First-Year Writing Program

Summer 2015

Course Descriptions

General Description of 76-101, Interpretation and Argument 9 units

Gen Ed: Fulfills Category 1: Communicating requirement for H&SS and a designated writing course for other colleges.

Interpretation and Argument (76-101) is a course that serves as a foundation for many reading and writing tasks you’ll experience in college and in your life. The course serves as the First-Year Writing course requirement at Carnegie Mellon University, and it also translates into the First-Year Writing course requirements at many other universities. While we can’t guarantee that in 76-101 you’ll engage in exactly the same kind of reading and writing practices found within your discipline or professional context, we can guarantee that you can (and should!) adapt and use many of the rhetorical strategies and language patterns in other academic and professional communication contexts.

Our curriculum does not allow our students to write arguments in a vacuum that aren’t accountable to a socially networked group of scholars. We believe that kind of writing is irresponsible and does not allow readers to engage with new positions. The sequence of assignments in the course is based upon the moves that experts make when they are writing their original research—something that we call an Argument Contribution. For someone to contribute an argument, that person needs to first analyze individual arguments and then synthesize multiple arguments into clearly defined perspectives.

We hope that this course prepares you to think about what a reader needs from you in order to believe your written arguments, as well as how you need to effectively plan and strategize your own reading, research, and writing processes. We want you to build your expertise in analyzing the demands of new academic literacy and communication tasks, and we also want you to work actively toward adapting that expertise for communication tasks beyond this course toward your own discipline and profession.

Each section of 76-101 is structured by the same objectives and core assignments. There is a core vocabulary and set of heuristics that all sections teach. However, students may find particular issues more interesting or appealing than others—we do encourage students to pursue their interests, but we also ask that they engage any 76-101 course with intellectual curiosity. Due to the limits of our schedule, we are unable to meet each student’s individual preferences for course topics, but we do offer a wide variety from which to choose.

Information is subject to change

Updated: February 5, 2015
As the story goes, when the French film pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière premiered their brief 1895 film “The Arrival of a Train a La Ciotat Station,” the crowd of spectators jumped up from their seats in a fit of fear, believing the train was charging directly towards them. They were certain it was real. Seven years later, another Frenchman George Méliès’ debuted the whimsical and bizarre tale of A Trip to the Moon, invoking a sense of wonder and possibility in the audience. Cinema from thereon became many things, offering viewers a spectrum of experiences teetering between reality and fantasy, representation and imagination.

Even amidst the rise of television and the Internet, movies today are still a tremendously popular medium. Tickets sales have remained fairly steady in the last twenty years, and viewers now have instantaneous access to a seemingly endless library of films via Netflix, Amazon, or On-Demand. Prolific and pervasive, movies have become such a staple of modern culture that we rarely step back and ask why we watch them. In what ways can cinema tell us who we are or what we should be? Is it possible to express ourselves from a seat in the theater? Can cinema make or reinforce communities? To what extent can movies enlighten or trivialize? Why do they entertain us?

These and other questions will serve as the focus for this 76---101 course. In exploring the connection between the spectator and cinema, we will learn and apply analytical methods for engaging academic and popular criticism, feature-length films and clips, other primary artifacts, and more. Students will write essays that analyze arguments and synthesize perspectives surrounding this topic, culminating to a final essay in which they make a contribution to our contemporary knowledge that will in part answer the question of why we watch movies.
**The Meanings of Subcultures**

Only three years after bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash initiated a new social movement known as “punk rock,” the British group Crass had already declared that “Punk [was] Dead” by comparing it to other new consumer trends that were popular at the time. Since the emergence of punk, it has been considered just one example of a subculture that claims to “resist” mainstream culture. This course will use punk and other music-based subcultures as an interpretive lens to discuss the dynamic relationship between mainstream or “mass” culture and alternative or resistant subcultures. For example, what makes something mainstream, and why or how would a subculture wish to resist the mainstream? For that matter, can one even speak of a mainstream culture?

This course will draw from the field of Cultural Studies to define and elaborate concepts of mass culture and subcultures. We will explore the history, influence, and controversies of various subcultures through texts that analyze the political nature of subcultures (e.g., Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*) and films which document how individuals participate in subcultures (e.g., *Afro-Punk*). Using methods of critical reading and academic writing, students will engage responsibly with the controversial topic of resistance in subcultures. Students will analyze arguments as part of an overall conversation of subcultural practices, synthesize perspectives on central issues within that topic, and finally contribute their own arguments to the discussion of the meanings of subculture.

**Shakespeare Sampler**

In the preface to a1725 edition of Shakespeare’s works, Alexander Pope wrote: “It is not my design to enter into a Criticism upon this Author; tho’ . . . of all *English Poets* Shakespeare must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for Criticism...” Indeed. Shakespeare has been the subject of literary criticism for centuries. As a vehicle for developing critical reading and writing skills, this section of 76-101 focuses on the literary and cultural criticism that has circulated around Shakespeare and one of his works. We will enter into the ongoing conversation with and about one of Shakespeare’s plays and, in the process, discover the various arguments that have been made about (1) Shakespeare and his preservation in the canon; and (2) the aesthetic, literary, and cultural interpretations of the play we read. At the close of the course, students will be able to summarize an argument about Shakespeare and his works, synthesize the major theoretical debates in literary and cultural criticism of a play, and present an argument of their own.