Rutgers University Writing Program
201: Research and Writing in the Disciplines
Course List Fall 2020
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, or contact Jaqueline Loeb, 201 Coordinator, jloeb@english.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 narratives 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 Theories**

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, psychological, and biological selves. Possible areas of research include musical preference, fashion style, race relations, self-help books, plastic surgery, and national pride.

**Disease and Epidemics**

The term *Quarantine* originally referred to the 40-day period that a ship from a plague-stricken land must remain offshore before coming into port to ensure they did not spread disease. Today, the term has been expanded to mean any period of isolation, often mandated by a government for the protection of public health. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented experience in our lifetime, disrupting daily life in unimaginable ways. Yet, humans throughout history have had similar encounters with disease. From the Bubonic Plague in Medieval Europe, to Smallpox in the Americas, to the Spanish Flu, AIDS, and Ebola on a global scale, humans have always tried to understand and fight disease and epidemics. This course allows students to examine the psychosocial perceptions and biological realities of how we negotiate disease and epidemics in our increasingly global world. Other avenues of research might be the politics of disease, healthcare and public health, the psychology behind blame in epidemics, religious explanations of disease, culture-bound syndromes, challenges in epidemiology, social contagion and mass hysteria, stigma and disease, representations of disease in pop culture, the role of (mis)information or social media in perpetuating and responding to epidemics, as well as more biomedically framed projects.

**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 Airbnb.

**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 course 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.

**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.

**Film, Theater, and Performance Studies**

Bong Joon-ho’s *Parasite*, Jeremy O. Harris’ *Slave Play*, and Philip Glass’ *Akhnaten* all share recent critical success and tackle important and arresting topics, but they are also reliant on the trappings of performance. The rules and pageantry of live and recorded performances also inspire questions
such as: is an audience required for a performance? Is reality television considered performance? Is performance a form of manipulation? Can a performance be hijacked by its audience? How do the parameters of performance change in a digital age? The broad scope of this class is designed to facilitate original and impactful research on a wide variety of topics that explore the elements of performance in film, theater, and classical music.

**Food, Farms, and Environment**

Can we produce enough food without destroying our ecosystems? Can we respond ethically to the crisis of the American farmer and farmers throughout the world? The current industrial agro-food system creates problems of environmental degradation, animal welfare, worker safety, and consumer health. Agriculture accounts for a quarter of total carbon dioxide emissions, half of all methane emissions, and seventy percent of the nitrous oxide emissions in the atmosphere from anthropogenic sources. “Can industrial agriculture be a force for good?” as a recent headline implored. This course gives students an opportunity to research agriculture, farms and the food system in any number of ways. Research options include topics such as hunger and food insecurity; sustainable farming; soil management; local ecosystems; permaculture; genetically modified organisms; humane treatment of farm animals; apiculture, organic farming; the "local food movement"; deforestation; climate change—the possibilities—unlike our natural resources—are practically limitless.

**Games**

Senet. Gladiator games. Chess. Poker. College Football. Monopoly. *The Legend of Zelda. Call of Duty*. Pokémon 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 throughout the last century, contemporary legal cases, academic studies, and popular testimonials reveal persistent inequality. How does gender affect perceptions of collegiality, leadership, and ambition?
Handmade: Trade, Craft, & Know-How in the 21st Century

Your great grandparents and forefathers could make almost anything out of sheer necessity and with knowledge passed down through generations. Much of that knowledge is lost to history, but today we seek to regain manual and practical "know-how." Americans and people across the developed world are fascinated with learning trades and crafts from knitting, canning, construction, embroidery, bee-keeping, artisan baking, carving, welding, glass-making, hunting, and tanning. Whether to de-stress, add meaningful work to their lives, or even as a form of protest known as "craftivism," Etsy, indie art, craft fairs, and Instagram have become marketplaces for all things handmade and homesteaded. Home DIY projects are also booming—from carpentry, construction, and plumbing, to sustainable gardening, animal farming, and homesteading. Does this signal a renaissance of artisanship, know-how, and skilled labor? Is it a fad enabled by YouTube and Pinterest? Or something else entirely? In this course, you will discover this and much more as you embark on a journey that will take you through time and continents in the quest for tradecraft both lost and found.

Happiness

What does it mean to be happy? How is happiness achieved? What are the differences between “the good life” and “a good life?” What forms does happiness take and which of these seem the most desirable or elusive? Readings from philosophers, essayists, journalists, and those in the “happiness-providing industry” will guide our journey to the answers—or, perhaps, leave us with even more questions.

Harlem to Paris: Queer Aesthetic Production in the 20th Century

From London to Paris, Harlem to Greenwich Village, gay and lesbian artists, writers, and performers of the early 20th century set the stage for the LGBTQ political movement to follow a generation later. Bohemian enclaves spurred the breathtaking artistic production of the Harlem Renaissance, a French passion for American Jazz, modernism and modernist literature, transgressive dance, opera, and musical performance. Leading this vibrant scene, queer artists blazed a trail of avant-garde poetry, prose, theater, and visual arts that reshaped the landscape of American and European cultural production, and forever changed social and philosophical discourse surrounding art, free expression, politics, race, gender, and sexuality. Students in this course are invited to explore any of the broad array of remarkable and unorthodox people, events, or controversies that shaped this singular revolutionary era and its enduring legacy.
**Heroes and Villains**

Walter White. Cersei Lannister. Tony Soprano. Dwight K. Schrute. We love anti-heroes, and we love to watch them be bad. The recent Golden Age of Television has given rise to a number of characters that fascinate us with their depravity. Beginning with readings from Chuck Klosterman’s *I Wear the Black Hat* and Maggie Nelson’s *The Art of Cruelty*, students will develop an original research project that deals with questions such as: Why do we root for the villain? How are flaws more relatable than virtues, and what does that say about contemporary morality? Is the experience of violence and evil in entertainment dangerous, or a necessary release?

**Image, Data, Story**

New Media, the cutting edge of publication, uses images, videos, graphic design, interactive user feedback, and community formation to develop ideas, tell stories, and make arguments. It uses sensual, visual, or algorithmic data to enhance and communicate in ways that differ from traditional writing. How does it work? How have writers used images, maps, and graphs to understand the problems they want to solve? How have algorithmic processes made results from big data sets more easily accessible to writers? How have illustrations, interactive visualizations, and other forms of multi-sensory, embodied, and aesthetic interactions made unseen forces and ideas visible?

**Innovations in Dance**

The rise of contemporary dance. The explosion in physicality (faster, bigger, higher). Barefoot vs. Socks. Modern dance or Postmodern? The rise of dance injury prevention and treatment. Instagram and the quest for dance perfection. Competitions: A Necessary Evil? Misty Copeland and the Black Ballerina. Dance from non-Western cultures. Key Broadway choreographers today. The dominance of hip-hop. All of these are possible topics for Innovations in Dance. Here is an opportunity for both the serious dance student and the casual fan to explore the art form through research writing.

**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 course, 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, and more.

**Modern Motherhood**

_Beyoncé. Kris Jenner. Serena Williams. Jacinda Ardern. Michelle Duggar. Octomom. Soccer Mom. Mommy-Blogger._ What does it mean to be a mother in 2020? From long-standing perceptions of the “angel in the house” to the “how-does-she-do-it” parent who “works outside the home,” or stays at home and battles “mommy ways,” “having it all” in the early twenty-first century has ushered in intense study on the shifting role and responsibilities of motherhood. These new paradigms develop, of course, with the advent of social media, increasing disparities in maternal-fetal childbirth outcomes along socioeconomic and racial boundaries, and new expectations for the role of motherhood—and mothering—in the twenty-first century. Research topics could include the economics of modern motherhood, social media and motherhood, celebrity mothers, mothers and political activism, the increasing number of childless-by-choice women, global politics of motherhood and adoption, shifting public images of motherhood, health issues with pregnancy or childbirth, postpartum mental health, and more.

**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.
Nutrition, Exercise, and Health

What scientific, social, cultural, economic, political, or ethical factors shape how we think about nutrition, exercise, and health in contemporary society? In this course, you can find out! Examples of potential topics include socioeconomic class and nutrition/exercise, eating disorders and body dysmorphia, childhood obesity, food and gender roles, the dieting industry, fitness and social media, the slow food movement, food insecurity in the developing world, government regulations and political lobbying, and so on.

Order, Chaos, and the Universe

There is a law of nature which says that the universe as a whole, runs downhill from order to chaos. If this be the case, then why do we, as extremely complex forms of living organization, exist? Under the umbrella of a tug of war between order and chaos, on any scale, from up close and personal to the formation of stars, planets and evolution of intelligent life in the universe, this course offers a vast canvas for students to investigate 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? What is the role of opposites (big/small, easy/hard, breadth/depth, fast/slow, strong/weak, near/far, hot/cold, order/disorder...) in our lives and the evolving universe? Can aging and the fighting of disease be examined as a tug of war? Does climate change/global warming/weather extremes/droughts and deluges, the obesity epidemic, the opioid epidemic, smartphone/social media/video game addiction, overwhelming plastic pollution in the oceans, the "sixth extinction of species," represent chaos compensating accelerating technical order, allowing too many to consume too much too fast? Does the accelerating power in artificial intelligence, machine learning, genetic engineering (CRISPR-cas9) and robotics doing more and more for us represent serious threats to our human future? If so, why are we, as a species, doing this to ourselves?

Philosophy and Science

Bertrand Russell once stated that “between theology and science there is a No Man's Land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No Man's Land is philosophy.” In the 21st century, philosophy is still under attack, with some (e.g. the late Stephen Hawking) even declaring that philosophers have lost the battle and should surrender its remaining territory to the scientists. Despite these ongoing attacks, there are still many questions science is unable to address on its own. Questions about how to live, how to treat others, what we can know (if anything), and who we should believe. Even within the hard sciences, there are foundational questions largely unanswered (e.g. What is time? What is everything made up of?), leaving much room for disagreements between active researchers that
boil down to—often unrecognized and un-argued for—philosophical assumptions. As philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett has said, “There is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.” In this course, students will get to explore both the “No Man’s Land” and the territory claimed by science by studying works in the field of philosophy of science and cutting-edge scientific research. Topics may include: the intersection of philosophy and cosmology, competing “interpretations” of quantum mechanics, foundations of cognitive science and artificial intelligence, neuroscience and free will, human nature and evolutionary psychology, scientific realism, and social construction.

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 these questions and others that make up the new the politics of climate change.

The Psychology of Conflict

“Can't we all just 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” allows 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.

The Psychology of Motivation

Have you ever wondered what motivates people to get up in the morning and do their best in school or sports or at work? Why are some people highly motivated and others not? How much do teachers, parents, peers, environment, or opportunities matter? This course allows students to explore the psychology of motivation and how it impacts various aspects of life. It is not, however,
a self-help course. Research topics may include topics related to developmental psychology, social psychology, personality psychology, behavioral psychology, theories about motivation and achievement, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, autonomy, self-control and self-regulation. Students may develop and explore their own research projects related to this useful and fascinating area of psychology.

**Religion and Humanity**

How do religious discourse, belief, and practice, the rejection of these things, or the many shades between them shape our sense of what it means to be “human”? How do these phenomena inform our sense of the social and ethical obligations we human beings carry? Religious systems tend to posit some picture of ultimate reality, but there are many ways of orienting one’s humanity toward any or all such pictures, and a remarkable range of roles such pictures have enabled human beings to assume. The differences and disputes among these mentalities, orientations, and roles—and their different understandings of the relationship between being human and being humane—are among the central threads of the human story, and they are all objects of interest in this course. Students can choose a research question on any topic dealing with complexities of, or interactions among, religious ontology and psychology, phenomenology, ethics, anthropology, sociology, or sociopolitical activity, or about representations of these matters within or across world traditions. From the otherworldly endeavors of mystics to the psychology of suicide bombers, from conversion narratives to conversion therapy, from “East” to “West” or comparative study of both (or interrogation of the value of those categories), from the ancient world to the New Age, and indeed, from theism to atheism to antitheism, all is fair game in this exploration of how what the many things we can mean by “religion” are entangled with the many things we can mean when we speak of our individual and/or collective “humanity.”

**Science and Fiction**

This course invites you to research some aspect of the relationship between Science and Fiction. This includes projects that engage with Science Fiction as a literary genre, but also projects that look at the narratives that surround science in contemporary culture more broadly. In each case, we take our starting point with the premise that we cannot fully extricate science from the stories that are told about or through science. Projects can set out to illuminate particular works of Science Fiction (movies, TV shows, novels, short stories, and so on) in light of larger social, historical, political, or ethical questions. What can *Star Trek* teach us about ethics? What can *The Matrix* teach us about free will and consciousness? Other possible projects might focus on the erosion of faith in science, scientists in contemporary political culture, the dividing line between science and pseudoscience, or how science is taught in schools.
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 course 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 more and more emerges 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 and Uncertainty

We tend to think of science as dealing in "facts," but in reality, statistical probabilities and confidence intervals are central to our understanding of the natural world. Making climate change projections, epidemiological models, natural hazard predictions, and more all requires interrelating a complex set of variables. Uncertainty enters in at many points, depending on the quality of data, the accuracy of measurements and representations of that data, and the reliability of the models connecting variables. Even so, it is often necessary to act upon this less-than-certain information, especially in cases like climate change, when the potential consequences of inaction are so dire.

At the same time, a different kind of "uncertainty" has taken hold in public discourse about science: distrust of media and government leadership, fueled by a history of unethical research practices and misinformation—from eugenics, to the Tuskegee experiment, to the prescription of thalidomide—has led people to doubt scientists' and public officials' remarks on topics such as the
reality of man-made climate change or the safety of vaccination. This class, therefore, will ask students to think about the role of uncertainty in science, policy, and public discourse.

**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.

**Stories of War**

In the *Iliad*, perhaps the greatest war story ever told, Homer writes: “How can I picture it all? It would take a god to tell the tale.” War is profoundly difficult to convey. It reconfigures nations, separates families, destroys landscapes, and kills in terrifying numbers. These extreme conditions pose a significant challenge to men and women's ability to communicate—whether soldier, civilian, nurse, or grieving parent. And yet, telling stories of war can be therapeutic for survivors. These stories can also function in honoring the dead and perhaps, as many believe, even promote a future peace. In this 201 class, we will draw from the fields of literature, gender studies, trauma studies, and cognitive psychology to consider how modern wars are represented across a range of textual and visual media, from diaries and letters (WWI & II), to fiction and poetry (Owen, Borden, Hemingway), to video games (*Call of Duty, Battlefield*), and films (*Full Metal Jacket, Dunkirk*). Student research topics might include an examination of war diaries and letters, poetry, protest songs, war films, soldiers’ tweets, and/or propaganda posters, among many other possibilities.

**The 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, manifesting 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 publicly 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, so 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?

**True Crime**

Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*. Michelle McNamara’s *I’ll Be Gone in the Dark*. All are masterful works of true crime– a genre capable of riveting its audience like no other. Across film, literature, and TV, true crime is the fastest-growing genre of the 21st century, with the podcast *Serial* breaking iTunes records in 2014 and has since been downloaded nearly 400 million times. True crime resides in a gripping and controversial league of its own– credited with training law school students in forensics, marshalling tens of thousands of amateur

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Reddit sleuths, and leading to the arrests of cold-case perpetrators. It is also criticized for sensationalism, one-sided narratives, and re-traumatizing victims and their families. How does true crime draw us into its storytelling vortex to evoke fear, compassion, empathy, outrage, incomprehension and even understanding? What are the ethical, social, legal, and psychological implications of true crime film, TV, podcasts, and books – both for audiences and the individuals they feature? Can a true crime documentary really teach us about sociopathy, forensics, and the dark corridors of the human mind? Can the genre yield something aesthetically “beautiful” – a work of art? Where is the line between documentary and the speculative conjecture of docufiction? In this course, students may explore any aspect of the true crime genre including specific cases, portrayals, and controversies, as well as the psychosocial, ethical, cultural, and philosophical questions that arise from these investigations.