

Spring 2018  
Tu/Th 9am, 10am  
CGIS South 050

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Office Hours: Tu/Thu, 11-12noon

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## Expository Writing 20: Documenting Lives

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### COURSE CONTENT AND THEMES

In a long-forgotten short story published in 1958, an unloved businessman takes up photography as a hobby only to find himself obsessed by the nature of the medium. He comes to believe that the camera alone can capture and preserve the reality of things and people. “In order to really live,” he tells his friends, “you must photograph as much as you can, but to photograph as much as you can you must either live in the most photographable way possible, or else consider photographical every moment of your life.” The story writer was inspired by a new fad in the postwar decades: middle-class amateurs taking candid snapshots of everyday life on portable cameras. More than a half-century later, in an age of Instagram and Snapchat, our networked devices go everywhere our bodies go, and we are accustomed to taking and sharing pictures of ourselves and others throughout the day. But what does it mean to document our lives and those of others through photographs? What kind of truth or reality can photographs reveal about ourselves and the world in which we live? And what about our ethical obligations? Do we have a moral responsibility as producers and viewers of

photographs? Finally, given the rise of Photoshop and the digital image, how can we even trust what we see?

We will begin with the controversy over Sally Mann's family photographs, which set off a firestorm of criticism when they were exhibited in 1992. Sifting through the reviews and responses, including that of Mann herself, we will try to understand why her photographs struck such a nerve. In the second unit, we will turn from photography-as-art to the rise of photojournalism, and in particular, to a groundbreaking series of photo-essays from LIFE magazine on racial segregation in the South. Unlike the first essay, which asks you to develop an argument based on primary sources, in this unit we will make use of a "lens" text, a historical study of LIFE magazine in the postwar decades. In our final unit, we will grapple briefly with the problem of proof and deception in the digital age. According to some critics, the advent of digital photography and the ease of alteration has undermined the fidelity of the photograph as a document, but others insist that photographs have always trafficked in deception. We will explore this debate before setting off on our own individual research projects.

## WRITING GOALS AND PREMISES

Some of our writing goals in this course will change unit by unit, as you take on the distinct challenges of several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the whole of the course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; one doesn't "arrive" at being a good writer, but rather continually becomes one. With these goals in mind, we begin with three important premises:

- Good writing is a recursive process: you will develop and write preliminary response papers and essays, which we will discuss in conference and for which you will receive feedback from me and your fellow writers; you will then revise those essays, giving your analysis time to evolve and grow more complex.
- Your writing will improve most when you possess clear ideas about what you want to accomplish in each assignment: what aspects of the writer's craft matter to you, and how you want to grow and improve. This class asks you to be thoughtful and self-reflective about your writing process: to question and evaluate your own work in each assignment (e.g. in Cover Letters with each essay, in peer workshop, and in our one-on-one conferences).
- While inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you have dedicated sustained effort to the process of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising.

## COURSE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

### Communication

The course works best when we treat it as a semester-long conversation about your writing. To make that conversation possible, there are a few important things to remember:

- **Conferences:** In each unit of the course, you will submit a pre-draft response paper, a draft, and a revised essay. After you have submitted your draft, we will meet to discuss my written feedback, which I will have sent to you beforehand. These conferences are our chance to work together closely on your writing and to focus your work toward revision, and they are most worthwhile when you are the one guiding them. My job during conferences is to talk through your ideas and clarify my feedback, and I'll be in the best position to do this job when you come to our conference prepared.

Being prepared includes having reviewed your essay, considered your questions, and begun to think about revision possibilities and strategies before we meet. You should bring a copy of your draft (with my marginal comments and feedback summary) with you to our conferences, and you should plan on taking notes in your notebook. Experience has shown that the most effective conferences last about 20 minutes, so the slots for each conference will be 25 minutes long. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, missed conferences may not be rescheduled.

In addition to our formal conferences, you are of course free to come see me on Friday during office hours about your developing ideas or to set up another time to meet if office hours aren't convenient. Due to the compressed nature of the week between drafts and revisions, I will not be able to provide feedback for any "second drafts" leading up to your final revision; however, by the time you are revising your drafts you will have received a number of stages of feedback and can by all means make appointments with the Writing Center!

- **E-mail:** Rather than take up our class time with announcements and administrative arrangements (and there will be many of them), I will use e-mail to communicate much of that information. As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your e-mail daily. You are responsible for the information I send you, including the feedback to your drafts and revisions (which are easy enough to overlook on a smartphone). Likewise, I make sure to check my email once every weekday for questions from you. Please note, however, that unless prior arrangements have been made, you should not

assume that I will check e-mail later than 8:00 p.m. I can answer most questions on the same day, *except over the weekend*.

### Class Participation

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class; you learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from simply listening to what others have to say. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small-group work. Therefore, you are responsible for being in class, prepared and on time, each time we meet. Being prepared for class means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments for our class, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussions.

### Grades

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown: Essay #1 = 20%; Essay #2 = 30%; Essay #3 = 40%. The standard for each essay also becomes more demanding as we progress (since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each essay). I will provide a letter grade on your revised essay (not on response papers, not on drafts). The remaining 10% of your grade represents a serious measure of your completion of in-class exercises and your constructive participation in class.

### Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, **your consistent attendance is essential**. It is an official program-wide policy that if you are absent without medical or religious excuse *more than twice*, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your second unexcused absence, you will receive a gentle letter of warning.

You are expected to let me know promptly if you have missed or will miss a class; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned. Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In those circumstances, you should contact me before class (or within 24 hours); you may need to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Freshman Dean. Absences because of special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, letting me know in advance. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you must directly petition the Director of Expository Writing, who will grant such a petition only in extraordinary circumstances and only if your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at **seven minutes past the hour**.

### Submitting Essays

Essays and revisions will be submitted on Canvas. The attachment must be in Microsoft Word (i.e. doc or docx; not pdf and not Pages). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you send is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty. NB: Unless you have made prior arrangements to do so, please do not email me your essays—that unfortunately creates a whole series of potential glitches in the feedback loop. If your essay is late, please submit it to Canvas and then send me an email letting me know that it's been posted. All work you submit to the course is for class readership – in other words, we will use essays and anonymous excerpts from the writers in the class (possibly yours!) as some of our texts this semester. If at any point you submit a draft or revision that you prefer other students not read, please let me know, but please don't make that request about everything you turn in this semester.

### Deadlines

For many class meetings, you will have a response paper due, or a reading or writing exercise that is designed to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those preliminary assignments. For that reason, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time since late submissions make it impossible for me to provide you with timely feedback. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical illness or a family emergency, you should contact me right away.

### Revision

Because of the emphasis this course places on revision, the schedule is designed to allow you as much revision time per essay as possible. Since you'll have a significant span of days in which to revise, the expectations for this aspect of your work in the course are high. Revision may require reconceiving your thesis, which will then compel you to change the structure of the draft; revision could also mean bringing in evidence that wasn't in the draft (or getting rid of evidence that no longer fits the revised thesis). In other words, the draft and revision should look dramatically different from each other.

### Completion of Work

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, it is an official program-wide policy that you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

### Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite them and how to avoid plagiarism. In Expos we foster an approach to writing that focuses on the perspective of the reader, and as a result you will frequently incorporate the feedback of your classmates, your peers, myself, and perhaps others into your work. If this feedback has become a substantial part of your work and you need to acknowledge the impact someone has had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, however, "You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." In the end, all work you submit must be your own. Writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

### Writing Center

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the basement level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. **I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide;** regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's Web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment (do it early and often!). Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

### Required Texts and Materials

Please note: you need to purchase only one book for the class, but I will often ask you to print documents from Canvas or from your own files, so please plan accordingly.

- Sally Mann, *Hold Still* (ISBN 978-0-316-24776-4) – copies on sale at the Coop.
- Course Packet – copies provided by me.
- One three-ring binder as course reader for collecting handouts.
- Class notebook of your choice (see below on Computer Policy and the Class Notebook)
- All other materials, including photographic images and "handouts" for writing exercises, will be provided in class and/or made available on the Canvas course site. If the reading materials are on Canvas, you must print and bring these to class.

You should also have access to a writing handbook when questions of grammar, mechanics or style arise. I'm happy to recommend one if you don't own one already.

### Computer Policy and Class Notebook

To encourage the best classroom discussions and full engagement in the class **laptops will not be allowed EXCEPT on days when I specifically tell you to bring them.** Study after study has shown that notes taken by hand are a vastly more useful tool than those taken on a computer. With this in mind, I ask that you purchase a notebook for the class and bring it with you for every class meeting. You will use this book to take notes on the weekly readings, to map out paper drafts, keep track of class discussion, and plan research in Unit 3.

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## Essay #1: Private Life and Public Art

### Take a Position

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#### *Assignment:*

When the *New York Times* magazine profiled the photographer Sally Mann in 1992, the images of her naked children – and Mann’s own claims about them – became the subject of a heated controversy. Write a 4–5 page essay in which you make a claim about how we should understand this controversy. Draw your evidence from the critical reviews by Mary Gordon and Anne Bernays, the published letters responding to the *New York Times* profile and to Bernays, and Mann’s recent memoir in which she looks back on the controversy in the context of her life.

You should do not outside research for this assignment.

#### *Goals of the Essay*

Create Stakes: set up a genuine problem or question at the beginning of your essay, making clear why someone might want to read an essay on this topic or need to hear your particular thesis argued (why your thesis isn't just obvious to all, why other theses might be less persuasive).

Form an Arguable Thesis: One of the most important elements of the essay is the thesis (the main proposition that needs demonstrating). Your thesis should be true but arguable (not obvious to all); be limited enough in scope to be argued with available evidence; and get to the heart of the topic being analyzed (not be peripheral). It should be stated early and it should govern the whole essay.

Analyze the Evidence: It’s imperative to guide your readers through your interpretation of the evidence in support of your thesis. Never assume (1) that readers know what evidence to look for, (2) that they’ll read a passage or image in the same way that you do, or (3) that they’ll draw the same conclusions. Your analysis of the evidence should persuade your readers of the validity of your claims.

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## Essay #2: *Life* Magazine and Postwar Journalism

### They Say/I Say: Using a Secondary Source

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#### *Assignment:*

In Unit 2 we will focus on a photographic essay series from LIFE magazine, one of the most popular photo-magazines of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the first unit, we focused exclusively on primary sources. In this unit, we are going to build on our reading skills by adding a secondary source. The secondary source not only provides essential contextual information, but it also makes an argument, one that you are expected to contend with in your own reading of the primary source. The central challenge to this essay is to use the secondary source as a “lens,” and to put the two sources in dialogue with each other within one coherent statement of argument. As with the last essay, you will need to generate your own question or problem.

You will draw on the textual and visual evidence from one photo-essay along with Wendy Kozol’s scholarly study of LIFE to frame an analytical question about how we should understand one photographic essay on racial segregation in 1956. Your question should establish an interpretive framework for the photo-essay. Our class discussion and in-class exercises will help you to develop a question about your chosen photo-essay & to lay out the stakes for your thesis.

You should do not outside research for this assignment.

#### Central Primary Source:

Choose either Robert Wallace, “Voices of the White South,” LIFE, September 17, 1956, 104-121 or Robert Wallace and Gordon Parks, “The Restraints: Open and Hidden,” LIFE, September 24, 1956, 99-112.

#### Supplementary Primary Source (for background and context):

- Editor’s introduction to the series, LIFE, September 3, 1956, 43.

Secondary Source (the “lens”): Wendy Kozol, *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), preface, vii-ix; Chapter 2-3.

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## Essay #3: the Multi-Source Research Paper

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### *Assignment*

Your task for your final paper is to write a multi-source research essay in which you develop an original, theoretically informed argument about a topic of your choosing. Essay Three presents several new challenges, particularly in focus, use of sources, and structure. In the first two essays, I gave you *all* the sources; for this essay, you will choose your own sources. You need to think strategically about how many and what kinds of primary & secondary sources you need to argue your thesis effectively. Do be wary of letting the ideas of other scholars or critics take over the essay – your argument is the one that matters most, and the secondary sources should be present in the essay only in the service of your own argument.

How many secondary sources do you need? It depends (at least 2, but no more than 5). These parameters give you a significant amount of freedom. Nonetheless, your argument must—at some point and in some meaningful way—engage with a critical debate that you have created. That is, you'll be arranging (through research) and contributing (through analysis) to a particular scholarly conversation of your own making.

We will work with Harvard librarians, sample essays, and the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* during this unit to (1) figure out how to find that material we need and (2) to evaluate those sources once we locate them. The sources you're using can play several roles in the essay, and some will play larger roles than others. They can help you to identify the analytical question you're exploring or to establish the motive for your argument; they can advance your argument, raise new questions, supply a key concept, or provide counter-argument or complication. Whatever role any individual source might play, the secondary sources together should be helping you closely analyze your primary source(s) – and so the essay should be a discussion that would not have been possible without those secondary sources.

Below is a list of topics to stimulate your thoughts (some are from past student essays). Do you have to choose from these options? **No**, but your topic should engage with some aspect of photography – its history, meaning, or controversies. Do I have to write about actual images? For this assignment, you can focus on texts alone by intervening in a critical debate about photography. Come see me early to discuss your ideas!

- Images of Childhood
- Youth Culture in *Life* Magazine, 1950-1970 (in fact, you could do a study of *any* subject/topic of a photo-essay published in *Life* magazine between 1936 and 1970 -- the Great Depression, the Holocaust, the Atom bomb, mainstream American politics, apartheid in South Africa or the caste

- system in India, corporate culture, feminism, Communism, Vietnam, religion, science, etc. Do some browsing in the online archive and see if something catches your eye).
- Interpreting Everyday Life: Street Photography vs. Instagram
  - Jacob Riis and *How the Other Half Lives*
  - Digital Photographs and Abu Ghraib
  - Photographing the Poor: Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange (photography as social reform)
  - Crime Photography: Voyeurism or Evidence?
  - The Mapplethorpe Obscenity Trial
  - Body Image, Fashion, and Photoshop (or anything having to do with photo manipulation and/or staging)
  - Picturing Addiction in Two Epidemics: Crack and Opioids
  - Photography and the Meme
  - The Role of Photographs in the Black Lives Matter movement
  - Reenactment in Documentary Film

### ***Goals and Strategies:***

Gathering and Evaluating Evidence: In Unit two, we worked closely with sources that I provided for you. In this unit, you will develop your own collection of primary and secondary sources through independent research. You may choose from a variety of disciplinary perspectives so long as your sources can help you frame and develop your research question and your thesis. Remember that you will need to use your sources to *develop an argument*; you should not simply amass a body of evidence and report on it. At every turn, think about how your sources reflect on your research question and how they will help you generate and advance your thesis. **You will channel your sources into a Preliminary Bibliography, which you will submit to me as part of Response Paper 3.1. You will then write a preliminary Essay Proposal as your Response Paper 3.2.**

Counterargument: A counterargument is a claim that contradicts or is in tension with your thesis or with part of your argument. Counterarguments play an important role, both in your writing and in your thought process. In your writing, addressing counterargument persuasively demonstrates that you have thought through your argument with care, are aware of potential problems, and are able to address them. A paper that ignores counterarguments, shouldering its way to conclusions indifferent to potential problems or alternative possibilities, often comes across as intellectually careless. In your thought process, counterarguments help to point out the weaknesses in your position or features that you had not considered, often helping you to see the problem you are addressing from a new perspective and to respond to it with greater intellectual creativity and insight. Why are counterarguments important? 1) Defeating counterarguments strengthens your thesis. 2) Counterarguments lend tension and structure to your argument. 3) Counterargument can help you to refine your thesis.

Structure: Learning to structure a multi-source essay, an essay in which you will be deriving much of the research as well as the research question and argument yourselves, will be a new challenge. It will require you to build on the structuring skills that we developed in our previous units. Above all, your essay needs to follow a progressive order while avoiding the Macbeth trap, that is, merely providing a list of examples or

series of restatements of the thesis ("Macbeth is ambitious: he's ambitious here; and he's ambitious here; and he's ambitious here, too; thus, Macbeth is ambitious"). The sequence of your argument's main sections or sub-topics, and the turning points between them need to be clear to your reader. In the longer research essay, therefore, it helps to announce or hint at your structure after the thesis, in a road-map or plan sentence.

**Formatting and Citation:** Your essay should be 12pt font, double-spaced, and paginated. You should write *at least* 2000 words and *no more* than 2500 words. This word count does *not* include the cover letter. Number each paragraph sequentially along the left margin. Adding paragraph numbers will allow for precise feedback. In this final essay, you will continue to cite every quotation and paraphrase with a footnote in Chicago style.

***Unit 3 Cover Letter (to be submitted with your drafts, and revised essays)***

With each version of your essays, you should submit a brief cover letter that provides some context to your paper, its strengths and weakness, and the challenges it presented to you as a writer. You should address the following questions:

- What is your argument as it stands now?
- Identify one place where you employ counterargument.
- How did writing this essay compare with writing the second essay? What was harder? What was easier?
- What do you need help with?
- (with the revision) Tell me how your writing has changed through the class. Feel free to be candid!

