

❖ Sample Syllabus Explanation #3

History 600
Professor Bill Cronon
Spring 2002

Writing Fellow: Nate Metzger, [contact info]. Nate has a mailbox in the Writing Center on the sixth floor of Helen C. White, where you can leave papers for him if you need to do so. For more on Nate's role in the seminar, see the section on Writing below.

Writing: [description of writing assignments] In both cases, you'll produce an initial draft to be read and critiqued by our Writing Fellow, Nate Metzger. For those of you who have not yet had the good fortune of working with a Writing Fellow, I want you to know how lucky we are to have Nate assigned to our seminar. Writing Fellows are skilled undergraduate writers who have been chosen in a campus-wide selection process to assist other students in drafting papers. They're given intensive training for an entire semester on how to offer constructive criticism in the drafting process, and are then assigned to writing-intensive courses to work one-on-one with other students by reading drafts, offering detailed comments, and then meeting individually with each student to make constructive suggestions for how drafts can be improved. I'm quite certain that Writing Fellows offer some of the best and most detailed advice you'll find anywhere on campus about how to become a better writer.

It's important for you to remember that Writing Fellows are not expected to have any special expertise in the subjects of the courses with which they work. Their role is to offer intelligent lay readings of the drafts they critique, helping you see how you haven't been as clear or as graceful as you could be in presenting your arguments. They're not supposed to evaluate the content of your papers; instead, they take the content you've given them and work with you to improve the way you structure and present it.

A word to the wise: please don't react to Nate by assuming that you're already a skilled writer and have nothing to learn from another undergraduate. Please respond as seriously as you can to the advice he'll be offering you. Skilled writers know that all good writing is rewriting. Among the most precious resources any writer can hope to have is an intelligent audience that is willing to give thoughtful feedback about the drafts one has produced. If you think your prose has no need of criticism, please think again. I've been writing all my life, and I'm still grateful whenever I'm lucky enough to receive the kind of critical readings of my work that Nate will be giving yours. You won't get this kind of help often in your life. Make the most of it. (Please note: when you turn in your final papers, you'll also turn in the rough draft with Nate's comments, and I also ask that you include a cover sheet in which you explain the ways in which the paper evolved between the two drafts.)