

# Rutgers University Writing Program

## 201: Research and Writing in the Disciplines

### Course List

### Spring 2018

***Consult your Course Schedule Planner for specific times and locations.***

Register for a topic of study related to your major or personal interest, develop your own research question within that topic, and learn the process of researching, writing and revising a 10-12 page analytic research paper.

The class meets core requirements for most schools at RU, and will help you gain valuable expertise in your topic area, learn how to do scholarly research, and improve your writing and revision abilities.

For more information, visit the Writing Program website at [wp.rutgers.edu](http://wp.rutgers.edu), or contact Lynda Dexheimer, 201 Coordinator, [lynda.dexheimer@rutgers.edu](mailto:lynda.dexheimer@rutgers.edu)

SAS Students: 201 is Core certified for both the Revision-Based (WCr) and the Discipline-Based (WCd) Writing & Communication goals.

SEBS Students: 201 meets Core Curriculum Requirements in Area VI: Oral and Written Communication

Other Students: 201 meets requirements for most schools at RU. Please check with your advisor.

Transfer Students: If you did not take Expository Writing at RU, you must register for 301, which is designed for transfer students, rather than 201.

## **Activism and Social Change**

How can citizens, individually and collectively, accomplish social change? Social movements are forms of collective action in response to inequality, oppression, and unmet needs. What do movements and social change look like? We will engage with readings, speakers, videos, case studies, social campaigns, music, and other visual media to study how change occurs. Students will have the opportunity to explore questions related to the history of social movements in the U.S., how movements begin, how they maintain momentum when opposed, and how traditional media and social media influence and facilitate policy change.

## **Autobiography and Memoir**

How do life experiences shape us? When we write the stories of our lives, why do we choose to construct a particular narrative in place of so many other possible representations of the self? In this course, we will examine autobiographical modes of reading and writing that focus on the self in historical and cultural contexts. We will explore the ideological assumptions that underpin how we conceive the nature of the self, as well as the identity politics that inform the ways in which we understand the deceptively simple question: *Who am I?*

## **Comics and Graphic Novels**

This course focuses on graphic narrative of all kinds. Students will have the opportunity to explore topics related to comics art, from superheroes to manga, DC to Dark Horse, and Kirby to Bechdel. Through this course, you can investigate everything from what makes something a comic to how the industry is run. Possible research topics include women in comics, comics marketing, differences among Japanese, European, and American comics, and the iconic nature of superheroes.

## **Conspiracy Theory**

JFK. Roswell. The Moon Landing. People seem to love a good conspiracy theory. Conspiracy narratives are important precisely because of the intense level of belief or disbelief that they provoke. By putting aside judgment as to whether a particular conspiracy theory is true or false, students will analyze just why certain conspiracy theories catch on so quickly and stay around for so long. Over the course of the semester, students will choose a specific conspiracy theory and examine its significance: What are the meaning-making structures that make it click? Why does it

have such a hold on the popular imagination? What does this say about people who “want to believe,” as the *X-Files* put it? What does this say about those who refuse to believe? How do new conspiracy theories develop and what determines their future level of popularity?

## **Constructing Identities**

Who are you? Is your identity fixed or is it always changing? How much of what makes you “you” comes from how others see you? How does identity intersect with values, beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, language, religion, family, music, fashion, history and so on? This course explores multiple and overlapping ways humans perceive themselves, both as individuals and as part of a collective group, and how identity affects people’s lived experiences every day. We will examine the relationship between environment and psychological and biological selves. Possible areas of research include musical preference, fashion style, race relations, self-help books, plastic surgery, and national pride.

## **The Ethics of Food**

"Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food," Michael Pollan advised in his bestselling book, *In Defense of Food*. In our busy contemporary society, we cram down French fries that don't grow mold if we forget to eat them for a month; foot long sandwiches stuffed with processed meats; fizzy drinks of a dazzling array of colors. This course will explore the ethics of food, in terms of its production and distribution. Possible topics of research include an investigation of the ethics of the fast food industry, genetically modified foods, factory farms, agribusinesses, organic foods, food waste, and the recent increase in interest for local produce in farmers' markets, and rooftop farming in urban areas.

## **The Ethics of Urban Development**

Cities are dense fabrics consisting of people living in close proximity, and they are constantly changing through urban development. Ethics is the study of right and wrong, or, as applied to urban development, who wins and who loses, and do some groups seem to matter more than others? For example, using Eminent Domain, the construction of an expressway through a crowded residential neighborhood might hurt some of the residents of that area, but might give improved access to many city dwellers who use that road. Possible research topics for this course include the ethical implications of such urban developments as urban renewal, gentrification,

suburban and exurban development, urban parks such as The Highline, the new urbanism, and air&b.

## **Exploring Asia**

How are the ways that we think about Asia changing in our rapidly transforming world? Contemporary India and China, for example, are among the world's most influential nations economically, technologically, and politically. South Korea is currently a world leader in digital innovation. Human rights issues in India, China, Myanmar, and other Asian countries regularly make headlines in Western media. This course will explore a range of topics relating to the diverse cultures of Asia, both classical and contemporary. Among issues addressed will be globalization, human rights, orientalism, and the relevance of Eurocentric notions of East and West.

## **Fashion**

How did something as essential as clothing evolve into something as frivolous as fashion, constantly changing and regularly discarded? How did the verb "to fashion", which means, "to make," end up as a noun that describes the latest and hottest garment to be worn, a word synonymous with change? This class will explore these questions. We will also examine how fashion is used to define individuals and how fashion is a form of communication and culture with rules, values, and prohibitions. From fashion design and designers, to beauty and marketing, to subcultures and politics, this course will look at fashion as a social and cultural language today. Some possible research topics are: the cultural significance of specific designers; an examination of fashion trends as subculture; or a history of cosmetic use and its evolution in the last 100 years.

## **Feminism for Everyone**

Regardless of age, race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, feminism is relevant to everyone. In this course we will explore the roots of the feminist movement, modern-day issues within feminism, the misconceptions about what it means to be a feminist, and the ways in which feminism is relevant to today's Rutgers students. Drawing on a wide range of sources from Mary Wollstonecraft to Sarah Silverman, from blogs to books, from fashion magazines to photographic archives, we will delve into feminism as not just an isolated movement, but one that intersects with myriad modern-day issues in politics, the sciences, sports, the arts, and pop culture.

## **Film**

E.T. The dance of death at sunset. Gangsters, hangovers, and martial arts. A slum dog millionaire. Perhaps no other art form in the last century has left an impact on culture the way that film has. Through the images on screen, audiences engage in their hopes and fears, find their heroes, and confront their demons. Hollywood, Bollywood, the indie, the foreign film, documentaries and animation--the categories that fall under the art form have left a lasting legacy on our imaginations. This course will explore the nature of film as an art form and look at its power to inspire and enchant. Students may write about the lasting influence of a particular film, a director, or the significance of a genre.

## **From Print to Film**

You read the book; you saw the movie. What changed from print to film? In this course, you will research and write about the process of film adaptation. Your main project for the class will be a research paper based on the critical discussion surrounding a classic film of your choice, subject to instructor approval.

## **Frugality, Simplicity, Life Off the Grid**

The average American is plagued with debt, yet feels compelled to maintain their onerous spending. Tethered to expensive devices we now consume eight hours of media a day – and still manage to create four and-a-half pounds of trash. It doesn't have to be this way. In this course students will explore alternatives to the unsustainable consumerism and mindless dependency that have become hallmarks of millennial American culture. Topics might include, but are not limited to: voluntary simplicity; self-sufficiency; thrift and frugality in American cultural history; social conditioning; alternative energy, housing, and economic practices; "preppers" and survivalism; urban simplicity; religious influences; "opting out" of social/technological paradigms; theory and practice(s) of minimalism; ethics, nature, and spirituality.

## **Games**

Senet. Gladiator games. Chess. Poker. College Football. Monopoly. The Legend of Zelda. Call of Duty. Pokemon Go. Games have been an integral part of human affairs since the days of prehistoric Egypt, and although they have continuously evolved since, they are arguably more pervasive than ever. What is it about “games” and “play” that humans find so appealing? In what ways have individuals (or entities) endeavored to harness the elements of game-play, and to what ends? Research topics may include video game addiction, gamification in business or education, the use

of simulation games for training, the impact of massively multiplayer online games on human behavior, and the rise of “serious games.”

## **Gender in the Workplace**

*How do your gender, sex, and sexuality affect the way people perceive your abilities?* Despite advances made in gender equality through the last century, contemporary legal cases, academic studies, and popular testimonials reveal persistent inequality. How does gender affect perceptions of collegiality, leadership, and ambition?

## **Health Care Ethics**

“Healthcare Ethics” focuses on the how personal, cultural, community and political ethics affect the practice and delivery of healthcare. Research topics include medicine, doctor/nurse patient relationship, mental illness, alternative and experimental healing, western and eastern medicine, nursing, pharmaceuticals, biomedical engineering and insurance industries. Students can also study how personal, cultural and religious views influence the practice and delivery of healthcare.

## **International Business Relations**

This course considers how and why international businesses develop objectives and pursue strategies in the context of global competition and geo-politics. Student research options include topics such as cross-cultural differences in business practices, international trade, outsourcing, the International Monetary System, currency disputes, global competition, trade wars, and the role of institutions such as the United Nations, NAFTA, and the World Trade Organization.

## **Issues in Education**

Education is a hot topic in the media, on the campaign trail, and even around the family dinner table because of controversies over issues like student debt, cyber bullying, affirmative action, and sexual education. This course will cut through the sound bytes to explore real research on important topics including teacher accountability, tuition hikes, high stakes testing, gender and learning, equality of education, school climate, the technology gap, funding crises, and charter schools, among many others. Students will explore how teaching practices, education policy, and

pedagogical ideals affect what and how people learn, and how that learning then affects the fabric of a society.

## **Justice in Popular Culture**

Mr. Robot. How to Get Away With Murder. The Wire. Serial. Orange is the New Black. NCIS. Narcos. This course will explore our culture's fascination with crime, law enforcement, and the justice system. Students will discuss and research the glamorization of the pursuit of justice, and the link between law and entertainment as seen in novels and "true crime" literature, films, theater, television, and news media. Students will explore cultural viewpoints on crime and punishment as they have been presented today and throughout history.

## **Let's Go! - The Car and Society**

From the days of the "Surrey with The Fringe On Top" to a not-so-distant future of fully automated self-driving cars, the automobile has touched every facet of human life for more than a century. The personal freedom, access, and independence that cars provide are unparalleled. Cars represent status, reflect our personalities, and cater to our personal preferences. This course will study a range of topics relating to the ubiquitous automobile and its effects on society. Research topics may include: automotive safety; environmental impacts; governmental policy and regulation; business and industry; marketing and advertising; history; sociology; music movies and pop culture; motorsports technology and many more.

## **Mass Incarceration**

The United States has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the Western world: a status gained through tougher drug and sentencing laws in the 1970s that increased the imprisoned population by multiple factors. In this class, we will explore the legal and social phenomena that led to this increase, as well as the responses and alternatives that are being posed. Topics that students can explore in individual research projects include: prison overcrowding, the death penalty, social and educational rehabilitation, the impact of race and class on arrest rates, sentencing reform, the juvenile justice system, the growth of private (for-profit) prisons, lifetime voting bans and/or the social stigmatization of ex-offenders, and myths about imprisonment that may affect social responses to the issue.

## **Motivation and Success**

This course explores the science of motivation and the psychology of success. Research topics may include topics related to developmental psychology, social psychology, personality psychology, theories about motivation and achievement, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, self-control and self-regulation. We will examine the work of Carol Dweck, Tony Wagner and Daniel Pink, among others, to help students develop their own research projects.

## **Music and Dance**

Music and Dance explores a range of collaborative possibilities between musicians, dancers and choreographers. We seek to understand how artists work together to create performances and how music and dance affect us individually and culturally. This rich topic is ideal for dance and music majors interested in an opportunity to build on their expertise and knowledge, but a background in the arts is not essential, and there is no requirement to write about both music *and* dance in individual research papers. Possible research topics include specific dance forms and the iconic artists associated with them; music and dance in film, on Broadway and in smaller, more rarified venues; gender in dance and music; commercialism and its effect on the arts; anorexia and body image; dance and music therapy etc.

## **Musical Expression and Performance**

This is an exciting, collaborative course designed to accommodate serious and meaningful research on a wide variety of topics. These have included important projects about the influence and significance of musicians like Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley and George Harrison; fusion in Jazz and World Music; protest music; music and racism; fan behavior; film scoring; file sharing; the creativity of amateur musicians; and even stage fright. Accomplished musicians who can use their expertise to shape a research topic, and students who love music and want to explore a topic that they are interested in, are equally welcome!

## **New Digital Arguments: How New Media Shape the Way We Write**

“New Media” is a catchphrase for a cloud of technology, skills, and processes that allow interactive user feedback, creative participation, and community formation around the media content. As researchers have found new ways to digitize data, writers have found new ways to present this information that go beyond the 2-D static illustrations long common in print arguments. There is now interest making use of interactive visualizations and other forms of what the MIT Media Lab



calls “multisensory, embodied, and aesthetic interactions.” Students in this class will examine how these “interactions” organize data to make their own forms of argument, and consider how examples of these emerging forms of communication can be used to enrich and extend more traditional forms of scholarly argument.

## **Nutrition and Exercise Science**

This course gives students an opportunity to research nutrition and exercise strategies for optimal wellness from a humanities perspective. Research options include topics such as training techniques; sports pedagogy; training and diet for athletes; diet and/or exercise as treatment for or prevention of disease; nutrition and exercise for pregnant women; childhood obesity; occupational therapy; physical therapy; sports medicine; weight management; eating disorders; food insecurity; etc.

## **Order, Chaos, and the Universe**

There is a law of nature that says the universe, as a whole, runs downhill from order to chaos. If this is the case, why do we, as extremely complex forms of living organization, exist? Under the umbrella of a tug of war between order and chaos, this course offers a vast canvas for student investigation into what intrigues, concerns, amuses, or puzzles. If overall chaos always increases, is evolving life simply a more efficient means of producing chaos? If effort keeps us in shape mentally, physically, and socially, and technology sells itself on the promise of eliminating effort, does advancing technology offer us empowerment, or just the illusion? Can aging and the fighting of disease be examined as a tug of war? Global warming? Explore questions like these and many others.

## **The Politics of Climate Change**

Record temperatures are causing melting glaciers and extreme weather. Sea level has risen eight inches since 1880. Coastal communities are flooding. The toll from storms and fires in the US has broken all records. The Pentagon considers global warming to be a major strategic threat. There is overwhelming scientific agreement that climate change is anthropogenic, and so, logically, solutions must involve changing human behavior. Yet somehow climate science has become a partisan issue! Why, we will ask, has denial of human-caused climate change become a litmus test for Republican candidates? Why are school boards around the country, adopting requirements

that climate science be taught as a “theory” and that the “other side” also be taught? This course will examine the *politics of climate change*.

## **Privacy Rights in the Digital Age**

Texts. Emails. Facebook. Twitter. LinkedIn. G-chat. Skype. The way we communicate has changed over time and the channels of communication seem to be ever increasing. This course gives students an opportunity to research and explore changes in communication in the context of the digital age. Examples of research options include topics such as the changes in language attributable to increased electronic communication, the loss of a message's meaning on social media, the importance of (or lack thereof) body language in communication, and the effects of increased connectivity on communication.

## **The Psychology of Conflict**

“Can we all get along?” Rodney King touched the soul of the nation in 1992 with this simple but insightful question because it poses fundamental human concerns: why do we fight with our family, friends, and loved ones? Why is argument the basis of so much of education and business? Why do gender, class, race, and ethnic groups sometimes fight over core values and backgrounds? Why do nations go to war? “Psychology of Conflict” will allow students to address these issues and more. Conflict may not always lend itself to resolution, but resolution can often be managed. Investigation of techniques for conflict resolution can provide an additional avenue for student research.

## **Public Health Issues**

Public Health is the science of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, research for disease and injury prevention, and development of policies that help make the home, workplace and public sphere safe. This course allows the student to research the intersection of health concerns with many other disciplines – public policy, psychology, history, sociology and science. The choices for research papers range from family planning to studying infectious disease outbreaks to biochemical terrorist attacks.

## **The Quest for Immortality**

Is it possible to avoid death? Would you really want to live forever? From ancient tales of magic elixirs and the fountain of youth to cryonics and @LivesOn (a Twitter account that will tweet for you after your death), the quest for immortality is as old as human history. Where religions have traditionally offered the spiritual solace of an eternal afterlife, today “transhumanist” entrepreneurs invest billions in an attempt to cheat death altogether by reversing the aging process or uploading our minds into cyberspace. This course will examine various immortality narratives, ancient and modern, as we seek to understand the origins and stakes of this drive for everlasting life. Possible research topics include immortality as an ethical and philosophical problem; the theme of immortality in film and literature, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to *Harry Potter*; cyborgs, vampires, and superheroes; resurrection and mummification; virtual or “technological” immortality; and the neuroscience of immortality

## **Science and Politics**

Trying to bring science and politics together may seem as fruitless as trying to mix oil and water. Yet the emergence of scientific discoveries including technological and engineering advancements, public health achievements in the 21st century, improved environmental awareness, and new medical techniques demands that our political debate no longer be driven by ideology alone. This class will explore the challenges of using social science methods and research that emphasizes science within politically infused discourses more often shaped by social media than by valid data. Students will learn how to analyze the scholarly debates about how science is used to persuade politicians and inform public policy debates.

## **Science and Power**

In the twenty-first century, scientific knowledge is more and more emerging as a dominant form of power. But what are the consequences of scientific breakthroughs and new technologies for human societies? The more we utilize science to take control over ourselves and nature, the more we are confronted with new problems that can be perceived as dangers inherent in modern technology. As a result, debating the intended and unintended consequences of scientific discoveries becomes a crucial task for thinking. Students may conduct research on topics that deal with bio-genetics and interventions into the genetic inheritance of humans; the continual sophistication of artificial intelligence; cyber-technologies and their range of application from virtual social spaces to cyber warfare between nations, among others.

## **Science, Medicine & Society**

“Science, Medicine and Society” focuses on ethical, social, and political controversies in a variety of medical and health fields. Research topics include biomedical engineering, nursing, pharmaceutical and insurance industries, health care, mental illness, alternative and experimental healing techniques, hospice, hospitals, and midwives. Students can also study aspects of medical training and the doctor-patient relationship.

## **The Selfie**

What does it mean to live in the “age of the selfie”? While selfie-taking and sharing has proliferated in the past several years, the phenomenon of documenting our own lives and leaving traces for others to discover and interpret long predates the term itself. This course will explore how the selfie -- named 2013’s “word of the year” by the *Oxford English Dictionary* -- fits into historical modes of self-representation, as well as the far-reaching (aided, perhaps, by a selfie stick) implications of the selfie for contemporary culture. Potential research topics may include but are not limited to: identity construction; visual digital culture; celebrity and branding; photography and self-portraiture; neuroscience and pathology; the relation between media and psychology; exhibitionism and voyeurism; and sociology and diversity. As part of our effort to investigate how this particular cultural artifact can affirm, reveal, conceal, subvert, bear witness, and question, students will also produce and analyze their own selfies throughout the course.

## **Stories We Tell**

What is your personal narrative? What are the stories you tell and listen to that make you who you are? Storytelling shapes identity and can be first-person accounts about relationships, honoring the dead, journeys, adventures, faith, politics and accomplishments. It is also living history as in the thousands of stories that make a culture’s collective identity. Storytelling is digital, written, oral, image, song, and dance and never before have so many diverse fields used the power of the story in their work. Storytelling played a role in evolution, and today is practiced at every cultural level, manifest in uprisings in Africa and cover ups in boardrooms, on porches in rural America and hospitals in urban centers, in the rituals of churches, mosques, temples, the courthouse – and your house. Past research topics have included how story relates to voodoo healing, an Indian epic tale, cigarette ad campaigns, Palestinian exile, photos from the civil rights era, classical music, the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, dementia treatment, hip hop dance, and chocolate. Yes, chocolate.

## **Stress and Mental Health**

Are you stressed out? How does stress affect your writing process? How is stress created, defined, and experienced? Using psychological and sociological lenses, students will examine the way we use and manage stress. Through independent research, students investigate a contemporary issue in the field of Psychology or Sociology.

## **Taboos and Transgressions**

What activities are we expected not to entertain publically or even privately? Sexual deviance, death rituals, illicit drug use—why do certain taboos both appall us and appeal to us at the same time? And who gets to decide what's forbidden? In this course we will consider how our ideas of transgressions have changed throughout the years and what new codes of conduct we're expected to abide by today. Topics of exploration include all things offensive, disobedient, and unmentionable.

## **Technology**

Technology sells the promise of doing more and more *for* us: one million apps and counting, drugs for all problems, TV on demand, self-driving cars, 3D printing, Internet in your glasses. Yet side-by-side with state of the art tech, we find mounting chaos: government gridlock; epidemic obesity; environmental degradation; privacy invasions; economic stagnation; debt crises, etc. This course offers students the opportunity to read and analyze research that may help connect the dots between the promise and the chaos, to step backstage and ask: Does technical progress really equal human progress? Or is the rising technical order at the expense of human/environmental chaos? Or both?