

Marsha McSpadden
mlmcspadding@bama.ua.edu
103 Proposal

The Art of the American Spectacle: A look at how “spectacle” has evolved and shaped American culture.

Objectives

By the end of this course, students should:

- Understand that writing is a process of prewriting, drafting, and revising.
- Collaborate productively with classmates and the instructor.
- Analyze and summarize readings for rhetorical strategies.
- Understand how writing strategies are used for different audiences and purposes.
- Be prepared to enter academic discussions and complete academic writing assignments.
- Understand the elements of formal argumentation.
- Understand the basics of research and citation.
- Students will read and evaluate material critically, analyze and summarize points of view and assumptions, and synthesize sources for researched arguments.
- Demonstrate proficient use of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Unit One: Sideshow. In this unit, we’ll look at the historical and cultural evolution of the spectacle. Salem witch trials. Carnival midways. Parades. Riots. Sporting events. Flash mobs. How did the business of “otherness” become culturally desirable? How does the notion of “spectacle” define a generation? How does this affect our concept of reality?

Unit Two: Sleight of Hand. In this unit, we’ll look at how the society of the spectacle serves as a distraction. What are the problems with treating the spectacle as “newsworthy?” How are our priorities changed? What becomes of politics when everything’s a photo-op?

Unit Three: Fifteen Minutes. In this unit, we’ll look at the spectacle surrounding celebrity. In the age of Youtube and Facebook, it seems as if everyone is seeking their moment in the spotlight. Is this healthy? What are the ramifications for a celebrity-centered culture? What is it doing to our relationships? Is the quest for Spectacle making us more jaded?

Assignments: Students will write:

- a personal narrative,
- textual analysis,
- visual analysis,
- and a researched project which will include an annotated bibliography and a PSA component in addition to an argument essay.

Proposed Texts:

A Writer’s Reference, Diana Hacker

A Brief Guide to Writing Academic Arguments, Stephen Wilhoit

Empire of Illusion, Chris Hedges

American Sideshow, Marc Hartzman

Fame Junkies, Jake Halpern

Technology: At least one of the “essays” will be a non-traditional essay delivered through social technology. Additionally, we will screen several documentaries and films as they reflect on our subject. Students will be required to incorporate database research into their written arguments.