

University Writing Seminar 2B-1, 2

Darwinian Dating: The Evolution of Human Attraction

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Class time: M/W/Th 10:10-11, 11:15-12:05
Classes meet 2x during conference weeks
Class Location: Rabb 119 (DuBois)
Student hours: Monday 2-3:30 (Rabb 224)

This course will be conducted **in person**. However, some elements of class (some student hours, conference) will sometimes be conducted virtually via zoom. There is also the possibility that class will be moved to a virtual setting for short or longer stretches. If this happens, we will move to zoom.

Zoom Link for student hours / conferences (as needed):

<https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/175110683?pwd=aTc0NlZTTmpNZlExaExlZGhyaItDUT09>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the power of writing as a means of communication and a process of thinking and understanding. As students complete a series of writing assignments, they will engage in a process of reading, drafting, reviewing, and revising, working in peer groups and individually with their instructor.

Among animals, individuals chose mates based on biologically informative features such as long colorful tail feathers, large canines, or a red, swollen posterior. We typically assume that human attraction (and love) is much more nuanced and complex... but is it? Many features that humans find beautiful or attractive, such as small waists, curvy hips, broad shoulders, and large eyes, can be tied to biological explanations. Even behavioral features, such as nurturing behaviors, may be attractive for adaptive reasons. In this course, we will explore biological explanations for these and many other aspects of human attraction. Using an evolutionary perspective, we will examine global patterns of attraction and challenge stereotypes of beauty. Are the Barbie-like women of Hollywood really who men are most attracted to? Do nice guys really finish last? Do traditionally attractive features in western cultures—such as large breasts—actually provide an evolutionary benefit, or might some be false signals? What about non-heterosexual attraction? In addition to exploring the biological roots of attraction, we will examine how principles of attraction are expressed in popular culture, as well as how they play out right here on a college campus. Students will explore this provocative topic as they develop their analytical and writing skills.

First Year Experience

UWS is the centerpiece of the First Year Experience, which introduces students to the rich intellectual life of the university. As part of the UWS, students will attend one Critical Conversation between faculty from different departments. The goals of the Critical Conversations are to build first year cohort identity and introduce students to Brandeis' scholarly discourse and the variety of ways in which our faculty engage with the world and each other. Each seminar will also assign a brief experiential learning activity to expand the boundaries of the conventional classroom.

Critical Conversation: First Impressions and Comfortable Illusions: How Our Brains Can Mislead Us. October 12, 5:30-6:30 pm, in-person (recording can be made available).

UWS Goals and Outcomes

The University Writing Seminar introduces you to the power of writing as a means of communication and as a process of thinking and understanding. You will formulate meaningful arguments, support them with observations and evidence, and convey them clearly and persuasively. You will gain the tools to be a successful and confident writer in any discipline and become an active participant in critical conversations across the University and beyond. Most importantly, these skills will prepare you to engage as an informed citizen in a global society.

Students will be able to:

- Understand writing as a recursive process of thinking and communication
- Articulate elements of effective writing and integrate them into their own work
- Participate in critical conversations by responding to openings, problems or contradictions in existing scholarship
- Assess their own and others' writing with respect to audience and purpose
- Generate original questions and pursue independent research
- Identify and evaluate sources and use them responsibly
- Develop awareness of disciplinary differences in writing and adapt their writing to different genres and contexts

Specific course policies are outlined in the **Class Policies handout**. Please review this document and **sign the attached agreement**.

Course Communication

There will be lots of time to ask questions and share information in class. I welcome your questions! In addition, you will be able to communicate with me in the following ways:

Email – You can always contact me via email at ekjacobs@brandeis.edu. I will try to respond as quickly as possible, usually within a few hours (assuming you aren't emailing me at 2am!). I will also communicate with you via email through LATTE. LATTE sends emails to your Brandeis email account (unless you set up an alternate). You can find email addresses for your peers on LATTE as well.

Course announcements – I will sometimes post announcements on LATTE. These appear at the top of the course page. You will also get an email notification of all course announcements. I will post a weekly schedule on Friday with the plan / deadlines for the following week.

LATTE Forums – There will be opportunities for discussion using online forums on LATTE. These will be topic-specific forums for students to engage in discussion, debate, questions, etc.

Student Hours – You are always welcome to come and talk with me during student hours. For these scheduled weekly times, you do not need an appointment. If you would like to talk with me at a different time, **feel free to make an appointment**.

In-Person Learning and Teaching Continuity

As of this fall, all in-person undergraduate and graduate classes in the School of Arts & Sciences will no longer be required to have an option for remote participation. Faculty are encouraged to return to previous absence/make-up policies, which could be more generous or have an explicit exception for students who are required to isolate. The Health Center will notify students of the exact dates they will be isolating, and students are encouraged to share this information with their instructors. Faculty may, but are not required to, record and post their classes.

Current events have reminded us that campus closures, long-term absences, and other disruptions are possible at any time. As your instructor, I will communicate with you about any changes to our course schedule and assignments via email and via LATTE “Announcements,” located near the top of the page. I also expect you to communicate with me about any unforeseen circumstances that might affect your performance in the class. If you have any questions or concerns about how unforeseen events might be impacting our course, please let me know.

Tech Support

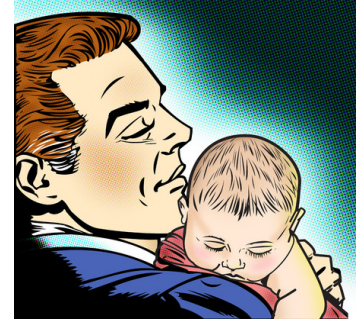
If you need technological support, please don't hesitate to contact me. Technological support (including LATTE, email, VPNs, downloading software, etc.) is also available by contacting The Technology Help Desk: <https://www.brandeis.edu/its/>

The Writing

The writing assignments for this course are structured around two topical units:

Unit 1: Principles of female attraction (i.e., what do women want?)

In unit 1, after an introduction to biological theories for understanding human social behavior, we will consider male features that are often attractive to heterosexual women, including masculinity, dominance, income, and nurturing behaviors. In essay 1, you will critically assess contradictory theories of female attraction through primary sources, specifically scientific data papers. In your essay, you will attempt to answer the question of what women really want – the nurturing “nice guy” or the alpha “bad boy.” In unit 1, we will also examine writing on male attraction from diverse disciplines and will consider how different fields approach writing. Draft due date: Fri. 9/23; Revision due date: Fri. 10/7

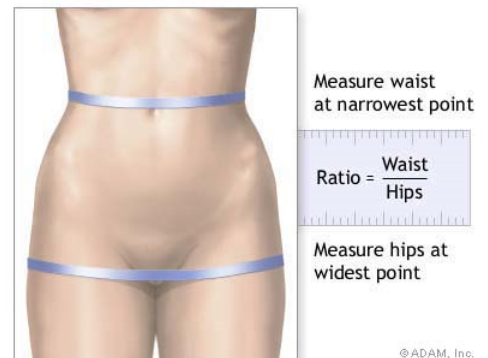


Comparative Genre Analysis

As a class, we’ll explore and discuss how various disciplines make different choices when writing. These choices aren’t random, but reflect what people value in their discipline. Having an awareness of how different genres approach writing will help you better understand what you read and will help you have more awareness of your own writing in the future, regardless of your class or genre. Reflection due date: Fri. 10/14

Unit 2: Principles of male attraction (i.e., what do men want?)

In unit 2, we explore female features that are typically attractive to heterosexual men, including youth, curvaceous breasts, the waist-to-hip ratio, and blonde hair. In addition to our readings, we will examine evidence of female beauty in popular culture, art, and archaeology. For this essay, you will select and explore a topic of male attraction using multiple sources and independent research (i.e., you will design and conduct a small research project) to inform and support your argument. In addition to biological sources, you may choose to explore interdisciplinary literature from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, history, etc. You are also free to explore non-heterosexual attraction and any element of what men want. The essay will be split into two steps, an initial proposal and the research paper. Proposal due date: Th. 10/27; Draft due date: Tu. 11/22; Revision due date: Sun. 12/11.



THE WRITING PROCESS

This course is organized around two essays (and one proposal) of increasing length and complexity. In each essay, you will be asked to develop a thesis and to analyze evidence to support your argument. This style of analytical writing will be expected of you in future papers across disciplines at Brandeis and in academia as a whole. During each unit, we will follow the same general format in developing ideas, gathering evidence, and drafting and revising essays.

- Pre-draft response papers and exercises; Reflection Letters: These take-home and in-class assignments will focus on specific aspects of writing and analysis (e.g., thesis, paragraph organization) and will aid in the writing of the essay draft.
- Essay draft: For each essay, you will submit a draft several weeks into the unit. This draft is an important part of the writing process, as it allows you to explore ideas and arguments. I don't expect your draft to be polished, but I do expect it to be as complete as possible. You should expect to make significant changes before your essay is done.
- Draft cover letter: With each draft and revision, you will submit a cover letter. In this letter, you should state your thesis and describe any questions or problems you have regarding your draft.
- Draft workshop: In the class following draft submission, we will have an in-class workshop in which we will work through student papers. In groups, we will offer constructive criticism and suggestions for improvements to the essay. You should come to class having read the selected drafts and having completed pre-workshop assignments.
- Conference: In the week following your draft submission, we will meet in a 20-minute, one-on-one conference to discuss your essay. Conferences are required and missed conferences will count as a class absence. This conference should be an active conversation, not simply a time for me to tell you what I think. Please come to each conference having read my draft comments and re-read your essay, and prepared to discuss ideas, questions, problems, etc. You should plan on taking notes during our discussions. You will sign up for conferences in class. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, I may not be able to reschedule missed conferences.
- Essay revision and cover letter: You will extensively revise your draft before submitting your final essay for a grade. Revisions will be due one week after the conferences by 5 pm.
- Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester, you will write a 2-3-page letter describing how your understanding of yourself as a writer has changed over the course of the semester. Your final portfolio consists of all the writing you have done over the course of the semester, including pre-drafts.

COURSE MECHANICS

Grading

Grades will be determined as follows:

Essay 1 Revision = 25%

Essay 2 Research Proposal = 5% (graded on completion)

Essay 2 Revision = 40%

Portfolio (including pre-drafts/cover letters/peer review) = 10%

Writing Community Membership = 20% (see below for breakdown)

Essay grades will be based on the quality of your final revised essay for each unit (see rubric in **Course Policies** handout). The final portfolio grade will reflect the body of work you have submitted (including pre-draft assignments, reflection letters, and cover letters for drafts and revisions), your growth over the semester, and your insight into your growth.

Writing Community Membership (20%)

Participation (10%)

You are a valued and integral part of our writing community and, as such, have important responsibilities to our class regarding on-time arrival and consistent participation. Your primary obligation is social in nature: your commitment is to our course community and to making it work well. Thus, you are expected to contribute to a community atmosphere that promotes a supportive exchange of insights and ideas. Before class, complete and puzzle over assigned reading and/or viewing and finish all homework and/or other assignments. Since much of our class time will be spent in class activities and workshops, your preparation is critical both to your success and the success of others. While in class, (1) volunteer meaningful comments and contribute to small group discussions to move discussions forward, (2) listen actively, (3) give useful and thoughtful input to members of our writing community, and (4) welcome all community members to share, learn, think, and grow. Each of you has something exceptional to contribute, and we look forward to learning from you.

Attendance (10%)

Your experience in our UWS writing community relies on collective attendance. Studies show that academic student success is highly correlated to attendance. One of the benefits of the UWS is its small class size, and this benefit is best realized when everybody regularly attends. That said, you are permitted to miss up to 5 classes. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Each additional absence beyond those permitted will lower your attendance grade by one full letter grade. For example, if you miss 6 classes, you'd earn a B for attendance. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course

changes from a classmate. It is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work.

Readings

Course readings include articles and book chapters, **which can be found as PDFs on the course website**. Although you do not need to purchase any textbooks, you may want to do some printing and should plan accordingly. If you are having difficulty paying for course materials, please see the **Free Resources** section of LATTE, and/or contact your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

Individual due dates are detailed in the **Weekly Schedule** handout.

Writing Assistance

In addition to our conferences, you are free to come see me during student hours. If you cannot attend student hours, please contact me to arrange another time to meet. I can also be reached with questions via email. I will typically respond to emails within a few hours, possibly excluding weekends. Please do not assume that emails sent after 9 pm will be received that evening.

If at any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, or editing revisions – you want extra help with your essays, the **University Writing Center** is an excellent resource. The Writing Center provides free one-on-one help with your essays (in persona and via Zoom). You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this service. Writing Center tutors are well trained and will work with you in sessions that you can schedule online:
<http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/writingcenter/index.html>

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In the University Writing Program, we welcome writers wherever they are in their writing and work with them as they discover how best to use their writing voice. We aim to push all students in their thinking and use of language while respecting each person's agency to express themselves in ways that reflect their choice of Englishes, languages, pronouns, stories, and perspectives.

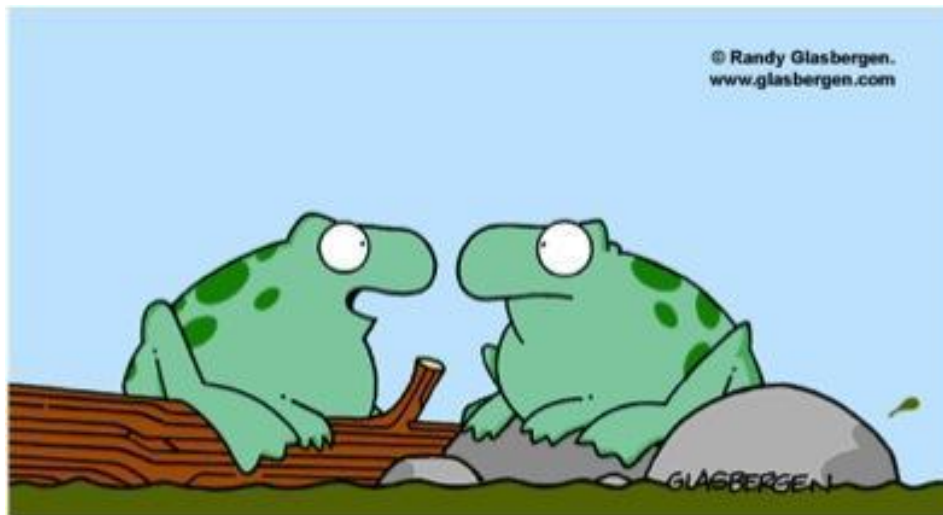
In this course, we will work together to ensure that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives will be well served. The diversity and identities which students bring will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. To this end, we will engage with materials and activities that respect and honor each student's unique experiences and perspectives. If anyone says something in class that makes you feel uncomfortable, angry, threatened, and/or excluded, please talk to me about it (anonymously, if you prefer). Furthermore, if you feel like your performance in this class

is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to contact me. I want to be a resource for you.

Ideally, science works to be objective. However, like many topics in academia, science can be subjective and is often built on privileged voices. I recognize that many of the ideas and readings for this course come from white, straight, cisgender men. More specifically, historically, biological discussions of attraction and reproduction have focused on heterocentric and male oriented perspectives. We will discuss these biases throughout the semester and challenges to these approaches are welcomed.

Student Support

Brandeis has many resources available to students. Please visit the sections on **Free Resources** and **Academic Advising, Counseling, and Student Services** on our course website for more details, and ask me if you have any questions.



“Looks aren’t everything. It’s what’s inside you that really matters. A biology teacher told me that.”

If We Move to Online Learning

If class is moved to Zoom (in the short- or long-term), it is possible to access Zoom via a cell phone, but a computer and reliable internet will be needed to fully engage with the course. You should have an up-to-date browser (to access LATTE) and Microsoft Office (available for free to all students online). Assignments should be submitted as word documents. Readings will be mostly PDFs.

Headphones can be helpful during Zoom classes for improved sound, but they are not required. If you are on campus, you may be able to use computer labs; it is also possible to borrow laptops, headphones, and other equipment, from the Brandeis library.

Contact me as soon as possible with technological problems. It can be helpful to take a screen capture of your problem.

NETiquette

A few things to keep in mind with a virtual classroom:

- When you participate in classes or conferences online via Zoom, you will be expected to behave professionally and to communicate to me and your peers in the same courteous manner that you would use in class. Discourteous and abusive behaviors – trolling, displaying inappropriate content, disruptive behavior, etc. – will not be tolerated.
- Video: If possible, try to keep your video on. This creates a greater sense of community. While I understand that there are reasons why having your video on will not be possible, I expect that students will try to do so when possible.
- Audio: Keep your audio **muted** during class. During discussions, please indicate that you would like to speak by using the “hand raise” function or a message in the chat. The instructor will manage the mute and unmute functions.
- Accessibility: Any students with accessibility concerns related to video calls should inform me as soon as possible at the start of the semester so these concerns can be addressed in a timely manner.
- Recording: Class discussions are meant to be an open space to work through ideas. Discussions can only be open, thoughtful, and respectful if we respect our mutual right to privacy and confidentiality. Posting recorded classes on social media is prohibited.
- Refrain from engaging with distractions. Consider closing web browsers, etc., so that email and social media are not a distraction. In-class materials will be available on LATTE in advance so that you can download needed handouts prior to class.
- Privacy: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) protects all student data and extends as well to the classroom experience. In accordance with federal guidelines regarding your privacy as well as the privacy of your classmates, only you are allowed to attend and to participate in this class.

