

English 686
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Publication and Professionalization in English

This course offers a practicum in scholarly publication for advanced graduate students and focuses on larger questions about how we determine what a “publishable article” is in general and with reference to particular (sub)fields and, even more generally, what professional standards govern writing, editing, and reading articles for journals. We will discuss debates over “professionalization” of graduate students, over the future of scholarly publishing, over the future of the discipline, and other current topics of interest to Ph.D. students in English. This course was suggested by the English Department's work with the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, and is part of the English Department's commitment to thinking about the theory and practice of doctoral education in the 21st century.

In order to accomplish these tasks, the course will have a workshop component and a reading/discussion/research component. I will be giving various assignments in the early weeks of the course, assignments meant to help students conceptualize what constitutes a publishable essay in their fields, and to think about how to get there themselves. I will also be assembling panels of graduate students and faculty members to discuss issues around publication, and we will also be reading some material attempting to untangle the many complicated issues about the “professionalization” of graduate study in general.

Prerequisites

Students must be done with coursework, finished with prelims or be taking prelims before the beginning of Spring semester. You'll also need a paper you want to work on *in your field*. This last stipulation is important for two reasons: 1) One of the goals of the course is to help students solidify what it means to write publishable essays in their fields; and, 2) I don't want the work you do with revising the paper to derail you from your dissertations. Ideally, students will choose a chapter or portion of a chapter to work on in the seminar. (This revised chapter, perhaps on its way to publication, would be a perfect writing sample for people seeking jobs within the next two years.) If an interested student has not yet drafted a dissertation chapter, a second alternative would be a seminar paper or conference paper that is strongly tied to the dissertation topic.

Work load

- 1) Writing: There will be several relatively short writing assignments (in addition to revising your paper).
- 2) Reading: Five or six straightforward essays and position papers on professionalization of graduate students, scholarly publication, and the pedagogy of research. All reading will be available online, including your peers' papers.
- 3) Going to the library: In order to understand what constitutes a “publishable essay” in your field, you need to be reading what the top journals are publishing.
- 4) Reading peers' papers: Each student in the seminar will be responsible for writing one (very detailed) reader's report. I will ask faculty to provide samples of reader's reports they've written and/or received, and we will discuss these, as well, in weeks 2, 4 and 6. You'll be responsible for

reading (but not commenting on) all of the other papers. I will post both the papers and the reader's reports on the course website.

5) Like any other graduate course, you're making a commitment to come to class every week prepared to contribute to the work the class is doing, either by reading and being ready to discuss articles, or having read and commented on your peers' writing. If you are concerned about fitting the class into your schedule, please consult with me before signing up.

Grading

Students will be graded on a S/U basis. Everyone who participates fully will receive an "S."

Tentative schedule of activities.

January 21

We'll meet only briefly. Sign-up for workshops, brief overview of course; questions, concerns.

Assignment: Bring in the paper you plan to revise and answers to the following questions: What is the greatest strength of this paper? What is its weakness? What is the paper's argument, and how does that argument enter into debate within a field? How is the argument framed? In other words, what methodology does the paper utilize? What do you need to know in order to make the paper publishable? In other words, what reading and thinking do you need to do in order to move from seminar paper, conference paper, or dissertation chapter to publication?

Read "Professionalization in Perspective," Report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Professionalization of Ph.Ds. (Online at <http://www.mla.org/professionalization>)

January 28

Discussion of elements of good critical writing: can we "map out" the typical moves of a piece of literary or cultural scholarship? Discussion of students' own papers and difficulties answering above questions.

Discussion of "professionalization"

Assignment: Read Cary Nelson, "Graduate Studies and the Job Market" (will be posted to the web). Find time in your busy week to browse among the journals in your field to see what kinds of things are being published.

February 4

Come to class with three clean copies of your selected paper. Each of the papers will be "sent out" to two readers, one a member of the seminar, and the other a faculty member who works in the area. Each reader will write a reader's report as if s/he were responding to an article submitted to a journal. These reports will be due in four weeks, and will serve as the basis of our workshopping of the individual student papers. The third copy is for me to scan and post on the class website, so everyone in the seminar can read it when the time comes.

Discussion of essays on professionalization.

Circulation of sample "reader's reports", and initial discussion of them.

Assignment:

Reread a published article or book chapter that you have found to be exemplary of the *best* work in your field. Come to class with notes (or prose) that will enable you to articulate what is good about the article and why it represents the most excellent and useful work in the field. Outline a “map” of the article (based on our discussion in Week 1). Do the same for the published article or book chapter that you have found to be exemplary of the *worst* work in your field.

February 11

Depending on enrollment, we might divide up into groups based on field to discuss the above assignment. General discussion about what “publishable work” means in a particular field, and new evaluation of where students’ individual papers are in relation to that standard.

General discussion of the realities of publication: faculty panel.

Assignment: Read selected essays on publication in the humanities. Find time in your busy week to browse among the journals in your field to see what kinds of things are being published. Reader’s reports due next week.

February 18

Discussion of writing readers' reports: faculty panel.

More discussion of the elements of publishable critical writing; more discussion of the norms of writing reader’s reports. Discussion of editing practices and standards.

Assignment: Go to the library and read around in the journals in your field. Xerox the editorial pages and table of contents for three journals to which you might consider submitting your revised essay.

February 25

Discussion of journals, with faculty from various subfields present to ask and answer questions.

Assignment: Find time in your busy week to browse among the journals in your field to see what kinds of things are being published.

March 3

Responding to readers' reports: faculty panel.

March 10, March 24, March 31, April 7, April 14, April 21, April 28

For the remainder of the semester, we will workshop students'. We will discuss 1 paper per class, and use the remainder of each class to discuss more general issues of interest and concern to the seminar participants. I will periodically invite faculty and graduate students in to discuss various issues related to professional research, professional training, and publication. We will also keep reading selected essays on these topics.