

# ENG 400 Descriptions, Fall 2019

## Genre and Multimodal/Multimedia Writing, Dr. Margaret C. Ervin

In the first decade of the 21st century, the term “multimodal composition” first came into wide use by Composition scholars. In the same decade, “multimedia writing” was proliferating online, and conventions for multimedia genres--such as text messages, tweets, Facebook posts, blogging, and vlogging--were evolving. This course brings the concepts of “multimodal composition” (the process of creating texts that incorporate some combination of audio, video, images, and text) and “multimedia writing” (those texts themselves) into play with theories of “genre.” This course will use multimodal and multimedia somewhat interchangeably, but generally multimodal is the English Studies usage, and multimedia is a more ubiquitous term.

Competing vocabulary notwithstanding, here is the central research question for this senior seminar: How can genre theory help us understand the evolution of multimodal/multimedia writing over the past five years?

To get a purchase on understanding “genre theory,” we will start by looking at Carolyn Miller, Amy Devitt, Charles Bazerman, and other scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Rhetoric and Composition, as you may already know from previous coursework, is a subfield within English Studies. The Rhetoric part of Rhetoric and Composition is concerned with what writing does (its effects on audience) and how it does it (the techniques writers employ to get those effects). Writing means more than words on a page or screen, which is again something you should be familiar with from previous course work, and refers to texts broadly, including both written genres and audio and video texts. The Composition part of Rhetoric and Composition is concerned with teaching writing, which should be welcome news to the BSEd students in the class.

Those who are entering the teaching profession can use this course to deepen their understanding from WRH 325 about how and why to teach multimodal writing and multimedia reading to secondary school students. Those who are interested in continuing their studies in English will do research in this class that will assist in graduate school applications. This seminar will interest all English majors who are curious about the role of new media in an academic setting and want to explore today’s popular Web and mobile app genres with a curious, caring, and scholarly eye.

## Introduction to Augmented Reality: Writing and Reading the World, Dr. Robert Fletcher

This seminar will serve as a theoretical and practical introduction to Augmented Reality (AR), a digital technology that turns the world into a palimpsest (layered text) for reading and writing. While we have been exposed to depictions of Augmented Reality through literature, TV and

movies for many years, the emergence of mobile platforms such as the Apple iPhone, Android-based smartphones, and Google Glass have brought many of these seemingly futuristic ideas closer to becoming part of our everyday reality. Perhaps the best evidence of this potential is the popular success of the Pokemon Go game in the summer of 2016.

This seminar will cover the theory and practice of AR, including both world-based and text-based augmentations. The first weeks will offer a brief theoretical introduction to AR, demonstrations, and discussion of various approaches to augmenting reality. Our critical perspectives on this topic will include digital media studies (Manovich), digital rhetoric (Lindhé), and digital literary studies (Borsuk). After this exploration of the range of AR experiences, participants will create and publish a small AR project of their choosing (e.g., a tour of a location, such as the West Chester campus, augmentation of a print text, creation of an AR game), either individually or in small groups. This “proof of concept” will serve as the basis for the seminar essay, which will situate the student’s AR project in the cultural and critical contexts. The AR technologies we use (Layar, Aurasma, perhaps others) will not involve any programming, and no prior experience with digital technology beyond a word processor and web browser will be assumed. Experience with image, sound, and video-editing software (Photoshop, iMovie, Garageband, etc.) will be helpful, but is not required.

### Literature and the Problem of History, Dr. Erin Hurt

This course will take Faulkner’s famous phrase—“The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past”—as a starting point for our critical inquiries as we explore the ways in which three authors represent history, memory, and storytelling in their fiction, set in the South and the Southwest. William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Sandra Cisneros use their novels to interrogate what history means. These authors’ novels differ from each other by telling the stories that the others don’t. At the same time, all of these authors deeply engage with the idea that history is contingent and not what we thought we knew; history is about (un)making, (re)writing, and erasing. Among the issues we will address are: history and fiction, collective memory, the idea of American identity, nation, empire, gender and society, race and ethnicity, postmodernity, narrative, slavery, freedom, closure, and community. Throughout, we will be paying close attention to each writer’s stylistic choices—how the writer’s narrative strategies affect the way we interpret the novel. Our goal, as we make our way through these novels, will be to articulate the ways in which these novels speak to each other about history and memory. During the semester, students will practice a number of different skills such as close reading, content and audience reception analysis, finding relevant scholarly work, and synthesizing critical arguments. Interested students can learn about the seminar instructor’s research interests from the English department website.

### Rhetorics of Health and Medicine, Dr. Kristin E. Kondrlik

Health and medicine affect us on a daily basis. We encounter writing about health and medicine in professional, personal, and civic discourses – in advertising, diagnoses, and popular

culture. In this course, we will investigate the rhetorical dimensions of health across various settings. This course will explore how our understandings of health and illness are influenced by rhetorical norms and practices; how patient/physician encounters, institutional and legal mandates, and public discourse create and influence healthcare decision-making; how medical discourses contribute to or prevent the improvement of health care practice and policies; and what these discourses reveal about the character and functions of healthcare in society. The course will introduce rhetorical terms and concepts as it unfolds, so students need not have a background in rhetorical theory to enter this course.

Interested students can find further information about Dr. Kondrlik on her website ([kekondrlik.wordpress.com](http://kekondrlik.wordpress.com)) or the English Department website.

### Postmodern Film, Dr. Geetha Ramanathan

This course will explore the instructor's thesis that postmodern film, in its most characteristic mode, is most productively read as an ironic and critical response to the film and television genres prevalent in a late capitalist media culture. We shall examine such formal and structural features as self-reflexiveness, genre-splicing, and parodic intertextuality, which constitute the art of postmodern film. We shall consider the themes, premises, and formal experiments of some postmodern films as symptoms of a culture defined by consumerism and a weakened sense of historical consciousness. We shall also consider how the themes and formal properties of other postmodern films may be read as a source of critique and resistance to the cultural degradations of late capitalism and to sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes. We shall look at how the public response to postmodern films has been orchestrated by film journalism, by Internet marketing, and by TV entertainment channels which promote the celebrity status of postmodern film-makers (like Quentin Tarantino, David Lynch, Tim Burton, and Oliver Stone). And we shall examine the extent to which these films are informed by poststructuralist ideas about textuality and subjectivity, and consider how postmodern film theory problematizes the modernist concepts of auteurism and avant-gardism.

The principal critical perspectives will be informed by cultural criticism and postmodern theory. The rationale for the course is that given how postmodern aesthetics, epistemology, and politics have, since the 1970s, defined a significant proportion of film production in the US (ranging from mainstream feature films to independent movies and music video), postmodern film merits critical attention and socio-historical analysis.

The purpose of the course is to cultivate a critical vocabulary for the analysis and evaluation of postmodern film. Students will understand postmodern movies not only in terms of stylistic innovation, but in terms of their cultural, historical, and ideological significance. Students will acquire in-depth knowledge of the diverse agendas of postmodern film, its relation to poststructuralist theory, and the complex conditions of its reception.

## Philadelphia Literary Culture, Dr. Joseph Navitsky

This seminar focuses on the premier place occupied by the City of Philadelphia in American literary production. Since the drafting of the nation's foundational documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—in Old City, Philadelphia has hosted many famed literary and intellectual circles that sustained a level of creative output, not to mention a publishing industry, that became the envy of the New Republic. Of course, the list of writers associated with Philadelphia is impressive in itself: Ben Franklin, Louisa May Alcott, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Montgomery Bird, Walt Whitman, W.E.B. DeBois, Harriet Jacobs, and more recently William Wharton, Sonia Sanchez, David Bradley, John Edgar Wideman, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Lorene Cary. But rather than merely reading the “greatest hits” authored by Philadelphia-based writers or studying texts solely because their narratives are set in the city, this course will situate select writers—and editors, collectors, and publishers—within the vast urban and intellectual landscapes of Philadelphia. The incredible cultural history of the city will also be explored through the study of—and, hopefully, visits to—its premier institutions, including the Edgar Allan Poe National Historical Site and the Rosenbach Museum and Library.

## Will the Revolution be on Snapchat? Understanding the Rhetorics of Online Participation

It has become a commonplace that online media “empower” ordinary people to participate in the creation of texts that broadcast media allowed them to only consume. While both celebrations and condemnation of that participation abound, real understanding of what a participatory media environment means for us as writers, readers, and citizens is scarce. This course focuses on building your understanding of the origins and implications of online participation as a rhetorical situation. We will read scholars from a variety of disciplines who explain the historical origins of online participation, the cultural and technological forces that have shaped participatory media, the rhetorical strategies that users employ within this environment, and the political and social implications of these strategies. You will go beyond the literature, and consult online primary sources to write case studies exploring the ways activists, scholars, journalists, and others engage with the opportunities and challenges of participatory media. A multi-modal writing project will give you the opportunity to apply what you've learned during the class to a political or social issue meaningful to you.

## Literature & Culture of the Civil Rights Era, Dr. Andrew Sargent

The Civil Rights/Black Power era of the 1950s-70s was a watershed period in US history, with a legacy that continues to be felt—if not fully understood—today. While many of us have a passing familiarity with the era's iconic players and images, our aim in this class will be to achieve a deeper understanding of the period by examining key works of literature and culture that sought to shape the black freedom struggle as it unfolded and to assess the movement's aims, achievements, and shortcomings in the decades after. To that end, we'll be digging into

speeches, novels, plays, autobiographies, poems, and other works by Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Harper Lee, William Melvin Kelley, Claudette Colvin, Anne Moody, Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, and many others. We'll also discuss photographs, documentaries, and recent feature films (such as *Night Catches Us* and *The Butler*) that help us visualize the movement's complexities and contradictions. Paying special attention to how the Civil Rights era exists in memory—particularly in the Black Lives Matter era—our critical approach will blend cultural studies, critical race theory, and whiteness studies, along with attentive close reading and discussion of our primary texts. Students will come out of this class with a richer grasp of the racial politics of both the 1960s and today; greater confidence in expressing their ideas in writing and in oral presentations; and valuable experience in conducting original research.

### The Rhetoric of Photojournalism, Dr. Kuhio Walters

According to photojournalist Ed Kashi, photojournalism has a 3-part definition: it is a “powerful form of visual storytelling”; due to its unique properties as a medium to freeze time, it can “help to illuminate and clarify the issues” that matter to us; and most importantly it can “work as agent of change, often outside its role in mainstream media” (<https://edkashi.com/what-is-photojournalism/>). Each part of this definition has its own folds and complexities that, if to be understood well, must be closely examined within their historical contexts, and within the evolution of current practices we call photojournalism.

This seminar examines the function of photojournalism as a means of delivering the news, educating the public, and commemorating significant events – all conventional understandings of the profession. We will analyze photographs that have been praised by the world’s prominent news associations and agencies (e.g., NPAA, World Press Photo, VII Photo Agency), learn of the ethical and practical complexities of publishing news photography (e.g., through the words of photo editors of major publications), and explore the vagaries of life as a photojournalist (through the nonfiction and memoir accounts of well known professionals). In this sense, we will be studying what subscribers, editors, and designers of newsworthy material expect out of photography.

However, we will also consider ways the still image, and increasingly documentary video, are manifestations of Kashi’s definition of photojournalism “as agent of change.” We will explore the ways its images can challenge official narratives about the meaning of a major event; we will work to give words to the overarching rhetorical force that is implied in single images (e.g., Eddie Adams’ photo of Nguyen Van Lem, Saigon, 1968) and series of images (e.g., the civic photography of Gordon Parks: <http://www.cdsporch.org/archives/15455>); and we will work to identify and define the most contemporary movements within photographic technology and citizen journalism.