Duke Writes

THOMPSON WRITING PROGRAM

Spring 2026 Writing 120 Constellation Pairings

Constellation: Why do we need rules?

WRITING 120.59CN- 120.62CN

ROAD NOT TAKEN

Instructor: Laurel Burkbauer

TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM-TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM

The Road Not Taken: Alternate Selves, Parallel Lives, and the Choices That Define Us

Do you ever wish you could have a do-over? That you could know the outcome of your choices before you make them? That you could read the last chapter of your own life first? This course will introduce you to the norms and practices of academic writing while exploring what the essayist Cheryl Strayed calls “the ghost ship that didn’t carry us”—the

many counterfactual lives we could have lived had we made different decisions at crucial moments along the way. This course topic relates to the Constellation theme of rules on the level of the individual, posing the question: “What rules should we have for ourselves?”

Our course texts—Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, Matt Haig’s *The Midnight Library*, and the film *Past Lives*—all ask, “What if…?” What if I could go back and make different choices? What if I had accepted that other job? What if I had married someone else? They feature figures who are able to experience multiple potential lives or who are prompted to stop and reflect on their own life trajectories because of encounters with other people who represent alternative life paths. These main texts will be supplemented by literary criticism, personal essays, and poetry that is concerned with decision-making, regret, potential, and possibility.

The signature assignment of the course requires you to select a novel, film, or piece of narrative nonfiction related to our course themes and interpret it through the lens of relevant secondary sources you find in your own research process. From *Groundhog Day* to *Everything Everywhere All At Once* to *La La Land*—time loops, multiverse stories, and what-might-have-beens are all fair game here! Shorter assignments ask you to close-read a film scene, respond to a book review, craft your own argument related to a critical essay, and create an annotated bibliography. You will also interview an older adult about a life-changing decision and present key takeaways to the class in order to cultivate wisdom in our community.

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Rules constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Constellation: How does social control operate in the modern world?

WRITING 120.57CN

DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Instructor: Kevin Casey

TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM

Dystopian stories – which typically feature various forms of suffering, subjugation, violence, and injustice meted out by authoritarian or totalitarian people in power – have long held sway in our popular culture and imagination. That's reflected by decades of memorable entries in the category, from the classics of high school English classes (such as Brave New World and 1984) to the more recent run of bestselling series featuring young heroines (such as The Hunger Games and Divergent).

This first-year writing seminar will look at the topic through the disciplinary lens of English literature and other media (such as film, TV, or video games.) In the process, we'll develop skills in critical inquiry, close reading, and (of course) writing – all while asking questions (and proposing answers) about why dystopian stories are so popular, how this genre of fiction intersects with our real world, and what they can teach us about our current moment and shared histories.

Writing assignments will include a close reading, a research paper, a personal essay, as well as several shorter pieces. This class makes no assumptions about your background or future plans, but does presume you want to read several novels (see below) and engage in regular class discussions about those stories and your own ideas and work.

This class will require reading two complete novels as well as shorter pieces. The novels are The Handmaid's Tale (Margaret Atwood) and Chain-Gang All-Stars (Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah),

It will also include watching, on your own time, 2-3 feature length films. Representative examples include Fight Club and The Dark Knight.

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Social Control constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Constellation: How do we see ourselves as political beings?

WRITING 120.40CN

DOLLY PARTON FOR PRESIDENT?

Instructor: Leslie Maxwell

TUTH 1:25PM-2:40PM

Dolly Parton, the famous—dare I say legendary—country singer, pop singer, businessperson, and philanthropist is, 60 years into her career, still moving forward. She understands social media, she knows how to joke and not take herself too seriously, and she also knows when to stop when she starts feeling uncomfortable in a situation—usually when the topic turns to politics.

Parton is nearly universally beloved in the United States (and abroad!), and often for different reasons: some may see her as a savvy businessperson, others love her music, and still others admire her philanthropy. Is she feminist or not? Is she politically neutral, or is there no such thing? Where some see a high-powered businessperson, others may see a cog in capitalism's machine. Some see her embrace of characteristics stereotypically associated with the South, and even more specifically with Appalachia, as bringing awareness of Appalachian culture to the mainstream—yet others see this as exploitative of a culture that is already marginalized in the United States. Some see a public figure that is outspoken, and others see a public figure that never speaks out (how is this one even possible?). Dolly Parton has created an image that is instantly recognizable—iconic, even. She's embraced by today's pop singers, recently collaborating with artists such as Beyoncé and Sabrina Carpenter, as well as her goddaughter Miley Cyrus.

In this course, we will explore these (and more!) complexities. How much does Parton contribute to the mythology of Dolly Parton, and how much does our culture contribute? How much do we, as members of the same society, continue to contribute? We will explore these questions and more, all the complications, twists and turns that make Dolly Dolly. Through this investigation, we will hone skills needed in academic writing and discourse, such as those skills that ask us to look at the complexities and complications inherent in an academic discipline. This course will use a multidisciplinary approach.

We will read book excerpts and essays, both in Parton's words and in the words of others. We will listen to podcasts, watch movies/films, and, of course, listen to Parton's music. Our class will emphasize critical reading and writing, and you will learn about how and why we use sources and texts in writing. Students will generate three major writing projects: a close reading of a text, an annotated bibliography, and a creative project. Classes will consist of small-group, large-group, and individual activities and small-group and large-group discussions. Engagement is an important part of the course grading components, as well.

Though we'll work hard, we'll also have fun, remembering Dolly's wise advice: "Don't get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life."

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Political Bodies constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Constellation: How do people respond to and resist Colonialism?

WRITING 120.30CN

RHETORIC OF COMEDY

Instructor: Benjamin Hojem

TUTH 4:40PM - 5:55PM

From Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" to South Park and The Daily Show, we take it for granted that comedy is a form of resistance, resistance against hypocrisy, corruption, and oppressive forces in our politics and culture. But is this true? Does comedy stoke our rebellious natures, or is it more like a release valve that encourages us to capitulate to the status quo? This course will explore this question through the perspectives of cultural critics, academic theorists, and the comedians themselves.

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Colonialism constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Constellation: What drives the decision for war or peace?

WRITING 120.48CN

ATTENDING TO ATTENTION

Instructor: David Landes

TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM

Attending to Attention - The Secret Method of the Liberal Arts

A revolution is occurring in the ways we pay attention, demanding that we learn, unlearn, and relearn ways of attending across most aspects of contemporary life. To our aid, a liberal arts education trains students' attention--liberally and liberatorily--to "cultivate and practice the kinds of attention that will make them intelligent observers, diligent critics, and thoughtful actors on the stage of human life" (Sullivan). This academic writing course teaches critical research and writing skills through exploring how different kinds of attention shape our various ways of knowing, thinking, and doing.

Our inquiry-driven writing within the liberal arts tradition will organize our survey of various conceptions of attention and will aid our building of cutting-edge vocabularies for attention's situational dynamics from the experiencer's point of view (e.g., the kind of attention you're using while reading this). Guiding texts will span the humanities, sciences, arts, and the technological frontier, providing theories and case studies to help us ask: What are the means by which attention is formed in any given situation? How is attention constructed, structured, and variably reconfigured? Students will select situations of their interest where the type of attention used determines differences in outcomes. Writing and research assignments will scaffold the process of conducting attention analyses. The final essay culminates your work as a participant-researcher analyzing and creating modes of attention optimized for goals in a given situation. Ultimately, students will be learning two interrelated fundamental methodologies of the liberal arts: 1) the conventions of academic reading, writing, and researching, and 2) the foundational skills of attention that are implicit to all academic work, disciplinary knowledge, and social action.

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Peace or War constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Constellation: How do sports shape society?

WRITING 120.46CN-120.47CN

SPORTS AND THE WRITTEN WORD

Instructor: James Holaday

TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM-TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM

For well over 100 years, sports have played an important role in American (and world) culture. And as long as there have been sports, people have written about them. From game reports in newspapers to biographies to autobiographies to predictions for the future to pure fiction, writings related to sports run the gamut. They often cross the line from journalism to literature or even poetry. In this class we will examine how writing about sports has changed over time by reading some of the genres listed above; then students will embark upon several sports-related writing projects of their own. First, students will produce a memoir-type paper on their experiences with sports. Athlete or fan, success or failure, funny or sad–everyone has a story! Secondly, students will produce a paper on an element of sports history. Sports have helped shape society (think Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball) or been shaped by them (think performance enhancing drugs or Olympic boycotts). For this paper, students will go beyond the obvious and do some research to examine a bit of sporting history. Third, since a large part of writing about sports involves telling stories about others, often using the words of those people, the next project will consist of interviewing a sports personality. To do this successfully, students will do any necessary research so that relevant questions can be asked of their subjects. Finally, students will have a chance to use their creativity and write a short story. The story must center around a sporting event of some sort and be written within set word limit guidelines.

This course is reserved for first-year students in the Sports and Society constellation who are assigned to take WRITING 120 this semester.

Spring 2026 Writing 120 Courses

WRITING 120.01

RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!

Instructor: Anna-Paden Carson Lagarde

MW 8:30AM-9:45AM

The 1746 Lima Earthquake. Hurricane Katrina, 2005. The Peshtigo Fire of 1871. COVID-19. From earthquakes and hurricanes to wildfires and pandemics, disasters have long shaped human societies and the stories we tell about them.

As the climate crisis intensifies, these events are becoming more frequent and devastating, affecting nearly every corner of our world. Yet within each disaster, there are countless individual experiences – spectacular stories of survival, loss, and resilience – that risk being reduced to statistics, lost in the larger narrative, and forgotten to time.

This course explores how disasters are documented, interpreted, and narrated by those with different perspectives and interests -- including survivors, historians, journalists, government officials, and artists -- and how their stories influence public perception, policy responses, and recovery efforts. Who controls the narrative, and what determines whose

voices are heard and whose are silenced? Who is blamed, who is exalted, and why? And how do these stories shape our collective understanding of disasters – past, present, and future?

Through case studies from diverse historical and cultural contexts, we will examine how disaster narratives have been crafted in literature, film, visual art, survivor testimony, and historical accounts. By analyzing these cultural responses, students will explore how people and societies make sense of catastrophe, not just as physical events but as moments of meaning-making, identity formation, and political contestation.

WRITING 120.02

BLACK RELIGIOUS RHETORIC

Instructor: Imhotep Newsome

MW 4:40PM-5:55PM

From the antebellum period through the mid-20th century, Black writers transformed religious discourse into a powerful instrument of resistance, testimony, and social critique. This course examines how enslaved, formerly enslaved, and free African Americans wielded biblical language and moral authority to challenge injustice, assert human dignity, and envision liberation.

Through intensive analysis of primary texts spanning over a century, we'll explore the rhetorical sophistication of writers who used religious tradition as both shield and sword in America's ongoing struggles over race, freedom, and justice. This writing-intensive seminar will sharpen your analytical skills, strengthen your academic voice, and develop your capacity for historically grounded argumentation.

Central Inquiry: Do the arguments crafted by these authors still speak meaningfully to our contemporary moment?

WRITING 120.03

BEING THE OTHER: DIASPORA & LIT

Instructor: Zeena Fuleihan

WF 3:05PM-4:20PM

Being the Other: Diaspora and Literature

What does it mean to feel "othered" as an individual living in diaspora, or to feel out of place both in one's current society and a familial homeland? In the past few decades, literature concerned with diasporic movement and experience has exploded in popularity in the publishing market in the United States and United Kingdom, but academic scholarship on these works is only beginning to emerge. By engaging with a range of such anglophone twenty-first century diasporic literature, this course teaches critical reading, analysis, and writing skills as we probe formations of identity and cultural belonging, on the one hand, and the complex gendered and racialized experiences of exile and immigration, on the other.

The texts we read will primarily emerge from diasporas from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, allowing for postcolonial and transnational inquiry in locations with some shared colonial and postcolonial histories. After beginning with a set of foundational readings, we will move into four units titled Mapping Home; How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?; Moving Between Worlds; and Trauma and Memory. In each unit, we will read contemporary fictional novels in which diasporic experience and movement is a central theme. Along the way, students will engage with key problematics of postcolonial, feminist, and diasporic studies such as Orientalism, the unhomely, hybridity, transnational movement, and intergenerational trauma and memory studies.

WRITING 120.04

AI, ETHICS AND SOCIETY

Instructor: Victor Crespo Santiago

WF 8:30AM-9:45AM

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has advanced rapidly in recent years. Today's most advanced AI systems approach human-level performance in many tasks. Given this pace of development, many experts predict that AI will radically reshape society within this century. On the most optimistic view, AI could greatly advance humanity's flourishing. However, if things go wrong, AI could permanently curtail humanity's potential or even generate immense suffering. First, this course introduces what AI is, how it has developed, and how Large Language Models (LLMs) work. Then, we will examine some social and

political risks AI poses and discuss appropriate responses. For example, assessment algorithms are already being deployed in areas such as college admissions, mortgage approval, and hiring. What would it mean for these algorithms to treat people fairly, regardless of protected attributes like race, gender, or national origin? Beyond these immediate concerns, we will also explore some potential longer-term risks.

WRITING 120.05

SUBTLE ASIAN TRAITS

Instructor: Jaeyeon Yoo

TUTH 4:40PM-5:55PM

Who or what do we define as “Asian,” both within and outside of America?

From coolie to model minority to robot, the Asian figure has been saturated with cultural stereotyping and fetishization. In recent decades, we’ve seen the rise of global Asian culture, heightened by the Internet and an ever-expanding Asian diasporic population; K-pop, boba tea, and the Facebook group “Subtle Asian Traits” are only a few examples of Asia’s continued viral symbolism.

The course examines the circulation of “Asianness” in 20th and 21st century Anglophone literature and popular culture, as well as the efforts and problems of self-representation. Through literature and cultural studies, we will explore the mutating—and sometimes contradictory—ideas of Asianness throughout history, as well as their interactions with capitalism, racialization, nationalism, and imperialism. Readings include political cartoons and Facebook posts as well as novels, plays, and anthologies. All course materials will be provided in English.

Throughout the course, we will engage in active writing alongside discussions on how to write/read. There will be in-class workshops held throughout the semester on various aspects of writing, such as how to annotate texts, edit, give feedback, and outline; the course offers opportunities to engage with different styles and forms of writing, such as writing for a public-facing audience. Aside from the final project, other assignments may include reading responses and reflective exercises.

WRITING 120.06

THE "REAL" WORLD

Instructor: David Palko

MW 8:30AM-9:45AM

Have you ever heard something criticized as “not real”? Maybe it was a street-peddled Louis Vuitton bag, a plate of turkey bacon, or even someone’s laugh. Yet what we mean by “not real” can be surprisingly slippery. In some instances, we may be talking about an item being counterfeit; other times, we may be referring to something fictional, inauthentic, nonexistent, or untrue—to name just a few possibilities. Each of these uses conveys value judgments, such as preferring old over new or prizing “natural” processes over technology-assisted ones. These underlying values animate questions like “Why is Britney Spears criticized for lip synching to her own music at concerts?” or “Why has the J. Paul Getty Museum spent a small fortune to determine if its Kouros sculpture is a forgery?” These are the kinds of questions we will consider in this course. We will ask what we mean by “real” and how it changes in different contexts. We will interrogate the values and ideologies we subscribe to when we describe things in these ways. And most importantly, we will think critically about whether we agree with the values that society tends to privilege in each of these contexts.

Topics covered will cross a wide variety of disciplines. Areas of focus will likely include genetics in *Jurassic Park* and *Blade Runner*, auto-tune and lip-synching in music, narratives in court proceedings, embellishment and ghostwriting in memoirs, forgery in visual art, spectacle in reality television, and of course, advances in artificial intelligence. Coursework will include reading (and in some cases, watching) materials to prepare for active classroom discussion. These discussions will be followed by frequent low-stakes writing assignments. Students can expect the assignments to explore writing for different purposes and audiences. Students will also regularly participate in collaborative workshops about their assignments to identify aspects of their writing to sustain and aspects to improve.

The final project will be a long-term guided experience through the writing process. Required activities will focus separately on brainstorming, research, drafting, revising, and polishing. Engagement at each stage will constitute a substantial portion of the project grade as will the final products to be turned in: a written project, an oral presentation, and a personal reflection. At least one draft of the written project will be submitted for instructor feedback prior to final submission. This process is designed to give students a framework

for approaching intellectual writing assignments throughout their time at Duke and, ultimately, in their professional lives.

WRITING 120.07

SCIENCE FICTION(S)

Instructor: Camey VanSant

MW 4:40PM-5:55PM

The nineteenth century witnessed major milestones in science and technology, from the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* to the rise of photography to advancements in transportation, such as steam trains and subways.

In this course, we will focus on three works of fiction that put science and technology at their center: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). As we read, we will focus on how the texts engage with the scientific explorations, social changes, and cultural anxieties that defined the time. Toward the end of the semester, we will ask similar questions about more recent texts, TV shows, or films—and we'll even take recommendations from the class.

All the while, we will research and write about a wide variety of sources: from literary texts to scholarly articles to historical and scientific documents. Assignments include three short blog posts; an in-class presentation; and three papers (a close reading; an annotated bibliography; and a research paper that takes the place of a final exam).

As you work on your three major papers, you will collaborate with classmates during writing workshops. You will also have the opportunity revise one or both of your first two papers.

WRITING 120.08

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Instructor: Jamie Brown

TUTH 4:40PM-5:55PM

"We don't have time for the green-washing fables of rich countries and richer corporations, nor to wait for climate breakdown and say 'I told you so.' Because we have 'told them so' many times, but this time we will be heard" (Extinction Rebellion Serbia, tweet 2/6/22).

As climate change puts more pressure on global systems, we can see that some places and people experience a disproportionate impact. Those most affected include poor and marginalized communities in every area, indigenous populations, and countries in the global South. One aspect of climate justice is that the voices of those experiencing the most impacts are often not the voices the world hears. Our class asks, "Who is telling the story of climate change and justice and how are they telling it? What kinds of change do these narratives envision, or demand?"

Class will begin with a brief examination of the scholarly literature about climate change: What drives it? What are the disproportionate effects? What can be done? We'll explore different perspectives on impacts and solutions, such as indigenous ecological knowledge, then we will tie in our own individual experiences. Along the way we will gain basic literacy with the language of climate change and climate justice. While the language of climate justice can be found in libraries and news articles, more often it's found in graffiti, in social media, in fiction and spoken poetry, in impromptu speeches and protest actions. It's found in interviews, essays, short films, and art installations. Here, you will have the opportunity to focus on modes of expression that are most interesting to you and share your insights with your classmates.

Writing assignments: You will write frequent short (100-150 words) reflections to share your responses to specific materials; two analysis papers (800-1,000 words each) where you will build skills in scholarly argument, synthesis, and revision; and a creative project that will combine writing and multimodal work to add your own voice to the climate justice narrative. Through these assignments you will build scholarly engagement and writing skills that can be easily transferred to other academic work.

WRITING 120.09-120.10-120.11

PREVENTING PANDEMICS

Instructor: Miranda Welsh

TUTH 11:45AM-1:00PM- TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM- TUTH 4:40PM-5:55PM

Preventing pandemics: interdisciplinary approaches to preparedness

In 2015, in the wake of SARS, H1N1, and Ebola, the United Nations and the World Health Organization convened a global team of experts to assess the threat of future epidemics. The team found that outbreaks are becoming more common for a multitude of reasons and we are unprepared to deal with them when they occur. They concluded that without better approaches to prevention and containment, future epidemics are inevitable: a prediction that has come to bear.

Where are new outbreaks most likely to occur and why? What ecological, sociopolitical, and cultural factors contribute to differences across locales in disease emergence, spread, and the capacity to respond? How have our dominant understandings--or narratives--of disease shaped our preparedness and response efforts to date? In the first third of our course, we will use an interdisciplinary case study of a single epidemic to examine these questions together, via guided readings, writings, and small-group discussions. You will summarize two of the guided readings independently (1 page each) and compose a written analysis of one of them (2 pages).

In the second two-thirds of the course, you will use your developing interests to form a three-person research team. Throughout the rest of the course, each team will collaborate to research a contemporary epidemic (e.g., cholera, Zika, SARS) and compose a review and synthesis paper about that epidemic (15-20 pages). In the paper, teams will summarize the biology of and public health response to the epidemic and then present three additional narratives of the epidemic, each from a different disciplinary perspective:

1. Ecological: specific environmental conditions and human-environment interactions encourage outbreaks (e.g., El Niño, deforestation, wildlife trade)
2. Cultural/anthropological: specific beliefs, values, norms, or customs (e.g., distrust, stigma, individualism) encourage outbreaks, as do culturally inappropriate interventions
3. Political/economic: specific characteristics of states and sociopolitical systems encourage outbreaks (e.g., by increasing poverty or inequality, by decreasing security or stability)

Each team member will research one of the three disciplinary narratives and present their findings in one of three sub-sections of the review and synthesis paper (3-4 pages per sub-section). Team members will work together to compose: 1) an introduction that summarizes the biology of and public health response to the epidemic; 2) a conclusion that applies the results of all three sub-sections to suggest specific improvements to prevention and/or mitigation efforts (3-4 pages each). 70% of the grade for the review and

synthesis paper will be based on the individual sub-section and 30% will be based on the co-written introduction and conclusion; 5% of the overall grade will be based on team member evaluations.

As you work on the review and synthesis paper, you will be expected to meet with your research team outside of class on a few occasions. Throughout the course, we will use guided workshops and peer review to revise our writing, and you will be expected to consider and incorporate the feedback you receive from your peers and/or professor before submitting a final product.

WRITING 120.12

WRITING PORTRAYED IN MEDIA

Instructor: Sharieka S Botex

MW 3:05PM-4:20PM

How do popular media and scholarly texts portray writing, reading, communication, and other literacy practices of various professions and academic disciplines? In what ways do scholars across disciplines discuss their writing and research on television shows, music, podcasts, and other forms of entertainment and media? When and how do media portrayals of writing, reading, and communication in various fields differ from and/or compare to lived experiences among people in these professions and scholarly fields? These are among some of the questions this class will provide you with an opportunity to explore. In this class, we will explore scholarly texts and popular entertainment media to learn how people discuss the writing, reading, and communication they do in their professional fields. This course requires students to review television shows, podcasts, music, and scholarship that shed light on academic and professional paths to better familiarize themselves with the ways writing, reading and communication transpire in their future majors or careers.

In this class, students are required to complete three main writing projects[1]: 1. Contemporary Issues Journals, in which they respond to assigned writing prompts, explore topics of interest and engage with scholarly texts and popular media sources. 2. An 8-10 page double-spaced research paper, which explores intersections between media and scholarly sources related to a profession or academic discipline of your choosing and a topic you are interested in writing about. 3. A media pitch in which you propose an idea about media content that you believe should be created to inform people about the writing,

reading, and communication in your intended major or future career and persuade them about why literacy practices are valuable in the field. Through writing and revising your assignments and participating in peer-review focused on the major writing assignments, you will develop an awareness of the literacy practices you may use in your future professional and academic endeavors and learn about similarities and differences in writing, reading and communication in different majors and professions.

WRITING 120.13

BODIES IN CULTURE

Instructor: Marcia Rego

MW 3:05PM-4:20PM

Bodies in Culture: Reading and Writing the Social Body

Using the human body as its principal lens, this course invites you to use the framework of cultural anthropology to think critically about pressing social issues and about your own surroundings and daily life. We will examine cross-cultural beliefs and practices concerning bodies, while perfecting important skills of academic writing and posing our own questions: How are our bodies regulated by various governmental, familial, and interpersonal spheres of influence? In what ways do we embody personal, religious, and political values? What are the ways in which different societies punish, reward, or commodify bodies?

In the process of reading about the social meanings of physical bodies—in everything from funerary cannibalism in the Amazon, to extreme body art in North America—you will compose short weekly essays (2-3 pages) in which you will practice different aspects of academic writing (i.e., acknowledging sources, delineating a claim, and supporting an argument). These essays will help you build both a theoretical background and a repertoire of writing skills that you will use to produce two major projects.

The first project (6-8 pages) will be a research proposal focusing on a specific way in which societies classify, regulate, consume, or commodify bodies. You will investigate a practice or issue of your choosing (e.g., organ donation, the plastic surgery industry, eating

disorders, the training of medical students), review the relevant anthropological literature, and propose a new set of questions and a research plan.

The second project will be a photo-annotation essay (1-3 PowerPoint slides), in which you will critically analyze an advertisement from popular media (an ad for cosmetics, sports shoes, deodorant, gym membership, etc.) to reveal the value(s) it reinforces or creates regarding bodies. All assignments are designed to foster your skills as a thinker and writer, as you engage in multiple drafts, revisions, and peer-critique workshops of your writing projects.

WRITING 120.14-120.16-120.17

CRAFTING MAGIC

Instructor: Cheryl Spinner

TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM- MW 1:25PM - 2:40PM- MW 3:05PM - 4:20PM

Crafting Magic: Writing & the Occult

The past decade has witnessed the renaissance of the witch, which last had its height amidst the "goth weirdos" of the 1990's. Currently, patches, t-shirts, and pins pepper Etsy with statements like "Support Your Local Coven" and "'We Are the Granddaughters of the Witches You Could Not Burn.'" Books and think-pieces have been published about this current phenomenon by popular tarot readers, astrologists, and witches, all of whom address the feminist, queer, activist potential of these practices. Most recently, performing powerhouse Taylor Swift has been accused of witchcraft on stage during her record-breaking concert, "Eras," and Swifties are experiencing a real psychological condition known as "post-concert amnesia."

We will begin with the Salem Witch Trials, traverse the 19th-century spiritualist and occultist movements, pivot to representations of witches in the 1960's and 70's, spend some time in the grungy 90's, and end with witchcraft in our current moment. We will examine the literary qualities of Tarot, spells, and incantations, and question the distinction between writing and magic. Is there really a difference between a poem and an incantation? Can the lyrics of a rock song be a hex?

We will also explore the often-overlooked mystical dimensions of the book as object. We will explore how books serve not merely as vessels of information, but as potent artifacts capable of transmitting ancient wisdom and embodying life itself. With “spines” that bind them together, how are books “bodies?”

As a whole, the course is an alchemy of disciplines. You might think of it as the following equation:

$$RM = W+L+H+A$$

(Radical Magic = Writing + Literature + History + Art)

Expect to produce quite a bit of writing over the course of the semester, which will include:

1. Weekly Blog Posts
2. Digital Archival Research Project
3. Literature Review
4. Bibliography
5. Grimoire

These assignments are intended to teach you varying techniques of writing genres over the course of the semester, which range from traditional academic writing, writing for the general public, and magical writing. Bi-weekly blog posts will clock in at around 250-500 words and will be informal responses to the reading of the week, and/or be a space to complete short assignments in response to a prompt. With the digital archival project you will learn how to conduct advanced academic research in David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University. You will choose an object from the treasures of Duke’s extensive collections related to magic and the supernatural and provide a 1,000 word description of the piece and why it is important for an exhibit on magic, feminism, and the supernatural. Collectively, we will gather the artifacts each of you have chosen and present them in a virtual exhibition. The archival project is intended to give you an opportunity to engage in writing that is not academic but intended for a more public facing audience. The literature review will train you in traditional academic writing. You will choose your topic of interest and write a literature review requiring a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed sources that outlines the major debates in the field.

For your final project, you will create your own physical grimoire. Creativity is encouraged. These grimoires, or "spell-books," are yours. If something inspires you, don't ask me—just put it in! There are parameters to the assignment that make it gradeable, but aside from those you really have free-range.

WRITING 120.15-120.50

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE & WRITING

Instructor: Charlotte Asmuth

TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM- TUTH 11:45AM-1:00PM

What do linguists know about language, and how can this help us with our writing? How do our identities shape our language use/writing—and vice versa? What can we learn about language/writing from doing field research with people? How might generative artificial intelligence affect language difference in writing? How might we (as readers, writers, researchers, and language users ourselves) respond to language difference?

These are some of the questions we'll explore in this section of Writing 120. Historically, language use marked as "different" in some way (e.g., slang, dialects, minoritized languages) has been treated by politicians, educators, and the general public as a problem to be fixed or eradicated. Our course operates with two assumptions, both of which make considering language in a college writing course interesting and useful:

1. the ability to communicate in multiple languages and/or use varieties of English is an increasingly common asset in today's world;
2. given that you will need to write for a variety of contexts in college and beyond, it's more useful to explore language patterns and options for what people ***can*** and ***do*** in their writing rather than for me to tell you what you ***can't*** or ***shouldn't*** do in your writing (Aull, 2024). After all, any proscriptions about writing (e.g., "don't use *I*," "avoid contractions") are not generalizable to all writing contexts!

Our course texts will include academic pieces written by linguists and writing scholars, book chapters that demystify aspects of academic writing (e.g., achieving "flow" in writing, finding and managing sources, revising), the occasional opinion piece, as well as the writing you and your peers produce in response to these published texts. As we look at this writing, we won't be examining it to see what is "good" or "bad" about it. Rather, we'll examine it to hone our sense of how readers might respond to writing and to learn writing

techniques. In other words, you'll learn to read for writing techniques (for anticipating readers' expectations and concerns, working with sources, defining and contextualizing key terms, summarizing texts, and taking a position in relation to others).

In addition to regular weekly writing assignments, the course will involve two major writing projects, both of which will be reviewed by your peers and me:

1. **Slang Analysis:** ~1,200 - 2,000 words. For this project, you'll explore a slang word or phrase that interests you by studying use of the expression by family and friends, in current dictionaries, and in a global corpus of web-based English/other online tools.
2. **Research Project:** ~2,500 - 3,500 words. You'll get the chance to further explore language and writing through small-scale primary research (e.g., interviews, surveys) that relates to your interests. The project will be divided into manageable stages over the second half of the semester.

No prior knowledge of another language is necessary for the course. This section of Writing 120 may be of special interest to multilingual students, future educators, students curious about how writing/language works, and students who are interested in doing research or studying languages, linguistics, cultures, politics, and policies, but all first-years are welcome.

WRITING 120.18

ASIAN AMERICAN NARRATIVES

Instructor: Susan Thananopavarn

MW 3:05PM-4:20PM

Asian American Narratives: Literature, History, and Activism

What does it mean to be Asian American in the twenty-first century? How are Asians and Asian Americans represented in popular culture, and how do writers and activists resist and complicate these narratives? Asian American writers have employed various genres to make meaning of their lives and the lives of others, including fiction, autobiographical essays, creative nonfiction, graphic memoirs, and film. Through these texts and your own writing, we will examine the choices people make in framing Asian American

experiences. We will also explore how literature, history, and theory can help us better understand key issues in Asian American studies such as the "model minority" myth, gender and sexuality, international adoption, refugee experiences, and anti-Asian violence. Our reading and weekly writing about these topics will culminate in three major projects for the class. In the first project, a 3-4 page essay, you will explore the issue of Asian American representation in a text of your choice. The second project will consist of a 4-6 page literary analysis that considers how a text responds to a key issue in Asian American studies. The final assignment is an exploration of Asian American oral histories through narrative. For the last project, you will decide the best form—essay, multimedia presentation, graphic novel, etc.—in which to convey an aspect of Asian American history through the lens of a single person's story.

WRITING 120.19

HUMOR AS HEALTH CARE

Instructor: Cary Moskovitz

TUTH 10:05AM-11:20AM

We all like to laugh, but can humor actually improve our health? for some health issues, it seems that it can--but whether such benefits accrue depend on the type of humor and how it is employed. This Writing 101 course will interrogate published research on the effects of humor on human health.

Through critical analyses of published studies investigating humor and health, students will develop skills in academic reading, writing and research. To begin, students will learn selected principles of experimental, human-subject research and some basic statistics concepts. Students will then practice careful, skeptical reading, effective summary, and thoughtful analysis as they draft, give and receive feedback, and revise written reviews of experimental research reports. In the second half of the term, students will produce a research-driven essay on an area of current research on the topic. Audiences for student writing will include both classmates and those beyond the classroom.

Over the course of the semester, students will develop skills in finding and working with appropriate sources, identifying and articulating claims, synthesizing and incorporating evidence, writing structure, and addressing counterarguments and conflicting evidence. Much of the work of the course will be collaborative, with students coauthoring at least one paper, giving feedback on others and working in small groups on many occasions. Students

should be comfortable with group work and reasonably available to collaborate with classmates outside of class time. Prior coursework in statistics is useful but not required.

WRITING 120.20-120.21-120.22

AM I A ROBOT?

Instructor: Michael Dimpfl

MW 11:45AM - 1:00PM- MW 3:05PM - 4:20PM- MW 4:40PM - 5:55PM

AM I A ROBOT? Technology and the End(s) of Experience

How do we develop our skills as writers if our goal is to analyze and understand our experience of the world? What is an analytical argument and what writing tools are necessary to develop a careful understanding of our complicated, technological existence?

Common technologies have transformed everyday practices. Reading, navigating a map, listening to music, turning on the lights, keeping up with the news, ordering food, visiting the doctor – these are but a few of the technologically-mediated experiences common to our day-to-day lives. But, does the promise of technology match the reality of its use?

Over the course of the semester, students will hone their skills as writers by exploring the relationship between our use of technology and our experience of the world. In a society that values technology, we often hear about the positive benefits technology brings. We think because it is technology, it is *good*. As a result, we neglect developing a careful awareness of the harm technology creates. We have an even harder time accounting for what is lost, forgotten or left behind in our immediate uptake of the latest gadget or techno-filtered experience. In this seminar, students will develop a set of critical analytical writing skills to explore the way that technology impacts our understand of not just each other, but the world itself.

Writing practices will require strong reading habits as well as a commitment to developing the reading, writing and observational skills central to critical analysis. We will explore formulating and mobilizing effective claims and take-up the challenge of producing nuanced engagement with unfamiliar thinking and ideas. We will examine the power technology has in our daily lives, particularly the effects it has on our psyches, social relationships, politics, and environment.

This is a reading and writing intensive seminar. We will draw on a variety of different texts, from film to journalism, social science to philosophy. Writing projects will include reading responses to assigned texts, a discussion facilitation project undertaken in collaboration with classmates, and two essays.

WRITING 120.23-120.24

MEDIA, MESSAGES, AND MEANING

Instructor: Hannah Taylor

TUTH 8:30AM-9:45AM- TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM

This course examines how digital spaces shape—and are shaped by—the ways we write, communicate, and participate in communities. From social media platforms to organizational websites, we'll explore how rhetoric operates across digital contexts and what it means to be an ethical, critically engaged digital citizen.

You'll develop skills in academic argumentation and research while analyzing and creating diverse digital genres including social media content, blogs, websites, and multimedia projects. Through hands-on engagement with digital communities of your choosing, you'll investigate how content, purpose, audience, and context intersect in digital writing. We'll examine discourse communities, design principles, and the political, ethical, and cultural values embedded in online communication.

Students will analyze, draft, and revise authentic digital artifacts while exploring questions about privacy, publicity, community engagement, and rhetorical effectiveness across platforms. By semester's end, you'll understand how to adapt your writing to different audiences, purposes, and media, applying these transferable skills to academic, professional, and civic contexts.

WRITING 120.25-120.26-120.27

NEUROSCIENCE & SOCIETY

Instructor: Emily Parks

WF 8:30AM-9:45AM- TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM- TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM

Can brain scans reveal whether someone is lying? Is there such a thing as a "criminal mind"? Do we have free will, or can we blame the brain for our moral shortcomings?

This course will introduce you to the goals and practices of academic writing as we evaluate how neuroscience can inform ethical, legal, and medical questions of our time. We will reflect on themes both ancient and modern: How can neuroscience inform our understanding of our own minds? And how can that understanding, fueled by cutting-edge advances in brain imaging, impact our modern society? Along the way, we explore scientific inquiry – the process by which scientists work together to build and communicate ideas. You will experience this process first-hand, taking on several roles along the way – the scholar learning to respond to scientific texts, the ambassador deciphering complex research for a public audience, and the researcher working in collaboration with other scientists (your classmates!).

Across the semester, you will write two major projects: a scholarly perspective piece (4 pages) and a scientific literature review (~12 pages), both of which will synthesize neuroscientific research to address a societal problem of your choice (e.g., racial bias, disease treatment, juvenile sentencing, drug addiction). For the latter project, you will work on a team of 2-3 students, co-writing the literature review.

This course is ideally suited for students interested in neuroscience, psychology, biology, or the law. The course is built on three principles. First, writing is a vehicle for critical thinking. It is the tool by which you will bridge the classroom and the real world. Second, good writing depends on revision. Thus, you will have many opportunities to practice giving and receiving meaningful feedback amongst your peers. Third, scientific innovation requires collaboration. By joining this Writing 101, you agree to be a contributing member of a team.

WRITING 120.28-120.29

RHETORIC OF COMEDY

Instructor: Benjamin Hojem

TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM- TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM

From Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” to South Park and The Daily Show, we take it for granted that comedy is a form of resistance, resistance against hypocrisy, corruption, and oppressive forces in our politics and culture. But is this true? Does comedy stoke our rebellious natures, or is it more like a release valve that encourages us to capitulate to the

status quo? This course will explore this question through the perspectives of cultural critics, academic theorists, and the comedians themselves.

WRITING 120.31-120.32

TAYLOR'S VERSION

Instructor: Lisa Andres

TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM- TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM

Dear Reader…

When it comes to Oscar nominations, there are always snubs and surprises. But this year, the biggest talking point came from the fact that while Ryan Gosling was nominated for his role as Ken (well deserved) in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* film, neither the director nor Barbie herself, Margot Robbie, received nominations. *Maybe* we could overlook this…that is, if the film hadn't been nominated for Best Picture, which seems to imply, at best, that a film which grossed over a billion dollars at the box office ($1.4, to be exact), directed itself.

But what does this have to do with Taylor Swift? Moments like this in pop culture, far from being innocuous and irrelevant, serve as a cultural mirrorball, reflecting back and magnifying our own struggles navigating what the world expects of us. This course, then, proposes to examine some of those struggles through the lens of Taylor Swift. Over the semester, we'll move through The Eras, applying Stuart Hall's theories of "encoding" and "decoding," and examining Swift's discography through various intertextual lenses (narrative, lyrical, cultural). We will also seek to trace thematic developments and evolving life lessons in her songs, as well as the media narratives which surround her and her *Reputation*. Finally, we'll look at pieces of the *Miss Americana* documentary where Time's 2023 Person of the Year poses the same question we're asking of you: *What now?*

We'll explore the answers all too well through (1) weekly readings and album streamings; (2) seminar discussions which will be led by you & your peers in small groups; (3) a series of low-stakes writing assignments designed to complexify what you know about the writing process & practice essential skills including a lyrical analysis and a literature review; and (4) the development of a capstone podcast project, which will ask you to work in small groups to synthesize arguments into a cohesive & coherent conversation.

…[are you] *Ready For It*?

This course is best suited for those who are interested in the intersection of media studies with critical analyses of race, gender, sexuality and identity. *Do not be fooled by appearances:* this course is not just listening to Taylor Swift songs. You will be expected to critically engage with the texts, visual, auditory, and written. Prior knowledge of Taylor Swift is not required; all levels of Swifties are welcome.

No textbook will be required; you will be asked to stream albums via Spotify.

WRITING 120.33

DECODING DISNEY

Instructor: Lisa Andres

TUTH 1:25PM - 2:40PM

Pardon Our Pixie Dust: Decoding Disney's Innovative History and Creative Films"

Visit any US Disney theme park, and there's always a chance you'll see construction walls around your favorite ride or restaurant. These walls – emblazoned with the words *Pardon Our Pixie Dust* – are usually accompanied by a number of inspirational quotes attributed to Walt Disney and are designed to remind (potentially grumpy) guests that much like their founder, the Disney parks can "*never stand still*." Instead, they must *"explore and experiment."*

One such quote – and my personal favorite – is this one: "*Around here…we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening new doors and doing new things, because we're curious, and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths*." Indeed, Walt Disney's curiosity and drive cemented him as one of America's greatest innovators: he (and his team!) blended sound, music, and color animation to produce the first feature-length animated film in 1937, pioneering the use of the multiplane camera in the process;

they developed the first audio-animatronics; and, of course, Anaheim's Disneyland, which opened in 1955, revolutionized the modern theme park.

This course, then, proposes to investigate the intersection of curiosity, creativity, and innovation through the lens of the Disney Company, specifically its films.

We'll start the semester by establishing a common foundation: we'll briefly look at the history of the company; read excerpts from the memoirs of current Disney CEO Bob Iger and of Pixar co-founder Ed Catmull; and screen "Disney's Folly," the film that started it all – *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Then, we'll turn to adopt the Pixar Brain Trust, which Catmull outlines in his book. The goal of the Brain Trust is to bring together a remarkable group of people to see if they could become something more. (No, wait; that's the Avengers…) The goal is to bring together a remarkable group of people to see if they could *create something more*. They would take an idea, and rather than focus on "fixing the problem" or "finding a solution," they would focus on understanding the weaknesses of the story and the perspectives of the people in the room to enhance and strengthen the final product.

With this model in mind, we'll first work as a class to develop a unifying, over-arching question for our course.
Throughout the semester, we'll model conversations through assigned readings, podcast listenings, and film viewings – which may include: *Frozen* (2013), *Frozen II* (2019), *Zootopia* (2016); *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000); *Soul* (2020); *Inside Out* (2015) and Pixar's new TV series, *Win or Lose* (2025).

And finally, each student will select an "innovative" Disney film of their choice to work with over the course of the semester. Through a series of "puzzle-piece" assignments – a 2-3 page note-taking assignment; two research assignments culminating in a 3-5 page Synthesis and a 4-6 page Summary and Response; and a capstone "articulating a stance" assignment (min. 8 pages) – you'll develop your own individual answer to our course question.
The ultimate goal will be a class podcast, inspired by Cole Cuchna's *Dissect*, where we'll transfer "long-form film analysis" to "short digestible episodes." We'll collaboratively write our introductory episode together, but each episode of the "season" will be based on your own research questions and conversations with each other.

Prior knowledge of the Disney canon is not required, but is strongly encouraged.
No textbook will be required; instead you will be required to have a Disney+ subscription.

WRITING 120.34-120.35-120.36

BIOPHILIC CITIES

Instructor: Lindsey Smith

TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM- TUTH 11:45AM - 1:00PM- TUTH 1:25PM - 2:40PM

In the 1980s, biologist E.O. Wilson popularized the concept of “biophilia,” that humans have an innate desire to connect with the living world. Yet, 60% of the global population now lives in urban areas that are more gray than green, and a recent Pew survey found that 31% of U.S. adults report being online “almost constantly.” Humans are increasingly disconnected from our inner biophilia, and that shift is negatively impacting our physical and mental health as well as the health of our cities. However, there is a movement underway to transform our concrete jungles into “biophilic cities,” filled with innovative greenspaces, wildlife-friendly design, green infrastructure, and habitat restoration that seek to reconnect humans with nature, increase biodiversity in cities, and make our urban centers more climate resilient.

Through a blend of seminar-style discussions, research, and writing projects, we will examine nature’s vast benefits and explore what it takes to design thriving biophilic cities. Our course materials will come from environmental science, urban planning, psychology, and conservation journals, popular magazines and books, and documentaries. In your final project, you will work collaboratively to propose an initiative that seeks to make an urban space of your choice more biophilic. Throughout the semester, you will also take part in a fundamental element of academic writing: exchanging feedback with peers on your works in progress. And, of course, we will get our dose of nature by holding class outside as much as possible and practicing shinrin-yoku (a.k.a. forest bathing) in the Duke Gardens.

WRITING 120.37

WISDOM IN COMPARATIVE RHETORIC

Instructor: Yan Li

MW 1:25PM-2:40PM

Confucius Meets Aristotle: Wisdom in Comparative Rhetoric

What can we learn when Aristotelian and Confucian wisdom traditions meet in conversation? How do different cultural frameworks shape what it means to speak, write, and live wisely? This course invites students to explore rhetorical traditions across time, language, and geography, with a particular focus on how Eastern and Western conceptions of rhetoric reflect and inform broader worldviews.

We will engage foundational thinkers—such as Plato, Confucius, Zhuangzi, Aristotle, and their intellectual descendants—alongside contemporary scholarship in comparative, cultural, and decolonial rhetoric. Together, we'll examine how rhetorical practices are shaped by values, ethics, relationships, and social roles, asking: How does one speak with authority in a Confucian context? What does ethos look like in classical Greece? And what happens when these traditions encounter each other in today's global contact zones?

Rather than viewing Greco-Roman rhetoric as the sole origin of rhetorical theory, this course builds a more expansive and inclusive framework for understanding how people across cultures persuade, deliberate, and cultivate voice. We'll ask:

- How do traditions define rhetorical wisdom?
- What is considered effective—and for whom?
- Whose voices have been elevated or silenced in dominant rhetorical histories?
- How can we reimagine rhetorical education for an increasingly interconnected world?

To explore these questions, course readings will pair texts across traditions, fostering comparative insights and cultural awareness. Students will develop critical and creative approaches to writing by practicing recontextualization, rhetorical analysis, and reflective inquiry.

Course Goals and Objectives

This course contributes to a larger movement in rhetorical studies that challenges the boundaries of tradition and canon, aiming to prepare students to write, think, and act with intercultural and ethical awareness.

- **Engage with Voice and Identity**: Explore how rhetorical traditions shape notions of the self, audience, and ethical persuasion.

- **Build a Global Rhetorical Framework**: Compare and synthesize diverse traditions, from Confucian moral persuasion to Aristotelian logic and beyond.
- **Apply Theoretical Frameworks Thoughtfully**: Use rhetorical theories to analyze writing, speech, and representation in complex cultural contexts.
- **Develop Culturally Sophisticated Writing**: Create work that is rhetorically nuanced and sensitive to differences in intercultural communication.
- **Reflect on Ethics and Power**: Consider how rhetorical practices are tied to social roles, hierarchies, and resistance across time and place.
- **Write for Specific Audiences**: Builds on the importance of communicating effectively in varied cultural and intercultural contexts.

WRITING 120.38-120.39

DOLLY PARTON FOR PRESIDENT?

Instructor: Leslie Maxwell

TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM- TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM

Dolly Parton, the famous—dare I say legendary—country singer, pop singer, businessperson, and philanthropist is, 60 years into her career, still moving forward. She understands social media, she knows how to joke and not take herself too seriously, and she also knows when to stop when she starts feeling uncomfortable in a situation—usually when the topic turns to politics.

Parton is nearly universally beloved in the United States (and abroad!), and often for different reasons: some may see her as a savvy businessperson, others love her music, and still others admire her philanthropy. Is she feminist or not? Is she politically neutral, or is there no such thing? Where some see a high-powered businessperson, others may see a cog in capitalism's machine. Some see her embrace of characteristics stereotypically associated with the South, and even more specifically with Appalachia, as bringing awareness of Appalachian culture to the mainstream—yet others see this as exploitative of a culture that is already marginalized in the United States. Some see a public figure that is outspoken, and others see a public figure that never speaks out (how is this one even possible?). Dolly Parton has created an image that is instantly recognizable—iconic, even.

She's embraced by today's pop singers, recently collaborating with artists such as Beyoncé and Sabrina Carpenter, as well as her goddaughter Miley Cyrus.

In this course, we will explore these (and more!) complexities. How much does Parton contribute to the mythology of Dolly Parton, and how much does our culture contribute? How much do we, as members of the same society, continue to contribute? We will explore these questions and more, all the complications, twists and turns that make Dolly Dolly. Through this investigation, we will hone skills needed in academic writing and discourse, such as those skills that ask us to look at the complexities and complications inherent in an academic discipline. This course will use a multidisciplinary approach.

We will read book excerpts and essays, both in Parton's words and in the words of others. We will listen to podcasts, watch movies/films, and, of course, listen to Parton's music. Our class will emphasize critical reading and writing, and you will learn about how and why we use sources and texts in writing. Students will generate three major writing projects: a close reading of a text, an annotated bibliography, and a creative project. Classes will consist of small-group, large-group, and individual activities and small-group and large-group discussions. Engagement is an important part of the course grading components, as well.

Though we'll work hard, we'll also have fun, remembering Dolly's wise advice: "Don't get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life."

WRITING 120.41-120.42

COMING OF AGE & HAPPINESS

Instructor: Sheryl Welte

WF 11:45AM - 1:00PM- WF 1:25PM - 2:40PM

College is one of the many turning points in your coming of age. It is a time when you separate from your family of origin, and thus are in a unique position to be able to reflect on your identity. The questions - "Who am I?", "Who do I want to be?", & "What do I want?" – are often daily challenges as you navigate being more independent and living a good life. Together, we will explore your personal and academic identity development, especially in relation to your happiness. In particular, we will reflect on emerging adulthood & student development theories, as well as scientific research on happiness, to help us understand how various factors - such as socioeconomics, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and culture - shape the development of your authentic self.

WRITING 120.43-120.44-120.45

LATINX LIT AND CULTURE

Instructor: Sandra Sotelo-Miller

WF 8:30AM - 9:45AM- WF 11:45AM - 1:00PM- WF 1:25PM - 2:40PM

According to the 2020 Census Bureau, almost 62.5 million people of Latin American descent live in the United States today. This is about 19% of the total US population, and this group is one of the largest minorities in the country. But what does it mean to be Latinx? How can we define US *Latinidad*? Is this pan-ethnic, monolithic identity helpful in understanding this community? Latinx stories and identities are as varied as their countries of origin, ethnic and racial identities, political relationship with the US, migration histories, and experiences living as diasporic people in the US. To understand and develop a working definition of *Latinidad(es)* and what Latinx Studies are, we will explore literary and cultural production that express some of the fundamental, social, political, and ideological issues affecting this community. In particular, we will analyze essays, poetry, short stories, film, and performance that explore issues central to the field of Latinx Studies. These narratives illuminate the cultural context, diasporic experience, and the role that gender, sexuality, race, and class play in forming this individual and collective identity.

Writing will be the primary mode of investigation into the concepts raised by the texts we examine in class. The core assignments in this course include an oral context report centering the work of a Latinx writer, artist, performer, or director, which you will present to the class. You will also write a review, where you practice using your perspective to effectively analyze a cultural text for a general audience. We will then focus on a research-oriented academic analysis where you interpret a primary text while coming into conversation with secondary sources. A fourth and final assignment asks you to collaborate in a group to produce a podcast where you explore an aspect of the Latinx experience through the telling of a single person's or small group's story. You can pick any topic as long as it is centered around a Latinx perspective. Through multiple writers' workshops and reflective exercises, you will learn to critique your peers' work as well as revise your own. These writing skills, along with the practice of careful observations, gripping descriptions, and critical analysis, will prepare you to articulate your thoughts and ideas in writing here at Duke and beyond.

WRITING 120.49

ATTENDING TO ATTENTION

Instructor: David Landes

TUTH 3:05PM - 4:20PM

Attending to Attention - The Secret Method of the Liberal Arts

A revolution is occurring in the ways we pay attention, demanding that we learn, unlearn, and relearn ways of attending across most aspects of contemporary life. To our aid, a liberal arts education trains students' attention--liberally and liberatorily--to "cultivate and practice the kinds of attention that will make them intelligent observers, diligent critics, and thoughtful actors on the stage of human life" (Sullivan). This academic writing course teaches critical research and writing skills through exploring how different kinds of attention shape our various ways of knowing, thinking, and doing.

Our inquiry-driven writing within the liberal arts tradition will organize our survey of various conceptions of attention and will aid our building of cutting-edge vocabularies for attention's situational dynamics from the experiencer's point of view (e.g., the kind of attention you're using while reading this). Guiding texts will span the humanities, sciences, arts, and the technological frontier, providing theories and case studies to help us ask: What are the means by which attention is formed in any given situation? How is attention constructed, structured, and variably reconfigured? Students will select situations of their interest where the type of attention used determines differences in outcomes. Writing and research assignments will scaffold the process of conducting attention analyses. The final essay culminates your work as a participant-researcher analyzing and creating modes of attention optimized for goals in a given situation. Ultimately, students will be learning two interrelated fundamental methodologies of the liberal arts: 1) the conventions of academic reading, writing, and researching, and 2) the foundational skills of attention that are implicit to all academic work, disciplinary knowledge, and social action.

WRITING 120.51

WOMEN, LEADERSHIP, PURPOSE

Instructor: Jennifer Ahern-Dodson

TUTH 1:25PM - 2:40PM

What does it mean to live a life of purpose? What is the role of purpose in women's leadership? How have women who've led lives of purpose navigated the course of their lives and careers? How might their stories and strategies inspire you to reflect on your own?

The first half of the semester includes informal written responses to course readings that help us explore the stories of women leaders in a range of contexts, and 2 essays focused on a key course concept related to leadership and purpose.

In the second half of the semester, each of you will pursue an individual project that helps you consider your own intentional next steps at Duke that reflect your commitments to what you care about. You will identify something important to you that relates to your future plans, goals, or aspirations. You will develop and explore a central research question about it, learn about it, and resource yourself as you make it a part of your future. Project culminates in a research talk and 10-12 page essay.

WRITING 120.52

WE ARE WHAT WE EAT

Instructor: Rhiannon Scharnhorst

TUTH 4:40PM - 5:55PM

Mark Menjivar's photo essay "You Are What You Eat" (*Gastronomica*, Fall 2012) captures diverse refrigerators alongside brief household biographies, reflecting Brillat-Savarin's insight that our food choices reveal our identity. Food practices are shaped by history, culture, and gender dynamics. This course explores how personal identity intertwines with food history, emphasizing women's contributions to food traditions. Through feminist scholarship in anthropology, history, and rhetoric, we'll examine how food symbolically defines who we are.

Course components include regular writing assignments to develop your critical voice, a collaborative research essay exploring feminist food history, and a student-designed class exhibit for the library titled "We Are What We Eat." Throughout the semester, you'll engage with diverse food writers, conduct primary research, and create work for public audiences while developing essential writing and analytical skills.

WRITING 120.53

WRITING THE WORLD AROUND YOU

Instructor: Madeline Sutton

MW 8:30AM - 9:45AM

How do you use writing to make sense of the world around you—and how do different contexts shape the way you write? How do writers navigate conflicting perspectives, and what strategies do they use to communicate complex or contentious ideas in constructive ways? How can we become more mindful of the choices we make as writers, and what does it mean to write with integrity, clarity, and purpose?

In this class, we'll explore many ways that writing connects us to the world and to one another. We'll examine how writing is shaped by context—who we're writing for, what questions we're asking, what kinds of evidence we're using—and how effective writers make strategic rhetorical choices that reflect those contexts. You'll take up this work in two major projects: a virtual museum exhibit, which uses historical, archival materials to make an argument rooted in peoples' experiences in the past, and a qualitative research project, which uses primary data to develop an argument based in peoples' everyday experiences in the world. In addition to weekly writing assignments that build toward the major projects, you'll compose reflective journals and self-assessments, participate in peer review workshops, and collaborate on in-class discussions and activities. Together, we'll study how researchers formulate and investigate questions, locate and evaluate information, analyze data, develop positions on intercultural and interdisciplinary topics, and present findings effectively. By doing so, you'll gain tools and approaches to write purposefully, think critically, and respond thoughtfully to the demands of academic and public discourse.

By the end of the course, you will have practiced writing in multiple genres and developed a richer understanding of how writing can be used to investigate, connect, and communicate across disciplines, professions, cultures, and communities.

WRITING 120.55-120.56

DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Instructor: Kevin Casey

TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM- TUTH 1:25PM - 2:40PM

Dystopian stories – which typically feature various forms of suffering, subjugation, violence, and injustice meted out by authoritarian or totalitarian people in power – have long held sway in our popular culture and imagination. That's reflected by decades of memorable entries in the category, from the classics of high school English classes (such as Brave New World and 1984) to the more recent run of bestselling series featuring young heroines (such as The Hunger Games and Divergent).

This first-year writing seminar will look at the topic through the disciplinary lens of English literature and other media (such as film, TV, or video games.) In the process, we'll develop skills in critical inquiry, close reading, and (of course) writing – all while asking questions (and proposing answers) about why dystopian stories are so popular, how this genre of fiction intersects with our real world, and what they can teach us about our current moment and shared histories.

Writing assignments will include a close reading, a research paper, a personal essay, as well as several shorter pieces. This class makes no assumptions about your background or future plans, but does presume you want to read several novels (see below) and engage in regular class discussions about those stories and your own ideas and work.

This class will require reading two complete novels as well as shorter pieces. The novels are The Handmaid's Tale (Margaret Atwood) and Chain-Gang All-Stars (Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah),

It will also include watching, on your own time, 2-3 feature length films. Representative examples include Fight Club and The Dark Knight.

WRITING 120.58

ROAD NOT TAKEN

Instructor: Laurel Burkbauer

TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM

The Road Not Taken: Alternate Selves, Parallel Lives, and the Choices That Define Us

Do you ever wish you could have a do-over? That you could know the outcome of your choices before you make them? That you could read the last chapter of your own life first? This course will introduce you to the norms and practices of academic writing while exploring what the essayist Cheryl Strayed calls “the ghost ship that didn’t carry us”—the many counterfactual lives we could have lived had we made different decisions at crucial moments along the way.

Our course texts—Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, Matt Haig’s *The Midnight Library*, and the film *Past Lives*—all ask, “What if…?” What if I could go back and make different choices? What if I had accepted that other job? What if I had married someone else? They feature figures who are able to experience multiple potential lives or who are prompted to stop and reflect on their own life trajectories because of encounters with other people who represent alternative life paths. These main texts will be supplemented by literary criticism, personal essays, and poetry that is concerned with decision-making, regret, potential, and possibility.

The signature assignment of the course requires you to select a novel, film, or piece of narrative nonfiction related to our course themes and interpret it through the lens of relevant secondary sources you find in your own research process. From *Groundhog Day* to *Everything Everywhere All At Once* to *La La Land*—time loops, multiverse stories, and what-might-have-beens are all fair game here! Shorter assignments ask you to close-read a film scene, respond to a book review, craft your own argument related to a critical essay, and create an annotated bibliography. You will also interview an older adult about a life-changing decision and present key takeaways to the class in order to cultivate wisdom in our community.

WRITING 120.60-120.61-120.67

HIDDEN CURRICLA: SCIFI & GAMIN

Instructor: Sarah Ishmael

WF 1:25PM - 2:40PM-WF 3:05PM - 4:20PM-TUTH 4:40PM - 5:55PM

Science fiction and video games serve as powerful platforms for exploring the complex boundaries of human identity, technology, and social dynamics. This course invites students to critically examine how narrative worlds in science fiction as well as video games and create "hidden curricula"—embedded messages that shape our understanding

of humanity, difference, its relationship with technological evolution - specifically the evolution of artificial intelligence.

A key discussion in this course will revolve around how Hollywood's depictions of AI differ from real-world AI development. What are the exaggerated risks that Hollywood presents—such as AI revolts or android uprisings—versus the actual risks we are seeing emerge, like the misuse of image generation, deepfakes, and algorithmic biases? How do these differences shape public understanding and ethical debates? We will also discuss how video games and films act as both mirrors and teachers, subtly (and sometimes overtly) influencing players' understandings of humanity. In doing so, they serve as critical platforms for both perpetuating existing stereotypes and offering spaces for reimagining and resisting cultural narratives.

Through an immersive academic writing experience, students will analyze science fiction films and video games like Mass Effect, Cyberpunk 2077, and Horizon Zero Dawn, alongside films and documentaries about gaming, science fiction, artificial intelligence and philosophy. We will investigate how these media:

- Explore concepts of humanity and artificial intelligence
- Reflect and challenge existing social hierarchies
- Communicate complex ideas about identity, power, and technological transformation

More specifically, we will be playing through the video game *Detroit Become Human* as a class. Students can play through the game by themselves, play in pairs or groups of no more than three students. Major assignments include a literature review as well as media/content analysis of a game or science fiction show.

Our course texts will include published academic articles, websites and videos that offer examples of methods/data for researching language use. What concepts of difference and sameness differentiate peoples from each other, and how do these concepts reflect, complicate and shape notions of human difference in the United States or differ from them entirely?

To respond to these questions, we will read, watch, listen to, and analyze a variety of media. In addition, we will produce our own texts such as personal reflections and academic essays. Students will learn to research, workshop, revise and edit their own ideas in form and content. In addition, they will learn how to analyze and develop their own arguments from various points of view, articulate and support their positions with research in a variety of forms, respond critically and ethically to other people's ideas, adapt their

writing for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts, and develop prose that is thoughtful, organized, precise in diction, and structured.

Perhaps unlike other courses you've taken, our course texts will also include the writing you and your peers will produce in response to these published texts. That is, some classes will involve peer review and others will revolve around discussions of anonymous samples of your writing. As we look at the writing you and your peers have done, we won't be examining it to see what is "good" or "bad" about it. Rather, we'll examine it to hone our sense of how readers might respond to our writing and to learn writing moves from each other.

We'll start the semester experimenting with and reflecting on strategies for reading challenging texts. As we read these texts, we'll also analyze them for writing techniques (for anticipating readers' expectations and concerns, representing work with sources, defining and contextualizing key terms, summarizing texts, and taking a position in relation to others).

Major Scholarly Assignments

1. **Comprehensive Literature Review:** Students will conduct an in-depth scholarly investigation synthesizing academic research on representations of humanity in science fiction media.
2. **Critical Media Analysis of a Game:** Students will produce a sophisticated analytical text examining the narrative structures, representational strategies, and embedded ideological frameworks of a selected science fiction video game or television series.

Key Focus Questions:

- How do speculative narratives redefine human ontological categories?
- What implicit messages emerge about technological agency and social difference?
- How do representational strategies in science fiction media negotiate complex power dynamics?

The course emphasizes advanced scholarly writing practices, including:

- Introduction to theoretical frameworks
- Introduction to different forms of media analysis
- Critical analysis development

- Sophisticated argumentative strategies
- Peer-review and collaborative scholarly discourse

By the end of the semester students will have developed advanced academic writing competencies and a nuanced critical approach to analyzing representational systems in science fiction media. This hands-on approach emphasizes synthesizing research, articulating arguments clearly, and contributing to academic and policy discussions about the construction of humanity in sci-fi and gaming narratives.

WRITING 120.63-120.64-120.65

HAIKU AND ZEN BUDDHISM

Instructor: Crystal Smith

WF 8:30AM - 9:45AM- WF 11:45AM - 1:00PM- WF 1:25PM - 2:40PM

This course introduces various Japanese forms of poetry including haiku, haibun, senryu, and tanka. We will explore the origins of haiku through Masters like Matsuo Basho, Yosa Buson, Kobayashi Issa as well as its evolution to contemporary English-language form. We'll further explore the principals of Zen and the mediative practices of reading and contemplating haiku. Haiku evolved from the poetic form, Renga, a collaborative poem which is considered to be one of the earliest forms of poetry, dating back to the thirteenth century. In the sixteenth century, haiku master Matsuo Basho broke from the Renga tradition and began writing a haiku in the 5-7-5 syllable structure. Basho's poems are considered by most to be the magnum opus of haiku.

Zen, in relation to haiku, places strong emphasis on simplicity, naturalness, and solemness. It also teaches that human suffering is a result of separation. The mediative practice of haiku allows us to experience unity with nature and the world around us. Thus, we can experience a "oneness" with our surroundings. The combination of simplicity of form and profoundness of meaning makes haiku an ideal topic for the interdisciplinary study of creativity.

In addition to weekly writing assignments, students will write descriptive and analytically producing two major writing projects that consider, respectively, Buddhism and poetic forms, and the concepts of enlightenment, impermanence, and Zen Minimalism. Simultaneous creative and theory-based small projects will allow students to engage haiku writing techniques and other forms Zen art. Some questions to consider in this course are:

What is your relationship with nature? How does poetry interpret the world in ways other writings cannot?

WRITING 120.66

SPORTS AND THE WRITTEN WORD

Instructor: James Holaday

MW 3:05PM - 4:20PM

For well over 100 years, sports have played an important role in American (and world) culture. And as long as there have been sports, people have written about them. From game reports in newspapers to biographies to autobiographies to predictions for the future to pure fiction, writings related to sports run the gamut. They often cross the line from journalism to literature or even poetry. In this class we will examine how writing about sports has changed over time by reading some of the genres listed above; then students will embark upon several sports-related writing projects of their own. First, students will produce a memoir-type paper on their experiences with sports. Athlete or fan, success or failure, funny or sad–everyone has a story! Secondly, students will produce a paper on an element of sports history. Sports have helped shape society (think Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball) or been shaped by them (think performance enhancing drugs or Olympic boycotts). For this paper, students will go beyond the obvious and do some research to examine a bit of sporting history. Third, since a large part of writing about sports involves telling stories about others, often using the words of those people, the next project will consist of interviewing a sports personality. To do this successfully, students will do any necessary research so that relevant questions can be asked of their subjects. Finally, students will have a chance to use their creativity and write a short story. The story must center around a sporting event of some sort and be written within set word limit guidelines.

Update: 10/22/2025