

### Feminist Perspectives on Writing Culture

This course is cross-listed as a senior seminar in Anthropology and a topics course in Women's Studies. It explores how writing can be an empowering voice, especially for women. The course is designed to explore excellent writing by women about culture in several genres and to provide a forum for students' own experimental writing about culture. We ask: Why should we write? What should we write? How should we write? What is feminist writing? Each student will work on an independent writing project and students are strongly encouraged to come into the class with an idea or project they want to work on. This could be an honors thesis in progress; some interview data from a methods course; someone's journals; autobiography; on-line archives; or another approved project. The important thing is that students have something they want to write about that they know or can find out a lot about that will convey a sense of culture and gender.

We will explore diverse genres used by women to write about culture. The course begins with Anne Lamott's compelling book about writing to introduce the art, craft, and purpose of writing. Then we read Norma Elia Cantú's "fictional autoethnography," written around snapshots from her girlhood, a concise and evocative means of expression. We then read four female anthropologists' writing in four different genres: Ruth Behar's experimental essays foregrounding the role of emotions in ethnographic work; African American pre-war anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston's autobiography; Carol Stack's experimental ethnography about African Americans returning to the South after years of emigration in the North; and Kirin Narayan's novel about a young Indian woman who comes to the United States and goes through a fascinating transformation.

#### The course goals are:

1. to help every student find a writing voice by reading excellent writing in diverse genres;
2. to engage students in creating a high quality writing project centered around culture and gender by writing and rewriting all semester;
3. to explore writing as a means of feminist critical reflection and social and personal transformation.

#### Requirements

1. Attend class awake and on time. Do the assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned and be prepared to discuss them in class. This is a seminar where discussion is expected.
2. **Hand in TEN reaction paper to the readings on the day they are assigned and keep them all in a portfolio that you hand in on 4/27 (50%).** The purpose of the reaction papers is to enable you to digest and react to the readings so that you are prepared for class discussion. Reaction papers will absolutely not be accepted any later than the end of class on the day the reading was assigned. Summarize what you learned from the reading, and make connections to other things you have read or experienced.
  - a. Each reaction paper must be 1-2 pages (200-400 words) typed double spaced.
  - b. Keep your reaction papers in a pocket folder (not a notebook).
  - c. Date each entry.

- c. Give each entry a title (e.g. "The Moral Dimensions of Writing" or "Food as Voice")
- d. Number reaction papers consecutively.
- e. Number pages consecutively.
- f. Reaction papers will be graded on (1) complete fulfillment of assignment; (2) quality and clarity of writing; and (3) depth of thought (i.e. whether you reflecting seriously on issues raised in class and in the readings).
- g. Entries should consider the reading as both a piece of writing and a conveyor of culture and gender. What kind of writing is it? What are its most striking characteristics? What kind of structure does it use? How are sentences composed? To which senses does it appeal? (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, emotion?) Does the piece work? What does it offer you as a writer? How does it connect to other readings/writing?

**3. Complete a major writing project (50%).** Students will work on this project and hand in parts of it all semester long. The following is an initial list of projects and due dates:

- \* paper topics due (1/2 page) Thurs 2/3 -- discussed in class
- \* revised topics due (1 page) Thurs 2/17 -- discussed in class
- \* 3-5 page writing sample due 3/2--discussed in class
- \* 5-7 page writing sample due 3/16--discussed in class
- \* 8-10 page writing sample due 4/6--discussed in class
- \* 10-20 page paper due 4/20
- \* poster presentations 5/2 and 5/4
- \* revised 10-20 paper due 5/4

Readings:

Behar, Ruth. 1996. The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart. Boston: Beacon.

Cantú, Norma Elia. 1995. Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1984. Dust Tracks on the Road: An Autobiography. NY: Harper Collins.

Lamott, Anne. 1994. Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life. New York: Anchor.

Narayan, Kirin. 1994. Love, Stars and All That. New York: Washington Square.

Stack, Carol. 1996. Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South. New York: Basic Books.

SYLLABUS

- week 1  
1/25      **introduction: feminist anthropology and writing culture**  
- introduction
- 1/27      - LaMott xi-32
- week 2  
2/1        **writing and the writing frame of mind**  
- LaMott 33-94
- 2/3        - LaMott 95-130 **\*\*1/2 page due on paper topic--discussed in class\*\***
- week 3  
2/8        **how and why to write**  
- LaMott 131-182
- 2/10      - LaMott 183-237
- week 4  
2/15      **writing gender and culture through “fictional autobioethnography”**  
- Cantú xi-32
- 2/17      - Cantú 33-74 **\*\* 1 page due on paper topic--discussed in class \*\***
- week 5  
2/22      **images and/in writing**  
- Cantú 75-104
- 2/24      - Cantú 105-132
- week 6  
2/29      **the vulnerable observer**  
- Behar ix-33
- 3/2        - Behar 34-89 **\*\*3-5 page writing sample due--discussed in class\***
- week 7  
3/7        **emotion in writing culture**  
- Behar 90-135
- 3/9        - Behar 136-178
- week 8  
3/14      **autobiography and writing culture**  
- Hurston Introduction, chapters 1-4
- 3/16      - Hurston chapters 5-9 **\*\*5-7 page writing due--discussed in class \*\***

**!! March 17 - 26 -- Spring Break !!**

- week 9  
3/28      **autobiography, race, and culture: disclosing and dissembling**  
- Hurston chapters 10-13
- 3/30      - Hurston chapters 13-16
- week 10  
4/4      **literary ethnography**  
- Stack xi-44
- 4/6      - Stack 45-106 **\*\*8-10 page writing sample due--discussed in class**
- week 11  
4/11      **literary ethnography, race, culture, and gender**  
- Stack 107-152
- 4/13      - Stack 153-199
- week 12  
4/18      **fiction vs. ethnography--pros and cons**  
- Narayan 3-118
- 4/20      - Narayan 119-201 **\*\* papers due \*\***
- week 13  
4/25      **genre and communication of self, other, gender and culture**  
- Narayan 202-311
- 4/27      - class presentations **\*\* portfolios due \*\***
- week 14  
5/2      - class presentations
- 5/4      - class presentations **\*\* revised papers due \*\***