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## **Expository Writing 20: Sexism and Politics**

### **COURSE OVERVIEW**

Today, the United States Congress is 19.4% female. That statistic trails the world average of 23.3%, with Nordic, European, sub-Saharan African, and Asian countries achieving better gender balance in national legislatures than the U.S. Some scholars contend that when women run, they are no more likely to win or lose compared to their male counterparts, though they are simply less likely to run in the first place. Other scholars identify a strong correlation between voting and sexist attitudes, notably in the 2016 U.S. election. But the puzzle persists: what accounts for the persistently low levels of female political representation in American politics, particularly since the United States boasts some of the highest levels of female participation in the labor market, especially in executive positions? Our course explores this question as it examines how prejudicial attitudes about women manifest themselves in American political life and society. In Unit 1, we begin by examining the popular argument that women should have more political representation because they would be better political leaders. In this unit, you will also have a chance to engage in the Harvard community by interviewing peers, neighbors, and other members of Harvard Square to get a sense of beliefs about women in politics. In Unit 2, we turn our attention to recent case studies, including Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, to investigate how gender stereotypes may or may not have played a role in the outcomes of their political races. Finally, in Unit 3, you will contribute to the scholarship in this field, by researching the phenomenon that Massachusetts lags behind other states when it comes to female political representation at the state and gubernatorial level. We will partner with the TBA to help them address this problem at the state level by writing a policy paper with recommendations that draw on your research into this issue.

The “Engaged Scholarship” components of this course include mandatory activities outside class time.

- *Interviews with Harvard peers and members of Harvard Square community to be completed before February 25 (no set time, flexible & dependent on individual schedules).*
- *Panel featuring TBA on TBD*
- *Capstone Presentations to TBA on TBD*

Some of our writing goals will change unit by unit, as you take on the distinct challenge of writing several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the whole of the course: developing your critical thinking skills, learning how to give good feedback, understanding what to do with feedback, building on your capacity to be persuasive, and

practicing good public speaking. With these goals in mind, we begin with these important premises:

**Writing is a process.** You will take notes on your reading; write and revise response papers; write drafts of your essays; and fully revise those essays. This continued process of drafting and revision is the primary work of this class, and is the main way your writing grows stronger. It's worth noting that 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 that process* of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising.

**Writing is thinking.** That evolving writing process also allows you to develop your thinking with greater depth and meaning. Writing is one of the best ways to *figure out* your ideas. . . and so you should expect your ideas and arguments to evolve during the writing process. When you hand in a draft, you should not think that you are 'done' with the paper. The draft is part of a step to a final product, and the more work you put in, the more I will be able to help you.

**Writing is a conversation.** When you write, you are often in conversation with the sources you are writing about. You are likewise in conversation with your audience. You will express your ideas in your response papers, drafts and revisions, and your audience from this course will be responding to those ideas, telling you what their strengths are and where they can grow stronger. In addition to the feedback you get from your classmates, you will have individual conferences with me about each essay (these conferences are a required part of the course), and you will receive extensive written feedback from me throughout the semester.

In addition, throughout the semester, we will pay attention to the writing you will do (and are doing) **Beyond Expos**. 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. Different occasions and disciplines also call for different approaches and conventions, and so we will also examine some of the ways those conventions have different inflections – or even very different appearances – in different disciplines.

The course is structured in the following units:

### **Unit 1: “Why should women have more political representation?”**

Most people would probably agree that the goal of gender parity in government is a good one. Women should be as equally represented in politics as men are. The problem, of course, is that women trail men when it comes to political representation, particularly in the United States. We might think that, since most people can agree on the goal of gender parity in politics, there might be little in the way of disagreement or lack of clarity in the reasons provided for *why* women *should* be more represented. As we will find, however, there is little absolute consensus on these precise reasons. In Unit 1, you're going to be thinking very deeply about why we should have women play a larger role in politics than they do currently, using the sources I provide to you as a starting point.

Sample of Required Reading Material

- Selections from Steven Pinker, “The Better Angels of Our Nature.”
- Francis Fukuyama, “Women and the Evolution of World Politics.”
- Oeindrila Dube and S.P. Harish, “Queens.”
- Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, “The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory.”

### **Unit 2: “Explaining the Real World: Testing Scholarly Frameworks.”**

In this unit, we’ll read the works of prominent scholars who are all trying to, either directly or indirectly, explain the campaign/recruitment dynamics and/or outcomes of political races involving female candidates. You’ll get to pick a case or two (options include Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or you can propose one or two to me). Then, you’ll test the scholarly frameworks, making an argument about how and to what extent the theories you choose provide an explanation for what happened in the real world (win/loss in a political race, campaign dynamics, or selection/recruitment—i.e., in your case(s)).

Sample of Required Reading Material (subject to change)

- Selections from Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox, “It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office.”
- Selections from Malliga Och and Shauna Shames, “The Right Women.”
- Ana Catalano Weeks and Sparsha Saha, “Ambitious Women: Gender and Voter Perceptions of Candidate Ambition.”

### **Unit 3: “Solving the ‘Puzzle’ of Low Female Political Representation in Massachusetts.”**

Through our partnership with the TBA, an organization that is leading the charge when it comes to increasing female political representation here in MA, we are going to help address the puzzle of why the state has so few women politicians at the state level (and also at the gubernatorial level), in light of its left-leaning, progressive politics. This unit culminates in a research policy paper with recommendations derived from your findings and a capstone project involving poster presentations to the TBA.

## **HOW THE COURSE WORKS**

On many class days, some of the texts we turn to will be your own writing: your response papers, drafts, and revised essays will be part of what we read and discuss. 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. If there is ever a particular piece you *don’t* want others to see, please just let me know.

There are no texts that you need to purchase for this class. Everything that is required reading or watching is available on the course website in the Reading Folder. For Units 2 and 3, you will be using online and library sources.

### Laptop Policy

Laptops are permitted, but if I notice that folk are not paying attention, I will (gladly) take this privilege away. I'm allowing laptops because I would like to give everyone the option to keep their lives clutter free and environmentally friendly (without extensive printing, pens, binders etc.). In general, I would love to avoid printing materials, so I am relying on you to engage closely and digitally with the materials I post on the Canvas website.

### 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**: We will have three conferences throughout the semester, in between the first draft and final version of each essay. These conferences are our chance to work closely on your writing and to focus your work in revision, and are most worthwhile when you are the one to guide them. Please come to each conference prepared – having reviewed your essay and my comments, considered your questions, and begun to think about revision possibilities and strategies. You should plan on taking notes during our discussions. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, missed conferences may not be rescheduled.
- **E-mail**: Rather than take up our class time with announcements and administrative arrangements (and there will be many of them), I use e-mail to communicate most of that information. As part of your participation in the course, **I ask that you check your Harvard or preferred e-mail account daily**; you are responsible for the information I post there. Likewise, I make sure to check mine once every weekday for questions from you. Please note that I don't check e-mail later than 7:00 p.m. I can answer most questions within 24 hours, except over the weekend.
  - **On Email Etiquette: Generally, it is fair to expect an email response that is as long as the original email. If you have a broad question that takes a couple of sentences to pose, but that requires a couple of paragraphs in response, then please think carefully about whether you need to send it. Chances are that a quick, micro-meeting will be more efficient. Similarly, if you find yourself writing an email to me that is getting very long (say, you're on a third long paragraph, for example), take a moment to think about whether you should be sending it—perhaps a quick, micro-meeting might be more efficient.**

### 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; as in any seminar, 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" means

that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assigned for the day, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussion.

### **Grades**

Paper 1 (Unit 1): 15%

Paper 2 (Unit 2): 25%

Paper 3 (Unit 3): 35%

Capstone Poster Presentation: 15%

Participation (particularly in all of the activities outside of class): 10%

### **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 letter warning you of your situation.

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 from 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 when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at the scheduled time (12pm or 1:30pm). Three latenesses of more than ten minutes will be counted as an absence.

## **WRITTEN WORK**

### **Submitting Essays**

You will turn in most assignments to the appropriate dropbox on the course website. Please be sure to **check the ‘Calendar and Logistics’ document** (there is one for every unit, in the unit folder) for details on when things are due, and pay careful attention to the general guidelines about format, etc. explained there.

When you are uploading documents to Canvas, you are responsible for submitting versions that I can open. (The document must either be in Microsoft Word or be easily compatible; your file should end in .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.

All work you submit to the course is for public readership – in other words, we will use essays and 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 would prefer other students not read, please let me know that – but please don't make that request about everything you turn in this semester.

### **Deadlines**

For many class meetings, you will have due a response paper or some other reading or writing exercise to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise – therefore each student in this section is allowed ONE 24-hour extension on a response paper, draft or revision during the semester. To use that 24-hour extension without penalty, you must: contact me *before* that deadline; submit the late work to Canvas; and be on time with the other work due on that day as well. Otherwise, the work will be counted as late. And beware: taking that one-day extension can mean that you're crunched for time at the beginning of the next unit.

Other than that “wild card” extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I do not grant further extensions. Essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to produce a note from UHS; in the event of a family emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to ask your dean to contact me by e-mail or phone. In addition, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative schedule.

### **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 – always at least a week after the 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.

### **Completion of Work**

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, it is an official Writing Program 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.

### **Policy on Collaboration**

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students or 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.

### **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. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to disciplinary action by the Honor Council.

### **Writing Center**

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, drafting, or revising – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden 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 <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

### **Submitting Essays**

Following the guidelines below will ensure that I can focus on your ideas and your prose when I read your essays, rather than devoting time to issues of formatting, pagination, etc. The guidelines apply both to essay drafts and revisions. Forgetting to check your essays for these matters can result in a lower grade for the essay.

All essays should adhere to the standard format:

- double-space in a reasonable, 12pt font, with one-inch margins
- number all pages and paragraphs
- include your name, the course title, my name, the date, the essay number and your essay title on the first page (don’t use a title page)
- include your name on each subsequent page
- proofread thoroughly for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors. Consistent errors will lower the grades on your essays.
- use the APA in-text citation method to document your sources, and include a correctly formatted list of Works Cited. Consult the [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#) for the appropriate citation information.

Please consult the relevant 'Calendar and Logistics' document for details on what needs to be submitted with each draft and revision.

**And a word to the wise:**

*Keep a copy of all your work*, and be sure to avoid computer disaster: you should both regularly save your work and periodically print working drafts as you write (in other words, you should never be in the position of having "finished" an essay or revision with nothing to show for it if your computer crashes).

**Will this course be a lot of extra work?**

This course does, indeed, require extra work (beyond that of a 'normal' Expos course). It is an 'engaged' Expos course, so while our main focus is on your writing, the reasons for it are also extremely important to us. We are partnering with community organizations and other institutions within Harvard. The reason why they are involved is precisely because this is an issue area with practical, current, and significant implications that really do matter out there in the world. Thus, there are additional requirements beyond just the unit papers, and these will take up extra time. However, I'm also carefully constructing the syllabus so that these time commitments don't become overly burdensome. I'm aware that you have a lot on your plate as a first-year Harvard student. My goal is to make sure that the extra work you do is reasonable, impactful, and meaningful.