

# EXPERIMENTS IN EDUCATION

“Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world.”  
– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In 1933, after John Andrew Rice was fired from his job as a faculty member at Rollins College in Florida, he decided to found his own educational institution. Black Mountain College, whose campus was in the Blue Ridge foothills of North Carolina, encouraged students and faculty to seek learning in “human contact, through a fusion of mind and emotion.” Students and instructors learned together in non-hierarchical classrooms and worked alongside one another to construct the university’s new buildings. There were no grades, no requirements, and students alone decided when it was time for them to graduate (many chose not to graduate at all).

What does it mean to learn? In this class, we will examine the assumptions that underpin learning at an institution like Yale and ask how we got here: what histories, preferences, biases, and assumptions inform our learning here? What alternatives to this model—in which students learn inside classrooms, from an instructor, based on a pre-established syllabus, and receive grades based on “academic achievement”—have existed in recent history, and why have these been discarded (or how do they survive today)? We will consider democratic, anarchistic, and decolonized education, “unschooling” and “UnCollege,” forest kindergarten and outdoor education, and specific alternative models such as the *Escuela Moderna* in Barcelona, Montessori schools, the *Schule Schloss Salem* and Outward Bound academies, and Black Mountain College. We will conceive of our classroom as an experimental space that allows us to explore some of the models and questions raised by our readings, and we will take our cue from Paulo Freire, who in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* invites us to ask: when you come out of an educational institution, who will you be? Who decides what you are allowed to learn? What determines the courses you take each semester? And when you are learning at a particular place, *where is the power that controls your life?*

## Course Materials

There are no required materials for this course; readings will be provided on Canvas. I would suggest that you purchase the following writing guide, which will serve you during our class and beyond:

Birkenstein, Cathy and Graff, Gerard. [\*They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing\*](#), 4th ed. W. W. Norton & Company, 2018. ISBN: 978-0393631678.

## Course objectives

This writing-intensive summer course will attempt to:

1. Contribute to your “writing toolkit” by focusing on your individual writing process and encouraging you to examine, expand, and reinvent it where useful;
2. Enable you to construct a compelling argument;
3. Allow you to approach writing from a variety of disciplines with confidence and excitement;
4. Cultivate your creativity and empower you as a persuasive, engaging, and lucid writer with a unique voice, whose experiences and interests can make vital contributions to scholarly discussion;
5. Develop and complicate your notions of what “learning,” “education,” and “teaching” might entail, in ways that enrich your own academic and creative work and allow you to contribute to your intellectual and personal communities;
6. Invite us all to experiment with what and how we learn in the context of our own classroom, by putting into practice the theories we encounter together.

## Assignments and Assessment

### Grading Distribution:

Essay 1 (3-4 pages)	<b>15%</b>	
Essay 2 (4-5 pages)	<b>25%</b>	
Essay 3 (6-8 pages)	<b>30%</b>	(A 1-page research proposal with a working bibliography will be worth 5%; a peer review and partial draft will be worth 10%; the paper itself will be worth 15%)
Presentation	<b>15%</b>	(A 5-minute presentation about an alternative educational institution or model. On the day that you present, you will also help lead the class discussion.)
Participation	<b>15%</b>	(Attendance and class participation will make up 10% of this. At the beginning of our course, you will set individual writing objectives with and aim to meet them as the semester progresses; you will assess yourself at course’s end for the remaining 5% of the participation grade.)

### Due Dates:

Essay 1, draft: Thursday, June 2, 12pm EDT  
**Essay 1, final:** Monday, June 6, 12pm EDT  
Essay 2, draft: Thursday, June 9, 12pm EDT  
**Essay 2, final:** Tuesday June 14, 12pm EDT  
Essay 3, prospectus and bibliography: Friday, June 17, 11.59pm EDT  
Essay 3, partial draft: Tuesday, June 21, 11.59pm EDT  
Essay 3, peer feedback exercise: Friday, June 24, *in class*  
Essay 3, full draft: Saturday, June 25, 11.59pm EDT  
**Essay 3, final:** Friday, July 1, in class  
**Oral presentations:** Throughout the semester

**A note on deadlines:** Please note that the deadline for the drafts of Essays 1, 2, and 3 will be extremely strict: due to our compressed schedule, I will aim to have your drafts back to you before start of class the

next day. If your paper is not in at 12pm EDT, I will not be able to return it until the weekend, which will significantly cut into your revision time.

## Course requirements and policies

1. **Attendance.** Please do your best to attend all classes, and let me know straight away if you won't be able to make a session. The discussion and workshop elements that are at the center of this course cannot be made up, and the summer semester moves at an incredibly fast pace, so regular attendance will be helpful to your learning. With this said, if you require an accommodation regarding attendance, do not hesitate to reach out so we can discuss.
2. **Preparation and Participation.** Come to class prepared to discuss the readings and participate in writing exercises and workshops. A good way to ensure you are engaging more fully with the readings is to take notes on what you read, even if only in the margins. In-class peer revision will provide you with valuable opportunities to give and receive feedback on writing assignments. I will ask you to **kick off and lead our discussion** in one of our classes, by preparing a short presentation about an alternative educational institution or model and asking a few questions about the reading. This will be part of your participation grade.

Class participation gives your classmates access to your thoughts and interpretations, which are likely different from theirs in some way, and this will allow our group to develop the fullest possible understanding of the questions we wish to explore. If you find class participation difficult or uncomfortable, please come see me during office hours so we can discuss some strategies for engagement with your peers that will feel enjoyable and constructive for you.

3. **Remote Learning and Zoom Etiquette:** If we must meet in a remote format due to public health conditions, the live discussion sessions will be held through Zoom. Most of us are familiar with remote learning at this point, but here are the basics: to access live sessions, click "Zoom" on the left side of [our class' Canvas page](#). Once you click the link, you may be prompted to install a small application necessary for Zoom. Once you do so, you will be taken directly into the Zoom meeting room. You can then use the audio and video settings menu (bottom left corner) to ensure the correct input/output sources are chosen. For more detailed information of Zoom operation, refer to the user guide in the [Technical Support page in the "Modules" tab](#) on Canvas. Try to ensure you are in a quiet location for the live sessions; this may not be easy if you are not on campus, so please do approach me if there are any aspects of your learning environment that you'd like me to know about so I can support you.

Unless your internet connection is struggling, I ask that you keep your camera on. If you can't turn your camera on for any reason, please just let me know. I would also like you to **keep yourself unmuted**: we will be a small class, and we will practice being attentive to each other and trying to keep our class conversation flowing organically. Feel free to mute yourself if there is unexpected noise on your end of the connection; you may also want to use [a virtual background on Zoom](#) if this is helpful. I will not be using one, and you may see my dog in the back of the frame. I ask that we all be flexible and respectful of each other if we catch glimpses of each other's houses or working spaces and/or home lives.

## Expectations

### Essay Submission

You will submit essays through the “Assignment” page on Canvas. **Please submit papers as Word documents, not as pdfs**; I’ll be commenting using tracked changes. When I set paper lengths, I’m envisioning that your papers will use Times New Roman 11 or 12-point font; you can use whatever font you prefer, as long as the paper roughly meets the page count if you convert it to Times New Roman 12.

### Academic Integrity

One of the goals of this course is to help you understand how to use published research – the final product of someone’s hard work – to support your own thinking. Plagiarism, in brief, is the submission of work that contains uncited instances of language and ideas that are not your own. Any instance of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty, such as unauthorized collaboration, has severe consequences at Yale. If you are unsure about how to cite something, or have any other related doubts, please ask! You may also wish to acknowledge any help you have received on your papers in a footnote, whether it’s from the Writing Center, a friend, or someone else. [You can consult Yale’s policies on academic honesty here.](#)

### Access

If you need some form of accommodation not already provided, have a medical condition, or have any other information that you feel I should know, please inform me as soon as you can. It is my job to make the classroom accessible for you; I will always be grateful for any information you share that can help me do that. Additional information and resources are available [at the website of Student Accessibility Services.](#) You can always ask them to contact me directly on your behalf, too.

### Email, Office Hours, and Assistance

I will answer emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Please be respectful when corresponding with me; I will always be respectful with you. I won’t take questions about grades by email, and if you have a particularly complex question or conundrum, it would probably be better to talk it out with me during office hours.

### Writing Support

Yale’s Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning also offers a range of assistance to student writers. They are there to support you, and I encourage all of you to make use of their services and expertise. [You can sign up for online tutoring at this link.](#) You need to upload a draft through this same scheduler at least two hours before the tutoring session, so that your Writing Partner can read it beforehand. You need not have a draft, however; writing partners can work with you to brainstorm or strategize before you begin writing.

### Celebrating Diversity

There will be zero tolerance of comments or behaviors intended to threaten, marginalize, or otherwise diminish others: it is our joint responsibility to make our classroom a space where intellectual conflict can occur in a context of curiosity and absolute respect. We will collaborate to make our classroom a “brave space,” meaning a place where people who are differently vulnerable can approach difficult or uncomfortable topics and realities with honesty and sensitivity. For more information on “brave spaces,” [click here.](#)

We will work actively on figuring out how to create a class environment that generates lively discussion, allows us all to learn new things, and challenges our preconceptions. Creating the conditions for good exchanges will be an active concern of the course: please respect your peers and their contributions by

listening carefully, responding thoughtfully to their interjections, not interrupting unnecessarily, and ensuring that all voices have an opportunity to be heard. Help your peers express their ideas when it seems as if they would benefit from your support; ask for help from your classmates if you are struggling to articulate what you mean. We will aim to be generous, sensitive, and productively critical of each other, and there will always be opportunities during class to consider or discuss how we are working and interacting as a group.

## Schedule of Meetings

**This schedule is subject to change as we work our way through the semester. All handouts and texts in blue will be available on our Canvas page.**

### Unit One: Why do we learn?

#### Monday, May 30

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Group Introductions, Course Introduction, and Syllabus Review

Handout: Introduction to Key Terms

Handout: Essay 1

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Exercise: Close Reading Claims

Class Discussion: High School in the Community

Handout: Reading Scholarly Texts

Handout: Finding a Good Essay Question (Poorvu Center)

#### Wednesday, June 1

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Handout: Discussion Questions

Discussion: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter 2

Exercise: Summarizing vs Analyzing

Handout: Presentation Assignment

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Handout: As She Herself Puts It

Exercise: Staying with a Quote

Handouts: Working with Quotations 1-3 (Poorvu Center)

#### Thursday, June 2

**Rough Draft of Essay 1 due, 12pm EDT**

#### Friday, June 3

Independent Experimental Education Research Day

**Reading:** John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*  
Chapters 1 and 2

Asynchronous Writing Skills Lecture—Bringing it all together:

Strong Body Paragraphs and Their Structure

Handout: Body Paragraphs

Handout: Recursive Writing (Poorvu Center)

Handout: Introductions (Poorvu Center)

## UNIT TWO: How do we learn?

### Monday, June 6

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Setting Our Terms of Discussion

Handout: [Conversational Moves](#)

Discussion: [D.C. Phillips, “Theories of Teaching and Learning”](#)  
and [Dewey and Dewey, \*Schools of Tomorrow\*](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Exercise: Placing Sources in Conversation

Handout: [They Say, I Say](#)

Handout: [Conversation Verbs and Clauses \(Poorvu Center\)](#)

Handout: [Essay 2](#)

**[Essay 1 \(final draft\) due, 12pm EDT](#)**

### Tuesday, June 7

Screening, 7pm EDT

*Into the Wild* (This screening is not mandatory; you may watch the film independently, but by holding a formal screening I hope to make the film accessible to all students) Please read [Joan James and Theresa Williams, “School-Based Experiential Outdoor Education: A Neglected Necessity”](#) before watching the film.

### Wednesday, June 8

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Student-led Discussion: [Maria Montessori, “Our Own Method,”](#)  
[James and Williams, “School-Based...”](#) and *Into the Wild*.

Exercise: Developing Transitions

Handout: [The Segue in Scholarly Conversations](#)

Handout: [Stitching—Signal Words \(Poorvu Center\)](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Writing Skills Lecture—Changing the Lens

### Thursday, June 9

**[Rough draft of Essay 2 due, 12pm EDT](#)**

### Friday, June 10

Session 1, 9:00-9:40am

Student-led Discussion:

[Carol Wren and Thomas Wren, “The Capacity to Learn”](#)

[Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine, “The State of Deeper Learning in American High Schools”](#)

Exercise: Introductions—Setting the Stage and Stakes

Handout: [How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#)

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am

Peer Review Workshop, Paper 2 (introductions)

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am

A Glance at Conclusions

[Handout: Conclusions \(Poorvu Center\)](#)

*Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations*

UNIT THREE: Where do we learn?

**Monday, June 13**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Midterm Review: Assessing Our Conversations

Student-led Discussion: [Simon Beames, Pete Higgins, and Robbie Nicol, \*Learning Outside the Classroom\*](#) (Introduction) and watch “From Farm to Food”

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Exercise: What Motivates Us?

Picking A Research Topic and Developing a Proposal

Handout: [Motivating Moves](#) (Poorvu Center)

**Tuesday, June 14**

**Essay 2 (final draft) due, 12pm EDT**

**Wednesday, June 15**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Student-led Discussion: [Rob Reich, “Common Schooling and Educational Choice”](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Library Visit: Identifying Sources

Handout: [Essay 3](#)

Handout: [Working with Sources](#) (Poorvu Center)

**Friday, June 17**

Session 1, 9:00-9:40am

Student-led Discussion: [Mira Debs, \*Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice\*](#) (excerpt)

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am

Writing Skills Lecture—Establishing Your Voice

Handout: [“And Yet”—Distinguishing What You Say](#)

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am

Building the Research Paragraph

Handout: [Research Paragraphs](#) (Poorvu Center)

*Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations*

**Research Proposal and Working Bibliography due, 11.59pm EDT**

## UNIT FOUR: Assessing what we learn

**Monday, June 20**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Student-led Discussion: [Adrienne Rich, “The SEEK program at CUNY”](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Exercise: Keeping It Complicated—Destabilizing Interlocutors  
Handout: [“Skeptics May Object”: Planting a Naysayer](#)

**Tuesday, June 21**

**[Essay 3 \(partial draft, with introduction, claim, and at least 3 body paragraphs\) due, 11.59pm EDT](#)**

**Wednesday, June 22**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Student-led Discussion: [Winston Owusu, “Unschooling, Uncollege, and Anarchic Learning”](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Writing Skills Lecture—Strategies for Revision: Linger, Deepen, Cut, and Expand  
Handout: [Revising Efficiently and Effectively \(Poorvu Center\)](#)

**Friday, June 24**

Session 1, 9:00-9:40am

Student-led Discussion: [Grading Models and Report Cards \(primary source analysis\)](#)  
Handout: [A P3 Model for Critical Reading](#)

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am

Peer Review Workshop, Paper 3 (structure, transition, claim)

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am

So What? Saying Why It Matters

Handout: [Funnel In, Funnel Out](#)

*Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations*

**[Peer feedback exercise due \(in class\)](#)**

**Saturday, June 25**

**[Essay 3 \(complete draft\) due, 11.59pm EDT](#)**

## UNIT FIVE: Transforming Learning/Transformational Learning

### Monday, June 27

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Concision, Clarity, Polish

Exercise: Lean Prose

[Handout: Lean Prose](#)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Discussion: [Wayne Au](#), “Decolonizing the Classroom”

### Wednesday, June 29

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Discussion: [Paulo Freire](#), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*  
(selection)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

End-of-term Review: Assessing Our Conversations and Writing  
Goals

Experimenting with Education

### Friday, July 1

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am

Presentations, Panel One

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am

Presentations, Panel Two

Class Conclusion

[Essay 3 \(final draft\) due, in class](#)