EXPOS 20: DANGEROUS SPEECH

Deirdre Mask, mask@fas.harvard.edu
Office Hours: Barker Center Café, Wednesdays 1-3, or by appointment

On the playground, the teacher tells the teased child that “sticks and stones can break your bones, but names can never hurt you.” But we know that speech can hurt; a cross burning on your lawn might damage you more profoundly than a slap across the face. In this course, we’ll examine the extent to which the First Amendment protects “dangerous speech” – a category that includes calls to violent action, racist abuse, and the communication of “subversive” political ideas.

Our first unit will focus on a close reading of a recent Supreme Court case: Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association, a decision striking down California’s ban on the sale of violent video games to minors. We’ll ask: how do Supreme Court Justices argue about dangerous speech?

Next, we’ll look to decisions applying free speech principles to communist agitators, cross burners, and protestors, and examine the theory behind the First Amendment. When does speech go too far?

Our third unit will focus on hate speech – speech that vilifies a group based on, for example, its race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Students will have the opportunity to choose a hate speech case or topic, either in the United States or abroad, to research in depth.

Texts and Materials
There are no books you must purchase for this course. Rather, course readings will be distributed either in class or on the course website. You will, therefore, need access to a good printer; there are many available on campus that print at a reasonable cost. One of the key readings for our class (and every class at Harvard) is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources, available at http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu

Please bring the assigned readings to class every day.

(Usually) No Laptops in Class
Most days, you will just need to bring the readings, pen and paper, and a copy of any work assigned for that class.

CAUTION: Dangerous Speech Ahead
By its very nature, a course on “Dangerous Speech” may at times include conversation or readings that use uncomfortable language or discuss uncomfortable ideas. This language is obviously not my own, nor do I condone it. If you ever feel uncomfortable with language used in class discussion, please contact me as soon as possible.
I will provide ample feedback on each draft, but it is impossible to provide a critique of everything that needs to be fixed in your essay at conference. Revisions require sustained and independent effort as well as attention to my comments; you should not assume that if you only make the noted changes, you will get your desired grade. Because of the emphasis this course places on revision, the schedule is designed to allow you as much revision time per essay as possible – always at least a week after the draft is due, and usually at least five days after your draft conference. 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.

**In-Class Workshopping**

All writing you do for this class is public – in other words, it may be chosen as one of the examples for us to consider in “workshop.” We’re all friends here! Tell me if you ever don’t want a particular piece workshopped in class.

The majority of your grade will come from your three essays, according to the following breakdown: Essay #1 = 25%; Essay #2 = 30%; Essay #3 = 35%. **Only revisions will receive a grade.** 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). The remaining 10% of your grade represents a serious measure of your completion of response papers, your constructive participation in class discussion and conferences, and the care with which you respond to fellow students’ work.
Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

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. If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade. On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Freshman Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours; otherwise you will be required 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; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Freshman Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Unexcused absences do not extend due dates. Class begins 10 minutes past the hour. Three late arrivals to class will be counted as an absence.

THE EXPOS ATTENDANCE POLICY IS VERY SERIOUS. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT, PLEASE CONTACT ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
EXTENSION POLICY

Even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected events or circumstances can arise. Therefore, I offer a number of opportunities to “earn” an extension throughout the semester. Any late paper (draft or revision) will be marked off 1/3 of a grade for each day that it is late.

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. **All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment.** Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course.

Collaboration Policy

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone 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, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.
Getting The Most Out of Expos

Some of our writing goals 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: 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. It’s worth noting that inspiration most readily comes when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you dedicate sustained effort to the process of reading, thinking, drafting and revising.

Your writing will improve most when you possess clear ideas about what you want to accomplish in each assignment. This class asks you to be thoughtful and self-reflective about your writing process: to question and evaluate your own work (in your Cover Letters with each essay) and in the course as a whole.

How Expos Will Help You In Other Classes At Harvard

Across the disciplines, academic writing is both the same and different. Different occasions and disciplines call for a range of approaches and conventions. In this course, we will explore common principles of academic writing – such as thesis, evidence, analysis and argument – which will be part of much of the writing you do at Harvard. We will also examine some of the ways those conventions have different inflections – or even very different appearances – in different disciplines. In other words, this course is about the law, but it’s not only about the law: it’s about how to think and write in every class.

The Writing Center: At any stage of the writing process – while brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, or approaching revisions – you may find yourself wanting help with your essays above and beyond conferences and our in-class peer workshops. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center, telephone 617-496-1655) offers appointments with trained tutors, and is an invaluable resource. Visit the Writing Center’s website to make an appointment or find out when and where the “drop-in hours” are.

RESPONSE PAPERS

In each of our units, the response papers are intended to help you to break down the process of writing into a set of stages. Each response paper is designed to prepare you for the next stage in the essay process, and to feed, ultimately, into the essay itself, helping you to write your way towards the discovery of a compelling thesis.

Any Questions?
Let me know!