readings. In your posts, you will situate the reading in relation to other class texts, practice close interpretations, thoughtfully connect the reading to current events, and/or raise critical questions. Think of the posts as ways to intelligently ‘digest’ the readings, push your thought farther and prepare for class discussion. I recommend drafting your posts as soon as you have finished the reading, before your thoughts fade.

Posts 1 and 2 are to be completed by 9/15. You may write posts 1 and 2 on any of the readings assigned in in Weeks 1-4. However, each post is due *before the start of class* on the day the corresponding reading is due. For instance, if you want to write a post on Isaiah Berlin, your post is due before class on 9/1. If you want to submit a post on 9/8, it must be on Philip Pettit.

Posts 3 and 4 correspond to specific authors. Post 3 responds to the Michelle Alexander readings, and is due before class on 10/6 or 10/8. Post 4 responds to the Lisa Guenther texts, and is due before class on 10/15 or 10/20.

This gives you some flexibility to fit your blog posts into your own schedule. However, since unexpected obstacles can arise, do not wait until the last opportunities to write your posts.

Since the blog is meant to extend our conversation in directions that *you* choose, you are expected to occasionally respond to each others’ posts. To facilitate this, you should quickly skim some of your peers’ posts (unless, of course, yours is the first one!), and include links when your claims overlap or contrast. Whenever you respond directly to a peer’s post, be sure to treat him or her like any other author, by providing a link and a citation.

Blog posts will be graded on an A-F grade scale. An exceptional (A or A-) post will:

- make detailed argumentative claims or raise significant critical questions about the reading
- connect the reading to current events or ongoing class discussions, using links or reference citations
- be clearly and carefully written, original, and respectful of interlocutors and readers

2. Blog Comments (Three comments, 1+ paragraph each)

You are expected to read your peers’ blog posts and to respond to them in your own posts. Additionally, over the course of the semester, you are required to leave *three* thoughtful comments on peers’ posts. Comments should be at least a paragraph in length, and should respond to a specific claim or question in your peer’s post. Moreover, they should be original; you can refer to existing comments, but do not repeat them. You are expected to raise new insights and questions in your comments

Comments 1 and 2 are due by 9/24. Comment 3 is due 10/29.

3. Enrichment events (At least one 90-minute event outside of class, 9/16, 10/8, 10/9, or 11/11)

You are required to attend *at least one* of the “Mass Incarceration and the Carceral State” events this semester, because they explore our class themes in great depth and give you a chance to engage experts face-to-face. Reserve time in your calendar *now*, so that you do not forget when the semester gets busy. In order to receive credit for attending, be sure to find me during the event to say hello. I look forward to hearing your thoughts!

-9/16, 6pm: Prof. Dylan Rodriguez lecture on race and the concept of “mass incarceration”

-10/8, 6pm: Prof. Daniel LaChance lecture on the history of the death penalty

-10/9, 10am: Informal discussion with Prof. LaChance, Jennifer Vitry, and Innocence Project

-11/11: 6pm: Prof. Lisa Guenther on the architecture of imprisonment and solitary confinement

At each event, take notes on the content of the lecture, and also the ways the speaker presents his or her claims (including evidence, framing, presuppositions, etc.).

Extra Credit: Students who attend an enrichment event are encouraged to write an additional blog post reviewing it and tying it to class discussions.

Students who have scheduling conflicts with *all four* events must let me know in advance, by 9/17. Together, we will agree upon an alternative activity to make up the required grade (not the extra credit).

4. Paper 1 Project: (4-6 page final draft and revision memo due 10/4 at 12:00pm via Sakai; rough drafts due via Sakai on 9/21 and 9/28, for commenting).

The first half of the semester culminates in a formal academic essay, in which you critically engage two or more of the readings from Weeks 1-4. A topic prompt will be assigned a month in advance, on 9/3. This essay will require you to push your thinking further than the blog posts, and will enable you to practice specific writing techniques that we discuss in class in Weeks 4-6.

Your writing begins in class on 9/17, when we practice “rough planning”—a technique that works better than outlining for many students. On 9/21, you will submit a complete draft of your paper. Half of the class will meet with an undergraduate writing tutor (UWT) who will give you face-to-face feedback on your draft. The other half of the class will receive written comments from me. On 9/28, you will submit a second complete draft. Students who previously got feedback from me will meet with the UWT; students who previously met with the UWT will get comments from me.

These multiple revisions will push you to refine your writing *and your thinking*. You may be surprised by how much you learn through this process!

5. Paper 2 Project: (7-9 pages, due 12/4, with *many* intermediate assignments. See below.)

During Weeks 9-15, our class will be entirely dedicated to supporting your second paper project, a research paper of your own design, exploring any class theme that interests you. Through this work, you will become an expert on a particular topic related to freedom, justice, and imprisonment.

To orient your project, an initial **project statement** is due in class on 10/22. In Weeks 9 and 10, you will conduct independent research, submitting an **annotated bibliography** on 10/30. Immediately afterwards, on 11/3, you will bring a **rough plan** of your paper's structure to class. We will workshop your rough plan so you can begin drafting the paper confidently. A first partial draft is due on 11/10, and a second, more complete partial draft is due on 11/17. During Weeks 12 and 13, you will meet with the UWT to discuss your draft in detail, and class time will be devoted to improving your draft. **A complete and careful rough draft** is due on 11/24. This draft should be *as complete and well written as possible*.

In preparation for class on 12/1, two classmates will read your complete rough draft and respond to it in detail. You will read and respond to their drafts. In class, all drafts will receive a very thorough peer critique. You will then revise the draft once more, submitting a **final draft** on 12/4.

Here again, you will be surprised by how much better we write when we write for others, revising in light of their feedback.

6. End of semester reflection: (1-2 pages, written in class on 12/3)

This final, brief assignment will ask you to reflect back on your progress throughout the semester, and set goals for future semesters at Duke.

Class and University Policies

[Abridged for sample syllabus]

Grades: Your final grade for this course will be composed as follows:

Blog Activity:	15% of final grade
Posts (4):	3% each x 4 (A-F scale)
Responses (3):	1% each x 3 (√, √-, 0 scale)
Paper 1 Project	25%
Rough draft submitted to me:	3% (√, √-, 0)
Final draft:	20% (A-F scale)
Revision memo w/ final draft:	2% (√, √-, 0)
Paper 2 Project	55%
Project Statement	2% (√, √-, 0)
Annotated Bibliography	10% (A-F scale)

Rough Plan and workshop	2% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
Progress Update 1 (11/10)	1% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
In class self-assessment (11/10)	1% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
Progress Update 2 (11/17)	1% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
In class self-assessment (11/17)	1% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
Peer critique prep and participation	2% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)
Final draft	35% (A-F scale)

Speakers Series Attendance (1 lecture): 2% ($\sqrt{\quad}$ or 0)

Students are required to attend one enrichment event (9/16, 10/8, 10/9, or 11/11).
 Students who cannot attend *any* enrichment events must submit a proposal for alternative activities. *Proposal due by 9/17.*

End of semester reflection 1% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)

Preparation and Participation 2% ($\sqrt{\quad}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0)

Absences 3% subtracted for every absence after two

Extra Credit Possibilities up to 5% added to final grade

Extra blog post on 9/16 event	1% added
Extra blog post on 10/8 and 10/9 events	1% added, 1% added
Extra blog post on 11/11 event	1% added

Reading and Workshop Schedule
(subject to slight changes if necessary)
(all readings posted to Sakai except *The New Jim Crow*)

Week 1

Tues, 8/24: Introductions; class and syllabus overview

Thurs, 8/27: Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (1998), pp. 29-45
Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro" (1852)

(Readings are always due by class time. Read carefully, take notes, and supplement those with the notes you take in class—you will need them when it comes time to write a paper. Come to class prepared with questions about the reading. Finally, consider writing a blog post and reading what your peers have written on the blog. You must complete posts on two readings by 9/15, and two comments on your peers' posts by 9/24. A second round of posts and responses will be due in weeks 7-9.)

Week 2

Tues, 9/1: Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1969)

Thurs, 9/3: **Class cancelled:** Professor at conference. **Paper 1 assigned via Sakai.**

Week 3

Tues, 9/8: Philip Pettit, "Freedom as Antipower" (1996)

Thurs, 9/10: Thom Brooks, *Punishment* (2013)
pp. 1-6; 15-20, 34; 35-42, 49-50; 51-55, 62-3; 64-9; 85

Week 4

Tues, 9/15: Glen C. Loury, *Race, Incarceration, and American Values* (2008), pp. 2-28
Vesla Weaver, "The Only Government I Know"

(**Blog check:** By class time today, students should have written *two* blog posts corresponding to *two* different readings, due before class on the days the readings were due. By 9/24, students should have written two comments on peers' posts.)

Wed, 9/16 [No class] **Enrichment event:** Dylan Rodriguez on the rhetoric of "mass incarceration." Westbrook Building (West Campus), Room 0012, 6:00-7:30pm.

(Students are required to attend *one* of four enrichment events during the semester. Students who attend may also write an extra credit blog post reviewing the lecture and connecting it to class themes.)

Thurs, 9/17: No assigned reading. In-class workshops: Blog Review and Rough Planning. (Proposals due for students who cannot attend any enrichment events.)

Week 5

- Mon, 9/21: [No class] **Paper 1 Draft 1 due** by 12pm via Sakai
Group A students begin UWT meetings.
Group B students will receive written feedback from me.
- Tues, 9/22: No assigned reading. In-class workshop: Thesis revision.
- Thurs, 9/24: Joseph Harris, "Forwarding."
In-class workshop: Using sources
(**Blog check:** Students should have written two comments on peers' blog posts.)

Week 6

- Mon, 9/28: [No class] **Paper 1 Draft 2 due** by 12pm via Sakai
Group A students will receive written feedback from me.
Group B students begin UWT meetings.
- Tues, 9/29: Joseph Harris, "Revising."
In-class workshop: Paragraphing.
- Thurs, 10/1: **Class cancelled** (Professor at conference)

Week 7

- Sun, 10/4: [No class] **Paper 1 Final Draft due, with revision memo**, by 12pm via Sakai
- Tues, 10/6: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2012), pp. 1-15, 72-103
- Thurs, 10/8: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2012), pp. 140-165, 178-187, 236-244.

(**Blog check:** By class time, students should have written *one* post on Alexander.)
- Enrichment event:** Daniel LaChance and other experts on the death penalty
Location TBA, 6-7:30pm
- Fri, 10/9 **Enrichment event:** Informal discussion with Daniel LaChance, Jennifer Vitry, and the Innocence Project. Location TBA. 10:00am-12:00pm (lunch provided afterwards)

Week 8

- Tues, 10/13: **Fall break, no class**
- Thurs, 10/15: Five Omar Mualimm-ak, "Solitary Confinement's Invisible Scars" (2013)
Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement* (2013), pp. 3-22, 34-36, 145-149

Week 9

Tues, 10/20: Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement* (2013), 161-7, 221-230, 244-251

(**Blog check:** By class time, students should have written *one* post on Guenther.)

Thurs, 10/22: **Paper 2 project statement due** in class in hard copy.
Class meets in Lily Library to learn research techniques

Week 10:

Tues, 10/27: Independent research; no assigned reading.
Bring *one* bibliography source to present to the class.
Source should be fully read and annotated.
Bring laptops.

Thurs, 10/29: Independent research; no assigned reading.
Bring *another* bibliography source to present to the class.
Source should be fully read and annotated.
Bring laptops.
Volunteers needed for Tues workshop.

(**Blog check:** By class time, students should have written *a third* response on a peers' post)

Fri, 10/30: [No class] **Annotated Bibliographies due** by 1pm via Sakai.

Week 11

Tues, 11/3: **Paper 2 rough plans due** in class. Bring 4 hard copies.
In class: paper structuring workshop.
*Volunteer needed to submit their rough plan to me by 10am, via email.

Thurs, 11/5: In class: Continue paper structuring workshop.
(Students are encouraged to begin drafting their papers immediately after class.)
(Schedule UWT meetings now.)

Week 12:

Mon, 11/9: [No class] **UWT meetings begin** and continue through Week 12 and 13.
(Do not postpone UWT meetings until the last minute!)

Tues, 11/10: **Paper 2 partial draft 1 due** via Sakai by class time.
In class: Paper 2 Self-Assessment 1. Write-on-site.

Wed, 11/11 [No class]
Enrichment event: Lisa Guenther on the meanings of prison architecture
Smith Warehouse, Room TBA, 6-7:30pm
(Students *strongly* encouraged to attend. Extra credit blog post worth *double*.)

Thurs, 11/12 **Lunch with Lisa Guenther**, 12:30-2:00pm. Location TBA.
(Students are expected to attend *all* of the lunch, *or* at least the segments that take place during normal class time (i.e. 12:30-1:00 or 1:25-2:00).)

Week 13

Tues, 11/17: **UWT meetings continue.**
Paper 2 partial draft 2 due via Sakai by class time.
In class: Paper 2 Self-Assessment 2. Write-on-site.

Thurs: 11/19: In class workshop: Responding to difficulties. Revision strategies.

Week 14

Tues, 11/24: **Paper 2 full draft due** to group members and me by 7:00pm via email
Class cancelled to ensure that drafts are submitted on time

Thurs, 11/26: **Thanksgiving break**; no class.

Week 15

Tues, 12/1: **Peer critique assignment due.**
Bring annotated hard copies of both peer drafts, and your two feedback forms.
In class: Peer critique workshop.

(Students are encouraged to begin revising papers immediately after class.)

Thurs, 12/3: Final class; no assigned reading
In class: End of semester reflection. Bring laptops.
Course evaluations

Fri, 12/4: [No class] **Paper 2 due via Sakai at 11pm.**
(Do not forget “Acknowledgements” section.)
Writing 101 is complete.