WR 449/549 Critical Reviewing
4 credits
Upper division standing required

Rationale for conversion: the conversion will give students a greater opportunity to engage with the markets for critical reviews, including a variety of print and electronic and digital publishing sites as an aspect of information literacy. An additional assignment will be added to the course requirements that will charge each student with becoming familiar with -- and giving a presentation to the class about -- a particular review market they have targeted. Students will also be required to attend events outside of class several times during the term for conducting reviews, such as films, plays, concerts, art exhibits, and or restaurants.

The four credit version will:
• add a written assignment requiring analysis of a website market for review writing;
• adds an assignment requiring students to give an oral presentation on digital aspects of the literary marketplace;
• add instruction on research into digital sources appropriate to advanced topics in critical reviewing
• require students to attend events outside of class for the purpose of developing material for reviews.

The syllabus below is the three credit version for the last time the course was taught, but includes updated outcomes and assignments.

Course Description from OSU Catalog:
Writing critical reviews of books, television programs, movies, plays, and restaurants for newspapers and magazines. The role of criticism in popular culture. PREREQ: Upper-division standing.

Course overview:
This class offers an opportunity for students to gain experience writing, reading, and analyzing reviews. Major assignments include writing reviews of Sherman Alexie’s short story collection The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven and of the movie Smoke Signals, which is based on this collection. We will also review Salon, a Web-based magazine. In addition to writing these and other reviews, we will read reviews published in a variety of sources (including The New Yorker, to which students will subscribe) and study the history of reviewing as a cultural and institutional phenomenon. We will also look at the relationship between the rhetorical situation of a publication (the left-leaning Nation versus the more conservative New Yorker, for instance) and the form and content of reviews that appear in its pages.

Finally, in this class we will spend some time discussing what might be characterized as the economics, politics, and ethics of critical reviewing. A negative review by a well known critic can sink a Broadway play or cause a movie to go immediately into video stores rather than showing in theaters, so reviews can play key economic, cultural, and political roles in our information age. Given these and other potentially serious consequences, how can reviewers...
enact ethical practices? How should a reviewer writing for a local newspaper establish standards for high school productions, for instance, or semi-professional musical events? We’ll discuss questions such as these in class, and we’ll also have conversations on these and related issues with guest speakers who have experience in the world of publishing.

**Text:** Andre Schiffrin, *The Business of Books.*
Various issues of *New Yorker, New York Times Book Review, etc*

**WR 449 student learning outcomes. Through a variety of learning activities, students will demonstrate:**
- familiarity with the major kinds of reviews and the major outlets for critical reviews (digital and print sources);
- the ability to analyze the major outlets for critical reviews and to write reviews appropriate for specific outlets (digital and print sources);
- the ability to write effective reviews for specific outlets;
- the ability to respond effectively to your peers’ work in progress and to participate in collaborative learning activities;
- competence in the mechanics of writing;
- understanding of the needs of various audiences/readerships and how these needs affect the style, vocabulary, and content of writing.

**Further WR 549 student learning outcomes.**
- Demonstrate graduate level critical writing strategies through papers of greater length and complexity.

**Major assignments and differentiation ENG 449/549:**
- Review of *The Business of Books* (length: 5-7 pages undergraduate; 7-9 pages graduate)
- Film review (length: 5-7 pages undergraduate; 7-9 pages graduate)
- Review of a Web Site (5-7 pages undergraduate; 7-9 pages graduate)
- Portfolio of reviews (at least 2 types) (length 10-14 pages undergraduate; 14-18 pages graduate)
- Case Study / Presentation on market(s) for critical reviewing (information literacy)

Directions for each assignment will be provided.
Please note: Page lengths are suggested guidelines only. I don’t have a problem with your writing longer essays if you wish, as long as it’s appropriate for your rhetorical situation. Mainly, these guidelines are meant to suggest what you should generally be shooting for, especially in terms of a minimum number of pages.

**WR 449 Evaluation of Student Performance & Grading:**
- Book review 10% of term grade
- Film review 20% of term grade
- Web Site review 10% of term grade
- Portfolio 50% of term grade
• Case Study/Presentation 10% of term grade

WR 549 Evaluation of Student Performance
Same weighting as above but more writing of greater length and complexity is expected on each assignment (see guidelines above).

Attendance policy:
Because this is a workshop/discussion class, attendance is important. More than three unexcused absences will constitute grounds for lowering your final grade for the course.

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:
Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty, and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations approved through SSD are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through SSD should contact SSD immediately at 737-4098.

Link to Statement of Expectations for Student Conduct:
http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/achon/htm

Sample Schedule - Brief Overview
T/R 3:00-4:20  Moreland 334

Week One:
Tuesday, October 1
Course introduction & Handouts:
Student Survey
Reviews: An Opening Inventory
Analyzing Rhetorical Situations
Two Examples of Rhetorical Sensitivity in Action
Analyzing Magazines and Newspapers that Publish Reviews
Phoebe-Lou Adams’ review of a biography of Jonathan Swift
Case Study: Reviews of Ted Hughes’ Birthday Letters
Rottentomatoes.com web site and ACQWEB’s Directory of Book Reviews on the Web

Thursday, October 3
Student survey due.
Discussion of reviews and their rhetorical situations. Please read the handouts on analyzing rhetorical situations, the examples of rhetorical sensitivity in action, the questions for analyzing magazines and newspapers, and the case study of reviews of Ted Hughes’ Birthday Letters with care. We’ll discuss them in class.

Beginning your mini-case study:
Before class, please locate at least three different reviews of the same book and bring them to class. Try to find reviews that appear in quite different kinds of publications directed toward different kinds of audiences, as I did for Hughes’ Birthday Letters. You could, for instance,
bring a movie review from *The Nation* (a left-leaning magazine), *The New Yorker*, and *The Gazette Times*. Feel free to use both print and online sources.

Use the handout on “Analyzing Magazines and Newspapers that Publish Reviews” to analyze the publications in which your reviews appear. Bring your written analysis to class. (It’s fine just to jot notes in response to various questions, but do a written—not just mental—analysis.) We’ll discuss your reviews in class.

**Week Two:**
**Tuesday, October 8**
  Mini-lecture: the history of book reviewing  
  Schriffin, *The Business of Books* 1-103

**Thursday, October 10**
  Mini-lecture: some major outlets for book reviews  
  Schriffin, *The Business of Books* 104-172

**Week Three:**
**Tuesday, October 15**
  In-class peer response of book reviews

**Thursday, October 17**
  Due: Review of *The Business of Books*  
  Guest lecture: Mary Braun, acquisitions editor OSU Press

**Week Four:**
**Tuesday, October 22**
  Group discussion of the reviews you are working on. Please bring either an outline of or notes for your review to class. Please also prepare at least two questions that you would like your group to address.

**Thursday, October 24**
  Guest speaker Dr. Jon Lewis (film reviews)  
  Read David Denby, *The Moviegoer*

**Week Five:**
**Tuesday October 29**
  Writing Reviews of Films, Books, and Web Sites  
  A look at two reviews of the same movie  
  Group discussion of the reviews you are working on. Please bring either an outline of or notes for your review to class. Please also prepare at least two questions that you would like your group to address.

**Thursday October 31**
  The art of writing brief reviews

**Week Six:**
**Tuesday November 5**
  Class discussion of *Smoke Signals*

**Thursday November 7**
  Class canceled: conferences

**Week Seven:**
**Tuesday November 12**
  Class canceled: conferences

**Thursday November 14**
  Writing with style
In-class peer review

Week Eight:
Tuesday November 19
Due: Film Review
Guest Speaker – Poetry Reviews (Dr. Anita Helle)

Thursday November 21
Holiday, Thanksgiving

Week Nine:
Tuesday November 26
Due: Web Site Review
Restaurant reviews and product reviews

Thursday November 28
Possible guest speaker
Begin presentations of Case Study

Week Ten:
Tuesday December 3
Putting it all together: final class discussion on critical reviewing
Case study due: please be sure to include an analysis of your rhetorical situation and a
writing process analysis and remember to clip your reviews to your essay or include them in
a folder

Friday, June 2
In-class peer response for your final project

**Your final project is due by noon on Monday of finals week. When you turn in your final
project, please include not only a writing process analysis but also drafts of your project. It
would help me if you would use a two-pocket folder, putting the essay and writing process
analysis on one side and drafts on the other. You can pick up your projects on Wednesday
morning from 9AM to noon, or you can give me a SASE to mail it to you.