OVERVIEW
Throughout history, great thinkers have used their writing abilities to help shape public debate and influence the cultural and legislative climates of their times. Laws have been passed and abolished, policies have been adopted and discarded, wars have been fought and ended, based on the give-and-take in the marketplace of written ideas. I speak in part from firsthand experience. During my 20-year career in writing and journalism, I have written pieces that contributed to the passage of new legislation and even, in one case, the recall of a public official. It was Edward Bullwer-Lytton who famously said, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Though we may question whether he was right about the pen being mightier, surely it's a potent weapon in its own right.

This course exposes you to one of the most personally satisfying—and socially significant—forms of writing. The coursework focuses on reading, discussing, and writing persuasive essays of various lengths and genres: everything from “op-eds” (the short, punchy opinion columns found in newspapers) to “think pieces” (the long, free-form, intellectually ambitious works found in high-quality magazines like Harper's or The New Yorker). There will also be one long research-based opinion piece that allows you to practice the source work and documentation skills required of all students taking WRIT 100.

THE 3 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF PERSUASIVE WRITING (and this course):
1. Your writing must have a point-of-view. In other words, it's not just a shapeless pile of facts, but rather, an attempt to sell an idea or a point-of-view. Editors call this idea or point-of-view the "take-away." An essay without a take-away is like an ice-cream cone without the ice cream.
2. "Good writing is good thinking." Even if you're a student who has always been praised for his or her ability to "write beautifully," don't expect to get by in this class on flash alone. There has to be substance. Here, the logic is as important as the language. Probably more important. And yet,
3. "The writing matters." You'll hear me say this till you're sick of hearing it. Though your primary job is to sell your idea, the language you use in your essay should have a certain elegance of phrasing and presentation that goes beyond what I might expect to find in an email you'd send to a friend, or something you'd write in a journal or diary.

COURSE PROCEDURES
There will be a fair amount of in-class work, including collaborative composition, group editing, and
regular (informal) debating. I emphasize strategies for establishing point-of-view and ensuring logical consistency throughout the piece. For example, in one exercise I will give you a list of a dozen facts about tobacco products and associated health risks. Then—working exclusively from that same set of facts—you must create outlines for two very different essays: one that argues for a total ban on smoking, and one that argues for the abolition of all anti-smoking laws. This forces you to use organizational and rhetorical strategies (i.e. information sequencing, emphasis, etc.) to make your case. Through this rigorous environment of devil’s advocacy and learning to argue (and defend) both sides of an issue, you’ll learn to refine your ideas and "bulletproof" your written arguments.

We’ll analyze the structures of arguments, discuss and drill in the techniques of written persuasion, and do close reading in some of the more famous works of persuasive writing. We will perfect step-by-step techniques for making logical appeals and emotional appeals, and discuss the settings in which each, respectively, would be more appropriate. You’ll learn to heighten the impact of your thoughts through such standard literary devices as metaphor, irony, anecdote, and so forth. We will touch on what I call "being serious about humor," which teaches you to skillfully use one of the most important tools in the persuasive writer's tool box. And, you’ll learn how to "connect the dots" of what's going on around you, thereby enabling you to spot emerging themes, patterns, and trends that seem worthy of comment. We will also discuss the ethical and procedural responsibilities that underlie the process of persuasion.

**NOTE:** We may submit exceptional student work to newspapers or magazines whose tastes and standards offer us a reasonable shot at publication. The “op-ed” section of the local newspaper is one of the last remaining places in modern nonfiction writing where all that matters is the power of the ideas conveyed in black and white. (For example, the bylines of students as young as junior-high age sometimes appear on the opinion page of *The Morning Call.*) My classes usually produce one or two students who make such a sale during the semester. Undoubtedly I'll be working on several essays of my own during the semester, and I’ll include the class in that process.

**WHAT YOU’LL BE WRITING**

In this class you will plan, compose, revise, and polish (and possibly submit for publication):

1. At least one opinion piece of standard op-ed length (600-800 words). An op-ed is a short essay that runs in the editorial or opinion section of a daily newspaper like the *Morning Call*. Many magazines also run short essays that are much like op-eds.

2. A humorous essay—that is, an op-ed-like piece that makes its basic point through satire, parody, or some other form of humor (750-1250 words).

3. A longer, research-based essay (2000-2500 words). This will be an expanded version of the op-ed noted in No. 1 above, incorporating a much greater degree of independent substantiation via statistics, surveys, quotes, anecdotes, and other back-up. In effect, you'll be using your op-ed as the launching point for a more comprehensive, journalistic piece of writing. We'll discuss this at length; also, I will give you prepared materials that both guide you in this endeavor and also establish basic research/writing procedures that should help you in the remainder of your Moravian career.

In addition to the above, you will write shorter exercises and “mini-essays” in which you practice the elements taught and discussed in class. And, you will critique each other's work in writing (sometimes in class, sometimes as homework). I expect these critiques to be more than just
off-the-cuff, two- or three-sentence summaries or overall reactions (e.g., “I really liked it, it was cool...”) Indeed, in some cases your critiques may be as long as the essays they're critiquing. The grade you receive for the quality of these critiques will have a meaningful impact on your final grade for the class.

All of the above works should be kept in a portfolio that you'll turn in at semester's end. We'll discuss the format and requirements of these portfolios as the semester progresses.

I am always available for student counseling/mentoring.

**SOME SPECIFIC BENEFITS OF THIS COURSE**
--You'll experiment with a variety of writing-process methods to see which works best for you.
--You'll practice taking direction from an "editor" and rewriting to that editor's specifications. That editor might be me, or it might be a fellow student.
--You'll begin to discover your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, a thinker, and maybe even as a person.
--You'll find topics to which you can bring the force of personal conviction.

*Let me say again:* There will be a significant daily emphasis on classroom thinking and discussion. Aside from improving your writing, the course will pay substantial dividends in critical-thinking skills that you can apply in other realms as you pursue your education. Since successful opinion writing must be rooted in a verifiable knowledge base, my classes feature lively discussions of world events, social issues, and other important topics. Invariably, a more well-rounded student emerges from the course.

**GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, ETC.**
Strictly speaking, this will not be a course in basic grammar and punctuation, which you were supposed to have mastered in high school. (I hope that doesn't come as too much of a shock.) However, we will spend some percentage of class time on the flaws in grammar and usage that can make your writing sound weak and amateurish, and we will work out of the *Bedford Handbook*, which is your only required text for this course. I may recommend additional texts to students who express interest in writing, or who show special aptitude for it.

**MISSED OR LATE ASSIGNMENTS**
Aside from being helpful to your professor's sanity and promoting an orderly work flow, your ability to meet deadlines is the lifeblood of writing at all levels. If you hand in an assignment late and you don't have an absolute killer of an excuse, the best grade you can hope to receive on that assignment is a C. (Here's a sample killer excuse: You disappear in a flash of light and I hear on CNN that you were later found floating incoherently in the Bermuda Triangle.) If this becomes a pattern, you will receive Fs. NOTE: The responsibility for staying current with all coursework rests with you, not me. Upon your return after an excused absence, you should get class notes from another student and determine which assignments you need to make up.

If you don't promptly approach me about making up an assignment, I'll assume that you have no interest in doing so—and I'll grade accordingly.
REWRITING
I will accept rewrites throughout the course of the semester. Because successful writing is so much about revision, the grade you receive on a given essay will be weighted heavily toward the grade you receive on the final rewrite. This gives you every possible opportunity to earn an excellent grade for the course. (This also means that the grade you receive on any essay is not "final" until portfolios are handed in for end-semester evaluation.) I reserve a great deal of leeway for myself in making these grading determinations.

You are not required to continue rewriting your pieces beyond the second finished draft. So if, for example, you receive a C- on the first draft, then a B- on the second draft, and you're content with your B-, so be it. However, that doesn’t speak too highly of your dedication to the craft or the course. And in my experience, complacency in this area tends to show up in other areas as well—notably classroom participation, which counts 30% towards your final grade (see below). NOTE: This policy does not apply to critiques. The grade you receive for any given critique of your fellow students' work is final at the time you receive it.

MY GRADING FORMULA
Your final grade will be an arithmetic average of the marks you receive for the various classroom exercises, take-home projects, and assigned essays, plus my perception of your understanding of the material, as demonstrated in class.

Assuming a normal level of attendance (see below), your final grade will break down as follows:

- Portfolio: 50%
- Participation and related issues: 30%
- Short Pieces & Critiques: 20%

_There will be no final exam, per se._

MY WORK ON YOUR WORK
Please don't expect an overnight turnaround on the work you hand in. I take my time and try to provide thorough, thoughtful guidance. Again, I would encourage you to think of me more as an editor than a teacher. It's not an editor's job to fix your work. I prefer to ask questions and raise issues that should enable you to make appropriate changes on your own.

ATTENDANCE
The coursework for this class is rooted in a combination of my own experience and the insights and suggestions that emerge during class discussion. This specific curriculum is not easy for you to obtain elsewhere, and there's simply no way to recreate the ebb and flow of what took place in class on the day you were absent. Further, it's hard for me to get a productive give-and-take going if we're always missing students. For those and other reasons, you _must attend class._

And, you must attend _punctually_. Lateness not only disrupts the class but shows disrespect for me and your fellow students. If there's some special reason why it's a hardship for you to be on time, let me know ASAP. Otherwise, late students may be barred from class and penalized as though absent.
This would be a really good place to mention that poor attendance and/or punctuality in and of themselves may get you an F in this class, regardless of the quality of your work when you're actually here.

PARTICIPATION
By now it should be clear that meaningful, regular participation is essential in this class, to perhaps a greater degree than in any other writing class you may ever take. Your ability to think, analyze, and express yourself coherently is part and parcel of this course. Please understand that mere attendance is not the same as participation. Nor is simply nodding and smiling and adding your occasional “uh-huh” to the classroom chorus. I don’t just want to hear what a nice voice you have; I want to hear what you think. Because participation counts 30% toward your final grade, truly poor participation can have a disastrous effect on an otherwise successful semester. Please see me SOON if you're pathologically shy about speaking in class. You will not get yourself off the hook by visiting my office the last week of the semester to say, "I'm sorry I didn't speak up more, but, see, I've just always been a really quiet person…"

TYPED WORK
All handed-in work must be typed. No exceptions unless I give you specific permission on that individual assignment. Also, I assume no responsibility for manuscripts submitted via email, and I strongly discourage the practice, except when I've instructed you to submit by that means.

CENSORSHIP
As a rule, I'm not a fan of it. I like to approach writing as a "political-correctness-free zone," meaning that no subject or personal belief is automatically off-limits. From my personal perspective, there are no taboos in what you write. (NOTE: This does NOT mean you can do anything you please in class or act abusively toward your fellow students and their ideas. I'll be giving examples that make this distinction clear.) If you have specific sensitivities that are based on religious beliefs or tragic personal experiences, please see me ASAP. Otherwise I'll assume that we can all tolerate the written views of our classmates, no matter their eccentricity, unpopularity, or outrageousness.

A FEW WORDS ON PLAGIARISM AND THE ETHICS OF WRITING
I expect you to conduct yourself with integrity in my class. Typical breaches of writing ethics include fabrications (making up sources, events, quotes, etc.); "lifting" material from other sources, like the Internet, without proper attribution (see notes on plagiarism, below); and creating so-called composite characters that you do not identify as such. You create a composite character when you combine the attributes or actions of several people into one fictitious person for the purpose of using that person as a convenient symbol of a trend or phenomenon you're describing.

Broadly speaking, plagiarism is the practice of passing off somebody else's ideas, words, writings, or experiences as your own. More specifically, it can be defined as copying from a book, article, notebook, online citation, or other source material—published or unpublished—without giving proper credit through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, and/or other customary means of identifying sources. The "or unpublished" part is important, because it means that you can commit plagiarism simply by using ideas or descriptions supplied by someone else during casual conversation. Bottom line, you have committed plagiarism if you give me the impression that you
wrote or thought up something that, in fact, you "borrowed" from elsewhere.

**IMPORTANT:** Because such offenses are almost always committed knowingly and with intent to deceive—and because the real-world penalties for such offenses are so harsh—you may end up with an F for the course if you engage in any of these practices even once!

In a very real sense, plagiarism is theft—theft of what's commonly called *intellectual property*. If you have any questions about what's ethical and what isn't, please ask me BEFORE you submit the work in question. Better yet, bring it up in class so we can all benefit from the issues you raise. Once you submit work, and it's determined to have been plagiarized, it's too late, folks. The party’s over. At my sole discretion, I may perform spot-checks on students’ work, using anti-plagiarism programs that are available online.

But let's hope none of the bad stuff ever comes up. I expect this to be a rewarding semester for all of you. I encourage you to look upon this class as a great opportunity to find out what writing is all about, and to get your thoughts and feelings down on paper.

**IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE:** Please review the pre-printed sheets attached to this syllabus. These additional sheets are general guidelines that will not apply specifically to every aspect of every section of WRIT100; Moravian, like most colleges and universities, gives its individual instructors considerable discretion in putting together their coursework. However, the guidelines do provide you with a good idea of the broad goals of the course as well as some of the expectations I'll have for the research you do on your journalistic pieces. As always, if these sheets raise any questions, PLEASE ASK RIGHT AWAY. In my experience, for every student who actually raises his or her hand to ask a question, there are at least a half-dozen others who have the same concern, but for some reason don't raise their hands. By speaking up, you can usually settle a lot of your fellow students' minds as well.

—Steve Salerno, December 2004