

ENGL 477/577 Language, Gender and Power
Fall 2013 BAL 2067 Wednesday 4:20-7:00

Course description: This interdisciplinary course explores how language reflects and interacts with society, with a particular emphasis on gender construction by members of the society through their use of language. Although the main focus will be on language and gender, we will also examine how language depicts other underrepresented groups.

Instructor: Dr. Janet Bing

E-mail: jbings@odu.edu

Office: 5030 BAL Phone: 683-4030

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00-3:00

Wednesday 3:00-4:00 **and by appointment.**

(Feel free to drop by at other times.)

Required Readings:

Undergraduates:

1. Bing, Janet (ed.) *Readings* The readings on Blackboard are central to the course and are available to ODU students on Blackboard. Undergraduates: Please note that a few readings are required only for the graduate students, but feel free to read them (and refer to them in your essays and test questions for extra credit). The readings for graduate students are labeled.
2. Crawford, Mary. *Talking Difference*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995.
3. Elgin, Suzette. *Native Tongue*. New York: The Feminist Press, 2000. (NT) Do not wait until the end of the semester to get this book because it may be difficult to get on short notice.

Please note: The primary source of information for this course is language, and all types of language will be studied, including taboo language (dirty words), offensive jokes and language not commonly used in polite society. In addition, students will examine the language of violence and religion. Mature students understand the distinction between studying language and using language and are able to discuss viewpoints they find offensive and disagree with, but anyone who finds such subjects uncomfortable should probably not take this course.

Blackboard and student E-mail. You **must** have an Old Dominion University Student Midas account to access Blackboard. If you do not have a Midas account, you can request one at <https://midas.odu.edu>. ODU's Blackboard web site may also be reached through the university homepage (<http://www.odu.edu>); click on *Current Students* and click on *Blackboard*, or go directly to: <http://blackboard.odu.edu/>. You must also have an ODU email account so that your messages do not go into my spam trap and so that I can contact you outside of class; you should check this account regularly. To request an ODU email account go to: <http://season.odu.edu/>. I will not use other email addresses to contact you during the semester so do not send me materials from non-ODU accounts.

Course Goals: The primary goal of the course is for students to be able to analyze different types of language using different methods and approaches. In addition, students will examine their own assumptions and beliefs about language and how these compare to writers who have contributed to this course.

Course Requirements:

-Reading: Students are, of course, expected to do all of the assigned reading for this class. If there is a problem with any of the readings (such as missing pages, poor quality, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible. If you want additional discussion of readings or additional help in interpreting the more scholarly readings, it is important to ask for a summary, clarification, or further discussion. Please come to class ready to discuss the topics in the readings.

-Discussion board: Every week, I will post one or more issues on the discussion board on Blackboard, and

you should react to those with at least one sentence. (Reactions such as, “I agree with ___” do not count.) Your reactions should be posted by Tuesday at noon. In addition, you will occasionally be asked to bring materials to class. The easiest way to do this will be to post these on the discussion board under the appropriate class date. Thoughtful responses and your willingness to find material related to the class will help you keep a good participation grade even if you are the kind of student who prefers not to speak up in large classes.

Graduate students: Graduate students will do all the reading assigned for undergraduates, plus a few assignments marked in the *Readings* marked for graduate students. **Graduate Student Oral Reports:** Shortly after mid-semester, graduate students will give interesting ten minute presentations on a subject of their choice concerning language and gender. The participation grade for graduate students will be based mostly on this presentation, as well as on class participation. Dates for oral reports will be assigned randomly.

-Essays and Essay portfolio: Each student will be required to write and hand in four essays on a topic to be assigned for three of the essays. Students should submit the essays in hard copy in class unless the essay has links to multimedia, in which case they may be submitted by Email. (Essays may also be submitted by Email in cases of emergency such as illness or printer failure, and in that case, the label of the submission should be your name and the number of the essay. Each essay should respond to the assignments below and have a title; citations from other sources are appropriate, but not required. If you cite another work, follow MLA or some other standard guideline. The first three essays should be between 500 and 1000 words (two to four pages double spaced), but some subjects will require more and some less, and that is all right. The final essay will be longer (1000 to 1500 words or four to six pages).

Essay 1. Write a critique of the language and/or images in some piece of culture or popular culture in terms of gender/race/sexuality. Some possible choices: YouTube videos, advertisements, cartoons, blogs, Facebook or Twitter messages, children’s stories, textbooks, cartoons, video games, computer games, etc. Remember, you can cite examples that break stereotypes, are non-sexist and racist as well as those that are sexist, racist or homophobic. There are some suggested specific topics in Units 2 and 3 on Blackboard. Graduate students may choose to do a short critical discourse analysis as described in the Cameron article.

Essay 2. Write an essay on any of the topics that have been raised in the course so far (except for the media).

Essay 3: Write an essay on one of the topics introduced in Classes 9, 10 or 11. This may be a letter to the editor or a narrative essay if you wish.

Essay 4

Option A: Select a joke or humorous piece with all male characters and change it so that all the characters are female. Ideally, the new joke should also be funny, but if this is not possible, explain what stereotypes and aspects of culture make the joke impossible to ‘translate.’ Be sure to discuss the technique that explains why the joke is funny. For example, is it the result of a frame shift, a blended space, or some other technique?

Option B: Find a good lesbian or feminist joke or humorous piece that is not a male-bashing joke and explain the technique that makes the joke funny and to whom. If possible, test this joke on both males and females, older and younger people, people from different ethnic groups, etc., to discover who finds it funny. (Survey monkey is one way to do this.) Note: A “humorous piece could be a video, a cartoon, a funny blog, something that might appear on *The Onion* web page, etc.)

Graduate Students: Individual conference with instructor: Graduate students will make a 10 minute presentation to the class on a topic of their choice (which can also be the topic of one of their essays if they choose). All graduate students are required to make an appointment with me to discuss their choice of topic

for this presentation before October 23.

Undergraduate Students: An individual conference with instructor is recommended, but not required.

Come in and discuss one of your essays or just talk about the course.

--**Tests:** There will be a midterm and a final exam. Tests will include both essay and objective questions.

Grading:

Midterm	15 %
Class Participation	15 % (This includes the presentation for graduate students)
4 Essays	48 %
Final exam	22 %

Class Guidelines:

1. Participation. Students and professors learn best when actively involved in the classroom, and there are many ways to participate including:
 - attending all classes (you may miss one class without penalty so save it in case you have an emergency);
 - having done the reading and homework on time;
 - having participated actively on the discussion board;
 - participating actively and honestly in small group discussions (leaving early will hurt your grade);
 - responding maturely to comments or questions by other students
 - consulting with or giving feedback to the professor in person, by E-mail or by telephone
 - notifying the professor if there are problems with the readings
 - being able to maturely disagree with the instructor or classmates on the issues raised
2. Late work is accepted for up to one week if there is a legitimate excuse (illness and death are legitimate, but trips to the Bahamas are not), but students cannot be sure of feedback on any test or assignment that is not handed in on time. Tests or assignments made up for an excused absence will probably not be graded until the end of the course. (I often file late papers and decide at the end of the semester whether to grade them or count them.) Late tests and papers are usually not returned to students.
3. Please turn off your cell phones unless you have prior permission (as in the case of a sick child), and in these cases, put it on vibrate and leave the room to answer any calls. Please do your eating and drinking during the class breaks. If you take notes on a laptop or iPad, do not text your friends, read your E-mail or Facebook during class.
4. I prefer not to give grades of *Incomplete* and, in cases where an incomplete is permitted, I rarely give a course grade higher than B.
5. Please bring extra paper to tests for essay questions. It is not necessary to bring a blue book.
6. Special Needs: If there is any student who has special needs because of documented learning disabilities or other disabilities, please discuss these needs with me and contact the Office of Engagement and Enrollment Services at 757-683-4655 or <http://studentaffairs.odu.edu/educationalaccessibility/> for assistance. ODU policy requires that you provide me with official documentation of allowed accommodations.
7. ODU Honor Pledge: By enrolling in this course you agree to the University's honor code in all work you produce. The following honor pledge applies to all exams and work done in this course:
"I pledge to support the Honor System of Old Dominion University. I will refrain from any form of academic dishonesty or deception, such as cheating or plagiarism. I am aware that as a member of the academic community, it is my responsibility to turn in all suspected violators of the Honor System. I will report to an Honor Council hearing if summoned."
I support the honor system and reserve the right to fail for the entire course any student who violates it. Good guides to documentation can be found on the web.
8. Student opinion surveys. Before the last week of classes, please complete your on-line evaluation of this course by going to the ODU web page, (click on) *Current Students* and (click on) *Student Opinion Surveys*.

Tentative schedule. The following assignments will be due on the dates indicated unless changes are

announced in class and on Blackboard.

Class 1. (8/24) Introduction to the field of language and gender, overview of the course, possible topics for papers. Small group discussion questions:

1. How do children gain their ideas about the appropriate behaviors for males and females?
2. What do animal (chick, alpha male) and food (peach, beefsteak) words used to address and describe men and women reveal? Are the words for males and females parallel?
3. In what way do forms of address indicate the relative importance of different people? For example, what do first names, titles, and words like *sir* and *little lady* reveal? When are terms such as *honey* and *dear* friendly and when are they a "put-down"?
4. Why do some of the following words have good connotations and others do not? *master/mistress*, *seminal/hysterical*, *bachelor/spinster*. Please remember that when you refer to words as words (and not as what they mean) you put them in italics or underline them.
5. Is it possible for groups to reclaim words with negative connotations, such as *bitch*, *queer*, and the "N-word?"

Class 2 (9/4) Essentialism and dichotomy. Assignment: Read Chapter 1 in Crawford and "The Question of Questions" on Blackboard, in Module #I. Please contact me if you have difficulty finding or accessing the readings on Blackboard. PowerPoint: Gender Polarization

Class 3 (9/11) Education and Socialization. Read Chapters 2 and 3 in Crawford and Module II in the *Readings*, "Education and Socialization?"

Class 4 (9/18) The Media: Public Wisdom. *Readings* Module III, "The Media". Bring in an example of portrayals of different groups by the media to share with the class. Video: Still Killing Us Softly.

Class 5 (9/25) Two Sexes, Two Cultures. Read Chapter 4 in Crawford and Module IV. Tannen video. **Essay 1 due.**

Class 6 (10/2) Public Life and Speech. Read Module V. Sandberg Ted Talk.

Class 7. (10/9) Language and Reality. Read Module VI. **Essay 2 due.**

Class 8. (10/16). Midterm. The exam will consist of both objective and essay questions.

Class 9. (10/23) Who Defines? Read Module VII.

Class10. (10/30) The Language of Violence. Module VIII. and Crawford, Chapter 4.

Class 11. (11/6) The Language of Religion. Module IX. Read *Native Tongue* Chapters. 1-11. **Graduate student presentations.**

Class 12. (11/13) Humor and Stereotypes. Read Module X, Crawford, Chapter 5, *Native Tongue*, Chapters 12-18. *Readings*, Unit 9. Graduate student presentations:

Class 13. (11/20) Language and Power. Finish *Native Tongue. Readings*, and Module XI. **Essay 3 due.** Graduate student presentations:

11/27 Thanksgiving holiday

Class 14. (12/4) Speaking Out Read Crawford, Chapter 6 and Module XII. Bring to class an example of women speaking out in public for a cause. Graduate presentations: **Essay 4 due.**

Final exam: (12/11 3:45) The final exam will be cumulative, but more emphasis will be placed on the readings since the midterm.