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Expository Writing 20: Narratives of Immigration

Course Description:

Immigration has become an increasingly divisive topic in U.S. politics, as thousands of people fleeing violence and poverty in Central America have arrived at the nation's border. While conversations about immigration tend to focus on its economic and cultural implications, the specific experiences of immigrants can get lost in the political shuffle. Who are the people who are coming to the U.S. border? What has motivated their journeys? Once they arrive, what happens to their individual stories and experiences? Who receives those narratives? How are they used? In this course, students will try to answer these questions, grappling with one of the most pressing moral and social issues U.S. lawmakers and citizens are confronting today. But rather than just approaching the complexities of immigration using academic literature, students will engage actively with how narratives of immigration are told and transformed, especially as individual experiences get processed into legal asylum cases. Students will have the opportunity to meet with and pose questions to lawyers and law students from the Harvard Law School Immigration Clinic, as well as lawyers working on the border at the U.S. family detention center in Dilley, Texas. They will also exit the gates of Harvard to attend immigration court proceedings, visit local immigrant neighborhoods, and talk with activists about their hopes and frustrations regarding immigration reform. This course aims to be a multifaceted intellectual experience, allowing students the opportunity to witness directly how academic arguments can affect human lives. And students will be asked to participate in this process, offering their own claims about how immigration policy should be shaped based on what they learn over the course of the semester. In Unit 1, we will start by looking at concepts of nationhood and community, asking students to critique arguments for and against open borders—including those by political philosophers Richard Carens and David Miller, and economist Bryan Caplan. In Unit 2, we will turn to the self-articulated experiences of immigrants to the United States, reading Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends* and narratives of actual asylum seekers. Then, students will put these narratives in conversation with former Attorney General Jeff Sessions's definition of persecution in his decision on *The Matter of A-B-* to make a case for who should "count" as a refugee. Finally, in Unit 3 students will write a research paper in which they will use an immigration story of their own choosing to argue for changes in United States policy. They will write this paper in conjunction with creating a capstone project: a two-minute video produced for the community partners they've engaged with throughout the course.

Course Goals

In this course, students will:

- 1) Learn to read critically and build arguments that show rigorous intellectual engagement with a wide range of materials.
- 2) Understand the necessary elements of an academic essay and practice executing them.
- 3) Explore the differences and similarities between analytical, comparative, and research essays at the college level.
- 4) Master the draft and revision processes so they can perform them independently in future courses.
- 5) Explore the connection between academic arguments and lived experiences.
- 6) Exit Harvard's campus to engage with community members and consider alternative forms of evidence.
- 7) Identify their individual strengths as a writer, their scholarly voice, and their intellectual interests.
- 8) Practice different forms of communication, from written essays to video presentations.

The Assignments

Unit I—Nations and Borders

Paper length: 4-5 pages

Why do nations have closed borders? What function do they serve and to what extent are they necessary? In this unit, we will read arguments for and against the concept of open national borders by political philosophers Richard Carens and David Miller, and economist Bryan Caplan. Ultimately, students will take their own stance on the concept of open borders—responding directly to Caplan's libertarian appeal for them.

During this unit, we will have a session with the Harvard Law School Immigration Clinic and students will attend immigration court proceedings in downtown Boston.

Unit II—Asylum Narratives

Paper Length: 5-7 pages

In Unit II, we'll start delving into narratives of immigration, trying to understand who is coming to the United States and why. We will focus our attention on asylum seekers from Central America, reading Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends* and watching the documentary *Which Way Home*. For the essay, students will read a number of narratives from actual asylum seekers in the U.S. and, using the framework provided by asylum law and Jeff Sessions's interpretation of it, make an argument about how the term "refugee" ought to be defined.

During this unit, students will visit a local immigrant neighborhood and will have a class session with lawyers and law students associated with the Dilley Pro Bono Project at the U.S. family detention center in Dilley, Texas.

Unit III—Immigration Policy

Paper Length: 8-10 pages

We'll conclude the course by looking directly at how narratives of immigration should affect U.S. policies. Students will pick a specific story to highlight that they feel encapsulates the limits of current immigration policy, and will advocate for carefully chosen alternatives.

During this unit, students will attend a panel discussion with local immigration activists and complete a capstone project to share with community partners.

Capstone Project: 2-minute video

For their capstone assignment, students will be asked to interrogate ways in which they may have contributed to the problems in immigration they have learned about throughout the semester. Created for the course's community partners, S.L.I.C., the videos will be presented at a capstone fair at the course's conclusion.

Required Texts:

There is only one required text for this class that won't be available online.

- *Tell Me How It Ends* by Valeria Luiselli

You can find this text on Amazon or at the [Harvard Coop](#).

Course Requirements:

- 1) Active participation
- 2) 3 papers and 3 drafts
- 3) 3 conferences
- 4) 1 capstone project
- 5) Response papers (pre-draft writing)

Grade Distribution:

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 25%

Paper 3: 35%

Capstone: 10%

Participation: 10%

Course Policies

Policy on Late Work:

Essays, essay drafts, response papers, and other class assignments must be turned in at the specified time or points will be lost. Each student will receive one, 24-hour “wild card” extension during the semester, giving them extra time on that individual assignment. Once the 24-hour period has passed though, or the “wild card” has been used by the student, late work will be penalized, up to one third of a letter grade for each day it is late. Penalties on late drafts will be applied to the grade on the revision. Extensions will only be granted for medical or family emergencies.

Policy on Collaboration:

This course is designed to foster collaboration amongst course participants. Students will rely on one another by developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work. 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.

Policy on Electronic Submission:

You will submit most of your work for this course electronically. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending 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.

Policy on Academic Integrity:

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 such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

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 Resident 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: often, to avoid impact to your participation grade you will be required to provide a note from UHS, another medical official, or your Resident Dean confirming your illness. *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 Resident 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. *Please be aware that taking unexcused absences impacts your participation grade (excused absences do not).*

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work:

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, 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. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

Statement of Inclusivity:

As your preceptor, I will always strive to create an environment that is sensitive to and inclusive of all people, traditions, ways of life, and viewpoints. If you ever feel unsafe or unwelcome in class, either because of actions I have taken or those of your peers, or if you simply feel that there is more I could do to accommodate your needs, please don't hesitate to be in touch. In class discussion, students will be expected to respect alternative viewpoints and to strive to understand perspectives they do not share. Through open, respectful communication we can all create an intellectual climate where each individual can thrive and grow.

Technology Policy:

While there may be individual class meetings in which I ask you to bring your laptop or tablet, they will otherwise be prohibited from use in the classroom. Cell phones should be put away for the entirety of our meetings.

