Writing 100: What is Ideology? Case Studies in American Politics and Culture

Spring 2005
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Course Theme

Today, the term “ideology” commonly refers to a set of widely shared beliefs held by a particular group. An ideology therefore provides individuals with something like a code of conduct that guides their thoughts and actions. However, the study of ideology presents us with a unique challenge in the sense that it exerts a powerful influence over individuals that often goes unnoticed.

How then are we then to study our own ideology? We will address this question by conducting 4 interrelated “case studies” that focus on: (1) the American Work Ethic; (2) the “War on Terror”; (3) the relationship between church and state in the United States; (4) the advertising and entertainment industries.

In each instance, we will attempt to understand the degree to which our daily exposure to the mass media has shaped, and continues to shape, our very identity.

Required Reading

Frank, Thomas. What’s the Matter With Kansas?
Orwell, George, 1984
Custom Reading Packet

(Books available at Moravian College Bookstore; reading packet will be distributed in installments throughout the semester).

Format/Requirements

This course will be primarily discussion-based. Each student is therefore required to complete the reading assignment prior to the beginning of class. This will allow each student to participate in the classroom discussions and workshops that will help him or her develop the ideas and arguments which are necessary for writing insightful and well-organized essays.
Writing Assignments

Each student will complete 9 graded essays (of 1-3 pages, depending on the particular assignment), one collaborative research paper (that is, a paper co-authored with another student), and one journal (weekly entries of varying lengths) over the course of the semester.

Three 3-page essays will include the following six components:

1. two short writing exercises;
2. an initial draft;
3. a discussion of how to revise the draft with peers in class (to be discussed further below);
4. a revised version;
5. a discussion of the revised version with the instructor;
6. a final draft.

Short Writing Exercises

These 1-page graded writing exercises will serve two primary purposes; they will focus on a particular aspect of writing (such as commenting on a cited passage from a particular text, or writing an introduction), and they will form the building blocks for three 3-page essays.

Journals

These weekly journals, to be turned in at the end of each month, will serve two primary purposes; they will allow students to comment on select articles from a political online journal which are of relevance to the course, and they will provide students with additional material that can be incorporated into any of the assigned essays.

Writing Workshops

The in-class peer editing sessions are designed to serve two purposes: to help a student focus upon his/her intended audience; to allow a student to develop a critical awareness of his or her own writing by way of examining another student’s work.

The writing workshops sessions will be divided into two parts, one completed outside of class and one completed during class. Students will exchange essays in class and then read and edit them outside of class before the next meeting; this part of the assignment will be completed by filling out “peer editing worksheets.” Using the completed worksheet as a guide, students will then discuss their respective essays with each other during class.
The edited draft and the worksheets must be turned in along with the second and third (final) drafts of each essay.

Breakdown Of Writing Assignments And Corresponding Course Material To Be Covered

I. Summary/Explanation (One 750 word essay and two 1-page writing exercises)

Each student will write a concise and well-organized summary of an assigned text. This assignment is designed to introduce students to the importance of reading comprehension. Students will be asked to “restate” the central idea of a text and the author’s supporting arguments in their own words. This paper will allow students to practice reading carefully; it will also prepare students for writing critically. Finally, the summary/explanation will introduce students to the formal aspects of the writing process (pre-drafting, writing, revising, re-writing).

Themes: “Madison Avenue”; Sponsoring “Freedom”; The U.S. Military’s Recruitment Program; Voices from the American “Heartland”

Reading Assignments:

John Berger, “Ways of Seeing”.
Toby Clark, “Propaganda at War.”
Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness (selections)
Thomas Frank, What’s the Matter With Kansas? (Chapters 1 and 7)
Douglas Ruskoff, “The Persuaders” (film)

II. Close Reading and Argument/Commentary (750 word essay; two 1-page writing exercises)

In this assignment, students will critique a particular essay, focusing on select passages that illustrate an author’s central argument. Each student will be expected to write a sustained commentary in which they incorporate reflections on their own experiences into a discussion of the American Work Ethic and/or the Advertising Industry.


Reading Assignments

David Brooks, Bobos in Paradise (selections)
Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed (selections)
Thomas Frank, What’s the Matter With Kansas? (Chapters 8 and 9)
Robert Samuelson, “Why We’re Married to the Market.”

III. Comparative Analysis (750 word essay; two 1-page writing exercises)

Each student will compare and contrast two essays that are written from different perspectives on a similar issue. In this assignment, students will be expected to develop an argument stating why they think one perspective has more validity than the other. This essay will enable the student to learn
how to analyze similarities and differences, expose argument subtleties, and discover significant criteria for an analysis.

**Themes:** “War on Terror”; God and Country

**Reading Assignments**

Joan Didion, *Fixed Ideas: America Since 911*

Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas* (chapters 10-12)

George Orwell, *1984*

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (selections)

**IV. Research Paper (2000 words: approximately 8 pages)**

This assignment will allow two students to work closely together, conducting independent research, evaluating sources and developing an original argument. Within the first six weeks of the semester, a list of possible research topics will be distributed in class.

In order to assist the student with this project, there will be several research related assignments due in the latter part of the semester. There will also be a class session conducted by the librarian that is designed to introduce students to various library resources that will assist them with their research projects.

Each student will also meet with the instructor for a research paper conference. Finally, students will present an oral version of research paper before handing in the written copy.

**Grades**

Final grades will be determined on the basis of the following percentages:

3 750-word essays: 25%
Peer Editing: 10%
Collaborative Research Project: 20%
Mid-term: 10%
Final: 15%
3 Grammar and 7 Thematic Quizzes: 10%
Journal: 10%

In accordance with the Moravian College grading policy, each letter grade corresponds with numerical “Quality Points”:

A: 4.00.
A−: 3.67
B+: 3.33.
B: 3.00.
B−: 2.77.
C+: 2.33.
C: 2.00.
C-: 1.67.  
D+: 1.33.  
D: 1.00.  
D-: 0.67.  
F: no points.

While this grading system is obviously quantitative, the final grade will be determined, in part, by a qualitative consideration; that is, on the basis of the first essay, each student will meet with the instructor to establish a set of goals for the rest of the semester in order to improve his or her writing in specific ways. If these goals are met, then the final grade will be adjusted upwards by 1/3 or 2/3.

**Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is of course expected. There is no penalty for unexcused absences. However, please note the following: **there will no make-up quizzes given if you are not present on one of the days that a quiz is given.**

Further, there will be no make-up assignment for missing one of the graded peer-review sessions. And finally, for each day a writing assignment is late, the final grade for that assignment will be lowered by 1/3 grade (exceptions made for documented medical absences).

*(Due to past difficulties arising from electronic mail submissions, all essays are to be handed in during class, no essay is to be turned in via e-mail).*