

Rutgers University Writing Program

201: Research and Writing in the Disciplines

Course List Fall 2021

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 to meet either the Revision-Based (WCr) or the Discipline-Based (WCd) Writing & Communication goals. The course may be taken to fulfill either of these requirements, but not both.
- 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.

Architecture, Design, and Public Space

From shopping malls to student centers, war memorials to community playgrounds, historic buildings to iconic structures, places of worship and relaxation, place and space has a significant influence on our lives. How we construct and design our physical surroundings reveals a great deal about both who and what we are. This course invites students to explore the relationships between "space" and "place" by examining why different factors (e.g., history, geography, religion) impact on the way individuals perceive and design the spaces they occupy in their physical world. Possible research topics include the politics of property rights and eminent domain; the redesign of urban centers, using concepts such as "defensible space;" and the representation of buildings, public squares, and monuments as evidence of cultural memory.

College!

This course explores the changing meaning of college in America, with a focus on the increasing privatization of public education. Research topics might include the rising costs of college and matching student debt, the disconnect between student life and academics, the stressful competition for admission to the most selective schools, the expense of remedial education, the rise of big time college sports as a revenue stream, the history of student protest movements, the role of fraternities and sororities, and the complex relationship between faculty and corporations. As part of the class, students will be required to conduct at least one primary source interview that is appropriate to their projects. This is a hybrid course with meetings one day each week supplemented by online activities, which will include keeping a research blog and participating in online discussion forums.

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.

Creativity

Exploring creativity! Where does it come from—the cosmos, the muses, our DNA? Do creative people think outside the “box?” What is the “box?” How do we break through to our innate originality and live it rather than conceal it in order to fit in? Are imagination, innovation, and inspiration the exclusive domain of the arts and sciences, or essential components for enriching our lives as well as our diverse profession? Those are some of the issues we’ll investigate. Research topics to consider include: creative ability and autism; effects of drugs on creative output; advertising and creative persuasion; the dark side and curse of creativity; left-handedness; the use of the Golden Mean—the mysterious number employed to establish order and beauty in art. Ultimately, you are free to follow your inspiration to discover other related topics.

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.

Family

What does your family mean to you? What did your family look like growing up? What does a family look like in 2021? What does it mean to be part of the modern family? This class will explore the history of the family unit, exploring how our ideas about family have changed throughout the past century. We will consider the ways in which the family unit has evolved, and the ways in which the family has stayed the same. The potential individual research topics could include family and work, family at home, marriage and family, divorce, race and family, family life during Covid, gender and family, family and finances, politics and family, family separation at the border, families around the world, the extended family, adoption, children in family life, family in literature, family in movies and television, the future of the family.

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.

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.

Food and Identity

Food is a vital part of life, and while it sustains and nourishes us, it is so much more. Food defines family traditions, childhood memories, festive rituals, and pivotal life moments. Whether a Japanese tea ceremony, Superbowl wing night, religious and holiday feasts, pizza with old friends, or your mom's precious recipe for kimchee, food is sacred, ever-present, and serious business. Vegans do not eat any animal products; dancers count calories; athletes count protein; Jews and Muslims eschew pork. Restaurants are everywhere. Are diners low-class or cool kitsch? What defines our food choices, and in what ways do they define us? In this course, students are invited to explore the intersection of food and identity in a way that fascinates them. Approaches might include, but are not limited to, culture, family, social status, health, and the body, changing traditions, etc. How does food reflect and influence one's culture and identity? What is the significance of what we choose to eat or what our families eat? How is food related to culture, gender, profession, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or religion? Should food identity be fixed or fluid?

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.

Human Ecology in the 21st Century

"How do humans live with our environments – both the ones that we build (the city, the suburb, the agricultural landscape) and the ones the earth provide for us? How do humans change the earth, and how does the earth change us? These are central questions for the holistic and transdisciplinary field of Human Ecology, an approach to environmental studies that invites participation and perspectives from ecology, psychology, public health, the fine arts, anthropology, literature, law, engineering, journalism, philosophy, and beyond. In this course, we'll learn the critical research and writing skills you'll want to write about the relationships between humans and our built and wild environments. Your topics are boundless: wherever humans live on earth, there's a topic to discover and explore; these can range anywhere from questions about living under the Anthropocene (the end of human time forever and always?), to environmental racism and climate justice, tree-bathing, apocalyptic imaginaries, space travel and Afro-futurism, the fungal networks that cover entire states, tar sands mining and oil pipelines, sacred geometries, religious approaches to earth

stewardship, women's ecofeminist collective farms in the 1970s, the behavioral economics of climate change mitigation, sea walls and coastal restoration, representations of nature in literature, film, and art, the queer farmers' movement and gay rodeos, Indigenous rights and epistemologies. If you can find the human-nature connection, there's nothing you can't dig into for a truly imaginative project, unbound by disciplinarity!"

Incarceration, Justice, and the Law

Americans make up only 4.22 percent of the world's population, yet we house 22% percent of the world's prison population. Our nation's prisoners are majority black and Hispanic, nearly all come from poverty, and 45% suffer from mental illness. How can we as a nation commit to meaningful legal reform? What principles guide--or should guide--our judicial philosophies and legal statutes? How can we address violent vs. non-violent offenders and those suffering from addiction? What models exist for successful rehabilitation? In this course, we will analyze the mechanisms of law enforcement, the causes of mass incarceration, judicial interpretation and application of criminal law, and the rhetoric of criminal justice. Topics that students can explore in individual research projects include the economic incentives behind the carceral state, race and policing, the death penalty, drug offenses, prison abolition, ethical philosophies of justice, the reality of violent crime and its victims, wrongful conviction, mental health and prisons, the political and popular rhetoric of crime and incarceration in the United States, and more.

Lost in Translation: Language, Culture, and the Self

Can we consider language as the most powerful/greatest human creation? Where does language come from? Do we shape our language or does our language shape us? The language history of the world demonstrates the diverse nature of humanity, and the major role language plays in defining a community. Will the character of our language change in the era of communication technology? Are we the last generations to experience languages as we know them today? This section invites students to explore any facet of language including translation, multilingualism, language acquisition, dialect, creolization, race and ethnicity, social class, disappearing and revived languages, linguistic justice, neurolinguistics, puns and word-play.

Love & Sex

Countless songs, novels, and movies focus on the same theme: love. How can we define love? What is the difference between loving someone and being in love? In this course, students will investigate

the ways in which love and sex affect cultural traditions, gender norms, and the human condition. We will look at controversial issues that arise when people defy, redefine, or revisit cultural and social norms associated with love and sex. Possible topics include acts of flirtation, gay marriage, public displays of affection, serial killers and necrophilia, sexuality in comic books, female genital mutilation, Internet sex addiction, sexual predators, and pornography.

Magic & Mythos: Disney in Popular Imagination

In 1934, a little-known outfit called Walt Disney Productions, Inc., launched their first ever feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It became the highest-grossing film of the decade. Flash forward almost ninety years and the American cultural landscape is transformed by the magic of Walt Disney World, Marvel Studios, Pixar, 20th Century Fox, *Star Wars*, Epcot Center, Tokyo DisneySea, and once-in-a-lifetime Disney cruises. Disney in the American mythos has shaped not only the animation, film, and theme park industries but also cultural sensibilities from America to galaxies far, far away. What historical and social narratives does Disney convey or invent, and with what impact? How do Marvel and *Star Wars* films reflect and shape our attitudes about science? How do Disney parks' innovations in design, architecture, and engineering influence guest behavior and modern technology? What does Walt Disney's vision of utopia and progress reveal about his or our values? What and whose vision of America is on display in Disney films, parks, and products? Bring your lightsabers, your glass slippers, and your curiosity to go to infinity and beyond!

Media and Public Life

Examining the state of our “public life” in the present moment is a fraught exercise. Chyrons scrolling across the feeds of traditional news networks present their audiences with entirely different versions of reality, while social media has proven itself less a vigorous new kind of public square than an unnavigable sea of misinformation and hot takes. Yet for all the ways that this fractious state of affairs feels like a new kind of problem, a closer look suggests that the relationship between the media and public life has always been complicated. This class invites students to explore that complexity from a range of angles, with potential research topics relating to one or both of its key concepts. Such research topics might include the shifting nature of the news media; social media as a venue for public discourse; advertising and public relations; contemporary propaganda; political polarization; public protest; government intervention and censorship; the role of art in the public sphere; local kinds of civic infrastructure; and many others.

Music, Dance, and Performance

Performance is a multi-disciplinary and multi-sensory experience that draws from a variety of intentional and unintentional forms of expression. For instance, "Cacti" by choreographer Alexander Ekman, is not only an exhilarating contemporary dance piece, but it also blends elements of percussion, mime, orchestral music, and humor to create a comprehensive performance. The broad scope of this class is designed to facilitate original and impactful research on a wide variety of topics related to music, dance, and performance.

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 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 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? 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?

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*.

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.

Religion and Politics

How do religions come into being? How are they theorized, and in relation to what? Rather than consider religions to be isolated institutions or belief systems, this course will investigate how religions interact with and participate in their surrounding worlds. If we separate the spiritual out from the worldly, temporal, or “secular,” we miss the opportunity to reflect on how religions, and their attendant beliefs, impact the sociopolitical issues and everyday lives of individuals and communities across history. Students can devise a research question that relates to (but is not limited to) the following topics: how religions inform contemporary politics or historic debates surrounding civil rights and slavery; how religions are used by persons to promote their own or contest others’ power; how religions devolve into cults and cult communities; how religion

structures theories of the relationship between gender and sexuality, the private and the public, race and class.

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.

Sports and Athletics

Organized athletics trace back to the Ancient Olympic Games in 776 B.C. and included sports like track and field, boxing, and wrestling. Today, skill sports like basketball, baseball, soccer, and football are played in large stadiums and arenas, and the athletes are stronger, faster, and more business minded. Additionally, technology has changed the game by allowing spectators to witness sports in ways never thought possible. For example, according to “Topend Sports: the Sports and Science Resource,” the 2020 US Open Tennis Championships implemented the next level Hawk-Eye Live that made line calls in real time (www.topendsports.com). In this course students may research any aspect of sports and athletics including sports management, social issues in sports, sports equity, coaching and training, performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), technology and sports, professional and amateur athletes, social media and branding, and sports injuries.

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?

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 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 docu-fiction? 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.

The Unexplained

People have always been driven to explore mysteries. Some turn into obsessions. Why is the power of curiosity and the need to know such a motivating force? Are some mysteries ever fully solved or do we just find new ways to understand them? Are UFOs a religion? A myth? A very real extraterrestrial phenomenon? All of the above? Are crop circles a human meme, an extraterrestrial sign, or something else entirely? Is there a hypothetical Planet X in our solar system? Or is it maybe a small black hole? What is dark matter? Why should I care? Are you the type of person who just needs to know? Is there a mystery that you have always wondered about? Then this is the course for you! We will explore a mystery together, about which you will write a short paper, and then you will develop an independent project wherever it leads.

Villains, Violence & Heroes

Walter White. Cersei Lannister. Tony Soprano. Dwight K. Schrute. We love antiheroes, 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 the readings from Chuck Klosterman’s *I Wear the Black Hat* and Maggie Nelson’s *The Age 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? How does antiheroism make available new types of fictional narrative, ethics, and subject matter? What political, technological, and intellectual trends have come to undermine our love for traditional heroism?