

Proposal for ENGL 3396: Writing in the Public Sphere

Instructor: Dr. Paul Butler

Proposed Offering: Spring 2012

Students rarely have the opportunity to write for broad audiences on topics that have an impact outside the walls of our academic institutions. The purpose of my proposed course, "Writing in the Public Sphere," is to invite students to conceive of beginning a dialogue with different publics beyond the academy while bringing their academic knowledge and research expertise to bear on topics of current importance. Students will imagine writing for publications as diverse as *The New Yorker*, *Wired Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and Salon.com. They will write critical essays in a range of genres ranging from place, space, and travel, to profile, to real-life drama, to explanation or "how to," to film, food, and art criticism, to cultural trends, including future trends, in various areas that may include technology.

Some of the representative works we will read include Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, *The Best American Essays of 2011*, Richard E. Miller's *Writing at the End of the World*, and Noel Carroll's *On Criticism*. Students will also read a selection of popular essays on various topics and discuss how to respond effectively as public intellectuals engaged in contemporary public discourse. The goal of the class will be for students to create a public persona as writers and intellectuals engaged in the public sphere.

Assignments include four essays, a class blog, a midterm exam, and a series of filmed interviews on the relevance of writing in our postmodern age.