

Journalism 5606W

Nancy Roberts

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 THE "SCHOLASTICUS " REVIEW

College professors around New England were horrified to discover during the 1980s and 1990s that the New England Monthly magazine was publishing reviews of their classes. While we all expect to see reviews of plays, movies, and books, the idea of reviewing classes was new, at least in New England. (Some years ago the Minnesota Daily did the same.)

But why not? These are semi-public events, often paid for by taxpayers. As you all know, some classes are more interesting than others. New England Monthly paid four writers to visit classes at educational institutions, and write the reviews under the name "Scholasticus." Not all the reviews have been successful, but controversy is a part of the game.

Why are some classes better than others? That's like asking what makes one tavern different from another. There may not be one single thing you can point to that accounts for the differences. Little details add up. As you may notice in the "Scholasticus" reviews, the authors tend to present the experience of the class rather than covering it as if it were a speech. Who takes a class-what are the students' majors? How do they respond? What techniques does the professor employ to gain the attention of the audience? The reviewers hold most but not all of their criticisms in reserve, letting the reader experience the situation and draw some conclusions on his/her own. And not all of the criticism is directed at the professors. Sometimes the students are blamed for being apathetic or too career-oriented.

You have all written class reviews before, probably as an end-of-the-quarter evaluation. And you have tried to explain to friends the good or bad qualities about your classes and teachers.

In this assignment, you should write a review of one of your classes (besides this one). Do try to present the experience of the classroom; the students' reactions and your own; the sights, sounds, and annoyances in the room; the professor's reputation and performance. Try to describe the experience and imply some perspectives or criticisms. Clearly, saying something like "This class really sucks" doesn't cut it. Get down to specific details.

Suggested length: Four to five pages, double-spaced. If your report runs less than three pages, chances are you didn't pay attention to the details. If you write beyond eight pages, you probably don't know what you are trying to say.

DUE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6
REWRITE DUE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18