COMPOSING THOUGHTS ENGL 703 (3 Credits)
QUESTIONS IN COMPOSITION THEORY AND LITERACY STUDIES

Day and Time: Thursday 6:30–8:20 PM
Location: Kiely Hall 321
Instructor: Corey Frost
Office: Klapper Hall 317
Office hours: Thursday 5:15–6:15 PM
Email: coreyfrost@gmail.com
Class blog: http://composingthoughts.qwriting.org

DESCRIPTION:

Writing is fundamental to our current approach to education, not only as a means of expression but also as a teaching tool. We generally agree it is important that students learn to write, and most of us agree it is just as important that students write to learn. There is less consensus on how writing should be taught, but over the last few decades especially scholars have at least identified a number of important questions to be answered. In this course, through readings from well-known texts in composition, rhetoric, literacy, and writing studies, we’ll debate some of those salient questions, particularly questions of pedagogy: does it help or hinder writing students to have them emulate models? How and why should we teach grammar rules? What is the role of orality in the writing classroom? Is “the writing process” something that can be defined? How does technology influence writing and the teaching of writing? We will talk about the diverse forms that reading and writing take, we will examine various approaches to composition pedagogy, and we will attempt to use those approaches to teach ourselves. As much as possible, our discussions will aim to produce practical techniques that you can use in your own classrooms, but we will not shy away from more theoretical questions. Consider this course a space in which you can think through the reasons behind, and the broader implications of, the challenges faced by every teacher and student of writing. English 703 is required for all English Education M.A. students at Queens College.

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, students will:
• be familiar with general ideas in composition studies and related fields
• understand various theories of composition pedagogy
• be able to apply those theories to aspects of their own teaching practice
• have acquired a range of practical tools for the teaching of literacy
• be adept at the use of certain digital technologies as pedagogical tools

REQUIREMENTS:

• Access to a computer, the internet, and a Qwriting account.
• Regular attendance and participation in class discussion. Please arrive on time, and please come prepared to participate in the discussion of the week’s readings.
• Regular comments posted on the class blog. In general you are required to post at least one substantial comment in response to the readings each week. Your contribution could be an original insight or a reaction to the general dialogue. The deadline is 9 am each Thursday. You may skip this up to three times.
• At least three short Teaching Tasks—(tentatively) an assignment prompt, a collaborative learning lesson plan, and a written response to a student paper—which will be developed out of our weekly discussions. These will be submitted to me, and then graded through an anonymous peer review process.

• One 3k-word essay addressing one of the questions brought up in our readings. The essay must clearly summarize a debate, cite at least three scholars who have participated in the debate, and present a compelling argument for your own opinion on the debate. Due 4/07, with a mandatory revision, not more than 2.5k words, due 5/26.

• One intermedia / multi-modal composition—a video, a podcast, a blog, etc.—that draws on our discussions of digital teaching tools. The submission will be accompanied by a letter explaining the process and the tools used. Parameters to be negotiated. Due 5/19.

• Your final grade will be calculated according to this formula: participation (online and in class) 30%, teaching tasks 30%, position paper 20%, intermedia composition 20%.

TEXTS:

There is one required text for this course: A Guide to Composition Pedagogies. Editors: Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0195125368. It is (or soon will be) available at the QC Bookstore for purchase or rental. All the other readings are articles and excerpts that will be posted or linked to on the blog, although you are encouraged to acquire the books from which the excerpts are drawn. A full bibliography will be provided.

SCHEDULE:

02/03 Introductions
02/10 “The Writing Process”: Is there such a thing?
02/17 Literacy Studies: What is the significance of literacy to society?
   Brandt, Rose.
02/24 Critical Thinking: Can composition save the world?
   George, “Critical Pedagogy.” Fish, Bizzell, Brent.
03/03 Teaching Grammar: Is it useful to teach rules for the mechanics of writing?
   Hartwell
03/10 Designing Writing Assignments: What sort of assignments are most likely to inspire students?
   Bean, Bartholomae.
03/17 Discourse modelling: What texts should students use as writing models?
   Elbow, Bartholomae. TT1: Assignment prompt due.
03/24 Collaborative Learning: How can students learn from their peers?
   Howard, “Collaborative Pedagogy.”
03/31 Plagiarism and Authorship: What does it mean to students to be an author?
   Howard TT2: Peer learning activity due.
04/07 Basic Writing/ ESL: How do teachers deal with different language abilities?
   Mutnick, “Basic Writing Pedagogy.” Rose.
04/14 Online Writing Tools: How can blogs and wikis be used to teach writing?
04/21 (No Class)
04/28 Responding to Student Writing: What is the best way to respond to student writing?
05/05 Revision: How can we teach recursivity? Berzsenyi, Perl.
   TT3: Response to student paper due.
05/12 Standards: How should writing skill be evaluated?
   Brannon, Ravitch.
Bibliography

Bizzell, Patricia. “Composition Studies Saves the World” College Composition and Communication 72.2 (2009)
Selfe, Cynthia. “Students Who Teach Us” and “Toward New Media Texts.” Writing New Media. 43-110.
Wysocki, Anne. “Opening New Media to Writing.” Writing New Media. 1-41.