SPRING 2027 WRITING 120 COURSES

Thompson First-Year Writing Program
Duke Writing and Rhetoric Program

FOCUS: Cognitive Neuroscience, Law, and AI

WRITING 120: NEUROSCIENCE & SOCIETY
WRITING 120.19 -120.20 - 120.21
Instructor: Emily Parks
WF 8:30AM - 9:45AM-TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM - TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM

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 engage with themes both ancient and modern, asking how neuroscience can enhance our understanding of the human mind – and how that understanding, driven by cutting-edge advances in brain imaging, can impact our modern society.

Along the way, we will examine scientific inquiry itself – the collaborative process through which scientists work together to develop and communicate ideas. You will experience this process firsthand, taking on several roles over the semester: the scholar learning to respond to scientific texts; the ambassador deciphering complex research for a broader audience; and the researcher, collaborating with others to generate and synthesize new ideas.

Across the semester, you will complete two major writing projects: a scholarly perspective essay (approximately 5 pages) and a scientific literature review (approximately 12 pages). Both projects will synthesize neuroscientific research to address a societal issue— such as the ethics of brain implants, disease treatment, social media addiction— and will be written collaboratively, mirroring the practices of professional scholars.

While the course provides a structured framework for approaching these collaborative projects, the ways in which your teams collaborate and develop their ideas are not formulaic. This class offers a unique Writing 120 experience: an opportunity to engage deeply in collaborative scientific inquiry. Success will require flexibility, intellectual curiosity, and a willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives.

This course is well suited for students interested in neuroscience, psychology, or biology. It is grounded in three core principles. First, writing is a vehicle for critical thinking—a tool for bridging the classroom and the real-world. Second, strong writing depends on revision, and you will regularly practice giving and receiving meaningful peer feedback. Third, scientific innovation depends on collaboration. By enrolling in this Writing 120 course, you commit to being an active and engaged member of an intellectual community.

FOCUS: Exploration of Genetics and Genomics

WRITING 120: The New Eugenics: Surveillance, Health Technologies, The Myth of Wellness
WRITING 120.02 - 120.03
Instructor: Hannah Taylor
TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM - TUTH 10:05AM -11:20AM

This course takes an interdisciplinary perspective to the questions: What is health, and who gets to decide? How do we, as a culture, define, measure, optimize, and police the bodies and minds we deem "well"? Across the semester, students will examine how contemporary cultures of health and wellness inherit, reproduce, and reinvent eugenic logics: the belief that some bodies, minds, and lives are more valuable, productive, or "normal" than others. From fitness trackers and genetic testing to algorithmic insurance models and prenatal screening, students will investigate how health technologies do not simply measure bodies, they judge them. Through the lens of rhetoric and writing, students will analyze the language and arguments that shape public understandings of medicine in relation to illness, disability, race, reproduction, and our technologically mediated world.

WRITING 120: The “Real” World
WRITING 120.61
Instructor: David Palko
TUTH 8:30AM - 9:45AM

The “Real” World

Have you ever heard something criticized as “not real”? Maybe it was a street-peddled Louis Vuitton bag, a piece of vegan cheese, 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.

Together, 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. In so doing, we will think about several fundamentals of writing: precision and clarity in communication, audience and purpose, the recursive nature of the writing process, and the social dimensions of writing.

Topics covered will cross a wide variety of disciplines. Areas of focus will likely include cloning and

genetics, forged art, embellished memoirs, lab-grown commodities, and of course, advances in artificial intelligence. Preparation for class sessions will typically involve reading materials as groundwork for in-class discussions and other hands-on activities. Class sessions will also regularly be followed by low-stakes writing assignments. 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. At least one draft of the written project will be submitted for instructor feedback prior to final submission. This process provides a framework for approaching writing throughout your time at Duke and, later, in the "real" world outside academia.

FOCUS: Free for All: Freedom, Justice, and Citizenship

WRITING 120: Women, Leadership, Purpose
WRITING 120.11
Instructor: Jennifer Ahern-Dodson
TUTH 10:05AM – 11:20AM

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: The Gothic South
WRITING 120.04
Instructor: Grace George
MW 3:05PM – 4:20PM

Sprawling oak trees and hidden graveyards. Crumbling barns and kudzu creeping over the walls. Church bells and overgrown swamps where hidden things lie. Welcome to the Gothic South, where something dark lurks beneath the surface of daily life. Offering a contrast to texts that present the American South as a region of civility, pastoralism, and honor, the Southern Gothic genre first emerged in the early 20th century and sought to highlight the rifts that slavery, war, religion, and violence wrought upon the region and the people who call it home. While often seen as attached to a specific time period, the genre has seen a recent resurgence in literature, film, and music from the modern-day South.

This course dives into the Southern Gothic revival to interrogate questions around region, class, and race in the American South. How do authors use the Gothic mode to grapple with legacies of violence, both historically and today? What does it mean that the most representative genre for a region is so heavily associated with horror, rot, and decay? How does the aesthetic influence everyday life for those who call the region home? What does it look like to live *with* haunting?

We will encounter various representations of the Gothic South, spanning from literature to film to photography to music. Along the way, we will look at a vast array of writing, including folktales, song lyrics, short stories, and critical analysis in addition to our main texts. Possible texts may include Kay Chronister's *The Bog Wife;* Jamie Quatro's *Two-Step Devil;* and Xan Kaur's *When Devils Sing,* alongside selections from Julia Elliott's *Hellions,* Grey Wolfe Lajoie's *Little Ones,* and Randall Keenan's *If I Had Two Wings.* In addition, we will turn to a variety of media, including films such as *Sinners* and *The Devil All the Time;* season one of television series *True Detective;* and music from Adia Victoria, Ethel Cain, Wednesday, and Beyonce's *Lemonade* album.

This course will be discussion-based and collaborative, with opportunities to practice both critical and creative writing methods. Assignments include a short (1-2 page) close reading of a text; a 5-7 page conference-style paper and corresponding presentation during an in-class conference; and a final writing project based on the student's individual interests and developed in discussion with the instructor. Over the course of the semester, students will learn how to effectively analyze written texts, develop and support an argument, and draft and write a well-constructed essay.

WRITING 120: Consent Before and After Feminism
WRITING 120.05
Instructor: Barbara Halla
TUTH 8:30AM – 9:45AM

What do we mean when we talk about consent? The concept has been crucial to modern feminist sexual politics, but its roots lay in governance and legal theory, where the notion of consent regulates agreements between individuals and institutions. We refer to consent of the governed, we give our consent when we sign user agreements, and hospitals require it before invasive procedures.

While consent has a history before feminism, it has been transformed and popularized through feminist activism, in particular campus activism against sexual violence. Today, it has become a stand-in for a strain of sexual ethics that aims to manage sexual encounters and limit sexual harm. For all its popularity, consent has many detractors outside and within feminist movements, attacked simultaneously for killing eroticism and being essentially meaningless in the presence of patriarchal socialization.

This course will explore the history, uses, and misuses of consent over 50 years of feminist history in the United States and Europe. We will look at work from a multidisciplinary cohort of feminist scholars, alongside literary texts and popular culture artefacts to consider what debates around consent tell us about the stakes and challenges feminism faces in the present.

Throughout the semester, assignments will help students read attentively and develop their writing skills. Weekly blogposts (200-300 words) will allow students to raise questions about the reading materials, while exploring their voice in a low-risk setting. Two critical essays (4- 5 pages) will be used to analyze sources in-depth and brainstorm potential topics for the final paper. Students will have the opportunity to revise these essays following feedback and meeting with instructor. Finally, an annotated bibliography

and outline will serve as further preparatory work for a final research paper (12-15 pages) whose topic and argument will be discussed in advance with the instructor.

FOCUS: Geopolitics & Culture

WRITING 120: Wisdom in Comparative Rhetoric
WRITING 120.28 - 120.29
Instructor: Yan Li
WF 1:25PM – 2:40PM - WF 3:05PM – 4:20PM

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.

FOCUS: Global Energy: Past, Present, and Future

WRITING 120: Climate Fiction
WRITING 120.36 - 120.37
Instructor: Kevin Casey
TUTH 11:45AM – 1:00PM - TUTH 3:05PM – 4:20PM

This Writing 120 course will focus on the burgeoning genre of Climate Fiction, or "Cli-Fi." This is speculative fiction that imagines the civilizational, economic, political, social, and other impacts of climate change and environmental disaster.

This class will require students to read and watch several novels and films. Required readings and viewings will be finalized in summer 2026 but here is a list of likely inclusions: *The Parable of the Sower* (Octavia Butler), *The Deluge* (Steven Markley), *American War* (Omar El Akkad), *The Road* (Cormac McCarthy), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller.)

While literature and film studies will be our primary disciplinary lens, the growing interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism — which applies an environmental/ecological lens to the study of literature and other texts (to understand the relationship between these texts and the physical world) — can also inform our work, as can students' interests in other relevant fields.

Writing assignments will be finalized in summer 2026 but may include: regular brief written responses to assigned readings/viewings; a substantial research paper drafted and revised in stages; a close reading; a book/film review; and a personal essay.

WRITING 120: Powering AI: The Rhetoric of AI and Energy
WRITING 120.35
Instructor: Denise Comer
TUTH 1:25PM – 2:40PM

AI, virtual as it may be, depends upon vast physical infrastructures: data centers, electrical grids, water systems, mining operations, and global labor networks that require enormous amounts of energy. In this course, we will look at the rhetorical complexities surrounding how AI is publicly represented as efficient and environmentally sustainable, and how organizations articulate contravening perspectives about the

energy-related costs of AI. We will begin with several shorter writing assignments (~250-350 words) that ask you to respond to theoretical texts and practice rhetorical analysis. Your first major writing project (750-1000 words) is a visual analysis of an image depicting content related to energy and AI. The second writing project (2000-2500 words) is a case study about a particular place, concept, or issue related to energy and AI. The third project invites you to recast portions of the case study into a creative, public-facing text (i.e., a photographic essay, poem, song, podcast, TikTok, travelogue, archive, etc.). Because our course is a writing seminar, your writing will be the primary area of focus, and all writing will be drafted and revised with feedback from peers and instructor.

WRITING 120: TBD
WRITING 120.62
Instructor: TBD
WF 8:30AM – 9:45AM

FOCUS: Global Health: Problems and Paradigms

WRITING 120: Preventing Pandemics
WRITING 120.16 - 120.17 - 120.18
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: Avoiding Vector-Borne Diseases
WRITING 120.12
Instructor: Cary Moskovitz
MW 1:25PM – 2:40PM

Malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, kills over one million people each year--mostly young African children. Mosquitoes also transmit dengue hemorrhagic fever, the most rapidly spreading vector borne disease with 50 million infections now occurring annually. Ticks spread diseases such as Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, Lyme Disease, Omsk Hemorrhagic Fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and more. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently noted that while 30,000 cases of Lyme disease are reported annually in the U.S., “the true incidence is 10 times that number.” Given the need for better repellents, new approaches such as clip-on and spatial repellent devices and permethrin-treated clothing are enticing. But how can we know how effective these novel repellents are at keeping mosquitos and ticks away? In this section of Writing 120, students will study the recent scientific literature on repellants as the focus for developing skills in academic reading, writing, giving and receiving feedback, and library research. Working from select principles of health science research and some basic statistics, students will practice careful reading, effective summary, and skeptical analysis as they draft and revise reviews of recent experimental research reports. Building on what they learn in the first half of the term, students will then write substantive scientific essays that make an evidence-based argument on a topic related to reducing vector-borne diseases. Audiences for student writing include classmates and health-science professionals.

Note: this course involves a considerable amount of collaborative work; students should have schedules and attitudes that will allow them to work extensively with classmates outside of class time. Prior coursework in statistics is useful but not required.

FOCUS: Humanitarian Challenges

WRITING 120: We are what we eat?
WRITING 120.15
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: Memory and Resistance in Latin American Film
WRITING 120.31
Instructor: Sandra Sotelo-Miller
WF 11:45AM - 1:00PM

Memory and Resistance in Latin American Film

Since the introduction of cinema in Latin America at the end of the 19th century, film has played a significant role in exploring and shaping collective understandings of history, identity, and culture in the region. Latin American movies have grappled with the legacy of colonialism, modern imperialism, dictatorships and state violence, the "War on Drugs," migration, and social justice movements. In this class we will explore some of these themes and the ways in which Latin American filmmakers have grappled them. We will consider questions such as: What role does cinema play in constructing or challenging official historical narratives? How does film reimagine the past? In what ways can cinema offer counter-narratives to dominant historical discourses? How do films participate in shaping collective memory?

This course is designed to offer both a broad engagement with these questions and opportunities for in-depth analysis through oral presentations, class discussions, and writing. Seminar discussions will help you develop the ability to analyze films and express your insights clearly with your peers. The various writing assignments will help you practice articulating your personal perspective and voice clearly; learn how to identify, evaluate, and use secondary sources to deepen your analysis; and produce public and academic facing texts that take purpose,

genre, and audience into account. Through writers' workshops and reflective exercises, you will learn to critique peer work and revise your own. These writing skills—combined with careful observation, vivid description, and critical analysis—will prepare you to clearly articulate your ideas in writing at Duke and beyond.

WRITING 120: Rhetoric of Comedy
WRITING 120.48
Instructor: Ben Hojem
MW 3:05PM – 4:40PM

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.

FOCUS: It's Not Too Late to Build a Better World

WRITING 120: Writing as a Creative Process
WRITING 120.50
Instructor: Hannah Davis
MW 8:30AM – 9:45AM

How do ideas and innovations emerge from writing? How might engaging in writing as a creative process help us build a better world? What power do words and ideas have to shape the world we desire?

In "Writing as a Creative Process," we will explore these and related questions—including what does it mean to be creative? —as we engage with both creativity and writing as academic fields of study. As composition scholar Wendy Bishop says, "Writing is, after all, a creative process; and like any such process, it depends on human connection." As such, we will engage in discussions, writing workshops, and activities that help you explore and investigate the course questions and to learn about yourself, creativity, writing, and, hopefully, the power you have to create a better world. Throughout the course, you'll practice creative thinking, invention, critical reading, drafting, workshopping, and revising as you complete writing projects that introduce you to writing as a mode of inquiry.

The goal of this course is not to arrive at definitive answers about the course's guiding questions but to practice critical thinking, reading, and writing as we explore new perspectives and form evidence-based arguments. If you are interested in learning about and discussing writing and creativity, then "Writing as a Creative Process" is the Writing 120 course for you.

WRITING 120: Biophilic Cities
WRITING 120.22 - 120.23
Instructor: Lindsey Smith
TUTH 10:05AM – 11:20AM - TUTH 11:45AM – 1:00PM

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. Humans are increasingly disconnected from our inner biophilia, and that shift is negatively impacting our physical and mental well-being 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. You will gain experience writing an op-ed, an argument essay, and a proposal for a project 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.

FOCUS: Knowledge in the Service of Society

WRITING 120: Coming of Age & Happiness
WRITING 120.32-120.33 -120.34
Instructor: Sheryl Welte Emch
WF 11:45AM – 1:00PM - WF 1:25PM – 2:40PM - WF 3:05PM -4:20PM

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.

By using a variety of sources about coming of age and happiness, we will engage with the work of others, learn to articulate a position, and situate our writing within specific contexts. To begin, we will read, discuss, and write about our classroom treaty and student learning and other identity stories using both our personal experiences and existing theories on coming of age and happiness. Informed by these theories, we will write reflect on our own experiences to further our understanding.

The final projects will be an in-depth exploration about some issue(s) significant to your coming of age and happiness. The topic, and the related additional readings, will be carefully chosen by you so that your writing will be relevant & meaningful as you continue your coming of age journey at Duke. Throughout the course, you will engage with your peers' writing, and thus collaboratively strengthen your ability to improve your thinking and writing.

If you are interested in and willing to be introspective to learn about yourself & others through personal writing, discussions, readings, along with some yoga & mindfulness, then this Wr120 class might be a great opportunity for you.

FOCUS: Medicine, Ethics, and Health Policy

WRITING 120: Narratives of Standard and Nonstandard Care
WRITING 120.25 -120.26 -120.27
Instructor: Leslie Maxwell
TUTH 8:30AM – 9:45AM - TUTH 10:05AM – 11:20AM - TUTH 11:45AM – 1:00PM

The "standard of care" that medical professionals pledge to give their patients is a legal, not medical, term. In this Writing 120 class, we will encounter fiction and nonfiction texts in which medical professionals question standards or in which they struggle or fail to meet the standard of care—sometimes because of cultural or religious conflicts between the patient and provider, sometimes because of gender or racial stereotypes, sometimes because of ignorance, sometimes out of desperation, sometimes even due to a moral or ethical failing. Texts (both fiction and nonfiction) will offer perspectives of patients and their families, medical professionals, and storytellers and journalists. What are the ethical, legal, moral, and medical standards that medical professionals are held to, and what happens when those standards are unmet? Who is accountable, and how is accountability measured?

WRITING 120: What Makes a Science
WRITING 120.42
Instructor: Michael Bergdolt
MW 4:40PM – 5:55PM

What is science? What disciplines are “scientific”? Is history a science? Who is a scientist? How should we respond to scientific studies or testimony from scientists? What knowledge can science give us? Conversely, what knowledge must we get from the humanities?

Many of you are going to pursue careers in the sciences, many more of you will engage critically with the sciences and professional scientists while at Duke, and everyone interacts with science and scientists in some capacity. Despite the ubiquity of science in our lives, we rarely spend time engaging with and investigating these kinds of important foundational questions in our everyday lives. This course will be a place to do just that!

The course will engage with philosophical, sociological, and historical texts to answer these questions. However, if the course is successful, we will not come to agreement in our answers. Instead, the course will focus on cultivating discourse, disagreement, and respectful argument by presenting good arguments from conflicting perspectives. With message board style discussion assignments and in- person sessions dedicated to discussion in large and small groups, we will hope to cultivate students’ writing and public speaking skills. Larger assessments will take the form of essays where students will argue in favor of a position among a set of competing positions presented in the course.

While the course is naturally a great fit for the aspiring natural or social scientist, it is also an excellent fit for non-scientists and humanists hoping to understand the value of the humanities (as a contrast to the sciences) and those interested in investigating or interrogating sciences norms and cultural relevance.

FOCUS: Modeling in Economic and Social Sciences

WRITING 120: Women, Finance, and Social Control
WRITING 120.38
Instructor: Jessica Corey
TUTH 10:05AM – 11:20AM

This course bridges psychology, rhetoric and composition, sociology, and finance to examine how economic systems function as a form of patriarchal social control — and how people are fighting back. As Tori Dunlap writes, "Having a financial education is a woman's best form of protest." Drawing on theorists including Bourdieu, Fraser, and Kilbourne, alongside accessible texts like Dunlap's *Financial Feminist*, the course traces how marketing psychology, gendered financial advice, and structural wealth gaps create compounding disadvantages for women — with particular attention to intersections of race and class. Students will develop as writers through assignments including a rhetorical analysis of financial advice media, a researched argument about a structural economic barrier, and a multimodal activist response project that asks students to intervene in a real economic conversation.

WRITING 120: Quantified: Rhetorics of Data
WRITING 120.55 – 120. 56
Instructor: Sarah Ishmael
MW 1:25PM – 2:40PM – MW 4:40PM -5:55PM

Quantified: Rhetorics of Data

Every statistic, dataset, and infographic teaches us something — not just about populations or trends or measurable phenomena — but about how we define what counts as reality, whose experiences become legible as truth or fact, and whose lives get left outside the frame of what can be known.

This course treats numbers, statistics, and quantitative evidence as rhetorical acts. We analyze not just what data says about our social worlds, but how it says it: through the institutional systems that determine what gets counted, through the viral infographics that make certain facts feel inevitable, through the scholarly contestation that erupts when an influential statistic gets something wrong about whose life it claims to measure.

Drawing on canonical frameworks from the field of composition and rhetoric, (Burke, 1966; Bitzer, 1968; Vatz, 1973) alongside critical scholars of knowledge production (Noble, 2018; Hacking, 1985; Popkewitz, 2012; Hall et al., 2013), students develop a set of theoretical and analytical tools for identifying how quantitative evidence produces, naturalizes, and contests definitions of truth, normalcy, and social reality.

Students will examine the styles of reasoning embedded in quantitative data — each one a different window into how numbers shape public knowledge and policy:

- Historicization of Statistics: how categories of measurement are invented, institutionalized, and naturalized over time
- Numbers as Rhetorical Situations: how quantitative claims construct audiences, exigencies, and constraints
- Styles of Reasoning: how categorization and uniformity produce the conditions for scientific and policy authority
- The Embodied Grid: how technologies of enumeration act upon people — shaping identity, diagnosis, and belonging
- Critical Data Analysis: how numbers get mobilized to determine social and cultural truths, and what those truths foreclose

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, 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.

Students will practice the above skills in homework assignments, individual conferences, presentations, class conversations, and collaborative workshops. In addition, students will take up this work in the following primary assignments:

- A personal rhetorical analysis of a statistic that has shaped their own life
- A rhetorical analysis of a viral infographic or dataset
- A historical literature review tracing scholarly contestation of a single influential statistic across at least two disciplines.

These outcomes represent the core intellectual moves this course is designed to cultivate. By the end of the semester, we will not only emerge as a stronger writer, but as people who read data with intention, curiosity and rigor.

FOCUS: Recoding the Renaissance: Text, Tech, and "Artificial" Intelligence

WRITING 120: Radical Magic
writing 120.58 – 120.59
Instructor: Cheryl Spinner
TUTH 4:40PM – 5:55 PM – TUTH 11:45AM – 1:00PM

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: Rhetoric of Comedy
WRITING 120.47 & 120.49
Instructor: Ben Hojem
MW 11:45AM -1:00PM — MW 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.

FOCUS: Science and Religion in Public Life

WRITING 120: Zen, Haiku and Our Planet
WRITING 120.39 – 120.40
Instructor: Crystal Simone Smith
WF 11:45AM – 1:00PM – WF 1:25PM – 2:40PM

Zen, Haiku and Our Planet

This course introduces the poetics of haiku, specifically the topic of Zen-inspired haiku relational to nature writing. This ancient form originated in Japan and is still practiced globally by contemporary poets. Many scholars have proclaimed haiku, the poetic form of the Holocene. By way of seasonal references known as "kigo" and haiku's impermanence, a concern with the present moment, climate change effects are consequently recorded through human encounters. Such effects have been chronicled from the 17th through 21st centuries by haiku poets in keen observation of the natural world. This informal "field work" documents abrupt shifts in normal seasonal progression and natural phenomena rendering a record of phenomenal consciousness or mental impacts that differ from standard data points. Our course readings and writing assignments will cover subjects of environmental stewardship through the contexts of Zen philosophies. We will examine the principals of deep ecology which align precisely with the Zen practice of interbeing, a regard and adoration for all life formations. We will further examine the concept of Zen Minimalism and its capacity to disrupt normative human behavior and thoughts, allowing for more compassionate perspectives on climate preservation and conservation.

In addition to weekly writing assignments, students will write, analytically, producing two major writing projects that consider: poetry and ecological awareness, human-nature relationships, and nature documentation. Simultaneous creative and theory-based small projects will allow students to engage in haiku writing techniques that form "notes on a problem" and forest bathing in Duke Gardens. Some questions to consider for this course are: What is your relationship with nature? How does poetry interpret the world in ways other writings cannot?

WRITING 120: Radical Magic
WRITING 120.57
Instructor: Cheryl Spinner
TUTH 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.

FOCUS: The American Experiences

WRITING 120: The Disney Version
WRITING 120.44 - 120.45 - 120.46
Instructor: Lisa Andres
TUTH 10:05AM - 11:20AM – TUTH 1:25PM – 2:40PM -TUTH 3:05PM – 4:20PM

"Decoding the Disney Version: Exploring Disney's American Vision"

Short Title: The Disney Version

In his seminal article, "Breaking the Disney Spell," noted Disney critic Jack Zipes insists that "*It was not once upon a time, but at a certain time in history…that Walt Disney cast a spell on the fairy tale, and he has held it captive ever since*" (21). Zipes goes on to contend that Disney has gained a "cultural stranglehold" on the fairy tale, obscuring the names of the authors and storytellers who came before, to dominate the genre with their deceptive stories peddling dreams of elusive "happily ever afters."

While Zipes, at times, comes across as hostile, his main point is worth considering: *has* "the Disney Version" of our favorite childhood stories replaced the versions that came before? Do we know that there's no such thing as "True Love's Kiss" in the literary fairy tales? That Cinderella's stepsisters cut off their heels and toes to try to fit into the glass slipper? That the Little Mermaid doesn't get the prince and turns (temporarily) into sea foam? After all, very few of the stories that Disney decides to tell are original ideas – most of them are adapted from or (loosely) based on someone else's source material.

This course aims, then, to consider what changes Disney has made to these stories – and, perhaps more interestingly, how those changes result in a distinctly *American* version of the story. *Food for thought:* what changes did Disney make, and what is the overall effect on the story? What values or perspectives are highlighted? Is the meaning and/or message of the story changed, or are the changes relatively harmless? What stories are being told, and who gets to be

the "hero"? Do these films portray American realities – and do they have an obligation to?

We'll explore the answers to these questions primarily through class discussion, reading academic arguments (starting with Zipes), and several major writing assignments. Our class discussions will move from a brief overview of Walt Disney's life and the role of American history + identity in the parks to an examination of several key Disney films. [Tentative texts include: Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pocahontas* (1996), *Hercules* (1998), The *Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Soul* (2020).]

And finally, each student will select an "American" 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 (~4-6 pages) 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

**Please note that no prior knowledge of or experience with Disney is necessary for this course. However, a genuine interest in the topic and a willingness to engage in questions of pop culture and the surrounding narratives are encouraged.

WRITING 120: Language Difference & Writing
WRITING 120.14
Instructor: Charlotte Asmuth
MW 3:05PM – 4:20PM

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 studies 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:

1. **Slang Analysis:** ~1,200 - 2,000 words. For this project, you'll explore a slang word or phrase that interests you by studying its use among family and friends, in current dictionaries, and through online tools to explore global usage.
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 in this constellation are welcome.

FOCUS: Thinking through Music and the Arts

WRITING 120: Music Saved My Life
WRITING 120.06 – 120.07 - 120.08
Instructor: Mike Dimpfl
MW 11:45AM – 1:00PM – MW 1:25PM – 2:40PM -MW 3:05PM-4:20 PM

In the early 1970s in downtown New York City, people came together to dance through the night to what would eventually be labeled a new genre of music -- disco. From the moment of its birth, disco transformed the way people understood the power of music. At the time, *listening* and *dancing* were inseparable – they were brought together on the dance floor, surrounded by strangers, shepherded by the

choices of the DJ in a musical conversation with the dancing crowd. This moment forever changed popular music and created a decades-long interest in dance clubs as places of encounter and celebration.

Today, the connection between dance music, DJs, and intimate dance clubs as central social nodes has frayed and occupies an entirely different place in society. Listening is guided by the power of algorithms and dancing is often a kind of shared isolation, not about the joy of encountering strangers in collective celebration or escape.

In this writing seminar, we will develop our skills as writers in the tradition of the social sciences by using the history of dance music culture as a lens through which to analyze the present. What lessons does the history of disco have to share about our alienated and atomized world? On the one hand, we see in the development of disco the emergence of dance club cultures that were spaces of open encounter. On the other hand, broader socioeconomic changes and the rapid advance of technology that accompanied the development of dance music forever changed the role of the human touch central to creating and appreciating music. We live in the wake of these tensions.

Over the course of semester, we will explore this history as a way of developing strong, theoretical argumentation central to social scientific writing. First, we will read theoretical texts to situate the power of music as a cultural phenomenon. This framework will guide our exploration, helping you develop the writing practices necessary to examine complex social phenomenon as they unfold in the real world. With this framework in hand, we will look at the emergence and transformation of dance music culture across the 1970s as emblematic of the transformational, and contradictory, power of dance music. Drawing on the lessons from that moment, we will examine the relationship between popular music and contemporary technology, analyzing the power music has to move us in a world of alienating technologies.

This is a reading and writing intensive seminar. We will being with weekly reading and low-stakes reflective writing assignments to develop our writing tool-kit. These will be accompanied by weekly listening to help you hone observational writing skills. A final project that will ask you to develop an analysis of popular music that mobilizes the theoretical framework established in the class. You will also attend a concert or show during the semester as a way of putting our thinking into practice in the real world.

FOCUS: Visions of Freedom

WRITING 120: Myths that Make Empires
WRITING 120.01
Instructor: Lauren Hoagland
WF 8:30AM – 9:45AM

Myths that Make Empires:
Heroes, Gods, and the Weapon of Writing

What do the empires of the world have in common? A large standing army or navy? A powerful and tyrannical dictator? A centralized form of government or access to the most cutting edge technology? Maybe some of these things, maybe all of them, but there is something even more central to empires than violence and power: story-telling. Ancient Greece, The Babylonian Empire, The Roman Empire, Imperial

China, The British Empire, and America all have their own specific heroes, champions, and gods that not only reveal the values at the hearts of these civilizations but also help to craft a unique imperial identity.

The aim of this class is to explore how writing and story-telling has been used to fuel and shape empires throughout history, giving a pen more power than a sword, a cannon, a naval ship, or even a drone. We will explore questions of ethics and integrity as well as creativity, ingenuity, and rhetoric, pursuing answers to the question: How has the art of writing been used to create and consolidate empires without shedding a single drop of blood?

Students will read a number of ancient sources that set the standard for empire myth-making and propaganda in the first half of the class, including selections from Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, before turning to modern examples which adapt ancient myths for a new imperial context, like Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief,* and examples that create entirely new imperial myths like Lin Manuel Miranda's take on the founding of America in the musical *Hamilton*. Other tentative texts for this class include: *Gilgamesh,* Plutarch's *Lives*, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Sima Qian's *Shiji 9, Richard III* as well as the TV show *Chaos*.

The assignments for this class will make use of numerous types of writing, including formal close readings, informal journal entries or blog posts, podcast scripts, and, finally, a project that will require students to write (or re-write) a creation myth of their own alongside a reflective "artist's statement." Writing assignments will be largely focused on the drafting process with multiple chances for revision, writing workshops, and feedback from the professor. The goal is to make sure students are writing as often as possible in formal and informal capacities, so they develop a personal sense of their writing voice and a comfortability with the writing and drafting process.

WRITING 120: Speculative Media & The Human
WRITING 120.54
Instructor: Sarah Ishmael
MW 11:45AM – 1:00PM

Speculative Media & The Human

Every science fiction film/film series and video game teaches us things - not just about robots or androids or imagined futures — but about how we define who and what the human being is. "Hidden curricula," as it were, about who counts as human, whose story gets told, and whose presence in an imagined world requires justification while others simply belong.

This course treats speculative media — science fiction film and video games — as rhetorical archives. We analyze not just what these texts say about humanity, but *how* they say it: through the media texts themselves (the games and films), as well as marketing campaigns and casting announcements, fan communities' social media posts, developer statements, through the discourse that erupts when a game or film gets something wrong about who is human and who isn't. As AI becomes more prominent in culture and industry, both the films and games we examine engage directly with these questions — and a key thread in the course will be how Hollywood and game developers' depictions of AI differ from its real-world development, and what those differences reveal about how we define the human. Artificial Intelligence serves as a recurring pressure point in this course: not because it raises new questions about humanness, but because it reactivates very old ones. Artificial Intelligence serves as a recurring pressure point in this course: not because it raises new questions about humanness, but because it reactivates very

old ones. Not all of the media we examine will involve AI explicitly — but those that don't dramatize the same underlying questions: who gets defined as human, by whom, and through what systems of knowledge. We will discuss how video games and science fiction films act as both mirrors and teachers, subtly (and sometimes overtly) influencing different understandings of humanity.

Drawing on frameworks from game studies, critical media studies, and composition and rhetoric, students develop a set of theoretical and analytical tools for identifying how speculative media produces, naturalizes, and contests definitions of the human.

In the first arc of the semester, students spend six weeks exploring six different rhetorical sites and theoretical frameworks: each one a different window into how speculative media constructs myths and "hidden curricula" about humanity:

- **Textual Discursive Analysis:** scripts, dialogue, and narrative structures are analyzed as sites where discursive formations about the human get produced. What knowledge about the human does the writing assume? What can be said and what can't? What does the narrative make it impossible to think?
- **Character & Body Rhetoric:** how games and films construct the human through character design, casting, and embodiment — whose body is the default protagonist, whose is the sidekick, whose is the monster, whose death the narrative mourns and whose it treats as inevitable
- **Institutional & Technical Discourse:** how institutions manage audiences, construct accountability, and position the consumer through official discourse; how institutions — studios, developers, and AI companies — construct and manage public discourse around AI, humanness, and accountability
- **Review Bombing & Collective Rhetorical Action**: how audiences mobilize rhetorically in response to perceived violations of their definitions of the human
- **Villain Redemption Discourse**: who deserves redemption - whose humanity is legible, recoverable, worth investing in, who gets to loop back into humanity and who is fixed permanently outside it.
- **Mis-en-scène/Game Mechanic Close Reading:** How game developers use environmental storytelling, AI storytelling, spatial rhetoric, and visual rhetoric of avatar/NPC design as well as how film makers use camera framing, movement, setting, etc. as visual rhetoric that shapes what bodies the film/game renders generic, disposable, and background.

Three of these sites are anchored by science fiction films/series episodes; three by video games such as (but not limited to) *Ghost in the Shell, Alien: Earth, Attack on Titan, Cyberpunk 2077, Detroit Become Human and the Assassins Creed game franchise*. Most of the science fiction films/games will have an aspect that engages with questions of AI, difference and humanity. Students engage with these speculative digital texts as researchers, analyzing the rhetoric and cultural discourse *around* them as carefully as the texts themselves.

In Week 7, students choose their own game (to play themselves or observe pre-recorded game play) or science fiction film/episode to analyze. The assignments that follow — a Scholarly Journal Article Analysis, Literature Review, and Rhetorical Analysis & Methods Memo — all build toward a 1-2 minute multimodal piece (a podcast episode or video essay) in which students present their emerging argument. That multimodal piece feeds directly into the final paper: an original scholarly contribution to media studies, digital rhetoric, and/or game studies. Students will leave the course with a paper that forms a strong foundation for submission to an undergraduate humanities-oriented research journal.

We will read, watch, listen to, and analyze a variety of media and scholarly literature. 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, students 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 will be using Ritzenberg & Mendelsohn's (2021) *How Scholars Write* and Fang's (2021) *Demystifying Academic Writing* as texts to help develop collegiate level academic writing competencies.

Key Focus Questions:

- How do speculative narratives redefine human ontological categories?
- What implicit messages emerge about 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 and rhetorical 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 speculative 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: TBD
WRITING 120.63
Instructor: TBD
WF 8:30AM - 9:45AM

Constellation: How do people, identities, cultures, and languages cross borders?

WRITING 120: East Asian Contemporary Art
WRITING 120.60CN

Instructor: Heejin Kim
WF 3:05PM – 4:20PM

What does the "contemporary" mean in contemporary art? Contemporary art is widely understood as the art of the present moment. Common conceptions also include: art that is difficult to understand, defies traditional genre conventions, and is absurdly expensive. This indicates that what we understand as "present" not only refers to *when* the art is made but further, to a *style*, as well as how it is circulated within culture.

This course situates contemporary art within the context of East Asia. Can there be an *Asian* contemporary style? Exploring how Asian artists grapple with this question will introduce us to the intersections of aesthetics and modernization, globalization and postcolonialism. While global capital homogenizes the world, postcolonial movements and Cold War conflicts challenge the standardization of style. East Asia's "late" modernity complicates these issues by demonstrating how opposing movements occur simultaneously. By asking what it means to define a "contemporary" moment in Asia, we will critically reconsider the genre distinction and periodization of art. Some examples that will be introduced in the class include: Nam June Paik, Ai Wei Wei, and Ho Tzu Nyen.

This class involves largely two writing projects. The first is a weekly writing assignment in which students analyze an assigned visual object. This assignment is to help students practice what to observe and ask when it comes to writing about a visual object. The second will be a final paper project. There will be multiple workshops and presentation opportunities to receive peer and instructor feedback.

Constellation: How does climate change affect our world?

WRITING 120: Haiku, Zen, and Our Planet
WRITING 120.41CN
Instructor: Crystal Smith
WF 3:05PM – 4:20PM

Zen, Haiku and Our Planet

This course introduces the poetics of haiku, specifically the topic of Zen-inspired haiku relational to nature writing. This ancient form originated in Japan and is still practiced globally by contemporary poets. Many scholars have proclaimed haiku, the poetic form of the Holocene. By way of seasonal references known as "kigo" and haiku's impermanence, a concern with the present moment, climate change effects are consequently recorded through human encounters. Such effects have been chronicled from the 17th through 21st centuries by haiku poets in keen observation of the natural world. This informal "field work" documents abrupt shifts in normal seasonal progression and natural phenomena rendering a record of phenomenal consciousness or mental impacts that differ from standard data points. Our course readings and writing assignments will cover subjects of environmental stewardship through the contexts of Zen

philosophies. We will examine the principals of deep ecology which align precisely with the Zen practice of interbeing, a regard and adoration for all life formations. We will further examine the concept of Zen Minimalism and its capacity to disrupt normative human behavior and thoughts, allowing for more compassionate perspectives on climate preservation and conservation.

In addition to weekly writing assignments, students will write, analytically, producing two major writing projects that consider: poetry and ecological awareness, human-nature relationships, and nature documentation. Simultaneous creative and theory-based small projects will allow students to engage in haiku writing techniques that form "notes on a problem" and forest bathing in Duke Gardens. Some questions to consider for this course are: What is your relationship with nature? How does poetry interpret the world in ways other writings cannot?

WRITING 120: Biophilic Cities
WRITING 120.24CN
Instructor: Lindsey Smith
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. Humans are increasingly disconnected from our inner biophilia, and that shift is negatively impacting our physical and mental well-being 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. You will gain experience writing an op-ed, an argument essay, and a proposal for a project 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.

Constellation: How do people resist colonialism?

WRITING 120: Memory and Resistance in Latin American Film
WRITING 120.30CN
Instructor: Sandra Sotelo-Miller
WF 8:30AM – 9:45AM

Memory and Resistance in Latin American Film

Since the introduction of cinema in Latin America at the end of the 19th century, film has played a significant role in exploring and shaping collective understandings of history, identity, and culture in the region. Latin American movies have grappled with the legacy of colonialism, modern imperialism, dictatorships and state violence, the "War on Drugs," migration, and social justice movements. In this class we will explore some of these themes and the ways in which Latin American filmmakers have grappled them. We will consider questions such as: What role does cinema play in constructing or challenging official historical narratives? How does film reimagine the past? In what ways can cinema offer counter-narratives to dominant historical discourses? How do films participate in shaping collective memory?

This course is designed to offer both a broad engagement with these questions and opportunities for in-depth analysis through oral presentations, class discussions, and writing. Seminar discussions will help you develop the ability to analyze films and express your insights clearly with your peers. The various writing assignments will help you practice articulating your personal perspective and voice clearly; learn how to identify, evaluate, and use secondary sources to deepen your analysis; and produce public and academic facing texts that take purpose, genre, and audience into account. Through writers' workshops and reflective exercises, you will learn to critique peer work and revise your own. These writing skills—combined with careful observation, vivid description, and critical analysis—will prepare you to clearly articulate your ideas in writing at Duke and beyond.

Constellation: What is The Cosmos?

WRITING 120: To Infinity & Beyond
WRITING 120.43CN
Instructor: Lisa Andres
TUTH 8:30AM – 9:45AM

"The second space race is here, and in this Constellation, we will explore the vast expanse we call “the Cosmos.” Across the arts and sciences, we will look at the stories that shape time and space, how worlds are being and have been arranged, and **the ways humans have contemplated their place in the Cosmos**. Join us as we investigate and reflect critically upon **what has been imagined about our world and other worlds, and our connection to it all**."

This semester, we're going to focus on **'what has been imagined about...other worlds and our connection to it all,'** specifically through the lens of the Walt Disney Company. We'll start with Walt himself -- who was integral to the first space race -- and what stories the American icon told about the world beyond the stars. Having established a solid foundation, we'll then move to look at several films from Pixar and Marvel Entertainment, seeking to answer how -- or if -- these studios engage with and build off of Walt's ideas.

Constellation: How is memory formed, shaped, and transmitted?

WRITING 120: Memories and Visions of Home
WRITING 120.51CN
Instructor: Eliana Schonberg
TUTH 11:45AM – 1:00PM

What makes a home? Is it a place? The people in it? The things you have? If you leave a home, can you return? Or can you take your home with you, like a turtle its shell, through your memories of it? How many homes can one person have? Can homes be transplanted? Rebuilt? Can you make a new home from scratch? As you embark on your second semester away from home, you may feel as though you're already well-established in a new home at Duke, or you may not; in either case, this is the ideal time to develop ways of thinking and writing about what home means to you and to others and how your memories play a role. In this Writing 120, we'll consider "home" and memory from anthropological, poetic, and sociological perspectives, and you'll get to explore different types of writing genres and strategies as we do. We'll read excerpts from authors as diverse as essayists Viet Thanh Nguyen and Rebecca Solnit, poet Elizabeth Bishop, and anthropologist Aihwa Ong.

In addition to informal writings in response to readings, you'll have the opportunity to write three formal assignments: a 5-page personal narrative about your concept of "home"; an interview with someone from a very different place or time period to understand a very different concept of home; and an extended essay in which you incorporate your narrative, the answers of your interview subject, and appropriate scholarly sources to help you understand your own and your interviewee's experiences from a new perspective. Finally, you will create a portfolio that highlights your accomplishments in the course, selecting from among your formal and informal writings for the portfolio including a final self-reflection that analyzes your writing and reflects critically on your writing challenges and successes.

Constellation: What makes a body political?

WRITING 120: Writing Portrayed in Media and Scholarship
WRITING 120.31CN
Instructor: Sharieka Botex
TUTH 3:05PM – 4:20PM

In Writing 120: Writing Portrayed in Media and Scholarship, you will have the opportunity to work towards becoming the writer you aspire to be, by writing, reading, dialoguing and receiving and providing feedback that is informed by the media and scholarship we explore, including texts and resources you find and share with our class community.

Within this course, you will explore and seek answers to a variety of questions that will help you develop a clear sense of who you are as a writer and that help you learn what academic writing is, how definitions and understanding of academic writing vary and how to adhere to academic writing conventions. Some of the questions we will explore and seek answers to include: What does media and scholarship reveal about people's writing, literacy practices, research, the reasons people write, and their writing processes? What do scholarly texts tell us about whether it is appropriate for researchers to discuss their own experiences, identities and interests in their research and academic writing? Do your own experiences, stories and perspectives count as knowledge and evidence? How do you engage in a scholarly dialogue where you contribute to a discussion and credit others who contributed to the dialogue? How do you use feedback to improve your writing? In what ways do scholars across disciplines discuss their writing and research in peer-reviewed articles and other texts? Are technologies, including artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT and DukeGPT necessary for the writing process? If so, what purposes do such technologies serve? How does using such technologies impact you, your writing and society?

Through reading, listening, and watching a variety of visual and alphabetic texts, you will be exposed to other people's perspective on the aforementioned questions, and engage in dialogue where you will be invited to share your own perspective.

Ultimately, this course positions you to improve and use any already existing academic writing skills and literacy practices you have and to acquire new academic writing and academic reading skills that will aid in you being an effective, engaging and confident writer, who is capable of writing and producing impactful and credible academic research and texts about topics you care about and want to write about.

Constellation: Why do we need rules?

WRITING 120: The Road Not Taken
WRITING 120.09CN – 120.10CN
Instructor: Laurel Burkbauer
WF 8:30AM – 9:45AM – WF 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, in the sense of "rules to live by."

Our course texts—Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, 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, psychological studies, personal essays, and poetry that is concerned with decision-making, regret, potential, and possibility.

The midterm paper asks you to craft your own argument in response to literary criticism of a course text. 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!

Constellation: How do sports influence society?

WRITING 120: Sports and The Written Word
WRITING 120.52CN-120.53CN
Instructor: James Holaday
MW 1:25PM – 2:40PM – MW 3:05PM - 4:20PM

For well over 150 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.

Updates: 10/15/26