Interpretive Writing to Communicate  
FORS 6368, Stephen F. Austin State University  
Fall 2023  
Course Virtual Class Hours: Tuesday 1:00 p.m

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Professor  
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Office Hours:  
Available all week.  
Room 209  
Available all week.  
Tuesday 9-9:30; 12:15-1:00; 2-4.  
Thursday 9-9:30, 12:15-1:00; 1:00 - 3:00.  
MWF are days open especially for MSRC students.  
Email for faster reply or to arrange a phone call during  
office hours or at other times during the week!!!!  
Meetings are sometimes scheduled across these hours  
beyond my control, particularly on Thursdays. If so, I  
will return your email/call at the earliest available time.

Ph.D. Students will be required to participate in peer-reviews of student  
drafts as well as write short comment responses for those drafts.

Option I – Interpretive Writing Course Description:

Provides an overview and experience in understanding, analyzing and producing  
interpretive written products to communicate in multiple writing situations and  
genres. Introduces students to advanced writing techniques related to graduate  
and professional performance.

Interpretive writing provides the opportunity to strengthen public understanding and  
appreciation of natural and cultural resource issues, themes and values through  
text or a combination of text and other media. To produce quality interpretive  
writing, interpreters must develop their skills and knowledge as writers. Good  
interpretive writing provides memorable images and ideas that facilitate audience  
connections to the meanings and significance inherent in and assigned to the  
resource. It engages readers intellectually and emotionally. This course provides
an overview of the writing and writing process relative to the interpretive genre, an examination of the characteristics of good writing, and skill development in essential techniques of interpretive writing for multiple audiences and purposes.

Objectives:

1. To expose students to the depth and breadth of natural and cultural resource interpretive writing and or business/technical writing;
2. To provide the opportunity for students to develop and improve skills, techniques and planning related to writing;
3. To provide experience in authentic learning opportunities concerning natural and cultural communications;
4. To provide experience in a writing workshop community; and
5. To provide students with the opportunity to experiment in narrative creative non-fiction writing, writing for the public, and writing for technology transfer.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the writing concepts present in the genres of writing through time.
2. Discuss their personal writing strengths and writing techniques to increase their strengths and abilities as professional writers.
3. Determine writing approaches appropriate to the audience, purpose, and venue.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of writing basics in both fiction and non-fiction approaches, including development, mechanics, style, and revision.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of writing methods and techniques, including such examples as logical explanation, word pictures, metaphors, character and dialogue, and storytelling.

Possible Project Assignments:

- Nature Journal
- Social media
- Blog
- Newsletter
- Wayside
- Site Bulletin
- Feature Article
- News Article
- Exhibit
- Guide
- Training Manual for Interpreters
- Living History Guide/Pamphlet
• Self-Guided Trail Pamphlet
• Environmental Education Project Guide
• Conservation Education Project Guide

**Option II Business and Technical Writing Course Description:**

This course provides opportunity for development and enhancement of communications expertise required of and utilized by middle and upper level natural resource professionals. Experiences include components of the research and public information circuits. Designed as a special topics course to support specialized content according to the needs and direction of the students' targeted professional niche.

**Objectives:**

1. To expose students to the depth and breadth of communications needs required by the natural resource professional community;
2. To provide the opportunity for students to develop and improve skills related to multiple media;
3. To provide experience in authentic learning opportunities concerning natural resource communications.

**Learning Outcomes:**

A student successfully completing the course will be able to:

1. Discuss the depth and breadth of communications opportunities and expectations of natural resource professionals;
2. Discuss the depth and breadth of natural resource communications document expectations;
3. Identify audience personalities and choose appropriate methods of communications accordingly;
4. Determine the purpose of a particular communication encounter and choose appropriate methods of communications accordingly;
5. Identify the appropriate medium for a natural resource agency, ngo, or private enterprise contact, for example: focus group, newspaper article, fact sheet, workshop;
6. Identify appropriate resource support to meet the communications opportunity requirements;
7. Utilize technology transfer methods to adapt research projects to a specialized audience, for example: researchers, managers, public;
8. Prepare appropriate drafts and products for research, conferences, workshops, public meetings, and public mediums.
Possible Project Assignments:

Students enrolled in this special topics course will complete at least 5 of the following:

- Conference Proposal
- Poster Presentation
- Grant Proposal
- Research Proposal
- Research Update
- Research Abstract
- Proceedings Paper
- Technology Transfer
- Fact Sheet
- News Article
- Workshop Design
- Focus Group Design
- EIS/EA Review
- Proceedings Review
- Conference Proposal Review
- Action Plan
- Interview
- Interview Write-up
- Research Interview
- Research Interview Write-up

Finished drafts and products are expected to be of the highest professional quality, suitable for publication, presentation, and/or use by outside entities. This means each piece will have been through multiple drafts and review prior to being considered a finished product.

In addition to the above projects, students will keep a reading journal responding to the assigned readings as outlined by the instructor. Each response will be at least two typed pages in length. Although there is a certain amount of freedom attached to reading journals, this course is for communications improvement and responses should reflect as such.

**Option III – Combination of Interpretive and Business and Technical – includes projects from BOTH lists or additional projects discussed with Professor – SUGGESTED PATH!!!!**
**Course Texts:** ALL STUDENTS


**Recommended but not required:**


Peterson, David. (2001). *Writing naturally: A down-to-earth guide to nature writing.* Boulder, CO: Johnson Books. (several readings are available in the D2L site) Not Required, but also a really good book for your shelf!!! You will be reading samples provided on line.

**Course Content Modules**

Course Content Learning Modules may be available throughout the semester as the need arises for special additional content. These modules serve as a lecture alternative to support the weekly discussions, your needed knowledge base, and your assignments execution. Availability will be posted on the course homepage.

**Course Requirements:**

**Class Participation:**

This is a graduate course in resource communications. As such, it requires students to assume responsibility for analyzing class readings and other course content.

Because this is a graduate level course it differs from undergraduate course format. **As graduate students you will be expected to participate as professionals in the field, meaning that your opinions will be expected and valued.** In addition, the class format is based on a workshop/seminar design. In a writing workshop, writers read other writers for inspiration, technique, style, and discussion; work on pieces for practice and submission for
peer review; and participate in the peer review process by careful and close reading of other classmates’ work.

Class participation includes, but is not limited to:

- Becoming familiar with and using D2L as the primary course delivery mechanism.
- Completing assigned readings.
- Completing and participating in assigned writings.
- Participating in online discussions and/or online coaching.
- Reading and responding to professional and student writing.
- Working with peers (in pairs or small groups) to complete assignments as required.
- Providing peer review comments for drafts of classmates’ projects.
- Submitting assignments online.
- Participating in instructor/student conferences.

Readings:

Course readings are taken from the assigned texts and a variety of supplemental readings. All supplemental readings are available in the texts or in PDF format in the D2L (myCourses) site. Please feel free to provide additional resources as the need and occasion arises.

Journal/Blog Entries:

As a writer, you will keep a writing and response journal/blog for this class. Students often state at the end of class that they wish they had more opportunity to experiment and practice writing, in addition to reading other writers. A good writer reads other writers and a good writer writes frequently. Hopefully, this will become a lifelong habit to provide a place for you to respond to readings, store quotes and comments, practice technique and style, and keep notes about observations for you to use in your writing. It is very important that you feel comfortable that this is a project to serve you, not to please me.

You may keep your writing journal in whatever way best serves your inspiration and thought – for instance a three ring binder, or using colored pens, etc. However, because it is necessary to have content to count towards your grade, you are required to update your Journal on D2L (myCourses) on a weekly basis. You can access your journal through the Journal/Blog icon on the homepage or the Discussion listed on the left side of the course page. They
both go to the same place! In addition, your journal has been set up so that other students in the class can view your work and you can view theirs. Please do this on a regular basis in order to be prepared for discussion in class. *Remember, although these journal entries do count towards your grade (and I will let you know if you are or are not reaching the expectation), the writing is for YOUR benefit. The more you write, the better you get to know yourself as a writer, experiment with new techniques, and gain practice. I WILL read everything you write, but I will not judge, comment, or intrude upon these places that are your and your classmates’ FREE spaces.*

**Workshop/Seminar/Discussion:**

Each week students have the opportunity to participate in an online seminar/coaching. You are only required to one session as assigned for participation and/or coaching at **1:00 on Tuesdays Central time. YOU MAY DO MORE. YOU MAY ARRANGE AN ALTERNATIVE TIME.** Our goal is for you to have contact with your colleagues in class as much as possible but we do understand you are juggling – thus why the Discussion is so important to keep in touch with your classmates. Keep track of the announcements and email for any changes in the virtual schedule due to professional commitments.

On your D2L page you will click on Communications, then on ZOOM. These virtual meetings focus on topics related to all aspects of writing, coaching writing, assignments, or personal projects you would like to discuss. Transcripts of the ZOOM sessions are available in ZOOM.

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion/Blog</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Led Class</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Project 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of 2 of the Writing Projects</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1000</strong></td>
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All assignments must be submitted in order to receive a passing grade in the class!!!!

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

1000 - 930 points = A
Syllabus

929 - 860 points = B
859 - 780 points = C
779 – 710 points = D
709 and under = F

Social Justice:

Stephen F. Austin State University and the Arthur Temple College of Forestry are committed to social justice. Every effort will be made to assure a positive learning environment based upon open communication, honest expression of ideas, and mutual respect. Tolerance for divergent backgrounds and ideas will be strongly encouraged, whether based on race, ethnic origin, gender, physical challenge, age, or religion. Suggestions to help foster an environment of academic freedom and social justice are welcome.

Professional Ethics Statement

Students in the graduate program are considered to be professionals, as well as students, and we expect that you will reflect professionalism in your work. As representatives of Stephen F. Austin and members of the graduate program of the Arthur Temple College of Forestry, you are held to the responsibility to conduct yourselves, your academic work, and your research in a professional and ethical way. This means that you abide by the rules of conduct stated in the student handbook, agree to a no cheating and no plagiarism policy, and follow the guidelines for ethical research set forth by the university.

Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Cheating can be defined as unethical use of another’s information to complete an assignment or test. Plagiarism can be defined as using someone else’s words or ideas without giving proper credit for their use. Be sure to cite your sources if in doubt. Behavior related to cheating or plagiarism may cause immediate failure of the course, and/or, at the very most, cause academic expulsion from the program.
**Course Schedule:**

Topics may be adjusted at the discretion of the instructor according to the needs of the class. Schedule may be adjusted as needed.

**Review Content Modules and ZOOM Lectures as Assigned on Homepage**

**USE YOUR SUPPORT WRITING BOOKS THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER TO HELP MOVE YOU THROUGH WRITING PRACTICE AND GROWTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topics/Agenda</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Aug 28-Sept 1</td>
<td>Introductions, MSRC Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sept 4 – 8</td>
<td>Writing in General and Course Overview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3    | Sept 11 - 15 | Crafting Interpretive Writing: History and Techniques  
Creative Writing |
|      | See Virtual Readings in D2L – begin with Week 3 |
| 4    | Sept 18 - 22 | Business and Technical Writing |
| 5    | Sept 25 - 29 | Interpreting and Writing Alternative Histories and Experiences |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 6    | Oct 2 - 6    | Challenges of Social Media – Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 7    | Oct 9 - 13   | Writing in Practice – Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 8    | Oct 16 - 20  | Writing in Practice – Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 9    | Oct 23 – 28  | Writing in Practice – Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 10   | Oct 30 – Nov 3 | Open Forum: Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 11   | Nov 6 - 10   | Reviewing and Revising – Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 12   | Nov 13 - 17  | Reviewing and Revising - Student Led |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 13   | Nov 20 - 24  | THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 14   | Nov 22 – Dec 2 | Reviewing and Revising Writing Down the Bones  
Zen in the Art of Writing |
|      | Virtual Readings |
| 15   | Dec 4 - 8    | Interpretive Writing Best Practices & Review Challenges |
|      | Virtual Readings |
SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS HELD ON TUESDAYS AT 1:00 P.M. (CENTRAL)
Student Academic Dishonesty Policy (4.1)
Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism. Definition of Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one’s paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student_academic_dishonesty.pdf

Course Grades Policy (5.5)
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average. Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/5.5_course-grades.pdf

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy (6.1)
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/

Responsible Use of Technology
It is expected that all students will only use cell phones, PDAs, laptop computers, MP3 players and other technology outside of class time or when appropriate in class. Answering a cell phone, texting, listening to music or using a laptop computer for matters unrelated to the course may be grounds for dismissal from class or other penalties.

Acceptable Student Behavior
Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy 10.4). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed. Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student-code-of-conduct_10.4.pdf

For University Assessment Purposes Only:
Program Learning Outcomes

1. The student will demonstrate proficiency in research design, relative to their field of study.
2. The student will demonstrate proficiency in the process of reviewing scientific literature pertinent to their field of study.
3. The student will demonstrate proficiency in basic statistical analysis; relative to their field of study.
4. The student will demonstrate preparation to pursue a professional career and/or Ph.D. degree in subject
5. The student will demonstrate competency in oral and written communication skills.
6. The student will demonstrate competency in comprehensive interpretive planning and design of interpretive products.

Please list each course in the program and indicate how it supports the Program Learning Outcomes for the identified program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>PLO1 Proficiency in Research Design</th>
<th>PLO2 Proficiency in Basic Statistical Analysis</th>
<th>PLO3 Preparation for Pursuit in a Professional Career</th>
<th>PLO4 Competency in Oral and Written Communication Skills</th>
<th>PLO5 Competency in Planning and Design of Int. Prod.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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N/A – Not Applicable  B - Basic  I - Intermediate  A - Advanced  M - Mastery

Definition of Rating Categories:

1. N/A – Not Applicable – course does not support the Program Learning Outcome.
2. B – Basic – course supports Program Learning Outcome by providing students with fundamental information, definitions, concepts, and lab activities relative to the expected outcomes.
3. I – Intermediate – course supports Program Learning Outcome by providing students with topic-specific information, concepts, applications, and lab activities that increase the students’ skills in making tactical implementation decisions relative to the expected outcomes.
4. A – Advanced – course supports Program Learning Outcome by providing students with transitional, high level topic-specific information, activities, and opportunities that enable the students to apply their critical thinking and tactical skills to resolved increasingly challenging strategic situations.
5. M – Mastery – course supports Program Learning Outcome by providing students with opportunities to independently apply tactical and strategic planning skills to successfully accomplish real-world, non-academic management objectives. Completes students’ preparedness for entry-level professional activity accomplishment.