

**English 286 / Investigation / “Untold Stories”  
Fall 2006  
Monday 5-7:30 p.m.**

“Whatever is unnamed will become unspeakable.”

—Adrienne Rich

“If you succeed in describing your world accurately,  
you will inevitably find yourself doubting yourself  
and running athwart of the cherished beliefs of your tribe.  
This is what it means to take risks as a writer—  
not baring your soul, or indulging in a purple phrase,  
or mouthing an unpopular creed. It’s the will to be accurate  
that will take you outside yourself and enlarge your work.  
It’s the will to be accurate that will bring you face to face  
with surprises, wonder, beauty.”

—D.W. Fenza

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Best way to contact: Email. If you have an urgent message, call the English Department and they will try to get in touch with me.

Office hours: Monday-Thursday, 1-5 p.m. Please note that I will be in meetings some of the time; be sure to make an appointment or call ahead to confirm that I’m in my office.

**Catalogue Description**

This course introduces five modes of investigation—textual research, interviews, questionnaires, observation, and experimentation. Explores various methods for presenting information to different audiences.

**Prerequisites and Satisfactions**

There are no prerequisites for this course. Investigation is a baseline course for the Writing Minor and does not count toward the English Major.

## Course Rationale

The modes of investigation studied in this course will include textual analysis; observation; interviewing; and other qualitative-research methods. We'll approach these modes with a variety of audiences in mind, ranging from the academic to the journalistic, and through a variety of media, including written, visual, aural/oral, and digital.

Because this course's central aim is the *critical investigation and shaping of knowledge previously unknown*, it will be useful to you whether you envision a future in law school, medical school, another form of graduate study, as a writer, in business, or some combination of these. It differs from Argumentation in that its primary concern is *discovery* rather than *persuasion*. However, if you have taken (or plan to take) Argumentation, you will find that the courses complement each other well.

Our section of Investigation, "Untold Stories," will be particularly concerned with stories that have gone unnoticed, been hidden, or have been told in ways that obscure the truth *as you perceive it*. Your perspective as a writer will be of central importance throughout the course. As Eudora Welty has written, although there are few themes to approach as writers that have never been approached before, there are still as many untold stories as there are writers: "It is only the vision that can be new; but that is enough."

## Course Objectives

<i>Your thoughts on this objective (August)</i>	<i>Your thoughts on this objective (December)</i>	<i>Objective</i>
		Identify an issue that you perceive to be under-explored. Shape your thoughts on this issue into a clear, focused research question.
		Identify audiences, genres, and publications for whom this question is relevant.
		Identify and gather appropriate evidence through various methods, including textual research, interviews, and observation.
		Develop and articulate a considered stance on a research question, supported by appropriate evidence.
		Incorporate evidence effectively into your writing, with attention to audience, genre, ethical and stylistic considerations, and accurate citation.
		Write up research in styles appropriate for various genres/contexts, including academic, business, journalistic, and multi-media.

### **Required Texts and Materials**

Note: Course texts are available at Charis Books, located in Little Five Points. This location was chosen with care—it's not meant simply to inconvenience you. ☺ Please see the first assignment, "What Does It Mean to Buy a Book?" for more details.

- Anne Lamott. *Bird By Bird*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
- Anne J. Herrington and Marcia Curtis. *Persons in Process*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.
- Eli Clare. *Exile & Pride*. Cambridge, MA: Seal Press, 1999.
- *Creative Nonfiction* journal #28 ("Essays from the Edge"), 2006.
- Jason Rekulak. *The Writer's Block*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2001.
- Article-length readings distributed in class or available online.
- A three-ring binder in which to keep your work and all handouts.
- A flash drive and/or several CDs. You should back up your work obsessively.
- Manila folders (two). You'll use these to turn in your essays.

### **Required Writing**

Each time you turn in an essay, it must be accompanied by all previous drafts and by all peer and teacher response. There is no maximum word limit for essays.

- One essay with a primarily academic focus (minimum 1,000 words).
- One essay with a primarily journalistic focus (minimum 1,000 words).
- One electronic portfolio to be presented to the class. This project constitutes your fourth-hour enhancement for this class.
- Short written assignments, some completed in class and some at home.
- Peer responses.

### **Essay Assignments**

Please see the separate handout, "About Essays," for specific assignments and information on formatting and presenting your essays. Due dates for each draft appear on our class calendar.

### **Disabilities**

Spelman College is sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities. Any student who feels she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to discuss her specific needs. Please contact the ODS at 404-270-5289 in MacVicar Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Academic Support**

I assume that all of us have different learning styles, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. If you feel comfortable doing so, please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you would like to discuss additional support for your work, I encourage you to talk with me about assistance from the Comprehensive Writing Program, the Learning Resources Center, and other services available to all students.

### **Academic Integrity**

At the heart of Spelman College's mission is academic excellence, along with development of intellectual, ethical, and leadership qualities. These goals can flourish only in an institutional

environment where every member of the College affirms honesty, trust, and mutual respect. All members of the academic community of Spelman College are expected to understand and follow the basic standards of honesty and integrity, upholding a commitment to high ethical standards. Students are expected to read and abide by the Spelman College Code of Conduct (see the Spelman College Student Handbook, <http://www.spelman.edu/students/current/housing/pdf/handbook.pdf>) and are expected to behave as mature and responsible members of the Spelman College academic community. Students are expected to follow ethical standards in their personal conduct and in their behavior towards other members of the community. They are expected to observe basic honesty in their work, words, ideas, and actions. Failure to do so is a violation of the Spelman College Academic Integrity Policy. Violators will be subject to sanctions outlined in the Spelman College Bulletin. An online copy of this policy can be viewed at <http://www.spelman.edu/academics/catalog/catalog.shtml#IndexAcademicIntegrityPolicy>.

### **Work From Other Classes**

Within the category of “academic honesty” comes the issue of submitting any work which has been/will be submitted to fulfill another academic requirement. This practice, identified in the College’s Academic Integrity Policy as “multiple submissions,” is a violation of academic honesty. However, I realize that—like most authors—you may find yourself returning to sources you’ve read previously, or topics that you’ve found compelling in the past. For example, you may wish to include a reading from another class in your research for an essay, or you may wish to re-visit a topic that you’ve already discussed in a current or previous class. If this is the case, *you must discuss the situation with me well in advance of the project’s due date*. Failure to do so will be a violation of academic integrity and subject to appropriate penalties.

### **Attendance**

Our English 286 class is interactive and discussion-based. Without each member’s presence and active participation, the class doesn’t work. Therefore, attendance, preparedness and participation are required.

You may miss one class without penalty. This “free” absence is intended to accommodate for unpredictable circumstances, such as illness, so try not to use it early in the semester. Aside from exceptional circumstances, being sick does not entitle you to extra “free” absences. Whether or not any additional absences will be excused must be discussed with me individually.

You will be considered absent if you are unprepared for class or are absent from a substantial portion (15 minutes or more) of any class meeting. Missing a scheduled conference also counts as an absence. Absences beyond the “free” one will pull down your final grade at the rate of one grade level for every additional absence. For example, a total of three absences (one “free” and two not) at the end of the semester would make a “B plus” into a “B minus.” Tardiness affects your attendance record as well: every three tardies equals one absence. You are responsible for keeping track of your own attendance record, but you’re welcome to check your records with me any time.

### **Punctuality**

Being prepared includes having the work due that day in hand at the *beginning* of class. I will not accept late work unless you’ve arranged for an extension ahead of time, or in extraordinary circumstances (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If you find yourself beginning to fall behind, see me right away. I’ll work with you to help you get back on track.

## **Grading**

Please see the separate handout, “About Grading.”

## **Fourth-Hour Enhancement**

For your fourth-hour enhancement project, you will complete an electronic portfolio of your research on one of your paper topics. Your audience will be members of our class. Regardless of your topic, your portfolio must include the following: research question; statement of your stance (in brief); annotated bibliography; selected records of research such as excerpts from your research log or clips of interviews; any necessary background; evidence of appropriate permissions and informed consent; and a PDF of the complete write-up of your research.

This project is not designed to be completed in our regular class time. We may occasionally work on it during class, but you should expect to earn the fourth-hour credit for English 286 by devoting time *in addition to* our class’s regular hours for in-class work and at-home reading, writing, and studying.

Your fourth-hour project will be presented during our course’s final exam time. It must include a polished, rehearsed oral presentation along with the multi-media component.

## **Communication is Key**

As you may have gathered from this syllabus, I can be fairly flexible about some course requirements (due dates, structure of assignments, etc.), *so long as you are in close communication with me*. The converse is also true: If I’m not hearing from you, it becomes much more difficult to work with you, and hence to extend flexibility. Don’t hesitate to speak with me at any time about concerns or questions you have, or just to share observations about your writing and/or the class. I will appreciate learning from you.