WRT 435/PSC 440

Seminar in Public Writing: de Tocqueville's America

Fall 2010

Instructor: Fredrik deBoer

Office Hours: Prior to class or by appointment (preferred)

Email Address: fdeboer@university

Time and Place of Class Meetings: University Hall 123, T/R 2:30-3:45 pm

Description of Course Content: This class is a seminar in public writing which explores that topic through a careful, semester long reading of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. That reading will be supplemented by third party scholarship that helps us to define and understand public writing. We will supplement our reading through in-class discussion and the production of weekly writing projects. We will produce a limited run, bound journal on de Tocqueville as our own piece of public writing.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. To develop a personal understanding of public writing-- what it is, what a public is, what we mean when we talk about writing for and about a public.
2. To read and digest Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, a seminal piece of sociology and history, and to come to understand it as a piece of public writing, de Tocqueville as a public writer, and the young America as a public.
3. To develop more advanced writing skills, to better articulate your own opinion in your composition, for public writing or any other.
4. To learn to synthesize third party scholarship into an understanding of a longer text, and to develop an appreciation of how general theoretical work can create deeper understanding of a specific, non-theoretical text.

Required Course Materials:

- Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Norton Critical Edition
- Linda Shamoon, *Public Writing*

COURSE FORMAT: Each week, we will read a selection from DIA and a journal article or book chapter that concerns public writing. During Tuesday's class, we will focus on the de Tocqueville section, and I will facilitate an in class discussion about our thoughts and impressions of that week's reading. On Thursday, we will bring our journal article or book chapter into the discussion, discuss its insights into public writing, and how it impacts our understanding of that week's section of de Tocqueville. Participation in our class discussion is an essential element of the class and will have a direct impact on your final grade.

Each week, you will prepare a response paper that reacts to the week's reading, due on Thursday. In the second half of the semester, we will hold a workshop, where the class will help each student to select one paper to revise, expand and update into an essay for our journal project. Once each essay has been selected, the class will work together to organize and layout our journal's format, choosing graphics and deciding on essay placement and order. The journal will then be bound and printed.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Response Papers: Response papers are informal, 2-3 page papers that react to the week's reading. A good response paper should share some of your impressions on the reading, with reference to specific passages, while also asking questions, highlighting problems, or exploring tensions. Although it is up to you to decide whether each response paper focuses on our de Tocqueville reading, our supplementary reading, or some combination of the two, remember that your final portfolio must adequately connect *Democracy in America* to the larger theme of public writing. "Informal" means that these papers should be personal, reactive and conducive to still evolving arguments. It does not mean that they should be sloppy or lacking in effort. Each student will have the option of skipping one response paper during the semester if he or she chooses.

Journal Essay: Each student will choose one of his or her response papers to expand, revise and update for inclusion in our own de Tocqueville public writing journal. Each essay must discuss an aspect of de Tocqueville that reflects on public writing, publics formation or the early American public.

Class Journal Grade: Once compiled and printed, the entire class journal project will be assigned a grade on a twenty point scale.

GRADING POLICY:

Response papers (x10)	5 points each
Class participation	15 points
Journal Essay	15 points
Class Journal Grade	20 points
Total	**100 points**

Additionally, if a student chooses to complete all 12 response papers, he or she can earn an additional 5 points of extra credit.

Project points are awarded on the quality of the homework, short assignments, peer views, post-writes, on-time submission of drafts, and thoughtful revision between drafts. Improvement in the quality of your own writing--based on peers' feedback and the instructor's oral responses--is crucial for full project points.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Submission of all projects on due dates (including homework, reflective statements, post-writes, on-time submission of drafts, thoughtful revision between drafts)
- High quality completion of <u>daily</u> reading &/or writing homework assignments
- Active and consistent participation in small group, peer response, and collaborative work
- Consistent, helpful contribution to class discussion and regular attendance.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of WRT 301 Public Writing, you should have:

1. Become familiar with concepts and issues regarding the public sphere and public deliberation; formulated a definition of public writing, who does it, why and when

2. Read *Democracy in America*, examined many of its key passages in detail, written about many of its parts, interrogated and critically examined its key arguments, and read and dicussed several articles of third party scholarship on the book.

3. Come to recognize how DiA is both a piece of public writing and how it is a statement on public formation in early America; in other words, applied our theoretical insights to the primary text

4. Developed a historical understanding of de Tocqueville, his life, his world, and the context in which DiA was written

5. Improved your ability to analyze your audience and rhetorical situation so that you may write and communicate effectively in a variety of public writing genres

6. Gained familiarity with a rhetorical approach to analyzing texts and persuasive interactions and have guided practice in applying rhetorical analysis

7. Improved your own writing process and your development as a writer

8. Drafted, revised, and polished a journal article for our real, relevant, and bound journal on de Tocqueville and public writing

9. Collaborated effectively with your peers to develop, draft, and revise several coherent, polished public writing documents.