THE UNIVERSITY WRITING SEMINAR
(For more detailed discussions of the UWS, please consult John Burt’s “Local Guide to the UWS”)

BASIC REQUIREMENTS:

- Class meets 2 hours per week. You are scheduled in a 3-hour block. We recommend that you meet 2 hours and use the remaining hour to cover some of your tutorials (see below). For instance, if your class is TF 1:00-2:30 then meet 1-2 on T and F and use the 2-2:30 time for tutorials.

- Students should write something every week. This can include drafts, in-class writing revisions, etc.

- Each student should get 4 20-minute tutorials (to be scheduled by you and the student at mutually convenient times) per semester. In a class of 18 students, this is 72 tutorial meetings. Make sure you get started right away. Tell the students this is a requirement and put it on the syllabus. There are lots of ways to do this. Some instructors pass around a sign-up sheet every week and have students come in to talk about whatever writing assignment is on deck that week. Some instructors have 4 larger assignments (with drafts leading up to them) and have all 18 students come in right before the final version is due. I’m sure you can imagine other ways to do it.

- Textbook requirements:

  You MUST have and use 3 textbooks, one each of three different kinds. The “default” texts are recommendations from John Burt. There are samples of textbooks and readers in the English Dept office (Rabb 144) if you want to see others. You can also talk to John (burt@brandeis.edu).

1. Rhetoric text (default text: Writing Worth Reading)
2. Book of short readings (default text: The Norton Reader)
3. Grammar and Style handbook (this is pre-assigned and ordered--do not order these through the bookstore. It will be Hacker’s Rules for Writers.)

FOR BOTH USEM+W TAs AND UWS INSTRUCTORS

You must print the following on your syllabi:

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in class, please see me.

AND
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

You may want to add some explanation to the notice about academic honesty to explain what you mean. An example:

“For purposes of this class, “dishonesty” would most likely consist of using ideas from a book, journal or the Internet without adding a footnote or endnote explaining whose ideas they were. It’s OK to do research or to use someone else’s interpretation as your starting point, or even to say “Jane X’s idea supports my argument.” Just let me know which ideas aren’t yours. “Dishonesty” does NOT include working together outside class: editing each other’s work, making/taking suggestions for improvements, I encourage you to do these things.”

DROPPING AND INCOMPLETES
Do not encourage these options. USEM and UWS courses are first year requirements and students who do not complete them in the first year can be placed on academic warning or probation. Be very clear that if a student is thinking about this they MUST talk to Michele Rosenthal (who will probably tell them no).

ATTENDANCE AND LATE WORK/ATHLETICS ABSENCES/RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES
You are allowed to set your own attendance requirements and to decide how to handle late work. However, we highly recommend that you put some flexibility into your wording on the syllabus so that you don’t end up in the uncomfortable position of wanting to accommodate a student and looking like you aren’t serious about your requirements while doing so. Do not use absolutes on the syllabus such as “Any student with more than three absences will fail.” Some useful phrasing:

- “late work will be penalized, if it is accepted”
- “normally, late work will not be accepted without some penalty”
- “more than 3 absences will adversely affect your grade”
- “after three absences, I will begin to lower your class participation grade for each subsequent absence”

This kind of phrasing allows you to work on a case-by-case basis, or to work out accommodations with Academic Affairs for students who have a rocky start or a mid-semester crisis. It is generally a bad idea to say you don’t permit any absences—you run the risk of flunking half the class for one absence or of looking stupid when you don’t flunk them.
Athletes often expect to teachers to give “excused” absences for athletic games and practices. Again, this is up to you, but we do not see why athletes should be excused but not students with part-time jobs, political activist commitments, drama performances, etc. In general, I think the healthiest attitude to take is “Everyone is allowed X number of absences. Plan ahead.” Announce at the beginning of the class that anyone who has afternoon practices or games should figure out whether it is a good idea to be in a late afternoon class. However, you should keep in mind that because of the Brandeis calendar, our athletes do not, like students at most other universities, have their spring breaks coincident with NCAA tournaments. We have also had situations in which coaches gave students inaccurate information about how game and practice schedules would work. This is not the students’ fault, though they must take responsibility for choosing to participate in athletic programs. You may outline for them a scenario in which they participate actively in class, always do the reading and the assignments on time and thus build up some credit with you for times when they have to miss class. You may also ask them to turn assignments in early when they have to miss a class for a game or practice rather than giving them an extension. Explaining it to them this way suggests that they must earn any accommodation you give them rather than simply getting it because they are athletes. In short, your ideal might be that they are responsible for working out conflicts among their university commitments but that you will help them to do this.

The Brandeis Policy Pertaining to Religious Observance is printed at the bottom of the academic calendar.

DESK COPIES
You must order your own desk copies, Xerox and use the attached form. Note that the desk copies will be delivered to your mailbox in the English Dept.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING ADDITIONAL READINGS
Ask yourself these questions:

Are the readings I want to use productive and necessary foundations for the assignments or lessons that teach writing?

Do the readings I want to use provide an example of a kind of writing I will be asking my students to do?

Can I link these readings productively to the lessons and principles explained in the rhetoric text I’m using?

Any readings you use should not be so difficult that students are struggling to do two different things at once: understand the reading AND write well/write the way you would about it. (Skip the deLauretis, the Derrida, the intriguingly knotty text you are writing about for your dissertation, etc.)
PROBLEM STUDENTS
If you have a student who disappears from class or seems to be having some other problem the first step is to email or call the student. If you don’t get a response, or you feel that whatever is going on the student will need help dealing with, send an email Michele Rosenthal. Be sure to keep a copy of this email and any reply you get from Michele, and send a copy to John Burt (burt@brandeis.edu). USEM+W TAs will, of course, consult with the USEM+W faculty member. State the facts of the case clearly, and if the student has an email that is not a Brandeis email or an off-campus phone number, please provide that for the Dean. You may decide whether it is more appropriate to cc the student on the email or to send the student a separate email letting him/her know you have contacted the Dean about him/her. If you do not get a response and/or the problem continues, keep updating the Dean and John.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY/PLAGIARISM
Students receive information about plagiarism in orientation, but it is probably a good idea to announce to your class that you will not accept academic dishonesty, and that you and the University take it very seriously. Tell them sanctions include failing the assignment, failing the course, and leaving the university. Some instructors think it is a good idea to tell them that you know how to use the Internet and that you spot check for plagiarized papers. Many instructors are confident that they give such original assignments that no one could plagiarize, but the proliferation of Internet sites means we shouldn’t get cocky. There are instructors all over the country coming up with “original assignments.” Moreover, sometimes simple assignments are good teaching tools and we should be able to use them.

If you suspect a student of plagiarizing, make copies of the relevant documents (paper, print from Internet, etc.). Talk to the student—perhaps there is a reasonable explanation for what looks fishy. You may decide that the student really didn’t understand what they were doing or that you were mistaken. If after talking with the student you think the incident should be reported, you may call Lori Tenser in Judicial Affairs for guidance (6-5070, tenser@brandeis.edu). She will send you the proper forms for reporting the incident. CC John Burt on all correspondence about the case. You should tell the student you are doing this. YOU MAY NOT PUNISH THE STUDENT FOR PLAGIARISM. In other words, you cannot say “I’m giving you an F for this paper b/c you plagiarized it.” The student has a right to a procedural hearing. One of the things this prevents is unequal sanctions, in which a student in one class gets no punishment but another gets expelled for the same offense. Judicial Affairs will decide sanctions partly based on how other similar cases have been decided. If the end of the semester comes before the University makes a decision about the sanction, you will put an “NC” for the student’s grade. You’ll see on the form a question about “Who will present the case should the student ask for a hearing?” Don’t worry about not being around to do that—if you aren’t here, the Writing Director will do it for you. Keep copies of everything you send to Judicial Affairs and notes on what happened. If the semester ends with a case unresolved, give copies of all these things to the Writing Director. USEM+W TAs, should refer any plagiarism cases to the faculty member teaching the course.
For more about finding and prosecuting plagiarism please see the attached memo from Lori Tenser (tenser@brandeis.edu), Director of Judicial Education at Appendix D.

STUDENTS WITH ESL PROBLEMS
If you have a student you think might benefit from extra help because English is his/her second language, you should contact Kitsie Henchman-Sallet, Coordinator, English as a Second Language Program, Rabb 342, 6-3991, sallet@brandeis.edu. Kitsie can tell you whether the student has an ESL tutor. If s/he has a tutor, you may be able to collaborate with the tutor to help the student. If s/he doesn’t have a tutor, Kitsie may be able to assign one. There is no charge for ESL tutoring.

MAILBOXES
If you are not a graduate student in English, you will be given a Writing Program mailbox behind Rabb 144. Memos, handouts, desk copies, and evaluations will be sent to this mailbox, and not to your home dept. If you want things to go to your home dept, we suggest that you put a notice on your mailbox with the MS number to redirect them to.

OBSERVATIONS
All UWS classes will be observed once during the semester by either the Director or the Assistant Director regardless of how long you have been teaching.

EVALUATIONS
We will be asking your students to fill out both the standard Brandeis University Course evaluation form AND a Writing Program evaluation form at the end of the semester. The Director of Writing will review the Writing Program evaluations for UWS instructors and write each one a letter summarizing the evaluations and commenting on your semester’s teaching performance (including your observation, contribution to staff meetings, compliance with requirements like getting your syllabus in on time, meeting with students for tutorials, etc., if relevant), English department graduate students: this letter will go to your DGS and your department file. USEM+W TAs should talk to their USEM+W faculty members about how their teaching will be evaluated.

Some questions the students will answer on these evaluations:

*Did you feel this course spent enough time focusing on general strategies for good academic writing you will be able to use in other Brandeis classes? If not, what do you feel was the focus instead, or what do you think the problem was?

*Did you feel that you understood what assignments/class activities were meant to teach you (circle one) a) 100% of the time b) 75% of the time c) 50% of the time d) 25% of the time e) never What could be done to improve this, if you circled c, d, or e?

*Consider your instructor’s comments (oral and written) on your work. Were they clear? Were they extensive enough for you to learn from them? Did they help you to improve your writing? Why (not)?
*Consider the readings, not including your rhetoric textbook. Did they seem like productive/necessary foundations for the assignments or lessons that taught you writing? If you are a USEMwi student, did you feel that the link between the USEM itself and general writing instruction was productive? Why (not)?
USEM Plus Writing
Pedagogical Issues And Possible Solutions
Identified by 2000-2001 USEM Teaching Assistants

Issue: Lack of time, or how much writing instruction can you provide in 13 hours?

Solutions: Utilize some of the other 39 USEM hours for writing instruction, taught by either the USEM instructor, teaching assistant, or the two as a team.

Offer 20 minute tutorials outside of the fourth hour.

Issue: Why should students bother to attend the fourth hour?

Solutions: It won’t be possible to receive an A in the USEM course unless you attend and fully participate in the fourth hour.

One fourth of the grade will be decided by performance in fourth hour.

Instructors should distribute an integrated syllabus or discuss the fourth hour in the USEM syllabus. (Some USEMTAs design a separate fourth hour syllabus to underscore their authority in the fourth hour, but distribute this syllabus at the first USEM meeting.

Issue: “I was the best writer in my high school, and I don’t need additional writing instruction.

Yes, but writing in college is different. The expectations and standards of good writing are different in college, and continue to rise in graduate or professional school, and/or in professional work life. Faculty members will expect you to demonstrate a more sophisticated level of reasoning, a greater ability to support your conclusions, and more advanced uses of argumentation, tone, evidence, and clarity.

Issue: First year students don’t have a clue about thesis statements or analytical writing.

Solutions: Offer class sessions on thesis statements and argumentation in both the USEM and the fourth hour.

Refer to the “Argument” sections of Rules for Writers.

Utilize techniques and exercises suggested in today’s workshop.

Consider inviting the Brandeis Debate team to a class to illustrate argumentation. (E-mail gregawil@yahoo.com)
USEM Plus Instructors’ Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Faculty Teaching USEM

Attend at least two of the fourth hour sessions taught by the USEM TA.
Design all writing assignments
Select due dates for writing assignments
Assign grades to all writing assignments
Consult with teaching assistant about particular writing issues that should be addressed.
Count fourth hour participation in USEM plus grade

Responsibilities of USEM Teaching Assistants

Attend one to three hours of USEM course per week
Meet with class for an additional hour of writing instruction each week.
Meet individually with each student for a tutorial on each writing assignment
Review first drafts of all writing assignments
Consult with teaching assistant about particular writing issues that should be addressed.

The fourth hour of instruction

Participation in this hour must count for the grade.
Utilize peer-editing techniques.
Utilize Hacker’s Rules for Writers.
Consider in-class writing assignments, discussion, review of common errors in mechanics.
Possible topics:
  - Introductions: types, objectives
  - Citation: forms, academic honesty
  - Paragraph structure: topics sentences, sentence flow, devices for linkage
  - Thesis statements
  - Argumentation
  - Analytical writing
  - Audience
  - Voice
  - Conclusions
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  - Thesis statements
  - Argumentation
  - Analytical writing
  - Audience
  - Voice
  - Conclusions