ENGL 1010: Expository Writing

Writing Project 2:
Community Discourse Ethnography

Learning Objectives

Writing Project 2 addresses the following ENGL 1010 learning objectives:

1. Conduct primary research; Make appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation **(Composing Processes)**;
2. Develop genre awareness and practice genre analysis; Complete writing tasks that require an understanding of the rhetorical situation **(Rhetorical Knowledge)**;
3. Learn about discourse communities; Demonstrate understanding of ethical and primary research practices **(Information Literacy)**.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the community discourse ethnography is to invite you to research a **discourse community**— a community that shares some kind of discourse, with "discourse" meaning a particular way of using language—written, spoken, and/or otherwise—to communicate. You could argue that any of the following are discourse communities: rhetoric professors, the kitchen staff in a restaurant, members of the r/Lizzo subreddit, marine biologists, a group of fourth-graders who hang out during recess, Nashville's Kurdish community, or MTSU alumni. To different degrees, each of these groups—even though they are made up of a wide range of people with diverse experiences and interests—share a common discourse that they use to communicate with each other. These discourses tend to involve things like shared sets of goals or interests, unspoken assumptions about members' background knowledge and experiences, and thresholds for what it takes to be a member.

For this assignment, your task is to choose a discourse community and research it. It can be a discourse community you're a part of, but it doesn't have to be. Here are some examples of discourse communities I've had students research in the past:

- Jazz musicians
- Dungeons and Dragons players
- Mechanical engineers
- Collective living arrangements (e.g., dorm, assisted living)

Note: All **blue links** are examples and/or resources. Please click on them and use them!

Project Definitions

A **discourse community** is a group of people who share a set of discourses, understood as basic values and assumptions, and ways of communicating about those goals. Linguist, John Swales, defined discourse communities as "groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals" (Discourse Community). Our class definition and Swales' 6 Characteristics of Discourse Community can be found in our class lecture notes: Defining & Writing about Discourse Communities. We'll also do some brainstorming as a class in Discourse Community Brainstorm.

A **community discourse ethnography** is a primary research project that requires you to engage with a specific **community** to study their **discourse(s)** through **ethnography**.
- **Community (N):** a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common
- **Discourse (V):** to speak or write authoritatively about a topic, idea, or culture
- **Ethnography (N):** the scientific description of the customs of individual peoples and cultures

Research Process

The primary research process for Writing Project 2 will take place in four parts:

1. **Personal Interview (see Small Writing 2: Interview Proposal)**
   a. Conduct an interview with *at least* one member of the discourse community you are studying. The interview must include at least four questions. If you conduct it in real-time, it should last at least fifteen minutes. If you conduct it via writing, your interviewee's answers should total at least 500 words.
      i. Alternatively, instead of the interview, you can conduct a survey (at least eight questions) that must be taken by at least ten members of your discourse community.

2. **Community Observation (1 hour)**
   a. In an effort to get a better understanding of your discourse community, GO to a place where you THINK you can **observe the community** in action. This can be set up like a true observation where you watch people for 30-60 minutes and take notes in a two-sided journal with your observation notes on the left side and your reflections on the right side.

3. **Soundscape Recording (20-30 seconds)**
   a. During your community observation, **AUDIO RECORD 20-30 seconds** of ambient noise from wherever you are. This shouldn't be a direct recording of someone's conversation. The goal is to capture the sounds of the environment where you complete your observation. Once you turn in your soundbite to me, I

will put all of the soundbites from your class together into one single compilation that we will listen to and discuss.

4. **Artifact Collection (3-5 artifacts)**
   a. Collect 3-5 pieces of discourse generated by your community. These can be pieces of written communication between members of the discourse community (e.g., text messages) or pieces of oral communication that are documented in some way (e.g., speech transcripts).

Writing Process

The writing process for Writing Project 2 will take place as you complete each research component. Because I'll be asking you to compose a new genre—a Research Report—I have provided a template for you: Writing Project 2, Research Report Template. Please use this template to compose your research findings about your discourse community.

Grading Checklist

The Community Discourse Ethnography is worth **5 points**; it will be graded with the following checklist:

❏ Is the community discourse ethnography **1200-1500 words**? (1 point)

❏ Does the community discourse ethnography include information about the writer's **interview**? (1 point)

❏ Does the community discourse ethnography describe the **author's experience** researching a specific **discourse community**? (1 point)

❏ Does the community discourse ethnography discuss **Swales' 6 characteristics** of a **discourse community**? (1 point)

❏ Was the community discourse ethnography submitted by the **deadline**? (1 point)