

ART 6600 Thesis Writing in Art and Design
Fall 2016
CRN 87993, 3 credit hours

Instructor: Paul Boshears, PhD
Class Times: Fridays 9am –11:30am
Office Hours: By appointment

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Location: Classroom South 430

Course Description

This course introduces students to the fundamentals and mechanics of graduate-level research and writing. This is a writing-intensive class. By the end of this course the students will have written a rough draft of their thesis necessary for the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgia State University.

In this class you will learn about the different audiences that professional artists engage with and how those audiences discuss those artists.

The MFA in Studio Art culminates in a final thesis exhibition/presentation of your studio work accompanied by a written thesis. The purpose of the written thesis is to demonstrate that you can critically examine your thesis exhibition/presentation and provide context for understanding it. Your goal is to create a robust, many-layered document that provides new and useful insights into the works you've produced during your time as a graduate student.

Learning Outcomes

The class will be a blend of applied and theoretical writing, including the mechanics of both research and writing. In this class we will explore the creative potential within the practices of critical writing, critical thinking, and artistic research.

This course is designed to:

- orient you to the resources of the [Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education](#) (ARCHE) libraries, modes of research afforded by the internet, and other archival resources in the metro-Atlanta area;
- provide you with practice in writing about your own artistic process and artwork;
- guide you through the stages of the thesis process, including conceiving, researching, writing, and proofreading.

Course Format

This is a writing workshop. There will be weekly writing assignments. Students are expected to arrive at each class meeting having read the assigned materials and produced the work they've been tasked with in the previous meeting. Prior to each class meeting students will have posted their assigned work in our online meeting space, iCollege. In so doing, the instructor and cohort are able to discuss the matters afforded by their writing.

Required Texts

Eric Hayot. [The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities](#). New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Any additional readings will be made available in digital format.

Required Materials

Students must arrive at each class meeting with the necessary reading and writing materials to participate: paper, pencils, pens, and/or laptops are expected. Failure to participate in daily assignments and discussions will result in significant reductions to your final grade.

Situating this Class

The mission of the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design is to offer a rigorous, comprehensive, and accessible graduate and undergraduate education in the visual arts to a diverse student population. From Foundation to Graduate studies, courses are designed to give each student challenging, discipline-specific training while presenting the opportunity for each to discover and nurture an individual vision and voice.

This class is designed to hone your reading and writing habits. My role in this class is to provide an environment in which each of you can articulate your thinking through text-based media. In order for this environment to cohere among us, I task myself with observing and inducing discussions between us.

Reading and Writing Are Difficult

I come from a text-based practice both philosophical and artistic. My experience has shown me that writing and reading are difficult tasks.

Often it is really, really difficult for me to find the appropriate terms or phrases to effectively communicate what I intend. I have—very frequently—denigrated myself for the pace at which I read certain texts, especially theory or philosophy texts.

I expect that it will be just as difficult for you as well, it may be even more difficult for you. And that's okay.

In this class we are going to read challenging texts and we are going to find ourselves thinking differently about ourselves and how our works are situated in the world.

I will be assessing both the clarity of the arguments you put forward and the evidence you provide to support those arguments in your writing.

It's called a "thesis" for a reason, our task in this course is to examine why .

My training has required I create and execute an undergraduate thesis with human subjects, a graduate thesis based on a problem I found in an extensive literature review, and a doctoral dissertation in which I contributed a novel understanding of a topic. Along the way I've had to write and sometimes publish essays.

Essays, theses, and dissertations are each cognates of one another and together they intimate attempts (French, *essai*) to advance (Greek, *thesis*) along a course or path (Latin, *dissertatio*).

We are going to dissect, embrace, and discuss the writings of others so that we can better understand where we are on the path.

Why 315 Words?

You will see in the class calendar that I expect you to arrive every week having written 315 words based on what you read last week. I arrived at this number by reviewing a sample of Welch School MFA theses and averaging the number of words they wrote as well as the average number of citations they provided. I divided these numbers by the number of weeks we will be meeting and derived a minimum word count necessary for you to write as much as they wrote.

In other words, if you read one article a week and write a 315-word response to each week's reading, you will have met your writing requirements for your degree. Hooray!

Grading and Assessments

Your final grade for this course will be based on the following:

Class Discussion (20%)

You are expected to read all assigned and discussed texts and participate actively in class discussions. We will also complete writing exercises and discuss these.

These discussions are designed to help the student and the professor find meaningful ways of communicating their understandings of the materials.

Writing Assignments (40%)

Every week you will arrive to class having written and submitted to our online space (iCollege) the assigned elements necessary for your thesis, e.g. Abstract, Thesis Statement, Outline, etc.

You will identify two artists that have influenced how you make art. For each of these artists you will read and respond to three modes of writing about these artists:

- 1) an interview of the artist
- 2) a critical review of a solo exhibition of this artist's work
- 3) a catalog-type essay about this artist's work.

You will also identify two themes or theories that inform the work you have been producing during the last two years. For each of these themes or theories you will write a review of the recent literature about these themes or theories.

These writing assignments are designed to facilitate the thesis writing process for the student. These writing assignments help the instructor understand what needs to be addressed during class discussion and workshop.

Job Talk (30%)

This is a two-part assignment. At the beginning of the semester you will give a 10 minute presentation (with 3–5 visual examples of your work) in which you explain what you've been doing at GSU for the last two years.

As a final project for this class you will revise this initial job talk in light of what we have read and discussed in this class.

This assignment is designed to familiarize the student with the professional conventions expected of exhibiting artists. This assignment demonstrates to the student the ways in which they've developed in response to the materials covered in this course.

This assignment assists the professor in understanding the students' aspirations and appreciation of the materials covered in this course.

Written Feedback (10%)

This is a workshop. We come to each meeting prepared to share what we've written and during these workshops we aid one another in this writing process by giving constructive, written suggestions for developing what we've written.

These writing assignments are designed to facilitate the thesis writing process for the student. This assignment assists the professor in understanding the students' aspirations and appreciation of the materials covered in this course.

Midterm Grade Notification

Each student enrolled in the course will receive notification of their midterm grade halfway through the term via email. Your final grade is contingent on your daily discussion and participation, as such your final grade may change dramatically by the end of the semester.

Assessing Learning Outcomes

I will ask you to complete three short assessments of learning during this semester:

- 1) On the first day you will be given a Prior Knowledge Assessment,
- 2) at the middle of the term I will give you a Learning Assessment,
- 3) and on the final day of our classes I will ask you to complete a second Learning Assessment.

I will use these tools to help gauge your learning as well as to identify ways I can better support how you learn. You will receive a participation grade for these activities.

Rubric for Assessing Writing

I will use this rubric to assess the writings you create in response to the readings assigned in this course.

| | 1 point | 2 points | 3 points | 4 points |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Criterion #1 Identification of critical issue | Critical issue not identified | Critical issue identified but with no evidence of understanding context | Critical issue identified with evidence of understanding social, cultural, political context | Critical issue clearly identified with evidence of deep understanding of social, cultural, political context |
| Criterion #2 Thorough and insightful analysis | Analysis is incomplete with no indication of critical thinking | Analysis is simplistic or vague with little indication of critical thinking | Analysis is complete with clear use of critical thinking | Analysis is thorough and insightful with sophisticated critical thinking |
| Criterion #3 Clear and logical organization | Organization is not clear and logical and does not help to support claim | Organization is at times clear and logical and only partially helps to support claims | Organization is clear and logical and helps to support claims | Organization is very clear and logical and helps to strongly support claims |
| Criterion #4 Proper grammar, spelling and punctuation. | Many grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors with no evidence of proofreading | Several distracting grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors with little evidence of proofreading | One or two grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors that are not overall distracting | No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors |

Letter Grades According to Rubric

| | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------|
| A = 16 | B+ = 14 | C+ = 11 | D+ = 8 | F = 5 |
| A- = 15 | B = 13 | C = 10 | D = 7 | |
| | B- = 12 | C- = 9 | D- = 6 | |

Policies Governing this Class

Academic Honesty & Integrity

Students and faculty are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards.

We can do our best work when we foster the best performances from one another.

I will be relying on and I must conform to the policies established by the community here at Georgia State University. Any and all cheating, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic grade of “F” for the course.

If you believe that I have breached these ethical standards, please follow the guidelines communicated in the Student Handbook (codeofconduct.gsu.edu) and refer to the Faculty Handbook (<http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwfhh/fhb.html>).

Accessibility and Accommodation Planning

It is necessary for me that this class be accessible to you.

Not all of us learn in the same ways. I want to work with each of you to ensure that we are learning together.

If you need accommodations, you have a right to have these met, so it's best to notify instructors as soon as possible.

Per the Office of Disability Services (disability.gsu.edu):

Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability may do so by registering with Disability Services. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which an accommodation is sought.

Disruptive Student Behavior Policy

Disruptive student behavior is student behavior in a classroom or other learning environment (to include both on and off-campus locations), which disrupts the educational process.

Disruptive class behavior for this purpose is defined by the instructor.

Such behavior includes, but is not limited to, verbal or physical threats, repeated obscenities, unreasonable interference with class discussion, making/receiving personal phone calls, text messages or pages during class, excessive tardiness, leaving and entering class frequently in the absence of notice to instructor of illness or other extenuating circumstances, and persisting in disruptive personal conversations with other class members. For purposes of this policy, it may also be considered disruptive behavior for a student to exhibit threatening, intimidating, or other inappropriate behavior toward the instructor or classmates outside of class.

For additional information on this policy see the Office of the Dean of Students: (deanofstudents.gsu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/disruptive-student-conduct)

Because this is a discussion-based course in which the majority of your grade is determined by how you contribute to the discussions in this class, **most—if not all—cell phone use during class time will be construed as disruptive student behavior.**

Plagiarism

In this class I will ask you to give textual support for your arguments about the materials we read. This means you are going to be asked to paraphrase or quote what the authors we read state. Consequently, there is a greater opportunity to knowingly or unknowingly plagiarize.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. GSU defines plagiarism as, "presenting another person's work as one's own." The official guidelines to which you are expected to adhere are located here: (<http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwfhb/sec409.html>).

You will find a handy one-sheet explaining and discussing plagiarism here: (<http://education.gsu.edu/files/2016/05/Plagiarism.pdf>).

Indiana University's School of Education has an excellent website for learning about plagiarism, here: (<https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/>).

I will issue extra credit toward your final grade if you pass and receive a verified certificate from IU's Plagiarism Certification Test, here: (<https://www.indiana.edu/~plag/test.html>).

Deadlines

All students are required to meet course deadlines. Late work will not be accepted unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as those mentioned in the attendance policy below.

There are no make-up arrangements, however there may be extra credit that can be arranged.

Attendance

- Class attendance is required.
- Two (2) unexcused absences will result in the lowering of the final grade by one letter grade.
- Failure to come to class with adequate materials for producing work will result in a recorded absence for that day.
- Failure to arrive on time will be recorded as half an absence, so for example, arriving late to class twice during the term will be recorded as one absence. Similarly, leaving class early will be recorded as half an absence.
- Information missed due to tardiness or absence will be the responsibility of the student.

Absences may be excused due to illness, religious holidays or other extreme circumstances as defined by the University, but it is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor and to give a written notification.

Security

Georgia State University and the Welch School of Art and Design have installed punch code locks to make our buildings safer for students and faculty. You should treat any lab or studio under card lock as a secure space. As such, GSU and the Welch School of Art and Design ask that you abide by the following guidelines to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone:

1. Always have your GSU ID card with you when on campus.
2. Never allow anyone to use your card. If a student or member of the staff or faculty is authorized to be in the area, their cards will give them access. If anyone asks for your card, report the incident to campus police immediately.
3. Always report suspicious people or activity to the faculty or graduate student in charge of the studio or lab. If, for any reason, there is no faculty or graduate student supervision, report suspicious people or activity to campus police (404-413-2100)

4. Never try to enter a studio or lab by 'piggybacking' on someone else. For example, if someone is entering the lab or studio before you, do not try to get through the door while it is open. Wait for the door to close and then punch in the code again to gain entry. Similarly, do not allow someone else to come through with you. It can be tempting to hold the door open for someone whose hands are full with equipment, etc. This practice, however, is not secure and can put everyone at risk. Wanting to help is good, but be smart about it.

Please refer to the Office of Safety & Security (safety.gsu.edu) for further information.

Retention of Work

The School of Art & Design has the right to retain any student project, whether it be for display, accreditation, documentation, or any other educational or legal purpose.

Student Evaluation

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

Subject to Change

This course syllabus provides a general plan for the course. With the exception of grading and attendance policies, deviations may be necessary and written notification of any changes will be provided.

Class Calendar

| Date | In Class | Assignment |
|---|---|---|
| Friday, 26 August Last Day of Drop/Add is today. | Review syllabus, class introductions, instructor introduction, and Prior Knowledge Quiz | Create a 10 minute Job Talk . A presentation of your work (3–5 visual examples) and an explanation of what you've been working toward these last two years. Read Hayot, 1–16. Write 315 words about an article you read this week. |
| Friday, 2 September | Job Talk presentations. Review department requirements for thesis completion. | Select MFA thesis from Welch School archive. Read Hayot, 17–35 Write 315 words about an article you read this week. |
| Friday, 9 September | Review citational practice (Hayot, 151) Discuss scheduling thesis committee meetings | Identify 2 influential artists and 2 themes that inform your work Write work plan and committee meeting schedule. Read Hayot, 36–50 Write 315 words about an article you read this week. |
| Friday, 16 September | Share influences and ideas. Discuss Institutional Contexts (Hayot, 36). Discuss influences. | Write 500 word synopsis of your selected thesis. Hayot, 51–73 Write 315 words about an article you read this week. |
| Friday, 23 September | Present Synopsis of Selected Thesis Discuss writing as practice (Hayot, 5) and reading as writing (Hayot, 51). | Write Abstract of Your Thesis Project. Read Hayot, 74–88 Write 315 words about an article you read this week. |
| Friday, 30 September | Workshop Abstracts Guest Speaker | Write Table of Contents , this includes 3–7 section headings and 1–2 sentences about each section. Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 89–106 |

| Date | In Class | Assignment |
|--|--|--|
| Friday, 7 October Last Day to Withdraw without Academic Penalty is 11 October | Workshop writing assignment Groups Assess Progress | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 107–125 |
| Friday, 14 October | Workshop writing assignment Learning Outcomes Assessment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 126–139 |
| Friday, 21 October | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 140–150 |
| Friday, 28 October | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 151–166 |
| Friday, 4 November | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 167–183 |
| Friday, 11 November | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 184–202 |
| Friday, 18 November | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 203–217 |
| 21–26 November | Thanksgiving Break | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Read Hayot, 218–238 |
| Friday, 2 December | Workshop writing assignment | Write 315 words about an article you read this week. Prepare your revised 10 minute Job Talk |
| Friday, 9 December | Revised Job Talk presentations Assessing Outcomes Assessment | Congratulations, You Wrote Your Thesis! |

This syllabus reflects a plan for the semester. Deviations may become necessary as the semester progresses.

