

Course Syllabus¹ English 472: Current Theories of Writing and Reading

Course Overview

Storytelling ... becomes a positive and powerful way to bring everyone to the table, validating what everybody has to bring, and using that as a way of studying this complex society we all share but in which we live differently depending on where we are positioned in it. Even though we may see it differently, because we're sitting in different positions around that table, we all have something to add to this developing story about who we are as a nation, where we are going in terms of addressing our racial history, and other aspects of justice. “The Story of the Storytelling Project: An Arts-Based Race and Social Justice Curriculum,” Lee Anne Bell.

Welcome to English 472! I am thrilled to teach this class and to provide you with a substantial *public scholarship* experience through storytelling. Public scholarship (variously referred to as “publicly engaged academic work,” “community engaged research,” and “community-based research”) “encompasses different forms of making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value.”² Increasingly, students are participating in public scholarship in and beyond their classes.

Your public scholarship storytelling project -- leading story circles and collaboratively (with community participants) writing “Neighborhood narratives”--is part of a larger project to tell new stories about the residents of Reading, PA. The reading, writing, and thinking leading up to the storytelling projects center on stories’ social change potential. Our class text, *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*, will be supplemented with readings on notions of community and neighborhood, community-building, and facilitating story circles. The writing, revising, editing, and review processes for the stories will be highly collaborative.

Neighborhood Narratives is also an important facet of a community-wide effort to rehabilitate the one mile segment of the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT) from Baer Park to the West Buttonwood Street Bridge in Reading, Pennsylvania (“BP-WBS SRT segment”) into a usable trail and park. From my perspective and the perspectives of most students already involved in this project, the rehabilitation of the BP-WBS SRT segment is an environmental justice necessity with implications for social and economic quality of life improvements.

Past experience with this section of the trail as well as a great deal of research on urban green spaces in impoverished communities makes it crystal clear that community participation and buy-in from the residents in the neighborhoods nearest to the trail is vital to long-term success. The communities in a larger sense and the individuals who live there may develop a vested interest in the trail if they are involved in the process and made aware of its possibilities. *Your work leading story circles and writing community stories are central to community-building. They will be printed in a small book to be distributed both in print and online.*

Course Objectives

- Rigorous Critical Reading and Critical Thinking
- Writing in Several Forms, including online
- Understanding of the Complexities of Storytelling in Community-Building and Social Justice

¹ I removed all information related to university policies that are not specific to this public scholarship class.

² Ellison, Julie, and Timothy K. Eatman. *Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University*. Syracuse: Imagining America, 2008.

- Collaboration
- Leadership Skills
- Leading Story Circles and Writing Stories with Communities near the “BP-WBS SRT segment”
- Contribution to the Public Good and Social Justice

Standards and Expectations

My expectations for your work and professionalism are high and generally unyielding. I expect the effort and outcomes appropriate to the academic and intellectual rigor of a 400-level course. Your writing in this class must be substantive, meaningful, and insightful in content and nearly perfect in mechanics, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, and citation. You are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the course material as well as knowledge of the conventions for writing in a college setting. And you are expected to be able to meet these challenges by acting responsibly and with commitment to the class and your work. Attendance, meeting deadlines, participation, timeliness, and regular participation in class discussions are required.

Graded Assignments (maximum 100 points)

1. Six Critical Reading Response Papers (CRR): 5 points each (30 points total)
2. Story Circle Script: 5 points
3. Facilitating Story Circles: 10 points (includes preparation process and on-site story circles)
4. Writing Neighborhood Stories: 20 points (includes the process: drafts, peer review, review/editing/revising, and final draft)
5. Final Analysis Essay: 20 points
6. Participation in class discussions and brief class presentations on your final analysis essay (quality and frequency): 15 points

Human Subject Research Training

The storytelling project falls under the category of what PSU refers to as “Human Subjects Research.” Conducting a Human Subject Research Study at Penn State University requires that all investigators receive online training through a series of “open book” quizzes.

The training is far simpler than it may first appear. I’ve had hundreds of students conduct human subjects research after completing this training. If you’ve already completed the training, please let me know, and I will confirm with the supervising professor.

The training requires that you pass an online set of quiz questions (modules) with an average score of at least 80% on all quizzes associated with this course’s module requirements. The modules enable you to find the information while taking the course, and you can take the course (each module) as many times as needed. **I will introduce all students to the Human Subjects Research Training in class will take place on Tuesday, January 19th.** All Students Must Complete Human Subjects Research Training by 11:59 pm on Sunday, February 14th.

Required Texts for English 472

1. Solinger, Rickie, Madeline Fox, Kayhan, eds. *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*. Routledge, 2008. Paperback version is available at PS Berks bookstore; *amazon.com*, and several additional online stores; a Kindle version is also available. All students are required to bring this book (or the assigned pages) with you to class every period when a reading is due. You may bring it by hard copy or online (tablet, laptop, computer) but NOT on your phone.
2. Assigned readings on CANVAS or elsewhere on the web.

English 472

Assignment Schedule

Assignments are to be completed on the dates listed. Assignments are subject to change at my discretion. Check your email twice daily.

MODULE 1: THE SRT PROJECT AND READING, PENNSYLVANIA: FROM COMMUNITY DEFICITS TO COMMUNITY CAPACITIES

Week 1

T Jan. 12

Read syllabus and assignment schedule.

R Jan. 14

Read: The Schuylkill River Trail project website at <http://sites.psu.edu/schuylkillrivertrailreading/>.

Reading Guide: Please note that the website is still under construction; however, there is enough information there to give you an idea of the main issues related to the project that have been studied, discussed, and debated on thus far. Be prepared to articulate and discuss what these issues are and to raise any and all questions about what you may be confused about.

Week 2

T Jan. 19

Read: Introduction to *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight (CANVAS)

Reading Guide: The assigned reading is the introduction to *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, described on p. 1 as a “guide about rebuilding troubled communities.” We are not reading the guide, but the concepts outlined in this introduction are important to the storytelling project in ENGL 472. Be prepared to discuss in detail the reasons, aims, and assumptions undergirding the two paths, what they call the “traditional” path and the “alternative” path.

R Jan 21

Read: Packet of articles on Reading, PA (CANVAS)

Reading Guide: In these articles, identify and analyze what are presented as Reading’s deficiencies and Reading’s assets.

Critical Reading Response Paper 1 (CRR 1) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Jan 23.

Week 3

T Jan. 26

Read the file on CANVAS for Human Subjects Research Training. Our class today will get everyone started on the Human Subjects Research Training. **All students must complete the human subjects research training by 11:59 pm on Sunday, February 14th.**

MODULE 2: STORIES, COMMUNITY-BUILDING, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

R Jan 28

Read: Introduction, p. 1-11, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Reading Guide: Be prepared to discuss the following issues raised in the introduction:

- 1) the functions of the stories they've collected in this book
- 2) the layers of optimism in the stories they've collected
- 3) the kinds of material and non-material resources used to make the projects written about in the collected stories
- 4) the notion of "authentic voices" in the stories they've collected.

Critical Reading Response Paper 2 (CRR 2) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Jan 30.

Week 4

T Feb. 2

Read: Essays 1 and 3, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Reading Guide for all assigned essays in *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*: For every essay assigned in the next several weeks, be prepared to discuss the following issues:

- What and whom is the storytelling project about?
- Who is/are the author/s of the essay and explain their relationships to the storytelling project.
- In what way(s) and to whom are the stories told?
- What kinds of "evidence"—in the looser sense the editors describe in the introduction—exists of the stories' impact?
- What are the characteristic and defining features of the essay?
- Is there anything else you think, feel, and want to share?

R Feb. 4

Read: Essay 5, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Critical Reading Response Paper 3 (CRR 3) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Feb 6.

Week 5

T Feb. 9

Read: Essays 6 and 7, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Also check out the website for "The Neighborhood Story Project,"
<http://www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org/>

R Feb. 11

Read: Essay 8, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Critical Reading Response Paper 4 (CRR 4) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Feb 13.

Week 6

T Feb. 16

Read: Essays 10 and 11, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

R Feb. 18

Read: Essay 15, *Telling Stories to Change the World (TSCW)*

Critical Reading Response Paper 5 (CRR 5) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Feb 20.

Week 7**T Feb. 23**

Read: *Re-Weaving the Community, Creating the Future*, by Ganley, p. 1-20 (CANVAS)

R Feb. 25

Read: *Re-Weaving the Community, Creating the Future*, by Ganley, p. 21-end (CANVAS)

Critical Reading Response Paper 6 (CRR 6) is due on CANVAS by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Feb 27.

MODULE 3: CO-WRITING THE NEIGHBORHOOD NARRATIVE**Week 8****T Mar. 1**

Read: Roadside Theater's "You and Your Community's Story" at https://roadside.org/sites/default/files/you_and_your_communitystory_0.pdf . Focus on community stories! Note that only some parts of the booklet pertain directly to our project. However, the entire booklet will hopefully inspire ideas.

R Mar. 3

With your partner, come up with a plan for your Story Circle. Write a script (even if you may depart from it). Show me you are ready. Share your plan with the class. Place this on the CANVAS dropbox.

Spring Break: Mar. 6-12

Week 9**T Mar. 15**

Review your story circle scripts and the readings from weeks 7 and 8. Get back into the story circle zone!

R Mar. 18

Class canceled today to give you time to facilitate story circles on site.

Week 10**T Mar. 22**

1-As close to your story circle as possible, work together to summarize, synthesize, respond, etc. What did you learn? What did you hear? What surprised you? What threads emerged? What differences were expressed?

2-Transcribe the recordings. Post your transcriptions to CANVAS prior to class.

R Mar. 24

Organize, write, revise, edit, and prepare to inform your classmates and me about your process.

Week 11**T Mar. 29**

Organize, write, revise, edit, and prepare to inform your classmates and me about your process.

R Mar. 31

Organize, write, revise, edit, and prepare to inform your classmates and me about your process.

Week 12**T Apr. 5**

Organize, write, revise, edit, and prepare to inform your classmates and me about your process.

R Apr 7

Draft of narrative is due to me by Saturday, April 9, 11:59 pm on CANVAS.

I will return these to you by Sunday evening.

Week 13**T Apr. 12**

Begin revising.

R Apr. 14

*Wednesday and Thursday meetings this week with story circle participants to review and collaborate.

Week 14**T Apr. 19**

Revise and edit narratives

R Apr. 21

Finalize narratives. Place on eBook platform and in CANVAS by 9:00 am today.

Begin analytical essay.

MODULE 4: THE FINAL ANALYSIS ESSAY**Week 15****T Apr. 26**

Analytical essay and class presentations (schedule for presentations TBD)

R Apr. 28

Analytical essay and class presentations (schedule for presentations TBD)

Analytical essay due during exam week by 11:59 pm on Wednesday, May 4th on CANVAS.