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# MERCER street

2015-2016

a collection of essays from the expository writing program

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EXPOSITORY WRITING PROGRAM

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE

# MERCER street

To the Class of 2016:

**W**elcome to New York University!

An NYU education begins, in part, with writing. This practice reflects the University's longstanding commitment to the centrality of written inquiry to undergraduate education. In the twenty-first century, this centrality is more evident than ever before. You have a wide range of courses open to you; alphabetically, they range from accounting to history to mechanical engineering to woodwind studies. No matter what field you choose, during your time here you will find yourself using writing to think, analyze, investigate, and create. And no matter what path or career you choose after you graduate (as a scholar, educator, health practitioner, entrepreneur, artist, performer, lawyer, engineer, or activist), you will find yourself using writing for those purposes and others: to propose, to investigate, to analyze, and to represent yourself and your work.

The essays collected in this volume represent the best work written for Expository Writing Program courses last year; most were written by members of the entering class of 2014. These essays are smart, moving, funny, analytic, creative, and—like us all, and like all written work—imperfect. They open up questions, problems, and puzzles that are not entirely solvable. The faculty of EWP hope that you will both enjoy and learn from them.

Take heart! College is a time to challenge yourself and nurture your mind both in and out of the classroom. Your most surprising encounters—your most creative or insightful moments—may happen when you least expect them. Be interested. That is almost always the best way to begin.

With all best wishes,

Dara Rossman Regaignon  
Director of the Expository Writing Program  
Associate Professor of English

## Editor's Note:

**T**he writings in this year's *Mercer Street* represent, above all, the remarkable minds and sensibilities of their authors. Each essay is at once the record and final form of a sustained thinking and crafting process. As you read and re-read these essays, you will be able to recapture the thrill of discovery originally experienced by their authors. That's because our essayists have cleverly anticipated what makes readers like you and me want to read. If even one of these essays succeeds in drawing you in, you can be sure that its author thought hard about what would probably charm you. Even when essays arise from a passion or a strong conviction, the writer who writes with composure and forethought is the one who will win the reader. Our *Mercer Street* authors have done their artful best to accommodate your experience as readers.

Beyond this dialogue with readers, all our *Mercer Street* authors have learned to create conversations with other essayists and with all manner of textual and factual material. They've understood that a fact is a lot like a reader: a fact has something of its own to say, if only we would listen, and what it has to say is generally not what we thought it was going to say! The question is: are we able to bend with facts that run against the grain of our expectations? Canny thinkers tend to learn—as you will see them learning in these pages—how to develop a flexible and dialectical way with facts, *and* with other people who may not think as we do.

A very subtle source of the essayist's conversational power is found in abundance in *Mercer Street*. It involves the writer's desire to figure something out while also realizing that customary ways of making essays and using words do not entirely prepare us for the present moment of writing. That is because every writing occasion is unique. In so many of these essays we find resourceful young writers discovering how helpful it can be to think anew about form and language as part of the quest for understanding. A questioning attention to the adequacy of familiar ways of writing will always give an essay a sharper dialectical edge.

Of course these approaches must always be worked out within a topical space. Our authors have consistently chosen volatile topics: the limits of tough-on-crime sentencing laws; the moral journey of the conscientious objector; the director's responsibilities in adapting literary works into film; the latent or blatant misogyny of contemporary rap music; the extent to which racial and gender slurs can credibly be "reclaimed" by those whom they offend; and whether narratives known as "flirtation romances" should themselves be flirting with masochism.

Somewhat hidden behind the nice appearance of these essays are weeks of patient reading and thinking. Invisible too is the influence and impact of many valued others (peers, teachers) who help us to get "beyond me." Then there is the productive process of trying, erring, and trying again, of drafting and drafting, which for the writer is akin to the musician's rehearsal or the athlete's warm-up. The young writers presented here, having moved through this process so well, are now inviting you to take your own turn as thoughtful scholarly writers.

Stephen Donatelli  
Editor, *Mercer Street*

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*Cover Photography:* Spandrel: "*Pax vel iniusta utilior est quam iustissimum bellum.*"  
("A peace, even an unjust peace, is more useful than the most just war.")  
Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Epistularum ad Atticum*, 7.14.

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