Supporting the College Writer: The Emily Balch Seminars for First-Year Writers and the Writing Center at Bryn Mawr College

Tsuda College, August 3, 2013

#### Thank You





- 1) Self-introduction
- 2) My experience with the Writing Center
- 3) My first-year writing course



### 1. Self-introduction

*My teaching experience and Writing Center background* 



#### Literature & Writing Courses

 Bryn Mawr C, U of Pennsylvania, Villanova U, Arcadia U, Haverford C, Temple U, Rutgers U. Topics have included:

Literature Courses	Writing Courses
18 <sup>th</sup> -century literature Early British lit survey Jane Austen Gothic literature Romanticism Performance Studies Introduction to Literary Studies	"Anxious Masculinity" "The City Imagined and Explored" "Space is Limited" College Composition Introduction to Academic Discourse Introduction to Critical Theory Writing Workshop Expository Writing I Basic Composition AP English high school teachers summer course

- Interim director, Bryn Mawr College Writing Center (2009-10)
- Co-coordinator, Bryn Mawr College Writing Program (2005-6)



#### A Few Unique Qualities of Small Liberal Arts College Students

**Homogeneity** of experiences/behavior:

- Students arrive with strong academic records/ambitions
- SLACs: School of choice for most
- Students adept at "being students" (polite, prepared, attentive, understand that learning means change)

#### **Diversity** of backgrounds:

- Economic extremes: Wealthy, full-paying students; middle class and poor scholarship students
- Language/writing-skill level: Sophisticated readers and writers; merely competent, dutiful writers; ESL writers
- Geographical: Regional, national, international



## 2. The Writing Center at Bryn Mawr College

Foundational concepts; interaction with first-year writers



# From the Writing Center Website (pitched to students)

The Bryn Mawr College Writing Center offers free, individual writing tutorials. Each member of our undergraduate student staff has been nominated by a BMC faculty member and has completed a rigorous training process.

We can help you understand your assignment, generate ideas, support your argument, organize your essay, polish your writing style, and improve your grammar.



# Key Writing Center Ideas & Practices

- Inculcate habits of seeking out and using feedback
- Envision writing as a process (and revision as essential to writing)
- Encourage collaboration
  - Tutor and student/Teacher and tutor
- Support the first-year writing (EMLY) classroom

#### Feedback

- Feedback is what experienced writers crave; Writing Center (WC) strives to instill habit of seeking feedback in student writers
- WC supports instructors who encourage students to use peer reviewing and build it into their writing process
- 3 parts of feedback:
  - Instructor to student
  - Peer-review (students to each other)
  - Writing Center (tutor to student)



#### Writing as a Process

- Revision: three components
  - a) Initial drafting (free-writing, transcribing notes, pulling out quotations from texts, etc.)
  - b) Outlining, reorganizing, redrafting
  - c) Final revision: turning "writer-based prose" into "readerbased prose"

"The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page." —Anne Lamott (1995)



## Revising Writerbased Prose into Reader-based Prose

Based on the research and writing of Linda Flower



#### Writing with an Audience in Mind

Revising writer-based prose into readerbased prose entails providing the reader:

- a **context** 
  - a clear structure
    - guiding expectations

BUT: Writer-based prose doesn't carry out these things without revision; it's important to understand this, and lead students into realizing that writer-based prose *is what we all begin with*.



#### Experienced/Inexperienced Writers

- Flowers discovered an important distinction between experienced and inexperienced writers:
  - Experienced writers believe that writing only begins when they get words down onto the page
  - Inexperienced writers believe that their job is done when they get their thoughts into print

Thus she conceptualized students as more or less experienced writers rather than good or bad ones.



#### **Features of Writer-Based Prose**

- Egocentric focus (whether using "I" or not)
- Narrative organization (often chronological)
- Survey structure (listing facts, aka "data dump")

So, what's good about it?



is a natural, cognitively undemanding mode of thought, a functional system that tries to impose order on experience—it's not just "error."



develops from the "inner speech" of early childhood; it is the outward articulation of thinking; it's evidence of our "episodic memory."



allows the writer to think in "complexes," loose collections of related objects. It's rational, but lacks the abstract, logical relations of *concepts*.



provides a narrative or list-survey organization that creates a kind of conceptual structure with "slots" to be filled in—i.e., chronological ("what happened next was...") or serial ("the next item on the list is...").



#### is, again, where we all begin.

#### So why is it limited?



#### Writer-based prose often relies on

- An **egocentric** focus: A single point-of-view that doesn't imagine
- other perspectives
- that readers are more interested in issues and ideas than the writer's process of discovery.

Egocentric expression is often marked by "saturated" language (words "dripping" with clear meaning *for the writer* but often ambiguous for the reader)



#### Writer-based prose can also rely on

A narrative organization/narrative framework, such as a blow-by-blow account of the writer's experience, or an order determined by the text under analysis (i.e., the sequence of the 5 acts of a Shakespeare play)



Writer-base prose can also rely on...

A survey structure ("data dump"): Information seduces or overwhelms the writer and trumps her ideas and intentions to explain them. She responds by making lists; she revises by adding items to or elaborating the lists.



#### Writing with an Audience in Mind: Reader-based Writing

Features of reader-based writing:

- Evidence of a shared goal
- Hierarchy of ideas
- Explicit conclusions
- Cues to the reader



#### Evidence of a Shared goal

As if you're saying to the reader: "My thesis answers questions that I bet you're interested in, too."



#### Hierarchy of Ideas

As if you're saying to the reader:

"There are lots of parts to this thesis and potential ways to digress; I'm going to prioritize and focus its topics for you, foregrounding what I think is most compelling/urgent/ illustrative; perhaps placing in the background others that may also be important, but less significant. I've done this work for you; that's why you want to keep reading, even if you disagree with me"



#### **Explicit conclusions**

(*Conclusion* in the broader sense of *findings*.) Reader-based prose is clear and direct from the outset as to what the writer's intentions are. (She may not know these, however, until after completing a few drafts.)



#### Cues to the reader

For short papers, these will come in the form of repeated key terms, transitions that recur to previous ideas, and effective topic sentences.



#### Another WC ideal: Encouraging Collaboration

- A collaborative mindset instills productive habits of writing
  - Seeking help when needed
  - Emulating best writing practices from reading (classroom texts and peer writing)
  - Critically re-reading and revising one's own prose
- Instructors collaborate by
  - including WC description on syllabus
  - requiring students to use WC
  - inviting tutors to give in-class presentations

#### WC is a part of class that is outside of the classroom



#### Collaborative relationships among Instructor, Student, Peers, WC



#### WC-Instructor Collaboration Example

From a WC-generated handout for faculty, "Proofreading: Teaching Methods"

Before beginning to help a student proofread, make sure that the errors in a paper are the result of the failure to proofread and not writing errors. Writing errors are indicated by their frequency and consistency as well as a student's inability to correct the errors when pointed out. More than three or four occurrences of the same problem indicate a writing, rather than a proofreading, error.

Once you have determined that the errors in a piece of writing are the result of failed proofreading, you can begin guiding the student toward productive practices that they can eventually follow independently.



#### "Proofreading: Teaching Methods" Suggested Method

- 1. Have the student focus on one type of error at a time (e.g., commas). Read the draft once looking only at comma use. Focus on a different problem during the next read-through.
- 2. Ask the student to read the paper aloud slowly, giving attention to each word. This may be done several times until each type of error has been eliminated. Sometimes it's also useful for you to read the paper aloud to help the student hear errors.
- 3. Ask the student to read sentences in paragraphs backwards. This removes the distractions of content and lets the student focus on word-level and sentence-level form. This is especially effective when correcting spelling and word choice.
- 4. Remind the student that proofreading should not happen until after all revisions are complete. The writer needs to separate proofreading from other stages of the writing process.



#### "Proofreading: Teaching Methods" Assumptions Behind the Method

- 1. Proofreading errors and writing errors are two different things.
- 2. The purpose of working with a student on proofreading is to help her change her writing and thinking processes that cause the problem. The goal is to produce a better writer and thinker, not a "cleaner" paper.
- 3. Given the second goal, "fixing" a student's errors yourself would be counterproductive. It would demonstrate only that **you** can recognize and correct errors. The student would not benefit from a demonstration of your ability.



#### The WC Supports the EMLY Classroom

"WC can deliver a lot of individual writing instruction in a very efficient way for EMLY students" (Jen Callaghan, Writing Center Director, BMC)

- WC helps first-year writers with shared, common problems in EMLY courses, such as:
  - Thesis building
  - Organization
  - Conclusions
  - Using sources
- WC does NOT provide punishment for writing errors; it is NOT a place for remediation



#### Supporting the EMLY Classroom II

- WC-Instructor-student collaboration:
  - Instructors can get a sense of how an assignment works, from tutor reports
  - WC can help teach students how to read prompts, how to approach teachers
- WC can show students how to locate things
- WC ends up synthesizing core writing goals of ESEM, BUT instructor expectations drive tutor's agenda



# 3. First-YearWriting: The EmilyBalch Seminars

Foundational concepts and my course


# The Emily Balch Seminars at Bryn Mawr College

EMLY teachers facilitate the seminars as active discussions among students. The seminars are small in size—14 to 15 students per class—to encourage thoughtful participation by students. The seminars are organized around fundamental questions in contemporary or classical thought that students will inevitably address in their lives, regardless of the majors they elect at Bryn Mawr or the profession or career they pursue after graduating. Seminar topics vary from year to year, and may focus within a particular discipline or encompass multidisciplinary fields of inquiry.

Emily Balch, Bryn Mawr Class of 1889 (and Wellesley faculty, 1896-1918), was a 1946 Nobel Laureate.



# **Emily Balch Seminars**

## EMLY seminars offer students opportunities to

- Narrow and deepen focus on texts; read texts closely
- Become more fluent readers and writers
- Make connections among sometimes disparate texts
- Hone critical thinking skills
- Engage with community of thinkers
- Work on using evidence and incorporating texts effectively
- Improve verbal expression and practice the mechanics of writing through the process of revision.

#### EMLYs are not

- Research courses
- Lecture courses
- Content-mastery courses
- Discipline- or genrespecific writing courses



# EMLY Operating Assumption: Writing to Think

- Fluency of thought
- Exploration of new and divergent ideas (generating and testing hypotheses)
- Reflective thinking (metacognition)
- Authentic connections to reading
- Interaction with text/author (critical stance)
- Meaning-making in community
- NOT about "correctness" or "right answers"



# Writing to Think II: Michel Foucault on Writing

"I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before"



## The importance of Fluency



#### <u>fluency</u>

Fluency is not an "add-on," but the broad base of the triangle



## Building Critical (Objective) Writing from a Subjective (Motivated) Base

- OPINE helps you know where to focus (how does the reading make you feel?)
- DESCRIBE helps you see what's actually there (what are the details from the text that inspire your feelings about it?)
- ANALYZE helps you explore and account for your feelings (how do the details of the text work—both in the sense of by themselves and in the context of the text as a whole?)



## Anxious Masculinity: Description

In western culture, an individual's assertion of masculinity is often accompanied by anxiety and discomfort. This anxiousness finds expression in a multitude of cultural forms. This course will interrogate ideals and images of masculinity, for men and women, in order to explore larger questions about the cultural contexts of gender. We'll frame our explorations through sometimes contradictory critical texts that raise foundational questions and propose theories about the biological and social constructions of gender. Using these texts as theoretical lenses throughout the course, we'll examine flashpoints in the ongoing cultural construction of masculinity to explore the notion that perhaps the only "timeless" aspect of masculinity is its constant vulnerability to subversion and change.

As an Emily Balch Seminar, this course will explore its topic through the critical reading of texts (construed in the broadest sense), classroom conversations, and cogent, idea-driven writing with frequent one-on-one conferences outside of class. The texts we will use in this examination include a wide variety of genres and media drawn from diverse sources and fields of study. This range is meant to encourage you to make connections among the texts, articulate the questions those connections raise, and to promote rich, open-ended interpretation and discussion.



# Anxious Masculinity: Texts

#### • Writing guides:

Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual; Gordon Harvey, Writing with Sources

#### • A nonfiction book:

C.J. Pascoe, Masculinity and Sexuality in High School [or: The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private, by Susan Bordo]

#### A substantial work of fiction:

Alison Bechdel, Fun Home: A Family Tragi-Comic [or: Fight Club, Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas].

PDFs posted online



#### Anxious Masculinity: Texts on Writing

- Linda Flower, "Understanding Academic Assignments" and "Writing Reader-based Prose"
- Harvey, Writing with Sources
- Gerald Graff et al., "They Say / I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing
- Joseph M. Williams, Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace.



#### Anxious Masculinity: Writing assignments

- Four papers:
  - three 4-6 page papers
  - one 6-8 page paper

To practice REVISION, students produce several versions of each paper:

- 1) an initial rough sketch or outline;
- 2) a more organized and articulated first draft;
- 3) a final, finished and polished draft.

(Peer reviewing usually happens after draft 1, but sometimes after draft 2.)

- several shorter pieces of writing on topics generated from readings and class discussions.
- Students also submit self-assessments during several stages of their writing process.



# Ann Lamott, again, on revision

"Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something anything—down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft—you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft—you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy."



# Syllabus: First Days

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	Reading/Writing Due
1	TU 9/4	Introduction to the course Masculinity and related words <i>OED</i> definitions (handout/M) Saunders, "My Amendment" (handout/M) Initial self-assessment
	ТН 9/6	Hoagland, poems from <i>Donkey Gospel</i> (M) In-class writing: Connect one of your own ideas about or experiences with masculinity to a specific moment in <u>one</u> of Hoagland's poems.



# First Unit: Nature, Nurture, and Masculinity

- OED definitions of Masculinity
- Stephen Jay Gould, "Biological Potentiality vs. Biological Determinism" (from *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History*, 1977)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, "How to Build a Man" (1995)
- Simon LeVay, "Thou, Nature, Art My Goddess: Genes, Environment, and Sex" (from *The Sexual Brain*, 1993)



# First Assignment

Engage with one of the readings to reflect on how we discuss gender. Focusing on a specific word or set of words, argue for how language reveals or transmits cultural ideas about masculinity. You might analyze or compare some of the typical words we use to describe it (manly, male, macho); or examine a polarized pair of words (nature/nurture, masculine/feminine, virile/ effeminate, aggressive/passive). You might also explore how gender-origin stories enter into these discussions (i.e., "men hunted and gathered while women stayed in the caves").



#### Unit 2:

#### Race, Class, and Histories of Masculinity

- Gary Cross, from Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity (2010)
- Caryl Rivers, "Always Worrying about Boys" (Huffington Post, 2012)
- Hannah Rosin, "The End of Men" (The Atlantic, 2012)
- R.W. Connell, "The History of Masculinity" (from *Masculinities*, 2005)
- Yen Le Espiritu, "All Men Are Not Created Equal: Asian Men in U.S. History" (2007)
- Kendal Thomas, "Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing: Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity" (1997)
- Susan Faludi, "The Son, The Moon, and the Stars: The Promise of Postwar Manhood," from *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999)



#### Unit 3:

### Female and Transsexual Masculinity

- Jack Halberstam, Introduction to Female Masculinity (1998)
- Stories from From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond (2004), and GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary (2002)
- Jenny Nordberg, "Afghan Boys Are Prized, So Girls Live the Part" (NY Times, 2010)
- Avgi Saketopoulou, "Minding the Gap: Intersections between Gender, Race, and Class in Work with Gender Variant Children" (*Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 2012)



#### Final Unit: Ideals & Images of Men and Masculinity

- C. J. Pascoe, Masculinity and Sexuality in High School (2007)
- John Berger, from Ways of Seeing (1985)
- Susan Bordo, "Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body," from The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private (1999)



# Final Assignment: Analyze an Image of Masculinity

- Describe and analyze specific ideas from 1-2 of our readings about how images reinforce conceptions or ideals of masculinity;
- Synthesize those ideas with those of an additional text to establish *your own* theory of how meanings are transmitted by masculine representations;
- 3) Use that theory as a "lens" through which you will argue the significance of your chosen image.
- Through this analysis of the image you will show us something new or surprising or problematic about masculinity.





A student's image choice





## BRYNMAWR