

# Exploring Public Issues through Writing

## ***GNED 400***

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*Class day/time/room: MW; 4:00-5:15 PM; Science Center G02*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Course Catalog Description:** *This course engages students in the critical analysis of a contemporary issue relevant to democratic citizenship. Students will develop interdisciplinary inquiry and writing as civic skills for active citizenship.*

This cross-disciplinary course seeks to engage students in the analysis of contentious public issues using multiple disciplinary lenses. In so doing, students are challenged to apply their disciplinary training and work with their knowledge and skills developed through their General Education program to evaluate the ways in which citizens have addressed these difficult issues. In turn, students transfer what they have learned about citizens acting in other places to a complex public issue in our own community. They practice the application of skills, particularly writing for the public arena, toward greater understanding and appreciation of the local issue and the lives of active citizens.

### **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

#### **The Longwood General Education Program**

This course also fulfills the requirements of Goal 13 of the General Education curriculum. The following information is taken directly from the 2008-2009 Undergraduate Catalog:

Goal 13: The ability to synthesize and critically analyze through written discourse and a common educational experience information pertaining to issues of citizen leadership (three credits).

*Outcomes: Students will*

- Engage in the process of citizen leadership by investigating multiple perspectives on an important public issue.
- Understand the nature of public discourse/debate as determined by purpose, audience, and context.
- Choose appropriate formats in writing for a variety of purposes.
- Analyze the effectiveness of their own texts and processes for specific rhetorical situations.

- Understand how the knowledge, skills, and values learned in general education are interwoven and interrelated and how they can contribute to the process of citizen leadership.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disabilities should inform the instructors of any special needs and contact the Office of Disability Support Services.

## COURSE MATERIALS

### Books and newspapers

*The New York Times*. Students are required to purchase and read (Monday through Friday) *The New York Times* for this class, paying attention to science, civics, and resource management issues. Visit Longwood's bookstore to obtain a subscription form. (Cost \$26)

*Public Literacy* by Elizabeth Ervin. Available at the Longwood Bookstore. (Cost \$23)

Others as assigned to support the study of the case.

### Readings on electronic reserve at the library

### Readings available on the Internet via these hyperlinks

**On selected days, students will write three questions regarding assigned readings and post them in the Blackboard discussion board.**

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

**Analysis of local issues (50 points total):** Each student in the class will select an issue with local implications to use as an important thread to be studied throughout the semester. Analysis of this focal issue will require students to carry out a number of tasks, including research, writing, and presentation of results, and completing the analysis will require extensive reading and consideration of public writing in a variety of formats and from a variety of sources.

The individual components of this analysis are summarized below. All of this information must be incorporated into your final project. You will compile and submit these materials as part of your final portfolio project (discussed below), which is due during the final exam period.

After selecting your issue, produce the following documents to complete this assignment:

1. An executive summary of the key aspects of the issue.
2. An executive summary of the important stakeholders involved and the arguments or positions of each group.

3. An executive summary of any legislation or laws that have been proposed to deal with the issue. You should consider referencing relevant town and county plans (e.g., Farmville's and Prince Edward County's Comprehensive Plan) and any related ordinances. You should also consider the incorporation of legislation or ordinances used in other locations that provide additional context for the local issue.
4. A summary of any court action that has been taken or attempted. Again, you should provide information specific to the local setting as well as examples from other locations that can provide context to the local issue.
5. An annotated bibliography of journal articles and/or books that explore research related to the key aspects of your issue.
6. An executive summary of potential solutions to resolve the issue. This should begin to bring together ideas from the other sections of the assignment and relate them to one another.
7. A collection of newspaper articles on your selected issues and other related public issues. In collecting these resources, you should think broadly about your topic and setting rather than very narrowly.
8. A reflection on the variety of public writing related to the focal topic.

*REQUIRED READING FOR THIS PROJECT: ERVIN CH. 5*

**Analysis of public writing (two documents; 10 points each):** A key challenge of transferring the academic skills you have developed during college to your lives as active citizens is understanding purpose, audience, and context. Over the course of the semester, you will prepare several writing assignments in which you need to effectively change your focus from the academic realm to the civic. Doing so requires practice, and before you prepare your own documents, you will analyze how others have addressed purpose, audience, and context. Thus, for each of the two major case studies considered in this class, you will carefully evaluate two examples of public writing and prepare an analysis of them. To complete this project, you will provide the instructors with a two-page document that succinctly discusses these issues as they relate to the required public documents: purpose, context, target audience, constraints of the author(s), genre, and tone of the assigned pieces. You can utilize a bullet-point format for this assignment.

*REQUIRED READING FOR THIS PROJECT: ERVIN CH. 1-4*

*DUE DATE FOR CASE 1: 2/6*

*DUE DATE FOR CASE 2: 2/25*

**Public writing assignments (three documents; 20 points each):** This portion of your grade is designed to demonstrate how writing can be used by citizens to influence public discussions. Please note that these assignments are as much about the process of writing as they are about the products of writing.

1. *Newspaper editorial:* As our entry point into public writing, you will write an editorial appropriate for publication in a newspaper that focuses on citizenship. Before you begin writing, refer to any newspaper's editorial page and study how an editorial is constructed. Keep in mind that these pieces typically are fairly short and focused. You want to get your argument across in a direct and succinct manner.

Topic: Responsibilities of citizens as it pertains to the local issue that you selected to follow throughout the semester.

*DUE DATE: 3/5*

*PEER REVIEW DUE: 3/7*

*FINAL REVISION DUE: 3/12*

2. *Letter to an elected or government agency official:* Write a letter that explains how you have applied a specific disciplinary mode of inquiry to arrive at a conclusion regarding your local resource issue and how the government needs to similarly respect this mode of inquiry when making public policy. Your letter should be professional and stick to the facts: members the government need information and facts to use in making decisions regarding policy.

Topic: A specific disciplinary perspective on your local issue.

*DUE DATE: 3/31*

*PEER REVIEW DUE: 4/2*

*FINAL REVISION DUE: 4/14*

*REQUIRED READING FOR THIS PROJECT: ERVIN CH. 6*

3. *Select a format:* Select one format appropriate for an aspect of your local issue. Prior to preparing the draft, you should prepare a memo in which you propose the format with which you will work and identify its relevance to the local resource project. If appropriate, it will be displayed at a town hall meeting.

Topic: Relevant to your local issue

*DUE DATE: 4/18*

*PEER REVIEW DUE: 4/20*

*FINAL REVISION DUE: 4/26*

*REQUIRED READING FOR THIS PROJECT: ERVIN CHPS. 7-9*

**Service project (20 points):** The class as a whole will complete a service project related to a major theme linking the two focal case studies. This service element may involve the organization and hosting of a town hall meeting to which guest officials, interest groups, and the public will be invited for a discussion of multiple perspectives on a key civic issue.

**Final Project and Portfolio (30 points):** At the end of the term, you will submit a final portfolio project that documents your efforts in this class. Your portfolio will include one section for each major course assignment: analysis of the local issue that you followed during the semester, your newspaper editorial, the letter to a government official, your public writing analysis pieces, and the open format document. Rather than including only your final products, you will document your progress by including at least two versions of each writing assignment.

In addition to functioning as a compendium of your efforts over the course of the term, your portfolio will also include new reflections on your efforts. Specifically, your portfolio project will include a type-written reflection on: 1) your progress over the course of the semester, specifically related to

key skills and knowledge associated with the major case studies, and 2) the ways in which this class incorporated skills and knowledge learned throughout your educational career at Longwood (i.e., in your major and in General Education). For this last part of the project, you are required to reference and discuss various course materials, including lectures, videos, and readings.

This final project/portfolio is due during this class's final exam period. In regards to format, it should be compiled and organized in a binder or similar arrangement, using dividers and other materials to make the organization very clear, and it should be presented in a very professional way that is appropriate for upper-level students.

**Note: All assignments must be completed in order for students to receive a grade for this class.**

Grading scale:

A= 90-100%      B= 80-89%      C= 70-79%      D= 60-69%      F= <60%

*\*Longwood's Honor Code applies to this class.*

Academic Pledge: "I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code."

Honor Creed: "We shall not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do."

*\*Longwood's attendance policy applies to this class.* Students missing more than 10% of class (unexcused) will have their grades reduced by one letter. Students missing 25% of class (excused and unexcused) will receive an F.

**\*Student conduct: Any student caught sleeping, talking, or disrupting this class will have points deducted from his/her final grade. The penalty is 5 points for each infraction.**

**\*Computer/phone usage in class: Students are not allowed to use cell phones, email, instant messaging, games, or any other aspect of the Internet during this class. The penalty is 5 points for each infraction.**

## **COURSE LECTURE AND READING OUTLINE**

**\*Readings that can be accessed using the links in the "Hyperlinks" section of the syllabus.**

**\*\*Readings that can be accessed through the library's e-reserve or through the course Blackboard site.**

### **Getting Started**

1/14 Introduction to course (Readings: none)

### **Case Study 1:**

1/16 through 2/6 (key topics outlined by week)

**Case Study 2:**

2/11 through 2/25 (key topics outlined by week)

**Practicing Citizenship: Linking lessons from case studies to other (local, regional) civic issues**

2/27 through 3/17 (key topics outlined by week; includes Spring Break)

**Building on the Case Studies: Connecting disciplinary approaches and content knowledge to other (local, regional) civic issues**

3/19 through 4/16 (key topics outlined by week)

**Community Problems, Community Engagement: Expanding to global citizenship**

4/21 through 4/23

**Final Exam Week**

4/29 Final exam at 3:00-5:30 (your portfolio is due during this exam period)