

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR: CONVERSATION  
FALL 2018



PROFESSOR AMY LETTER, M.F.A.

Email: [amy.letter@drake.edu](mailto:amy.letter@drake.edu)

Office: Howard Hall 329

Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 9-11:30am and by appointment

**FYS 016 (CRN 6486) – Conversation**

TR 12:30pm-1:45pm

Meredith 206

This is a new course which will focus on conversation, meaning both in-person, face-to-face, attentive but fundamentally unstructured communication, as well as the idea of a Great Conversation, a culture-wide process of writers, thinkers, and creators responding to one another and building on each other's insights.

For our purposes, “conversation” is both a practice and a subject, both a concept and a method. Conversation requires “being present” (mentally and physically), listening, being open to ideas, interrogating ideas to take them further, speaking appropriately and meaningfully – humanly and humanely – and many other things about which we will read about, and which we will determine for ourselves.

Sherry Turkle’s book *Reclaiming Conversation* is organized around the idea, taken from Thoreau’s *Walden*, of “one chair,” “two chairs,” and “three chairs” – one chair for solitude, two for friendship, and three for society. We will use this concept to structure almost every class meeting, spending some time in “collective solitude,” some time one-on-one in pairs, and some time in larger group conversations.

**Required Texts:**

*Reclaiming Conversation*, Sherry Turkle

*So You Want to Talk About Race?*, Ijeoma Oluo

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

Students in this course will...

- Gain knowledge from reading about conversation, especially in difficult circumstances (the digital age) and regarding fraught subjects (race).
- Consider conversation both as an oral activity that takes place in-person among individuals, *and* across time and space among members of a society, via writing.
- Gain wisdom from experiencing many conversations, as an active participant in frequent classroom discussions; especially by taking time to analyze those conversations as examples of our subject (metacognition: *thinking about thinking*).

- Write and present (speak publicly) on conversation in general, with a researched focus in the particular kinds of conversations relevant to individual's majors.

## ASSIGNMENTS & PERCENTAGE OF FINAL GRADE

Assignments: Your major assignments will be based on 1) understanding the assigned readings 2) participating in class conversations 3) researching the kinds of conversations most relevant to your major

### 50% - Course Essay in Two Parts

Essay Part I – An essay which explains, narrates, and describes your readings and experiences on conversation, especially conversations in the “digital age.” In this essay you will research the role of conversation in your major field (or a major that interests you; or I can suggest a field of study). The length of this essay will depend on how “concise” or “wordy” you are as a writer. I will be looking for ideas, not counting the words, but somewhere between 5-10 pages is typical.

Essay Part II – An essay which picks up where your midterm left off and continues your exploration, focusing a bit more on *difficult* or *delicate* or *dangerous* or *fraught* conversations, like conversations about race; this essay might suggest any tentative conclusions you may have come to – or perhaps explain why you believe no conclusions can yet be drawn.

### 50% - Attendance, Participation, Preparation, Metacognition, and “Presentation”

Half of your grade in this course will be based upon 1) reading the assigned pages attentively prior to class, 2) arriving on-time and 3) participating in our class conversations, and 4) creating a written record of your thoughts and observations each class period, which will be useful to you in constructing your essays. 5) Each student will be asked to speak informally on the readings and lead a whole-class conversation at least once, and this will be called “presentation.”

### Typical Class:

5 minutes welcome, attendance, etc.

5 minutes in silent conversation with yourself (you may write, but you do not have to)

10 minutes in conversation with one other

15 minutes in conversation with two or three others

20 minutes in conversation with the whole room

10 minutes writing about the day's conversations (writing is required)

10 minutes rounding up and reorienting: what's next?

} On some days we may do one or the other of these
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### Subjects of our conversations:

First Half: *Reclaiming Conversation*

Second Half: *So you want to talk about race*



#### Grade Scale For Assignments:

A+ = 100	A = 95	A- = 92	B+ = 88	B = 85	B- = 82
C+ = 78	C = 75	C- = 72	D+ = 68	D = 65	D- = 62
NG (no grade) = 0 unless revised; revision meeting required					

#### Grade Scale For Calculating Final Grade:

100-98 = A+	97-93 = A	92-90 = A-	89-88 = B+	87-83 = B	82-80 = B-
79-78 = C+	77-73 = C	72-70 = C-	69-68 = D+	67-63 = D	et cetera...

#### **Attendance**

Attendance: 0 Absences = 100%; 1 = 95%; 2 = 90%; 3 = 85%; (each add'l absence subtract 5%)

#### **Technology Policy**

In large part, we will study our own conversations. There is evidence to suggest that laptops and cell phones have deleterious effects on conversations. The devices in our pockets are designed, intentionally, to distract us as much as possible, because, simply, the makers of these devices profit more if we look at the devices more. Their methods for keeping eyeballs glancing back to the screen, for making hands reflexively reach for the devices, are sophisticated and effective, drawing from behavioral psychology, and are similar to the stimuli that contribute to gambling addiction and other compulsive behavior. This is a sorry effect for many reasons, including the consequences to conversations. For these reasons, we probably want to keep our technology as far away from us as possible during class. We can discuss what forms this could take.

#### **Other Important Information:**

Dept. of English Statement on Sensitive Classroom Materials: Your instructor will make appropriate accommodations for documented disabilities. If you have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and know that specific subjects elicit an uncontrollable emotional response, and you want advance warning about classroom material, please contact Michelle Laughlin, Student Disability Services coordinator, who will work with you to make your instructor aware of your request. Your instructor will then work with you to determine what the appropriate accommodation might be.

If you have not been diagnosed but find a certain topic so distressing that you are unable to perform academically, we encourage you to consult Ms. Laughlin; her office can refer you to the appropriate resource.

Advance warning is not always possible. Literature represents the full spectrum of human experience and no subject matter is off-limits in a literature, writing or film course. English faculty strive to create a classroom environment in which potentially volatile material can be viewed, read, discussed and written about in a thoughtful and mature manner and in which the perspectives of all participants are listened to and respected. Students may expect to experience a certain amount of productive discomfort when confronting

uncomfortable topics. Classrooms are not necessarily "safe spaces," but they can be spaces in which we support each other in confronting life's most difficult issues.

Accommodations: Students who require accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must contact Disability Services in Old Main 107 and arrange the necessary accommodations.

Late Assignments: Assignments are not accepted late without prior approval. Whatever your circumstances are, contact me and let me know what's going on; if we can make arrangements, we will. If we can't, you'll at least know exactly what the situation is.

Revisions: Writing may be revised for a higher grade; however, non-assigned revisions require the student arrange a meeting with me to discuss their intentions.

Emails: Contacting your college instructors is an adult semi-professional activity. Always write emails formally, using correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation; be clear and detailed about who you are and what you need; make your purpose apparent in the subject line; most importantly, be polite.

⚠ Plagiarism ⚠: All work submitted for a grade must be the original creative and intellectual work of the student who claims ownership; if the work includes the ideas or words of others, that fact must be clearly indicated within the work, and the work must provide ample information to allow readers to find the sources from which the ideas or words were taken. Plagiarism means presenting the **ideas or words** of others as though they were your own: because students are made aware of this, all cases of plagiarism are considered intentional. Plagiarism is *always* grounds for **failure of the course**.

Responsibility: The student is responsible for all information and material discussed in class, including class rules, department or university policies, and changes to the schedule or assignments. If forced to miss a class, it is the student's responsibility to obtain accurate information regarding what was missed.

## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 / August 28 and August 30

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 3-17***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 19-56***

WEEK 2 / September 4 and September 6

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 59-99***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 103-136***

WEEK 3 / September 11 and September 13

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 137-176***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 177-207***

WEEK 4 / September 18 and September 20

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 211-248***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 249-289***

WEEK 5 / September 25 and September 27

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 293-333***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION 337-362***

WEEK 6 / October 2 and October 4

**TUES: DRAFT OF PART I DUE \* IN CLASS FOR PEER REVIEW**

**THURS: PART I DUE \* CLASS OPTIONAL – COME WITH QUESTIONS**

WEEK 7 / October and October 11

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 1-22***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 23-52***

WEEK 8 / October 18

**TUES: FALL BREAK CLASS WILL NOT MEET**

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 53-82***

WEEK 9 / October 23

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 83-120***

**THURS: CLASS WILL NOT MEET**

WEEK 10 / October 30 and November 1

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 121-152***

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *SO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT RACE? 153-178***

WEEK 11 / November 6

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *So You Want to Talk About Race?* 179-200**

**THURS: CLASS WILL NOT MEET**

**WEEK 12 / November 13 and November 15**

**TUES: BEFORE CLASS READ *So You Want to Talk About Race?* 201-224**

**THURS: BEFORE CLASS READ *So You Want to Talk About Race?* 225-242**

**WEEK 13 / November 20**

**TUES: DRAFT OF PART II DUE \* IN CLASS FOR PEER REVIEW**

**THURS: THANKSGIVING**

**WEEK 14 / November 27 and November 29**

**TUES: PART II DUE \* CLASS OPTIONAL – COME WITH QUESTIONS**

**THURS: DAY OF BLESSED REST (YOU EARNED IT)**

**WEEK 15 / December 4 and December 6**

**ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS AND REVISIONS; REGULAR CLASS WILL NOT MEET**

**FINAL EXAM WEEK / December 10**

***This course has no final exam***