**Sample Writing Assignments for WI Courses**

***Exploratory Writing Examples from Bean 104-116:***

* In-Class Writing
  + Writing at the beginning of class to probe a subject
    - Open-ended
    - Specific
  + Writing at the end of class to sum up a lecture or discussion
    - Summary of lecture/discussion
    - “Minute paper”
      * What is the most significant thing you learned today?
      * What question is uppermost in your mind at the conclusion of this class session?
      * What is the muddiest point in the material I have just covered?
* Journals
  + Open-ended
  + Guided
* Reading logs
  + Reading notes
  + Summary/response notebook (p.144-145)
* Other
  + Creativity exercises (Writing dialogues, p.110)
  + Thesis statement writing (p.115)

***Discipline-Specific Writing Assignments from Bean:***

Political Science, from Bean p.129

[Summaries of articles or course lectures]

Write a 200- to 250-word summary of Kenneth Galbraith’s paper, “The Theory of Countervailing Power,” which attempts to provide a theory that describes and accounts for the distribution of power.  Your summary should accurately convey the contents of the paper.  It should be comprehensive and balanced with clear sentence structure and good transitions.

Political Science, from Bean. P.129

[Dialogues]

Write a short dialogue (two to three pages) between a neo-elitist power theorist and a pluralist.  First, take the role of the neo-elitist (be an intellectual son or daughter of Ganson) and explain to this poor, unenlightened pluralist the meaning and importance of the concepts of predecision politics and the mobilization of bias.  Respond to this radical fluff in the role of a Yalie pluralist.  Continue the dialogue by alternating roles; be sure to respond in the role of one theorist to the arguments raised by the other.

Sociology, from Bean p.123

[Linking course concepts to personal experience]

Describe times in your own life when you have experienced role strain and role conflict.  What are the key differences between these terms, and why is the distinction useful?

Sociology, from Bean p.126-7

[Frame assignments - “A frame assignment provides a topic sentence with an organizational frame that students have to flesh out with appropriate generalizations and supporting data.”]

To solve the problem of homelessness in America, we must realize that not all homeless fit into the same category.  In fact, we ought to specify X categories of homeless.  First, [development] ... Second, [development] ... [Third, Fourth, ...]

***Sample Assignments from Prof. Greggor Mattson at Oberlin College, for a course titled “Enacting the Law”:***

1. Legal experience (5 pages)

Interview a friend or family member about an encounter with the law: civil or criminal, personal or

public. This could include serving on a jury, a police stop, drawing up a will, landlord/tenant disputes,

or small claims court, etc. Find out how they knew what to do, how to act, and what feelings they

had at different stages of their encounter. Analyze your interviewee’s experience using Ewick &

Silbey’s framework (Before, Against, With the law). Be sure to justify your analysis by linking your

interviewees’ words to the authors’ concepts.

2. Observing institutions (5 pages)

Visit a courtroom and observe legal proceedings. Take note of the participants and their varying

degrees of formal legal knowledge and the ritual practices of the court. How would the authors we

have read characterize the encounters you observed? Use at least four concepts to interpret and

contextualize your observations.

His full syllabus can be found here: [http://new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/1550154.pdf](http://new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/1550154.pdf" \t "_blank)

***Sample Assignments from Prof. Mattson’s “Intro to Sociology, Science of Modern Life” course:***

Assignment #1: The sociological story of a name

Using your name or the name of a close friend, find out the story of the name (ask parents/grandparents). Use the texts and internet data sources we have used in class to construct a sociological story of your name—what does this name say about the person? Into what trends does it fit? If it defies trends, speculate upon sociological reasons why.

Assignment #2: Peer interview

Use Lareau to analyze class position and trajectory. Interview someone who is NOT a friend about his/her upbringing and high school extracurricular experiences. Use Lareau to interpret your interviewee’s experiences.

Baby names are a surprisingly good place to look at how culture shapes action. We often think about what your name says about you; sometimes we think about what it says about your parents’ tastes and creativity. But what does your name say about what Bellah calls the paradox of individualism? What evidence does he give that individuals are made by society and not the other way ‘round?

Now you’re ready for a journal article from one of the top two sociology journals. First skim through the article—it’s not meant to be read like a novel. Pay special attention to the abstract and the conclusion. One of the most important things a name communicates is gender: despite feminism, androgynous names are no more popular now than 50 or 100 years ago. Rarely do girls’ names become boys’ names; it’s almost always vice versa. What does this fact, and importance of unique names, tell us about the paradox of individualism in American culture?

His full syllabus can be found here: [http://new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/1550152.pdf](http://new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/1550152.pdf" \t "_blank)

***More Sample Assignments in Bean by Discipline:***

* Physics and psychology examples on pp.79-80. (formal)
* Several defend/refute thesis statements on p. 87. (formal)
* Economics on p.88 (formal)
* Formal exploratory p.92 (or save for staging?)
* Philosophy – p. 93-94 (formal)
* Psychology (1), Literature (3) P. 94 (formal)
* Religious studies p.107 (informal, exploratory)
* Philosophy, p.123 (active thinking)
* Nursing/medical ethics, p.124 (thesis statement) (formal)
* Mathematics p.125 (Problem-posing assignments)