Writing & Culture WRIT 015-10
Argument in the New Yorker
Summer Main First Session 2019
MTWTH 1045-1245pm ICC 209A

Instructor       Dr. Sandosharaj
Office Hours     TuWed 930-1030am
Office           New North 340
Email: as4291@georgetown.edu

Course Description
In this course we explore how to evaluate and construct arguments by reading film/music/television reviews (as well as the occasional profile or essay) from the New Yorker. In addition to standard argumentative essays, students will use a paper or online subscription to the bimonthly periodical to engage not only with issues in news, art, books, sports, music and politics, but also with the sharpest, most stylish contemporary writers. These award-winning writers model how to construct convincing arguments using specific examples, lucid prose and deep attention to refutation, all while remaining an informative pleasure to read and an insightful—thought decidedly liberal—look into the current cultural climate.

The contemporary nature of the reading material will provide ample opportunity for students to connect to broader communities and current events. For example: readings for newly released books at Busboys and Poets or Politics and Prose, independent films at the historic E Street Cinema, or traveling exhibits at the National Gallery and other museums. Students will supplement their reading by checking out the albums, artists, films and shows reviewed in the magazine. This means students will be required to travel to theaters, talks, or museums, depending on what is covered in the issues of the magazine during the semester.

To prepare we begin with They Say/I Say, a short text that explains the conversational nature of academic writing by emphasizing refutation and counterargument. Drawing from the techniques explained in TSIS as well as those modeled in the New Yorker, students will compose their own arguments about topics covered in in both texts. Students will begin with their own intellectual curiosities then complicate them with questions and substantiate them with research. The goal is to convince. Papers will be argumentative “counter” reviews as well as academically shaped arguments rich in research and MLA citations when appropriate.
Learning Goals

Students should be able to:

- identify and utilize aspects of convincing argument including refutation, evidence, analysis, exemplification, and logic
- use writing for both thinking and communication
- deploy language effectively by harnessing the power of grammar, punctuation, and syntax
- read critically in ways that demonstrate a nuanced and evolving sensibility
- view writing as a process that necessarily involves multiple drafts, revision and edits
- acquire intellectual habits of mind that transcend discipline and vocation
- build a "toolkit" of writing moves with an understanding of when/how to use them

Required Materials:

- *They Say/I Say with Readings, Fourth Edition* (Graff, Birkenstein, Durst, eds.)
- Introductory subscription to *The New Yorker Magazine* (digital/paper)
- Price of admission for two films (E Street Cinema and/or AMC Loews in Georgetown) OR two exhibits at local galleries OR downloads of two albums OR combination of above*
Grading
Grades will be uploaded to Canvas with the exception of participation, which will be recorded in the paper gradebook. This gradebook is always available to students. Additionally, I will return assignments with copious comments.

To avoid discrepancies, please save all graded work and check Canvas regularly.

Breakdown of Course Requirements

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<td>Paper Two Revision</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework &amp; Drafts</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
<td>2</td>
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Formal Papers

Formatting
Everything written outside of class must be typed. *Everything.*

All assignments should be submitted on 8½ x 11” white paper only, should observe 1” margins, use Times New Roman 12 point font, and other trappings of standard MLA formatting including appropriate heading, page numbering and spacing.

Correct all typographical errors and staple. One point off for missing staples. Paper clips do not count.

Evaluation of Papers
Formal papers will be graded by the rubric available in Canvas. This rubric values thesis, counterarguments, evidence, exemplification, organization, clarity, complexity, grammar and style. All other assignments will be graded for content, formatting, grammar/style, 50%/25%/25%, respectively.
**Student Resources, Classroom Policies and Procedures**

**Late Policy**
Do not be late to class. There is a five-minute grace period. After five minutes, students may not enter the classroom without permission. This means after the grace period students should wait by the door to be acknowledged. Do NOT enter the classroom until permitted. This is because tardiness is disruptive. Consistent tardiness (three or more) will result in those students being barred from entering class that day. This means missing any quizzes or homework submission that day. Any student who has a difficult time getting here, should consider taking a class at a different time slot. Please see me if you have any questions.

**Absences**
Do not be casually absent. There is work due nearly every class period, not to mention it is difficult to convey a seriousness of purpose as a student without being present in the classroom. Please note that participation points cannot be recouped even if the absence is excused.

**Cell Phones and General Decorum**
Cell phones must remain off/silent during the entire class. Give full attention during class periods. Students repeatedly reminded about cell phone use will be asked to leave or to place their mobile device out of sight. If you must use your phone, leave the room discreetly. This should be a rare occurrence.

**Course Evaluation**
You will have the opportunity to anonymously evaluate me at the middle and at the end of the semester.

**Classwork and Assignments**

**Late/Make Up Work**
With the exception of papers—penalized one letter grade per day late—late work for unexcused absences is not accepted. No exceptions.

Work may be submitted in advance of an absence (excused or unexcused). Please note assignments must be printed to be graded, however.

Canvas will be updated daily with homework assignments and announcements. Check it DAILY since the syllabus calendar is tentative only. Students are responsible for anything posted on Canvas. This means a student who is absent on any given day must check CAN for the homework due the next class. Keep up.

In addition to CAN, please email a classmate for information about what was missed during an unexcused absence.
If you have issues printing an assignment before class, email the assignment BEFORE CLASS as proof of its completion. Then provide a hard copy the same day. Please note assignments cannot be graded unless a hard copy has been provided.

**Excused Absences**  
Excused absences require documentation. Excused absences include: illness that requires a doctor’s visit/prescription, court appearance, funeral, out of town emergency, athletic event, many extracurricular/academic club activities, an emergency such as a flat tire or natural disaster. In the case of an excused absence, students will be permitted to make up all missing work once documentation has been provided. If an excused absence is expected, please provide the appropriate documentation and discuss with me *in advance* when work should be submitted. Make up work for excused absences should be completed within a week of student’s return to class.

**Homework**  
Generally, homework assignments should be no longer than one page double-spaced. Do not exceed this length unless otherwise directed. Part of being a skilled writer is fitting the format/constraints of a writing situation.

Be as creative and critical as possible. Relate concepts, patterns and incongruities to other readings and discussions. Make links, draw conclusions.

Save all work to a cloud service (or storage device). I recommend an online storage cloud (Dropbox is free) for ultimate security (self-emailing is also a great strategy). Printer problems and disc errors are not excuses for repeated late work. Again, on rare occasions, students can email an assignment to prove it was completed on time but must provide a hard copy to grade.

**Readings**  
Underline and annotate readings in order to contribute to class as well as prepare for assignments and formal papers. Notes from readings should result in questions and observations to be shared in class.

**Open Note Vocab Quizzes**  
Be sure to look up and record definitions to new words when reading for homework. Record these definitions in notes, on notecards, in the margins of the reading, or on post-its. This is the only way to prepare for open note vocab quizzes. Open note quizzes can cover *any word* from the reading. Students can use printed or written notes during vocab quizzes but will not know what words from the reading will appear on the quiz. The goal of the quizzes is not punitive, but to ensure that students understand what they are reading. College level vocabulary and references cannot be intuited from context clues. Precise definitions are necessary; vague notions of what a word means are insufficient and, moreover, they can obscure comprehension. Please note some quizzes may be pop.

Sharing definitions is not acceptable.
Participation
Participation is assessed daily by a one, two, or zero. Scores are based on the quality and quantity of contributions made to discussion and overall classroom environment. Energy and curiosity are encouraged. No points for attendance.

Syllabus Calendar
Please note these readings, assignments and due dates are tentative and subject to change. Please keep abreast of any changes by checking Canvas regularly.

Student Resources

Statement on Plagiarism
Plagiarized papers (work copied from a written text without documentation, a classmate’s work, or the internet) will earn a zero with no possibility of making up the grade. A record of this plagiarism will become a part of your record in the English Department and potentially in the office of the chairperson of your major department and in the office of the Dean of your College. A second occurrence of plagiarism in the class or in the English Department will result in a failing grade for the class and a recommendation of expulsion from the University.

Please see the university’s policy at https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/whatisplagiarism.

Writing Center
Please note that Georgetown has an excellent Writing Center that is engineered to be used by all students, including advanced writers. Please check out their offerings and online scheduling at http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu.
Talking Back to the New Yorker Paper One Prompt

The Quibble: A Minor Objection
Identify an aspect of a New Yorker critic’s argument* with which you have a quibble. Did the author make a comparison you find unfair or inappropriate? Did the author misrepresent an artist’s motivation or overlook a relevant achievement? Does her argument make sense but miss a major point? Does she misunderstand, overstate, or undervalue some aspect of the artist’s work? Does she seem to be working from an unstated bias? Does she gloss over some part of her own argument? Does she gloss over better examples, important counterarguments or fail to note an important exception, qualification, or mitigating factor? Does she go too far or not go far enough? Is she flat out wrong about something?

Write a 750-word essay that quibbles with a point made (or an implication of a point made) in one of the reviews we read in class. You do not have to dispute the review’s overall thesis. Rather, focus on an aspect of the critic’s argument that you find problematic.

Note: This paper is not a research paper. You do not need any outside sources other than the New Yorker review itself.

Requirements
- Standard MLA formatting (titled, double spaced, stapled, numbered, Times New Roman 12 pt font with one-inch margins, proper heading, in text citations and works cited page)
- Word count
- Underlined thesis
- Templates encouraged

*Review must be one of the articles we read as a class unless otherwise cleared by me.
Talking Back to the *New Yorker* Paper Prompt 2

**Option One: Critiquing the Critic**
Write an 850 to 1000-word research essay critiquing a *New Yorker* critic. This criticism should be based on a critical reading of three or more of their reviews. Your paper can evaluate an apparent gap or misapprehension of the critic’s understanding of a topic, an unstated preference that seems to undergird their opinions on a specific topic, or some other pattern you have identified in their work. Be careful not to assail the critic, however. This is not a personal attack on the critic as a person. This paper is an assessment of the critic’s ideas. Note that critics are unlike journalists in that they do NOT aim for objectivity. Their job is to give their informed opinion. However authoritative, their reviews are simply their opinions of an artist’s work.

**Option Two: Who Did It Better**
Write an 850 to 1000-word research essay that compares and critiques a *New Yorker* review of an album, book, film, or exhibit with another review of the same album, book, film or exhibit. The latter should be published in a reputable source with a circulation comparable to the *New Yorker*. Please note circulation refers to number of readers not demographics/qualities of readers. Your paper should do more than simply compare the two reviews, however. Be sure to argue something. This could mean a simple evaluate quality or something more complicated such as a predict an effect based on a similarity between the two critics.

But I don’t know a lot about the artists, books and movies reviewed in these issues.
Remember, this is a research paper. Unlike your first paper, your thesis will not be evident right away. In fact, your thesis should change several times before you write your final draft. As you gather research you will pose new questions, as you pose new questions, the answers or lack of answers will (re)shape how you focus your argument. This is the mark of a strong thesis. It will go through several iterations. A strong thesis will adjust with research, insightful questions, and critical thought. It will reflect how your ideas change as you learn more about your topic.

Does this mean I have to review an entire album, book, exhibit, or film the same way the professional critic does?
Not necessarily. You may opt to do a full review, one that focuses on the quality of said album or movie, or you may choose to focus your research paper on one aspect of the review(s) you disagree with, feel uncomfortable with, or want to know more about.

Does this mean I have to watch the movie or listen to the album reviewed?
Yes.

That said, if subject is a book review, you can focus on the writer’s claims/summaries of said book. If you choose this latter option, read a portion of the book.

How to include scholarly research for a movie or an album?
The research you utilize will depend on your thesis and topic. You may choose to explore how race/ethnicity/class/gender impact how certain artists are re/viewed. You may choose to use historical research to contextualize your topic. You may find a literature scholar who supports
one of your claims (remember, your thesis should not echo a scholar but you can apply a scholar’s idea to a surprising context/source). How you incorporate research is entirely up to you. It can play a significant role in your paper or can play a small role, backing up one of your smaller claims instead of your thesis. Consider journals on pornography, television, reality tv, pop culture, feminism, identity, etc. There are journals for every imaginable subject and subtopic.

Where should I look for this research? How do I start?
Start by rereading the reviews with a fine-toothed comb. Underline quotes you find compelling. Next, conduct Boolean searches using one of the following databases: JSTOR, LexisNexis, ProQuest, Academic Search Premier, etc. Consider searching scholarly journals that relate to your topic (film journals, journals on pop culture, contemporary media, literary criticism, film criticism, history of film, pop music, etc). Make an appointment with the library for a research consultation.

Requirements
- Standard MLA formatting with in-text citations and Works Cited page.
- Works Cited page should include at least two scholarly sources in addition to the reviews.
- Underline thesis and provide word count.