

Map My Words: Writing about Borders & Belonging
Smith College, Fall 2017
English 118

Meeting Time: T & Th 10:30-11:50

Instructor: Callum Angus

Office Hours: Seelye 307 | Tuesdays 12:30-1:30 & By Appointment

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Course Description

What do a map and an essay have in common? Surely both tell a story and rely on standardized words and symbols to communicate with an audience. But more importantly, both make hidden the process of creation. There is little indication on a map of the disagreements, wars, and history behind it. Borders depicted as solid lines on a map ignore the millions of people who live their lives on both sides. Maps are capable of both erasing places and conjuring fantasies about imagined locations. A finished essay also makes invisible all the messy work behind it: first, second, and third drafts are hidden in the final product, despite their crucial role in developing an author's themes and ideas. Often entire paragraphs of material are cut by the author to focus their argument and avoid derailing tangents. And gallons of ink go unseen in correcting grammar and syntax. Reading a polished, published piece, it's easy to forget that all of this goes into essays even by the most accomplished writers.

In this course, we will examine both maps and essays, but — and this is a big *but*— the essay will receive more of our attention. This course is designed to get you reading, discussing, and thinking about maps and borders primarily to generate ideas for your *writing*. As such, we will spend time everyday digging into the writing process in order to make revision a visible and even exciting subject. You will take four papers through multiple drafts. You will learn to seek out and write eloquently about a wide range of sources online, in the library, and in museums. You will keep a weekly blog where you will “map” your own writing process. And you will practice new rhetorical strategies, styles of persuasion, and elements of syntax, with the ultimate goal of synthesizing these components into logical, complex academic essays.

In the process, we'll ask questions about maps (both real and imagined) made by artists, writers, activists, and others: Is a map a rhetorical document? How do borders shape our understanding of who belongs in a country, and who is cast as an outsider? Is there inherent bias in the language of maps? What histories of exploration and exploitation are communicated (or silenced) by the act of mapping? All of this and more will form the fodder for your essays, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of rhetoric in writing and in everyday life.

Learning Objectives

By writing, reading, and engaging in discussion in this course, you will learn to

- deploy rhetorical strategies to build a logical argument and support a thesis;
- use the writing and revision process to develop complex, thoughtful arguments—thus writing essays in which your thinking evolves rather than essays that defend pre-formed positions;
- understand and use patterns of organization (i.e. narration, description, textual analysis etc.) in your writing;
- locate, evaluate, and synthesize diverse sources of information, opinions, and viewpoints in your essays;
- accurately cite, quote, and paraphrase a wide variety of academic and popular sources;
- contribute to a cooperative writing community as a thoughtful peer-review partner and editor;
- write clean, concise prose in Standard English, adhering to basics of grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and style.

Required Reading*

Heben Nigatu, [“19 Maps That Will Help You Put The United States In Perspective”](#)

James Wan, [“Why Google Maps gets Africa Wrong”](#)

Richard Rodriguez, “Go north, Young Man”

Gloria Anzaldua, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, excerpts

Jose Antonio Vargas, “My Life As An Undocumented Immigrant”, *The New York Times*

Radio interview w/ Jose Antonio Vargas [“Illegal” vs. “Undocumented” on WNYC](#)

Yair Wallach, “Trapped in Mirror Images: The Rhetoric of Maps in Israel/Palestine”

Camille Owens, [“Mapping the Origins of Middle Earth”](#)

Melissa Smyth, [“At War with the Skies in our Eyes”](#), *Warscapes*

Greg Milner, [“How GPS is Messing with our Minds”](#)

Rachel St. John, “Unmaking Native Space”

Radiolab podcast, “Yellow Rain”

Andrea Useem, “Towards a Civil Society: Memory, History and the Enola Gay”

Kao Kalia Yang, [“The Science of Racism: Radiolab's Treatment of Hmong Experience”](#)

William Lloyd George, [“The Secret Army Still Fighting the Vietnam War”](#)

Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, excerpts

Glexis Novoa, [“Landscape of Symbols”](#)

Jaune Quick-to-see Smith, [“The Red Mean: Self Portrait”](#)

Ana Mendieta, [“Performed Invisibility: Ana Mendieta's 'Siluetas'”](#)

Postcommodity, “Artists Bisect Border Fence with Balloons” (video trailer [“Through the Repellent Fence”](#))

Brian Zanisnik, [“Beyond Passaic”](#), *Triple Canopy*

*All required reading will be linked or posted on Moodle, or will be handed out in class.

Course Requirements & Expectations

Papers & Portfolios

You will write and revise **four essays** in this class: two shorter papers (3-4 pages each), and two longer papers (4-6 pages each). All four essays will go through a drafting stage during which you receive and incorporate feedback from myself and your peers. Class time will be devoted to developing revision techniques; lessons on rhetoric, essay organization, and structure; and workshops to add to your writing toolbox with each new essay assignment. To receive full credit, each final essay must be accompanied by a **portfolio**, including at least one rough draft, reflective writing (see below), and evidence of peer-review to demonstrate revision and your use of peer and instructor feedback. Final papers turned in without a complete portfolio will be reduced by one grade integer (i.e. a final paper that receives an “A-”, but is unaccompanied by the portfolio contents, will receive a “B-”). Each final essay must be double-spaced, 12-point font and in MLA Style. Portfolios will be “turned in” on Google Docs, saving a few trees in the process!

Presentation

For your final paper in the course, we will be visiting and conducting research at the Smith College Museum of Art. With support from museum staff, we’ll spend a good amount of time looking at work that asks us to question the purpose of a map, and how a map might launch us into thinking about a political or cultural conversation in a new way. After outlining and researching, you will present a short 5-10 minute presentation including a visual component to the class about your chosen subject and final paper. Your final paper will be turned in a week later, and will incorporate these suggestions, with your grade reflecting both your written work and oral presentation.

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing — short, informal paragraphs in response to specific questions about writing exercises, reading, and discussion — grows awareness of what works for you as a writer and as a student. You will be asked to reflect on your revision process in your portfolio, and sometimes at the end of class we will spend a few minutes reflecting in writing on the preceding discussion. In addition, please arrive to class with a short reflection on the day’s assigned reading in hard copy.

Blogs

You will be required to post short weekly blog posts to a class blog as a documentation of your writing throughout the semester and a commentary on how rhetoric and class discussions overlap with the “real world”. Writing on the blog may take a more informal tone than the written essays, but should still be proofread for grammar and syntax and adopt a clear and logical structure. You will be expected to post once each week by Thursday, class time. Keep your eyes open for interesting maps and material in the news, other classes, and elsewhere!

Workshops

In this course you will regularly participate in two kinds of workshops: **peer review workshops** and **grammar & style workshops**. In peer-review workshops, you’ll learn to give and get constructive feedback with the goal of working toward effective revisions that develop your ideas and move your readers in intended ways. Your goal in these workshops is to think about an

essay holistically, and gain insight into how your audience is interpreting your current draft. What changes can you make to your writing to change their understanding? Peer-review workshops will take place both in and outside of class.

Grammar & style workshops will take place in class. On certain days you will be asked to bring paragraphs and sentences to class (printed out) and you will learn about and practice using complex grammar and syntax for stronger writing. Topics covered will include using commas, dashes, and parentheses to emphasize information; different strategies for incorporating quotations; making your sentences more complex by using left, right, and mid-branching sentence constructions, and more. These workshops are an opportunity to learn new skills and experiment with your writing style.

Conferences

Twice during the semester you will be required to meet with me individually to discuss progress on your current draft and techniques that may be useful as you continue to revise. In addition, you are always welcome to visit me during my office hours; it is best to send me an email ahead of time or mention after class that you're planning on coming to office hours, but this is not required.

Class Policies

Grade Breakdown

Your final course grade for the semester will be based on the following breakdown:

Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	20%
Paper #3	20%
Paper #4 & Presentation	20%
Blog, Reflective writing, Participation	20%

Attendance

If you do miss a class, you are still responsible for completing assignments and homework by the original deadline. It is not my policy to email you a list of what you missed in class that day; instead, you should use your weekly schedule, Moodle, your classmates, and my office hours to stay on top of your assignments. If you have extenuating circumstances that might affect your overall class attendance throughout the semester, do talk to me *as soon as possible*—ideally, during the first week of classes.

Academic Honesty

All Smith students are required to adhere to the Academic Honor Code, available here: <https://www.smith.edu/sao/handbook/socialconduct/honorcode.php>. When using ideas, words, and short passages from other people's writing in your own writing, you are *required to acknowledge the source*. Failure to acknowledge the contribution of others is considered plagiarism, a serious academic offense. We will spend considerable time in this course learning how to accurately cite outside sources of information.

Tardiness & Late Work

If you arrive more than 5 minutes late to class three times without an official excuse, this will count as one absence. After the first two unexcused absences, your final course grade will be affected. To avoid this scenario, as soon as you become aware of a situation that may result in an absence or late work (i.e. a medical emergency, religious observance etc.), please come talk to me to work out a plan. If you request an extension ahead of time, I will accept late work one class period after the due date.

Office Hours

You're encouraged to come to office hours to discuss questions or concerns related to this course. If you have a time conflict with my office hours, I am more than happy to schedule an appointment. Send me an email or talk to me before or after class.

Accessibility

All students regardless of learning and/or physical disability are supported in this class, and by the college. I strive to make this class as accessible as possible, and if there is ever a suggestion you have about how I can further accommodate student needs, please feel free to bring them to me. In addition, students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services (<https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services>), and, *at the start of the semester*, do meet with me about tailoring accommodations identified by ODS to your work in this course.