

## AN OVERVIEW OF WRITING IN CORE 2560: AMERICA THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

Christof Demont-Heinrich  
Mass Communication and Journalism Studies  
2007

The United States, and Americans, occupy a unique, privileged and powerful position in the contemporary world order. Indeed, according to many scholarly and public accounts, the U.S. has achieved unprecedented status as *the* preeminent world power. Yet despite, or, paradoxically, perhaps because of its status as what some have called a world "hyperpower," large numbers of Americans are mostly, if not totally, unaware of what U.S. global preeminence means to them, and to other people around the world. CORE 2560, America through foreign eyes, aims to inspire critical reflection about the role of the United States -- its political and economic system and practices, its culture, and, most fundamentally, its social actors, meaning its people(s), in a globalizing world. It does so by asking a simple, crucial question:

- How does the rest of the world view the United States, Americans and, as the international communications and political economy scholar Herbert Schiller has put it, the "U.S./American situation" with respect to globalization?

The course will use hands-on research, analysis, and frequent writing assignments – both informal and formal and in- and out-of-class -- to promote multi-way learning, dialogue, interesting and informed discussion, and debate about the U.S., Americans and how global "others" view Americans, "ought to" view "us," and how "we" therefore (ought to) view ourselves and "others". All of the assignments, and methods used, are designed to help students develop and hone, in a hands-on fashion, their research, analytical, writing, and critical thinking skills. Indeed, one of the fundamental teaching premises of this course is the notion that writing and critical thinking skills are inexorably linked and that, furthermore, writing about what one is thinking in relation to

others' thoughts is an extremely effective and stimulating way to foster deep, long-lasting intellectual development.

Formal and informal writing assignments will ultimately demand that students critically evaluate a variety of ideologies and attitudes about commonality and difference as a means of developing and constructing their own evolving views on national, and global, human social relationships.

In total, students will submit six formal individual written assignments, typically ranging in length from 3 to 5 typed pages, with one longer group paper (10 to 12 pages). The group project will also include a formal presentation in which students present research and analysis of various foreign representations of a specific aspect of America's global "situation" from a specific region of the world.

After attending the CORE Writing Intensive Workshop in June of 2007, I plan to devote more in-class time to explaining and discussing formal writing assignments than when I taught CORE 2560 as class as a 30-student, "non-writing intensive" class (I put quotes around "non-writing intensive" because I had students write 3 formal papers).

Additionally, I plan to work hard to link formal and informal and in- and out-of-class writing. This is something I did not do enough of in CORE 2560 when I taught it as a "non-writing intensive" class. In fact, one of the most important things I learned from the June 2007 Core Writing Intensive Workshop was the ways in which formal, graded writing assignments can be linked up to more informal in-class activities, discussions, debates, and so on.

So, for example, I plan to devote in-class time to discussing what students will focus on/write about for a given formal assignment.

I hope to incorporate in-class time to collective brainstorming and construction of the group assignment, perhaps having students start by writing a 'core paragraph' on the empirical object(s) and questions they hope to grapple with in this assignment.

I also plan to devote more time and attention to linking out-of-class informal writing with in-class activities and discussions. For example, I plan to have students write about, and reflect upon, in-class group activities out of class. Ideally, this linking of in-class with out-of-class intellectual engagement by way of reflective, informal writing, would often, though not always, be done with an eye toward helping students develop material for the formal writing assignments.

Collectively, writing assignments will account for 67.5% of students' quarter grade. Additionally, students will be frequently asked to post informal written responses and analyses to an international class discussion board (10% of their quarter grade). Four "pop" quizzes (7.5%) and class participation and attendance (10%) account for the final portion of students' grades.

Below is a list of the proposed writing assignments for "American through foreign eyes." The total number of formally graded written material will total approximately 35 pages.

- Six individual writing assignments
  - personal reflection paper  
(2-4 pages) 5%
  - study abroad student interview paper  
(3-5 pages) 5%
  - foreign student interview paper  
(3-5 pages) 5%
  - summary-response paper  
(3-5 pages) 10%
  - analysis paper  
(3-5 pages) 10%
  - comparative analysis paper  
(5-7 pages) 15%
- Group project (10-12 page paper & group presentation) 17.5%

TOTAL = 67.5% of quarter grade

The assignments represent different genres (personal writing, journalistic writing & academic writing). They are also "scaffolded," meaning they move students from cognitively simpler to harder tasks (from personal summary and reflection in the first paper to summary, response, comparison, analysis, critique, and synthesis in the final paper).

Students will have an opportunity to revise all written assignments, with the exception of the final group paper. In order to help facilitate the revision process and to make it more concrete as well as more intellectually engaging, I plan to regularly bring into class examples from students' own writing. I will discuss these in terms of what students are doing well as well as in terms of what they need to work on in terms of improving their writing and critical analytical thinking skills.

I will strongly encourage students to come in and meet with me to work on their writing. Indeed, I plan to appeal to students more often in class to meet with me individually. This sort of one-on-one engagement with students and their writing is one of my favorite parts of teaching. Honestly, in the two years I have been at DU, I have been disappointed that more students haven't come to me to work with me directly on their writing.

I will strongly and frequently encourage students to conference with me 1-on-1 about their writing for the individual writing assignments. However, I will not require 1-on-1 conferences for individual assignments. For the group written project, though, I will require teacher-student conferences. Finally, I plan to promote the University Writing Center and actively encourage students to go to the Center to receive 1-on-1 attention.

The reflections and ideas I have advanced here are grounded in the notion that it is crucial to make very clear, to oneself, and to students, the basic intellectual foundations and aims of a given course. In keeping with this approach, I believe it is critical to be make as clear as possible with students on how their informal and formal writing will be evaluated and why it will be evaluated in a given manner. Indeed, I have always explicitly referred to the criteria by which I evaluate formal writing in class. This is one of the means by which I seek to achieve clarity, fairness and consistency in evaluating student writing.

Students' formal writing assignments will be evaluated according the criteria listed below. I will

introduce and discuss these criteria before the first writing assignment. I will also use the terminology from this evaluative rubric in workshoping students' writing in class and in the marginal comments I write in their papers. I draw these evaluative criteria – *purpose, focus, development, organization, style/grammar* -- from Dr. Stephen Reid, who has written a widely used textbook (*The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers*) and from whom I learned much while working as a GTA for the Colorado State University Department of English in the late 1990s.

Here are the criteria by which I evaluate formal written assignments:

An "A" paper will meet ALL of the following criteria:

- Writer establishes a clear claim addressing the specific question(s)/set of sub-questions outlined in the assignment sheet.
- Writer stays focused on his or her claim(s) from beginning to end, making sure to answer key questions within the larger analytical frame outlined in the assignment sheet.
- Writer makes sophisticated and frequent use of an array of specific AND relevant evidence/support/examples/quotes to support and develop his or her position.
- Writer has organized essay in a logical way that consistently shows a clear connection between the questions outlined in the assignment sheet, his or her main claim, and the evidence/support offered in support of that claim.
- Writer has a clear sense of style and grammar which makes it easy for the reader to follow his or her ideas from start to finish.

A "B" paper will be deficient in ONE of the above criteria.

A "C" paper will be deficient in TWO of the above criteria.

A "D/F" paper will be deficient in THREE of the above criteria.

Ultimately, as a writing intensive CORE course, America through foreign eyes will aim to help students develop a number of critical thinking, writing and practical skills. These include, but are not limited to:

- research skills
- interviewing skills
- analytical skills
- synthesis skills

I am excited about teaching CORE 2560 with writing assignments serving as the primary mechanism of learning and evaluation. In-depth writing assignments, *rather* than multiple choice questions, and short answer/essay questions of the sort I used on my midterm and final in the “non-writing intensive” form that this course formally took, are, in my view, much better suited to inspiring the hands-on, reflexive, and critical learning I would like to see my students experience in this class.

**I**n sum, then, students will emerge from CORE 2560:

- 1) with a greater understanding, awareness and ability to critically reflect upon, and write about, the diverse views of the United States and Americans advanced by people who reside outside of the U.S.;
- 2) with the ability to compare, contrast, classify and critically assess competing theories and definitions of "globalization" and competing perspectives on the U.S. role in a globalizing world in both verbal and written form;
- 3) with the ability to apply theories and key terms learned in class in diverse educational and real-life contexts, both in verbal and written form;
- 4) with the ability to effectively question and challenge others' views on the U.S. role in the global context in intelligent, informed and socially productive fashion, both in verbal and written form;
- 5) with the ability to clearly, cogently, and reflectively defend their own views and persuade others of the basic soundness and validity of those views, in written and verbal form;
- 6) with a heightened sense of larger global context and having shed some of the individual and national insularity that has been traditionally associated with social actors who, as Schiller (2000) has put it, reside in the world's "ruling core society."