WRIT 150

Issues in Law & Social Justice
Dr. Patricia Taylor

Online, 4 Credits, Fall 2020
Section 64500: TTh 11:00-12:20
Section 64650: TTh 12:30-1:50

Email: ptaylor7@usc.edu
Office Hours: T/Th 2:00-3:00PM & by appt.
Sign-ups: https://bit.ly/2OTJtQY
Zoom Room: http://rb.gy/9ys8pk

Introduction

Hi! I'm Dr. Taylor, and I'm looking forward to getting to know all of you this semester. I've been teaching writing for 15 years, but this is just my second year at USC. Please take some time to watch my introductory video on our course Blackboard, and make an introduction of your own!

Course Description

Writing 150 introduces the techniques good writers need to produce college-level academic writing. We will focus on strengthening your ability to interpret and critique information from a variety of sources and to employ that information to advance your own argumentative positions. At the conclusion of the semester, you should be able to compose an essay that explores issues and persuades through reasoned analysis, exhibits sound logic and solid support, incorporates outside sources to advance your own argument, and expresses ideas clearly and concisely.

However, writing is not merely about presenting a fully formed final product. As author Ta-Nehisi Coates once wrote, "the best part of writing is not the communication of knowledge to other people, but the acquisition and synthesizing of knowledge for oneself." We will echo Coates, and writers like him, who value the writing process as a form of inquiry and self-education.

Our work this semester will also encourage you to develop your thinking as it relates to our course theme. As the United States has seen demonstrated in vivid form this summer, law and justice are not always the same thing—sometimes, our laws create the conditions for injustice. All of our projects will advance your ability to think through and write about these issues:

- In the first project, you will examine the question of what individuals may ethically do to protest or challenge unjust laws or systems.
- The second project will help us tackle the question of how *writing* may help intercede in problems of injustice, through a close examination of the rhetoric of two important authors on the topic of mass incarceration.
- In your third project, you will choose a social justice topic to research and develop a deep understanding of the arguments and issues that concern all the participants in the conversation about that issue.
- In your fourth project, you will develop your own argument or proposal for addressing the issues from project three.

Because issues of justice are so complex, immediately relevant to many people's lives, and at times deeply contentious, this class will require your commitment to generous listening, careful speaking, and an open mind.

The rest of this syllabus will help you understand the details of what will be expected of you, and how you can succeed in this class this semester!

WRIT 150 Syllabus

Course Materials

Required Textbooks
Writing 150 Coursebook (available only from the USC Bookstore)

Recommended Textbooks
Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*
Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
Joseph Harris, *Rewriting*
(Selections from all three texts will be available as PDFs from our course sites, but many students report that hard copies make for a better learning experience.)

Required Materials
Laptop/tablet with webcam and mic
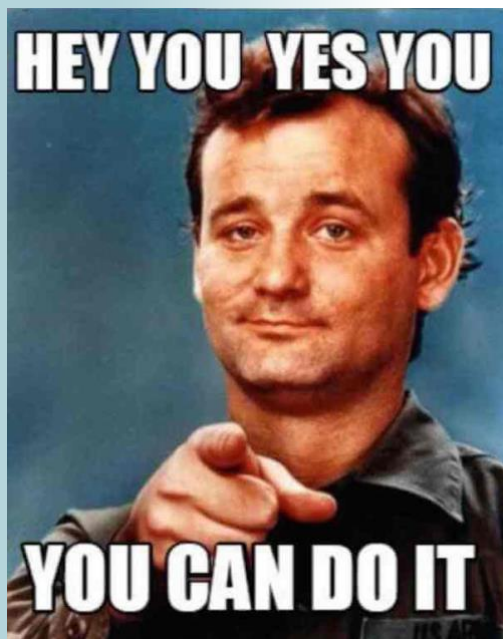Reliable internet access
Notebook and pen or pencil
(If you do not have access to the first two items, please let me know at any point during the semester.)

Resources
How To Succeed in Online Classes (aimed specifically at Chemistry students during the Pandemic, but really great advice for everyone)

Tips for Learning During Disruption

Five Keys to Online Success

What Being Online Means
When USC made the decision to go online for the fall semester, faculty in the Writing Program were asked to design courses that would replicate as much of the experience of a face-to-face class as possible. This means that our classes include substantial synchronous teaching, where the students and faculty are online at the same time, in the same online space. For this reason, our classes will continue to meet at the same time listed in the course schedule for most class sessions. However, there will also be times when we are asynchronous, meaning you will be working on your own.

In weekly announcements I will let you know what to expect from each class session. We will use the following platforms (and perhaps others) for a variety of synchronous and asynchronous work:

1. **Blackboard.** This is the central learning management system for the university, and we will use it for class announcements, submitting work, getting feedback, and do asynchronous discussions.
2. **Zoom.** You've probably all used Zoom at this point. Many of our synchronous class discussions and workshops will take place either with our class of 15, or in smaller break out rooms. You must use your USC account to log-in to have full access to the feature we will be using.
3. **Perusall.** This is a text-based social annotation program. We will hold some text-based discussions about readings on this platform. Sometimes we will use this for asynchronous work (you read whenever you like and post comments as you read), and other times we will use it as a semi-synchronous option (we all are on it at the same time posting responses to one another).
4. **Google Apps.** Everyone has a Google account through USC. We will use Google Meet as a back-up for Zoom, and Google Drive for sharing work for peer review.

Motivation and Engagement
As you are probably already aware, online classes pose a special problem for active engagement. It's easy to turn off your camera when the class is in Zoom and passively watch others. It's even easier to get distracted by a text message from a friend when you are supposed to be watching a lecture online than when you are in person. To the extent that I can, I am designing our class sessions to mitigate these issues--I'll try and keep lectures short, discussions moving, and make as many opportunities for active participation from everyone as I can. But the success will depend more on you and your classmates than on me: I cannot force participation and engagement. **I need your full commitment for this class to succeed.**

To this end, I ask you to commit to the following:

1. **Be active in every session, not just present.** Come prepared to all classes, participate in all class activities, stay engaged and focused. Dedicate a space for classwork if you can. Set yourself up for learning.
2. **Be willing to collaborate and help others learn.** This class will work best if you see yourself as not just *receiving* an education, but helping others get the benefit of working with you. Build relationships, be kind, and help each other.
3. **Seek help**—from me, from your advisor, from your classmates, from university support systems—if you are struggling to stay engaged and self-motivated in the course.

WRIT 150 Syllabus

Teaching Philosophy

One of the greatest hindrances to a student's active learning can be fear of failure: fear of looking silly or stupid in front of a classmate or faculty member, fear of not getting a good grade on a project, fear of what one's family or friends might think. For some students, this fear means they choose not to take risks, always playing it safe. For others, it can be crippling: they might not turn work in because it isn't as good as they think it should be, or they may not even try to complete the work because they are afraid it may prove they aren't good enough.

I believe that the ability to fail well is an important skill, perhaps even more important than doing something "right" the first time. If we fail because we took important risks, or are in the process of learning something difficult, then even large failures can be more valuable than superficial success. Edward Burger argues that "individuals need to embrace the realization that taking risks and failing are often the essential moves necessary to bring clarity, understanding, and innovation." Embracing failure, he writes, can result in "a mind enlivened by curiosity and the intellectual audacity to take risks and create new ideas, a mind that sees a world of unlimited possibilities." As a teacher, my job is to provide you with opportunities to fail well so you see those possibilities and learn as much as you can. I value curiosity, risk taking, persistence, integrity, revision, and self-awareness more than simply meeting minimum requirements.

However, there are different types of failure, and they are not all equally valuable. High quality failure requires care and effort before, and a willingness to learn afterwards. Low quality failure can come from carelessness, taking harmful shortcuts, excessive procrastination, refusing to take responsibility for one's actions, or ignoring constructive criticism. My goal as a teacher is to try and provide room for high quality failures and accountability for low quality failures.

FAILURE IS ONLY THE OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN AGAIN. ONLY THIS TIME, MORE WISELY

Grading Contract

Because I value high quality failure but also want to provide accountability for low quality failures, our class this semester is participating in a study run by the USC Writing Program on grading contracts. This contract guarantees a "B" grade for any student who completes all the labor for the class, puts in a good faith effort on all assignments and in class participation, and who behaves responsibly in all other respects. Higher grades can be earned through exceptional work on the final portfolio, and lower grades are determined by the number of lapses in work or responsibility according to the chart below.

Grade	Absences	Late Essays (Missing Essays)	Late Ancillary Assignments	Academic Responsibility
B or higher	0-2	None	0-2	0-2
B-	3		3	3
C+		1	4	4
C	4		5	5
C-		2	6	6
D+	5		7	7
D		3 (1)	8	8
F	6	4 (2)	9	9

A "B+" or higher grade can be earned by meeting all of the requirements for a B on the grading contract *and* through exceptional quality in your final portfolio, with 70% of your grade coming from the fourth major writing project and 30% from the final portfolio. **Penalties are cumulative.** If you have 3 lapses in academic responsibility and 1 late essay, your final grade will be a C-, or if you have 4 absences, 3 late ancillaries, and 3 lapses in academic responsibility, your grade will be a D+. These penalties are always applied on a starting point of a B grade. **There will be ways to fix some penalties—see the next page!**

Attendance and Absences

Because this class is both a workshop on writing and a seminar on critical reasoning, it depends on your consistent attendance as well as your active engagement and participation. One of my greatest pleasures as a teacher is seeing and hearing your minds at work during class, and your participation is essential for much of the work of the class—but participation is impossible if you are not present. Your attendance at every class session is thus mandatory.

However, "attendance" will be defined differently because we are online. When we are on Zoom, simply logging in will not be sufficient; you must answer the roll call question, and participate in any break-out sessions at a minimum. When we are engaged in asynchronous work, your completion of certain assignments will stand in for your attendance.

According to the contract, you can have two "free" absences, additional absences will result in grade penalties, and after six you will not be able to pass the class. That said, I realize there are instances when a third absence is unavoidable. For this reason, I offer attendance make-ups to void the penalty on the contract.

You may "make up" 2 additional absences under the following conditions:
1. You have a demonstrated need (illness, family emergency, etc.),
2. You contact me before the class in question begins, and
3. You complete an assignment in place of the class session.

Generally speaking, these make-ups will be made available only for synchronous sessions because asynchronous sessions already allow flexibility for completion. These make-ups can only erase the penalty for an individual absence, not the fact of the absence itself. If you use your two free absences, and make-up two additional absences, a fifth absence still has the full penalty of a fifth absence.

Extensions

While late work can result in penalties, I will give extensions in some circumstances. If you are concerned about your ability to meet a deadline, please e-mail me with an explanation and a request for a specific new deadline, which I will either approve, modify, or deny. While I might tentatively approve an extension verbally, it is not official until I respond to a written e-mail request.

Remember that turning in an incomplete or imperfect project is better than turning in a late paper, which in turn is better than turning in nothing. Turning in nothing is 2 letter grades dropped; turning in a late paper is only 2/3 of a letter grade drop; turning in work that doesn't quite meet standards is considered a lapse of academic responsibility and won't result in a lowered grade unless you have multiple breaches. I reserve the entire right to determine whether a submission is evidence of sufficient effort to be considered an acceptable paper, a lapse in academic responsibility, or simply proof that a paper is underway and will be turned in late.

Get Out of Jail Free Card

Each student may have one additional "Get out of Jail Free" card to use in the event that the terms of the contract are violated. It can erase one infraction against the contract. I will apply it automatically at the end of the semester to whatever individual infraction is causing the greatest harm to your grade.
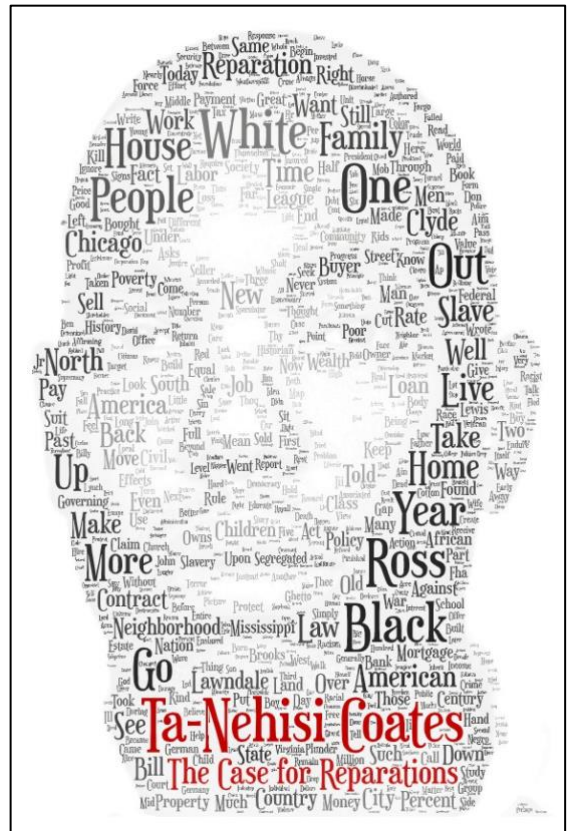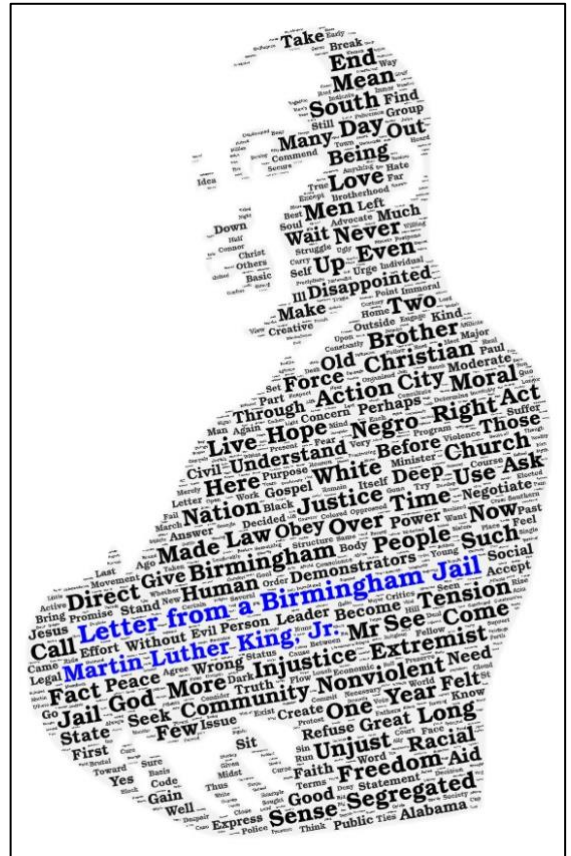
WRIT 150 Syllabus

On Reading

Most of us read primarily to either absorb information, or be ourselves absorbed into a story. This is valuable and powerful—but it's not what inherently makes a good writer. Those who want to improve their writing skills need to read a bit differently: reading carefully and with an eye towards the choices individual writers make.

Most of our reading this semester will be to this end: we will read them not merely or even primarily for the content they offer, but to think about how and why the author presented their content and arguments in the ways they do. This is a difficult transition for some students. As we progress through the semester, we will work on moving from absorbing information and ideas to considering the work authors do as models for our own work.

As such, your reading will need to become more careful and focused. We will discuss specific strategies for reading, but you will need especially be prepared to read actively, not passively. To read actively means doing more than passing your eyes over the text, instead also thinking about and questioning what the text says, and why it says it the way it does.

It is especially important that you annotate the text with your thoughts. Some annotations will be required when we use Perusall, but you will also want to annotate a text for yourself—finding ways to put your own summaries, questions, and notations in the margins of the text.

Academic Responsibility

Academic responsibility is a broad category that encompasses any number of areas where your effort goes a long way to helping your own and your classmates' learning, but where low quality failures are common. Positive answers indicate a fulfillment of academic responsibility; negative answers indicate a lapse in academic responsibility.

1. **Preparation for Class**
   a. Do you come to classes—synchronous or asynchronous—having completed any readings or requested preparation?
2. **Behavior in Class**
   a. Do you arrive on time? If you are late to class, or had to leave early, did you send me an e-mail so I can update your status for the class?
   b. Do you participate in every class? (This can include volunteering to respond to questions, asking questions, working collaboratively in pairs or small groups, etc.) Conversely, do you avoid dominating class discussion by making sure everyone else has room to speak?
   c. Are you civil and respectful in class or on class discussion boards? (You are welcomed and encouraged to disagree with other people's positions, but please do so civilly; avoid using derogatory or insulting language, ad hominem attacks, etc.)
3. **Comportment in individual conferences**
   a. Do you arrive on time to scheduled conferences?
   b. Do you come prepared with a copy of the assignment and a way to take notes?
   c. Are you thoughtful and responsive to feedback?
4. **Effort on assignments**
   a. Was the assignment turned in? (Ancillaries that are not turned in at all are considered both late *and* a lapse in academic responsibility.
   b. Was the assignment complete?
   c. Does the assignment represent a good faith effort to meet the prompt and its requirements, including things like topic, word count, formatting, proofreading, and so forth?
   d. Is the assignment your own work, original to this class, with all sources cited?

This list is not necessarily comprehensive, but it should give you a general sense of what the expectations for your behavior are.
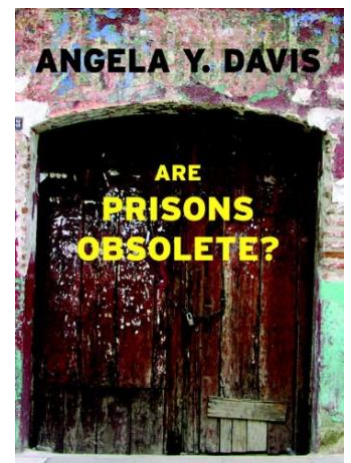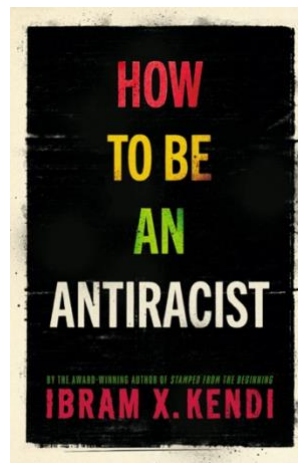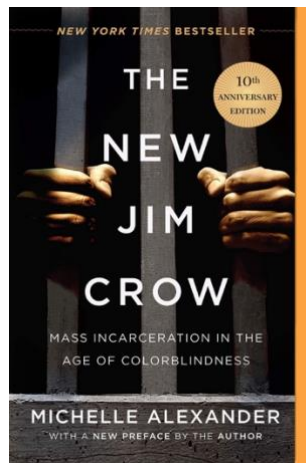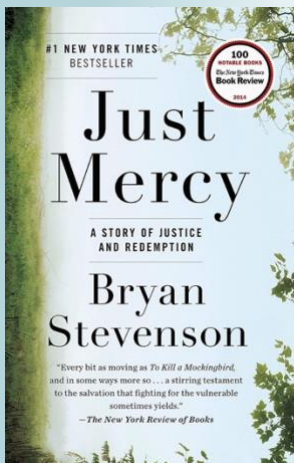
Turning in Work

All assignments must be submitted via Blackboard by 10AM on the due date unless otherwise noted in the course schedule or on the assignment sheet. While I will not comment on assignments that are turned in by e-mail or hardcopy, if you have technical difficulties with Blackboard, these can serve as placeholders until the Blackboard issues are resolved.

Word Counts: While most assignments have word count recommendations, these are not hard minimums or maximums. I assess your work on the intellectual and rhetorical work you do rather than on length requirements. If you are more than a few words over or under, the main concern is whether you have properly understood the intellectual and rhetorical tasks set for you.

File Formats: Please title your file name with your last name, first name, assignment title, and extension (e.g., Stark, Tony, AWA10.docx). If you do not use Word, make sure to export your file to a .docx or Word document because Blackboard does not read .pages, .gdoc, or certain other file formats. Anything turned in under an unreadable format will receive a 0.

Page Format: Make sure your papers are formatted according to MLA style guidelines.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page (but not in the header), list your name, the professor's name, the course, and the date.
- Center the title. Do not underline, italicize, re-size, or place your title in quotation marks. Write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space and the page number. Number all pages consecutively, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Everything should be double spaced, but with no extra space between paragraphs. Paragraphs should be indented ½ inch.

Some ancillary work, like outlines or charts, may be single spaced but should follow all other guidelines.

"The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is the nation's first memorial to the legacy of enslaved black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence. Work on the memorial began in 2010 when EJI staff began investigating thousands of racial terror lynchings in the American South, many of which had never been documented." Equal Justice Initiative.

Conferences

Much of this course will be tailored to your individual needs as a writer. This will be accomplished by regular one-on-one conferences with me, both required and optional. My regular office hours will be T/Th from 2:30-3:30 PM on Zoom, and You can reserve a 15-minute timeslot in advance at https://bit.ly/2OTJtQY.

I am available for optional conferences at other times by appointment; if you cannot attend currently scheduled office hours, send me an e-mail with your schedule of availability for 2-3 consecutive business days and I will do my best to find a time to meet with you.

For required individual conferences, you will need to:

1. Sign up for the meeting using the Office Hours link above
2. Have a copy of your essay, either printed or electronic, to reference during the conference
3. Come with questions about how you can improve your work, and
4. Be prepared to take notes.

During the meeting, we will discuss the different avenues for improving your work. **Note: missing a required conference without rescheduling will be considered an absence that cannot be made up.**

Email

I try and answer any questions via e-mail within 24 hours during the work week unless there are exceptional circumstances. I will often respond over the weekend, but usually not as quickly. I do not usually comment on whole projects outside of office hours or the normal class revision and grading process, but I am happy to look at one or two small pieces of a project if you provide a particular focus for my comments. For example, if you send me a polite e-mail with a draft of an introduction asking if you have clearly established your argument, I'd be happy to provide feedback by e-mail.

Feedback and Record Keeping

All assignments will receive a grade out of 4 on Blackboard for record keeping purposes:

- 4: the assignment is on time and meets the requirements
- 3: the assignment is late but meets the minimum requirements
- 2: the assignment is on time but does not meet assignment requirements,
- 1: the assignment is late and does not meet requirements
- 0: the assignment was not turned in

These are not relative or additive values, only a way to keep track of the penalties for the grading contract in a way that Blackboard can process.

The final papers in each of the first three units (WP 1, 2, and 3) will receive written comments (usually both marginal comments on specific elements as well as a paragraph or two of overall written feedback) as well as a number indicating the quality of the paper:

- 1: an excellent piece of work with only minor surface areas needing revision (equivalent to an A or high B)
- 2: a solid piece of work with one or two substantive areas that need revision (equivalent to a B or high C)
- 3: meets the minimum standards in most areas but needs holistic revision (equivalent to a C or high D)
- 4: does not meet the minimum requirements in multiple areas, and/or constitutes a breach of academic responsibility (equivalent to a D or F).

These numbers are merely for your own reference, and will be reported to you within the comments, rather than within the gradebook. I aim to grade or comment on short assignments within 72 hours of the due date, and major writing projects within two weeks.

During the semester other people will also be reading your work and providing feedback and/or grades. When I share your work with the class for critique the purpose will always be with the intent of helping you and others improve, never to shame you. Other faculty will also read some of your work (they will co-grade your fourth paper, for example). If you have any concerns about this, please discuss it with me as soon as possible.

Pax Ahimsa Gethen, "People Protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline." 15 Nov. 2016. CC-BY-SA. Wikimedia.

Academic Integrity

In academic writing, we regularly build on the ideas and texts of others. However, when we use another person's ideas, language, or syntax—whether directly, in summary, or in paraphrase—we must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it with a standard form of academic citation. Failing to do so is plagiarism. Plagiarism on assignments prior to the final portfolio will be considered either a "late" or "missing" assignment for the purposes of the grading contract, depending on the severity of the plagiarism. Plagiarism in the final portfolio will result in failure for the course, and the issue will be referred to the Associate Director of the Writing Program and to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.

If you have questions about using sources during the semester, you can consult the *Writing 150 Coursebook* (pages 97-127), as well as visit me during office hours. You can also visit the Writing Center, the Purdue OWL website, or Harvard's online guide to using sources. If you are ever tempted to plagiarize because of stress or lack of time, talk to me first so I can help. Don't let stress tarnish your record.

For more on the University policy on academic misconduct, see the Student Code, Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" and USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards Section 13, "Academic Integrity".

You commit plagiarism if you do ANY of the following:
- Use the internet or another source to "get ideas" that you use without citing
- "Cut and paste" or modify and include text, images, or sound in a project without citing
- Put another person's ideas "in your own words" without documenting the source.
- Submit a project created by someone else, including a tutor, while claiming to be the author.
- Submit a project created in whole or part for another course (including high school) without the permission of both instructors.
- Take another person's expressions—a word, phrase, or longer passage—without telling your reader what has been done. This is considered plagiarism even when your own ideas are being expressed.

Writing Center

The USC Writing Center is open to all students of the University and offers free consultations for any type of writing assignment. It is a terrific resource, and you are highly encouraged to visit the center throughout the semester for any additional guidance on the assignments for this course or for any other course. To make an appointment, create an account through their online system. Be sure when you attend your online conference that you have a copy of the relevant assignment sheet and your draft that you can send to your consultant, and be prepared with specific questions or issues that you would like to work on.

Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call. Free, confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call. Free, confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298. Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. Use this website to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776. Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/ interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710.Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101. Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call. Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call Non-emergency assistance or information.