



Screenshot: Britney Spears' Instagram, August 2019

“GUT FEELINGS ARE GUARDIAN ANGELS”—ORIGIN UNKNOWN

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Office Hours: Zoom, by appointment

Class Information

Meeting place: Zoom (link on Canvas)

CRN: 19539

Section: 106

Meeting time: 7:30-8:45 PM M/W

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 📖 *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*—Roxane Gay
- 📖 *Heavy: An American Memoir*—Kiese Laymon
- 📖 *Shrill*—Lindy West, Aidy Bryant

Texts are available for purchase through the Cornell Bookstore, Amazon, &etc. TV episodes are available through the course reserve for this class on Canvas. Podcast episodes are available to stream through iTunes and Spotify. All other course readings are locatable online and on Canvas.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What does it mean to have a “gut feeling” about something? Our hunches or intuitions have often been dismissed as irrational, but scientists have also learned that the stomach has brain cells: our gut is literally our “second brain.” In this course we will explore what it means to think and know through our bodies. Why do we believe what we believe? How do sick and marginalized bodies feel and think? What do our guts tell us about gender, racial politics, disability, desire, and power? The texts in this course will encourage us to question conventional medical accounts of minds and bodies. In terms of your own writing, you will complete a personal essay, your own piece of non-fiction journalism, and produce podcast episodes. The process of crafting these responses will enable us to thoughtfully and critically read a text, respond to that text, support these responses with evidence, learn to revise our thinking, and, as this is an English FWS, to read these texts creatively and critically.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- 📖 Learn to close-read and analyze a variety of texts (print, film, and otherwise)
- 📖 Practice and test our abilities as writers in a number of different contexts and assignments—these will include in-class responses, weekly critical responses, group writing, and several revised projects
- 📖 Learn how to write ethically and with respect to the minds and ideas of others, avoiding plagiarism and other forms of intellectual and academic dishonesty
- 📖 Effectively organize a longer essay to produce a cohesive, polished argument
- 📖 Learn different modes of argumentation and provide appropriate and sufficient evidence for the claims we make
- 📖 Learn and identify the aspects of what constitutes a narrative—its common forms, tropes, and how these expectations may be subverted
- 📖 Enter into an ongoing conversation by engaging with primary and secondary research sources
- 📖 Establish standards for academic discourse and participation through in-class discussion, peer evaluation, and collaborative assignments

OUR CONTRACT:

In this class, I use of contract grading. This will likely be a departure from what you have been trained to think about grades and what they mean, what they purport to measure, and how they claim to reflect your abilities as thinkers, writers, and students. I think, shortly, that grades based on a product, rather than a process, are poor reflections of me as an instructor and of you all as students. When grades are de-prioritized as a learning objective, I find that students are more open to taking risks in their work, pursuing questions that may not provide an “assessable” result. This is good—this is the kind of work that will actually make you better writers and thinkers. It also makes the class collaboration more engaging and, dare I say, even fun. So, when you enroll in this course and want to pass, you enter into an exchange with me characterized by clear expectations and hopefully a more democratic exchange of ideas. On my side of the agreement, I promise to do the following:

- 📖 I will make the requirements for each assignment clear and respond clearly to any questions you may have about my expectations
- 📖 I will document all due dates clearly and consistently
- 📖 I will be present and committed to building a generative, supportive classroom dynamic
- 📖 I will provide you with written and/or oral feedback that engages with your work respectfully, purposefully, and rigorously
- 📖 I will not be a fascist about anything because fascism is bad

THE BASICS, OR TERMS OF OUR AGREEMENT:

In order to pass this class to your and my satisfaction, your efforts must reflect a willingness to engage with class material and requirements at a level consistent with your own educational goals. In other words, you are your result, and I meet that performance in my own

responses to your work. To break this down so you know what you need to do on your end:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

You cannot expect to succeed in this class without attending regularly and participating in class (either individually or in groups). To that effect, I will allow you two absences, no explanations necessary, as I recognize that life is messy and unpredictable. Absences in excess of this number will lower your final grade—more than five will result in failure of the class. If you miss more than three class meetings, it will lower your grade significantly (half a letter grade). You must attend conferences—failure to do so will qualify as two absences. Participation will be assessed based on your contributions to in-class discussions and group work in addition to your preparedness for class—including coming to class with all assigned work finished and all reading completed. When online reading is required, you will be expected to have annotated copies ready on your laptop or tablet, as we will be using them in class. If you arrive to class more than fifteen minutes late, you will be considered absent. If you must miss class due to participation in a university-sponsored athletic event, religious observances, or an emergency, please contact me in advance to be certain of my requirements for make-up work. Make-up work will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Homework (any assignments not listed as an essay or part of an essay) is figured into this aspect of the course, as well. Every semester you get two care days: you determine when you need a day off, you take that day off no questions asked, no notice from you to me required. These days will not affect your attendance agreement. Get your nails done. Get centered and back in your lane. Eat some stew. Moisturize. Unbother yourself.

WRITTEN WORK, OR THE “W” IN “FWS”:

You agree to complete all work listed in this syllabus. Written work for this course will consist of a personal essay, your own piece of non-fiction journalism, a review of a TV episode, and a researched, scripted, and recorded podcast episode. For each project, you will develop a central argumentative claim and provide sufficient evidence to support that central claim, with an emphasis on revision. Of these four projects, three will undergo extensive revision. Digital files of every project should be submitted (in first and final draft) to Canvas. For workshopping, you should be prepared to respond to your peers’ drafts. All essays must be uploaded to Canvas on or before the time designated on your assignment sheet, the day they are due.

Writing projects: Expectations for each writing assignment will be made explicit on the according assignment sheets—look to your assignment sheets for answers before emailing me, I *beg* of you. The essays need to be typed, formatted, and documented according to MLA standards for written work. Due dates are made explicit in the syllabus and on assignment sheets. Failure to turn in any of the written assignments will affect your contractual standing significantly, and you cannot pass this class if you do not turn in first *and* final drafts of *each* essay. We will be using Canvas for all essay and project file submissions.

Workshops: You will be required to workshop your rough draft of your work with your peers. A workshop will take place the day your draft is due and is a required aspect of the drafting process. As such, workshopping this draft will figure into your contracted agreement for the essay as a whole—it’s really important to make peer review sessions.

Conferences: You will be expected to attend two 20-minute conferences throughout the course of the semester to discuss ongoing writing assignments and your work in class. These will be held during the ninth and thirteenth weeks of the course. Sign-ups will be circulated the week before.

Late work: You agree to turn in work on time. All work should be completed by the due dates made explicit in this syllabus and on your assignment sheets. As a general rule, I do not accept late work—submitting work on time is a large part of fulfilling your end of our contract. It is your responsibility to have all materials ready for each class meeting. You *must* turn in your first draft. ***I will not evaluate a final essay that did not go through the drafting process, and I will not assess a final essay if you did not turn in a first draft.*** If you are ill or need to miss class the day any written work is due, you must email the work to me before the class meets. I am open to granting extensions, but you need to contact me *at least 48 hours* before the final due date. If you miss a workshop, you will be required to show me that each member of your peer group has received feedback from you. In the event of something significant (e.g. prolonged or sudden family illness, emergencies, emergency vet visit because your cat started wheezing suddenly only find out that he does so because he wants you to carry him up the stairs like the little baby man he is, etc), please contact me and we will proceed appropriately.

OUTLINE OF LETTER BREAKDOWNS:

Letter	# of Allowed Absences	# of Late Assignments	# of Missed Peer Reviews	# of Missed Conferences	# of Missed Assignments
A	2	1	0	0	0
B	2	2	0	0	0
C	3	3	1	1	2
D	3	4	2	2	3 or more
F	4 or more	5	3	2	3 or more

- ☛ **An A semester** will include all of the elements and specifications required of a B semester, but with pronounced excellence in written work. There will be evidence of a deep and thorough engagement with assignments and subject matter throughout the term. Your in-class participation has been consistent, topical and productive, and you will have demonstrated a genuine interest in learning from the class and your classmates.
- ☛ **A B semester** will include final written work of satisfactory quality, including participation, depth, and thoroughness in your contributions to your workshop group and the class as a whole. You attended all workshops and conferences and enthusiastically participated in all aspects of the writing process, from invention to preliminary drafts culminating in a thoroughly revised, well-developed final draft that has been submitted in accordance to set deadlines. You have also completed all homework assignments on time and in accordance with assigned requirements. Additionally, you will have completed each component part of your assignments in a timely and satisfactory manner.
- ☛ **A C semester** will include a mix of satisfactory and unsatisfactory quality in written work and disjointed focus throughout the writing process, including first and final drafts of your essays and their component parts. Your in-class participation is sporadic.

📌 **A D semester** (or below) will include written work of unsatisfactory quality, a marked lack of participation, and an unsatisfactory engagement or a failure to engage with the writing process.

HOUSEKEEPING:

Office hours and contacting me: My office hours are Wednesdays from 6 PM to 7:00 PM in Goldwin Smith 340. I am also open to making appointments with students who have scheduling conflicts with my posted hours, though we may need to meet over Zoom. My email address is mo433@cornell.edu. This is the best way to contact me. As a rule, however, I do not check my email after six in the evenings during the week, and do so less frequently over the weekend. Please allow for 24 hours to respond to you before you send a follow-up email.

A note on incompletes: Because this course is collaborative and based heavily upon process and revision, turning in a significant portion of work after the end of the semester is difficult for you and for me. In other words, I will not grant requests for incompletes except for in very rare circumstances. As always, however, come talk to me.

A note on plagiarism: I expect all work turned in to be the original work of each student. Do not submit work that is not your own in both conception and execution. Do not submit work that was completed for another class. Plagiarism in this class is grounds for immediate failure, and if it becomes a problem also grounds for expulsion from the university. If you have questions about proper documentation and citation methods, please see me or set up an appointment with a consultant in the Writing Center.

Technology policy: Excessive phone use in my class is more of an annoyance than it is productive, so please refrain from doing so. We will be spending substantial time every class on group work and workshopping, so I encourage you to use your laptops and tablets for note-taking, writing, and in-class revisions. If they become a problem, however (and I can always tell if they do), I reserve the right to ask that they be put away for any given class period. Also: I do not allow photographs to be taken in my classroom unless I am aware that the photo is being taken and I have given my explicit permission for you to do so. I do not allow video recordings in my class to that same effect. It's a little creepy, even if it's meant to be endearing/for the Vine (or tiktok sheeeeeesh, RIP Vine (crying emoji)).

Disability statement: Please see me during the first week of class if you have a documented disability and I will be happy to make accommodations. Your access in this course is important and a **priority** for me. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and/or SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS and keep me apprised of anything that comes up for you. SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 607-254-4545, sds@cornell.edu.

Title IX statement: As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination with a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Victim Advocacy Program here at Cornell, 607-255-1212, victimadvocate@cornell.edu.

Basic Needs Security: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable me to direct you towards any resources that I may possess.

A note on content: Please note that the texts we will be reading and watching contain content some might find controversial or upsetting, including explicit language, violence, and sexual content. If you are concerned that such material might prevent you from completing the course, you might want to reconsider your enrollment in this class. I do not assign texts that are violent for the sake of creating a spectacle, nor do I assign content without thinking for quite some time about why the intellectual, analytical, and creative merits of a text are, by necessity, elaborated through violent actions and occasionally disturbing content. In other words, I am not and will never assign content to traumatize or for shock value. Furthermore, for this course particularly, many of the texts and images we examine will directly confront eating disorders and body size. There will be numbers involved in this endeavor in the form of statistics, and several readings reference weight and clothing sizes. If this will be difficult for you, *please see me*.

Cornell Writing Centers: The Cornell Writing Centers (WC) provide support for individuals at any stage of the writing process. It is a free resource available to everyone on campus—faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students—for nearly any kind of writing project: applications, presentations, lab reports, essays, papers, and more. Tutors (trained undergraduate and graduate students) serve as responsive listeners and readers who can address questions about the writing process or about particular pieces of writing. They can also consider questions of confidence, critical reading, analytic thought, and imagination. Writing tutors also have experience working with non-native speakers of English. During the academic year, the WC are open Mondays through Thursdays from 3:30 – 5:30pm (Mann Library & Rockefeller Hall 178) and Sundays through Thursdays from 7:00 – 10:00pm (Olin library Room 403; Uris Library Room 108; Tatkon Center Room 3343; Flora Rose 110). Writers can schedule appointments or drop in at a convenient time. For more information or to schedule an appointment, go to: <https://cornell.mywconline.net/>

COVID-19 Contingency: The university has not released clear guidelines for instructors in the event we are ill, or in the event a critical mass of students is out due to illness. I will try to the very utmost of my ability to ensure that you have access to this course if you get sick, and to ensure a continuance of instruction if I fall ill. We may, however, have to move to a different instruction modality very quickly, so if this comes to pass, I will ask for your patience as I recalibrate our syllabus, assignments, and classroom expectations in order to account for this shift, and for the attendant difficulties such a shift will inevitably occasion. ***IMPORTANT: Please, please do***

not come to class if you have symptoms of COVID-19, have been exposed to someone who is waiting on test results or has tested positive, or if you yourself are waiting for results or have tested positive. Nothing in this class is more important than you not making yourself sicker or infecting me and your classmates. **COVID-related absences will not affect your final grade.** Please, please stay home and stay in communication with me.

Essay Assignments and Due Dates:

- Essay #1: 2 page ungraded autobiographical(ish) response | Due in Canvas: Sunday, September 5th
- Essay #2: 2 page opinion essay | Draft due in Canvas: Wednesday, September 22nd | Final Due in Canvas: Sunday, September 26th
- Essay #3: 3 page short story analysis | Draft due in Canvas: Monday, October 25th | Final due in Canvas: Sunday, October 31st
- Essay #4: 8 page public essay | Proposal due in Canvas: Friday, November 10th | Draft due in Canvas: Monday, November 22nd | Final due in Canvas: Sunday, December 5th
- Essay #5: Podcast script and essay | Final due in Canvas: Wednesday, December 15th

This syllabus is subject to change and I may revisit due dates, assignment requirements, or reading schedules based on adjustments to workloads or to allow more time for us to spend on different aspects of our learning process.

COURSE CALENDAR

Macronutrients

📅 Week One

- Monday 8/30: Introductions; **essay #1 assigned**
- Wednesday 9/1: *Scientific American* article, “Gut Feelings”; Crawford, “Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life”; *Maintenance Phase* podcast episode, “The Body Mass Index” (listen on Spotify or Apple Podcasts)

📅 Week Two

- Monday 9/6: No Class, Labor Day
- Wednesday 9/8: No Class, Holiday

📅 Week Three

- Monday 9/13: Foucault, “Preface” and “Looking and Seeing”
- Wednesday 9/15: Sontag, “Illness as Metaphor”; in-class reading; **essay #2 assigned**

📅 Week Four:

- Monday 9/20: Caldwell, “Body Identity Development”; Machado, “Unruly, Adjective”
- Wednesday 9/22: Peer review

Mutinous Bellies

📅 Week Five:

- Monday 9/27: Clare (2 chapters); Mingus, “Re-framing” (link on Canvas)
- Wednesday 9/29: McMilliam Cottom, “In the Name of Beauty”; Irby, “Skin Rashes and Arthritis,” “The Many Varieties of Hospital Broth”

Hungry Bellies

📅 Week Six:

- Monday 10/4: Caldwell continued
- Wednesday 10/6: Boland, “Anorexic,” O’Reilly, “Thin,” Wilson, “Hunger”

📅 Week Seven:

- Monday 10/11: No class, Fall Break
- Wednesday 10/13: O’Reilly continued; Machado, “Eight Bites”; **essay #3 assigned**

📅 Week Eight:

- Monday 10/18: Machado, continued
- Wednesday 10/20: Gay, *Hunger*, Parts 1-3

📅 Week Nine: Conferences

- Monday 10/25: Peer review
- Wednesday 10/27: No class, conferences