

Expos 20

Telling Her Story: Narrative, Media, and #MeToo



Dr. Alexandra Gold

1 Bow Street, Floor 2, Room 234

alexandra_gold@fas.harvard.edu

she, her, hers

Spring 2020

Class Time: Tu/Th 10:30-11:45 & 12:00-1:15

Classroom: Emerson Hall 106

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30pm (except for conference weeks)
& by appointment (in-person or Google Hangout via Slack)

COURSE OVERVIEW

In a powerful essay, writer and activist Audre Lorde suggested: “where the words of women are crying to be heard we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.” Lorde is not alone in asking us to pay attention to and take responsibility for women’s stories; for centuries scholars and activists have championed the stories of women, including women of color and queer women, that have routinely gone untold or unheard. Yet if this issue has always been pressing, the call to heed women’s stories is especially urgent at a moment when such stories have come to dominate the cultural landscape and public consciousness – from news accounts to popular shows, literature to Twitter hashtags. Responding to our current moment, this course examines how women’s stories are narrated across a variety of media and explores what impact sharing of them can have. Prior knowledge of women’s studies or feminist issues is not required for success in this course.

Unit 1 begins with literary narratives, focusing on three short stories by contemporary women authors: Roxane Gay’s “Strange Gods” from her collection *Difficult Women* (2017), Carmen Maria Machado’s “Real Women Have Bodies” from *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017) and Jenny Zhang’s “We Love You Crispina” from *Sour Heart* (2017). We’ll explore the questions these stories raise about embodiment, family, love, and society and consider how they speak to intersectionality: the nexus of gender, sex, class, ability, age, and race.

Unit 2 turns to another narrative media form: television. Students watch three episodes of Hulu’s 2017 adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Our discussions of the show will be informed by two touchstone feminist theory texts: Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women.” Examining the connections between these theoretical sources and the show, we’ll consider how they together illuminate the complex and troubling relationships between gender, authority, power, and image.

Unit 3 moves into the realm of visual art and arena of “hashtag activism,” considering the impact of social media movements like #MeToo. We’ll probe the relationship between art and activism in our contemporary media climate, contemplating how and whether art and/or social media can achieve “representational justice.” **In 2019-2020, this unit centers on the Boston Museum of Fine Arts’ “Women Take the Floor” exhibit, including an organized trip outside of regular class hours to museum.** Students use this exhibit as the inspiration for their final papers, independently developing research topics on art, activism, social media, audience, and their potential connections.

*****IMPORTANT COURSE NOTE ON DIFFICULT MATERIAL*****

Our reading material and class discussions often deal with difficult, potentially triggering material, especially surrounding topics like sexual and racial violence, abuse, and body image. If this is or becomes a concern for you for personal, religious, or other reasons, please speak with me at any point in the semester to come up with an alternative plan. I am committed to ensuring that the course remains a safe environment for every student. To this end, I expect students to treat each other and me with respect, fostering a space for collaborative learning in which all students can equally and freely participate. Students should approach the course and each other with an open mind. I support productive disagreement and questioning as long as everyone approaches discussions with civility.

COURSE GOALS

As an introduction to college-level academic writing, Expos 20 helps you hone fundamental reading and writing skills to succeed in your other Harvard courses. Throughout the semester, you will

- understand that thinking *is* writing, and that writing is a process
- develop thesis-based, evidence-driven analytical arguments with “stakes”
- “close-read” various genres of text, including visual media
- plan, draft, and revise your own and your peers’ written work
- learn how to effectively use a variety of sources and avoid plagiarism
- practice organizing complex ideas in a clear, coherent, and persuasive manner
- cultivate your writing style by carefully considering sentence- and word-level decisions

READINGS & OTHER MATERIALS

Except for *The Handmaid’s Tale*, all required texts and materials are freely available on the course Canvas site. **Please print them out for class.** *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Season 1, Ep 1-3) can be purchased via Amazon Video (~\$9) or Hulu (with student subscription)

The only other key material for this course is the **“Gold Guide”** – a compilation of all pertinent writing handouts and worksheets for the semester. Please treat this like a course textbook and bring it with you to every class. It is yours to keep and consult during the semester and ideally in the rest of your writing career at Harvard. A digital copy will be available on Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSIGNMENTS

Class Engagement (5%) is critical to the success of this course and your development as a writer and thinker. Participating in discussion as an active listener and contributors helps you clarify your understanding of assigned texts and consider classmates' perspectives. Engagement also includes consistently showing up to class prepared and on time as well as contributing to small and large group activities, including draft and peer review workshops. These workshops are opportunities to share works-in-progress and refine your own revision skills by collaborating on fellow students' work. I know that some students find it difficult to participate in discussion. Though I urge everyone to share their thoughts, there are many other ways to participate in the class community, from posting to Slack to sharing notes. I'm happy to meet with students at any point to discuss individual strategies.

Response Papers (5%): Response papers are a crucial facet of Expos and this course. They ensure that you have completed and considered the required reading, allow you to be an active class participant, and prepare you to successfully write your essays. In each unit, you will be responsible for one or two response exercises. Some will be turned in to me, and I will provide brief comments, but many will be used in class either for discussion or for peer review, giving you the opportunity to become better readers of your own and others' works-in-progress. All response papers should be completed thoroughly and thoughtfully. Failing to give these response papers effort and attention will only prove detrimental when it comes time to write the essay.

Major Essays (90%): This course requires **three essays**, each with **one preliminary draft**. Drafts do not receive grades, but they will receive significant (audio-visual) feedback. Each of you will also meet with me in person to discuss your draft in **individual or group conferences**. The revised, final version of each paper will be graded and receive timely written comments from me. All papers should follow the instructions outlined on the assignment sheet, including proper documentation of sources. Each essay increases in length and complexity, helping you build a repertoire of reading, thinking, writing, and revision strategies to carry into other courses. Writing and revision are *processes*; ideally, you'll continue to improve as you practice and refine your skills.

- **Essay 1 (25%):** In Unit 1, you'll write a ~5 page analytical essay on your choice of *one* of three short stories: Gay's "Strange Gods," Machado's "Real Women Have Bodies," or Zhang's "We Love You Crispina." The essay asks you to develop argumentative and close-reading (analytical) skills based on a single text.
- **Essay 2 (30%):** In Unit 2, you'll write a ~7 page essay that uses a critical feminist text – either Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" or Rubin's "The Traffic in Women – as a lens for interpreting *The Handmaid's Tale*. The essay asks you to think about the connections between two texts and practice applying a theory to another source and introduces you to working with non-literary (visual) sources.
- **Essay 3 (35%):** In Unit 3, you'll write a ~10 page research paper that speaks to some aspect of visual art, activism, and/or social media, adopting one of three suggested approaches (i.e. contextual analysis or comparison). You'll have the opportunity to define your own topic and select your own sources based on our visit to the MFA "Women Take the Floor" Exhibit.

INSTRUCTOR POLICIES

Technology: Laptops, tablets, and cell phones should be silenced and stored at the beginning of class. I ask that you take notes by hand and work from hard copies, unless otherwise noted on the syllabus. This is a seminar-style course, and it can be distracting to me and your fellow students – not to mention your own learning – for you to be on your devices during class. I believe that you will get the most out of this course if you are engaged with each other without the barrier of technology. If, however, you require technology as a part of your learning accommodations, please speak with me. Likewise, in emergency cases, please let me know if you require access to technology.

Disability Accommodations: I want all learners to feel welcome in and benefit from this course. Should you require any accommodations to do so, please reach out to me as soon as possible to discuss any arrangements that can be made. Please note, however, that I cannot make any accommodations without official notice from the Accessible Education Office: <http://aeo.fas.harvard.edu>.

Submission of Work: Unless otherwise stated, all assignments will be submitted electronically through Canvas. Please use only .doc or .docx file formats so that I can comment on your work. If you need Word software, it is freely available through Harvard. It is your responsibility to ensure that files you send me are not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file, the essay may be subject to a late penalty. I expect that you will turn in all assignments completed and on time. Pay attention to the syllabus/Canvas to ensure that you meet all deadlines.

Note: I strongly advise you to keep digital or hard copies of all of your work and to back up your work with cloud software like Google Drive or Dropbox in case of a computer crash or other malfunction.

Extension Policy (aka the “Life Happens Clause”): I realize that unexpected circumstances arise and that some of our assignment deadlines unavoidably conflict with other life events (religious holidays, sports, travel, midterm exams, sickness, etc.) Each student is therefore allowed one 48-hour extension during the semester without explanation. It can be used on any major assignment with the exception of the final revision (Unit 3). If possible, contact me before the assignment deadline to tell me that you’d like to invoke the clause. Should other unforeseen circumstances arise, such as a medical or family emergency, additional extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis. Please notify me as soon as possible so we can arrange for you to submit your work.

Office Hours & Communication: My office hours are designed for you. I am eager to help you formulate ideas, answer questions, or discuss any other course issues during that time. **If you cannot make my office hours, I am glad to set up an alternate meeting in-person or via “Google Hangout.” You can always reach me by email or direct message on our course Slack.** I will do my best to answer all correspondence in a timely manner during normal weekday hours (9am-5pm). However, please do check your syllabus and assignment sheets before contacting me with questions about due dates, paper length, and other information readily available on these documents. If it is a question that might benefit the whole class, feel free to post it on Slack. For questions that are especially involved, complex, lengthy (e.g. several paragraphs long) or extremely specific, it may be more expedient to set up a quick video-conference call or meeting. Except in extenuating circumstances, all conversations in Office Hours or otherwise will be confidential. Please do not hesitate to speak with me if I can support you in any way.

INSTRUCTOR GRADING POLICIES

GRADING	
IS	ISN'T
<p>A specific metric</p> <p>A measure of how successfully you've accomplished a specific writing & thinking task and met its particular criteria (Elements of Academic Writing). Paying careful attention to in-class discussions, feedback, response papers, and the drafting process will set you up for greater success.</p>	<p>The rule</p> <p>A measure of your self-worth, value, full intellectual ability or potential, or a determinant of your future. It is also not a direct measure of effort <i>per se</i> (how many hours you spent on an assignment, how many times you came to office hours— though all of that can help!)</p>
<p>Additive</p> <p>You <i>earn</i> points based on how well you've mastered the core skills (Elements) of each assignment through the writing, feedback, and revision processes.</p>	<p>Deductive</p> <p>You don't <i>lose</i> points from a singular, idealized paper. Each student is striving toward their own "ideal" paper based on their strengths & weaknesses and drafting/revision processes.</p>
<p>More stringent with each assignment</p> <p>The skills you learn in Unit 1 should be implemented and improved upon in Unit 2, etc. Assignments are designed to increase in complexity and thus difficulty, both to introduce you to a variety of writing genres/assignments types you might encounter at Harvard and to challenge you.</p>	<p>Always linear</p> <p>Writing is a (often hard) process and not necessarily an even one. Some people may excel at certain assignments and vice versa; some types of assignments may be more familiar to you than others. Some units may be more challenging personally or academically than others.</p>
<p>A reflection of your own original work</p> <p>"Original" work is not about saying something no one else has ever said. Original work derives from your own voice, insights, and efforts in a way that engages and educates reader. It may be informed by appropriate sources of collaboration: class discussion, writing center sessions, and responsible use of sources; it is free of any type of plagiarism.</p>	<p>A reflection of perfection/failure</p> <p>No paper is perfect, even those by the best writers. No paper is a failure, unless it is not turned in or it is plagiarized, which might incur some form of disciplinary action (depending on case and severity). Each draft and revision are steps in an ongoing writing and research process that will continue beyond this class.</p>
<p>Criteria-Based</p> <p>The core Elements central to each essay are noted on the assignment sheet; grades indicate how well you meet them. While content is important, this is a writing class. Having an exceptional, exciting idea but an unclear, missing, or partial articulation of that idea/thesis won't meet the designated criteria.</p>	<p>Consistent Across Disciplines/ Courses</p> <p>Different courses, profs, TAs, etc. have different approaches to feedback/grading, especially when it comes to writing. Expos courses may prioritize writing criteria that other courses and disciplines may not. Your best bet is to check with your course head or consult the syllabus.</p>

INSTRUCTOR GRADING POLICIES, CONT.'D

Everyone gets a substantial amount of time for revision – 1 week – because I expect that your revisions will be substantial. Real revision requires real time; revising the entire paper the night before the final draft is due isn't a strong revision strategy nor will it typically lead to the best possible outcome.

I hold every student to a high standard, and I expect that every student will work to meet it to their own greatest ability. I am here to assist you in that process and only assign tasks that every student is fully capable of, but this course is a two-way street; you are responsible and accountable for your work, efforts, and ultimately grades. In this course, A, B, & C-range papers meet each essay's criteria and demonstrate a genuine effort to master the assignment's task and its various elements of academic writing, but they'll succeed to varying degrees. My grading outline follows the official Harvard Grading Policy, found here: (<https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/grades-and-honors>).

An 'A' grade (A/A-) means that the essay is excellent (*not* perfect) and complete (it has a fully realized beginning, middle and end; it addresses the questions/issues that it raises). An "A" essay skillfully expresses an argumentative thesis and adeptly handles all of the core Elements of Academic Writing central to the given assignment. An "A-" essay will do this to a slightly less successful degree, typically having one important Element of Academic (i.e. thesis, evidence, structure) argument that needs significant improvement.

A 'B' grade (B-/B/B+) means that the essay is strong and succeeds in many ways but presents two or more key Elements of Academic argument that still need significant work. This means that while a "B"-range essay offers an engaging and intelligent discussion, certain aspects don't yet live up to the rest of the essay or to the promise the essay offers. A "B+" paper might, for instance, offer a partial thesis and some good work with evidence, but could use substantial development in both areas and/or presents some shortcomings in other areas. A "B" paper might need substantial further revision in these areas and others.

A 'C' grade (C-/C/C+) means that the essay possesses potential, but in its current form is flawed, holding the essay back in a substantial way. "C"-range essays require significant further revision in all or most pertinent Elements.

Grade Change Protocol

Because you *earn* grades and therefore play a significant role in the grading process, I am open to your concerns. If you feel that the grade you've earned on a revision is unfair, you may write me a letter detailing the reasons why you believe your grade should be higher and responding to my feedback within one week of receiving revision comments. Like any strong argument, this letter must be detailed, using *specific evidence* from your work to support your points. The letter, that is, must cite particular passages/sentences/etc. to make its case. I spend significant time on my feedback for drafts and revisions, about 30-45 minutes per essay plus 30 minutes in conference. That means I've devoted at least 1½-2 hours to every student's essay each unit. Your letter should demonstrate a concerted (if not quite equal) effort. The letter does not guarantee a grade change, but if it presents a strong, well-supported argument, I'll consider it.

EXPOS-WIDE POLICIES

Expos Completion of Work Policy: Because this 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 when 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 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.

Expos Attendance Policy: 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 me before class to explain (or within 24 hours), otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical office, or your Resident 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 me 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.

Collaboration: Because of our small class size, collaboration among students is not only encouraged but built into the nature of the course. However, only the following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this class: 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.” All work submitted for this course must be your own. 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 important issue. All the work 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. When outside sources are required please follow the citation guidelines I provide. 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. If concerns about plagiarism or responsible use of sources arise, you can always consult the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>.

COURSE/CAMPUS RESOURCES

Harvard maintains an extensive network of resources to help you with everything from housing to study skills, some of which are listed below. If you need assistance of any kind during the semester and feel comfortable speaking confidentially with me, I am happy to help you locate whatever resources, services, or information you need to be fully present – physically, intellectually, and mentally – in my course.

Harvard Writing Center: At any stage in the writing process – from brainstorming to polishing – you may want extra one-on-one essay advice. The Writing Center offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors who can offer invaluable feedback. I highly encourage you to take advantage of this free service. The Writing Center is located in the Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit the writing center website: <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>

The Writing Center's **English Grammar and Language (EGL) tutor** is available to work with students who have questions about grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and writing in English as a second language. The EGL holds drop-in hours at the Writing Program offices on the 2nd floor of One Bow Street, room 227. For more, see: <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/egl-tutor>

Academic Resource Center (ARC): The ARC supports a wide variety of educational opportunities, including peer tutoring, ESL consultation, learning workshops, study groups, and more. If you need help with things like study skills or time management, I encourage you to utilize their comprehensive resources: <https://academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu/>

First-Year Experience Office (FYE): FYE is responsible for all aspects of the first year at Harvard College as students transition into a new community. For more on what FYE has to offer, including important information about academics, advising, yard life, wellness programs and more, see: <https://fdo.fas.harvard.edu/>

Mental Health (CAHMS): I take mental health extremely seriously. If you are struggling with mental health issues that requires care or wish to speak to someone about counseling, you can make an appointment, without referral, at <https://huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health>. CAHMS is located at the Smith Campus Center, 4th Floor and can be reached by telephone at (617) 495-2024. 24 hour urgent assistance is also available at (617) 495-5711. Ongoing, documented mental health issues should also be brought to the attention of the Accessible Education Office. <http://aao.fas.harvard.edu>.

Office of Sexual Assault Prevent & Response (OSAPR): The OSAPR provides survivors of sexual and gender-based violence confidential support and advocacy. They can be reached via 24-hour hotline (617) 495-9100 or by appointment. Harvard, in accordance with Title IX, has a detailed Sexual and Gender Based Harassment policy, which can be found in full via the OSAPR website. A comprehensive list of Harvard, local, and national resources (including medical, legal, and peer counseling) can be found on the OSAPR website: <https://osapr.harvard.edu/harvard-resources>