Description: This graduate course focuses on the art of critical writing about art with an emphasis on the type of writing necessary for a successful MFA thesis. We will consider a variety of forms of writing, ranging from gallery/exhibition reviews to descriptive art writing (ekphrasis) and the more formal writing done in theses. The ideal outcome of this class will be a preliminary thesis proposal but because this class is a first-year requirement, it is recognized that not everyone will be at this point.

Goals and Objectives of this Course:
• develop ability to read and critique other writing about art, including mfa theses
• execute competent, thesis-level writing in more than one critical format
• begin the process of translating one’s individual practice and theory of art into writing

Structure and Content: Writing is an individual activity. In class, we will focus on identification of the obstacles to good writing, defining precisely what is meant by “good” writing, and developing the skills that one can use in critiquing and improving one’s own and others’ writing. In other words, although your primary focus for this class is your own writing, because most of you will probably teach at some point and because it is also easier to recognize successful and unsuccessful writing when someone else does it, we will use class to develop skills for critiquing as well as skills for thesis writing. Class meetings will consist of discussion, structured writing activities, and peer review. Ultimately, it will be helpful to think of the class as a group tutorial with the group focus falling on the nature of critical writing and the individual focus involving a path of reading and writing related to your personal goals.

Textbooks:
No textbooks are required. There is an e-book in McConnell library which we will use on occasion; I may also provide electronic readings from other sources.
Recommended:
Barnet, Sylvan. A Short Guide to Writing about Art, 10th ed. (US: Pearson, 2011). I will either use a web page for the additional readings or a bibliography in Refworks. If webpage, the link will be found on my home page: http://www.radford.edu/rbarris/
If Refworks, I will give you the login and password when it is set up.

Requirements and Expectations
1. Do not miss class, do all assignments, participate cheerfully and informatively. Be flexible.
Assignments:
1. Short in-class writing assignments mixed with assignments done prior to class and brought to the group for anonymous critique.
2. “Peer” review of papers from other classes with a goal of developing writing-relevant rubrics for consistent grading.
3. Development of your personal “conversation” about art: this conversation takes place between your art and the art that influences you, or conversely, the art you reject. Not technically a research paper, it is similar to the type of writing you will do for your thesis. If taken seriously, it may evolve into the proposal and/or the first chapter of your thesis. The evolution is not required; the paper is.

Grading:
Because this is a graduate class, everyone starts with an A. You can only go down by not doing work or showing up. Hopefully, your writing and your personal feelings about writing will improve.

Preliminary Plan (11 topics are identified – without knowing how much time each one will require or what needs may emerge during the semester, consider this an outline in the literal sense of the word):
1. Why we write/ why we don’t write
   Read the “overture” in David Carrier. Bring something you’ve written which you’re reasonably proud of, erase your name from the first page and make 10 copies.
2. Writing about art from non-historical perspectives. For class, find one example of non-art historical writing about art to bring with you.
   Activity: Writing about art without saying what you see (saying what you don’t see)
3) ekphrasis
3. Developing style analysis skills
   Activity: 1) critiquing writing which says the same thing in different styles
   2) synonymy
4. 1) Themes versus theses
   2) preliminary polylogue statement (1-2 pages about your own work)
5. Paraphrasing exercises
6. Critiquing a published article (article will be assigned prior to class)
7. Comparison of critical writing about the same work of art (readings will be assigned prior to class)
8. Peer review activity using papers from an undergraduate class
9. Comparison of exhibition reviews (readings will be assigned)
10. Stage 2 of the polylogue statement
11. Organizational maps for long pieces of writing