First-Year Writing Program

Summer 2016

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.

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.

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.

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 to choose from.
Summer Session 1: May 16-June 23

Section S
Garrett Stack MTWRF 12:00-1:20
Environment, Progress, Apocalypse
From bottle caps to the homes we live in, everything we touch comes at a price. As science and technology continue the rapid progression spurred by industrialization, we are finding ourselves in an increasingly complex society. Part of this complexity is the interconnectivity between ourselves, our progress, and the natural world. But what is the cost of our progress? How do we understand the environment in which we live? How can we harmonize this understanding with our ever-increasing technological advances? This course will examine these issues and perspectives surrounding the role of humanity and our relationship with the natural environment. To do so, we will read arguments from a variety of perspectives and eras in order to get a “big picture” view of humanity and the environment. We will draw upon authors from a variety of contexts, including industrialists, environmentalists, and entrepreneurs. We will also consider utopian and dystopian visions of the future as represented in modern film and literature. In doing so, this course will focus on the points of tension that exist between technological advancement and environmental awareness, and the problem spaces that arise when arguments for progress conflict with arguments about conservation and the role of the consumer. By examining a variety of opinions and arguments, articulated in a variety of ways (newspaper articles, essays, fiction, academic journals, and film), we will be able to reach some conclusions about our complex relationship with the earth, and how progress can both benefit and impair the future of people and the planet. Over the course of the semester, we will analyze and synthesize arguments written by experts so that we can make a unique contribution to the overarching question of how we can negotiate the at times conflicting priorities of people, progress, and the environment. As we move from our studies and transition into the world-at-large, it will be up to us shape future policy and progress; this course will give us a place to start.

Section T
Natalie Suzelis MTWRF 1:30-2:50
Resistance in Subcultures
Only three years after the Sex Pistols emerged as representatives of a new social movement known as “punk rock,” the British group Crass had already declared that “Punk [was] Dead” by comparing it to other pop culture trends emerging at the time. Yet, since this declaration, the label of “punk” has been used to refer to anything from underground musical styles, fashions, and attitudes, to social groups and political movements. This course explores the history, influence, and controversies of punk and other subcultures through text, figures, music, and film (for example: figures like Kathleen Hanna – a feminist icon of riot grrrl punk and Punk Attitude, a film that concentrates on the use of style in various “scenes” of the punk movement.)
Using academic cultural theory to define concepts of mass or “dominant” culture and subculture, this course ultimately uses punk as a lens to discuss the dynamic relationship between popular or “mainstream” culture and alternative or “resistant” subcultures. We ask what makes something mainstream, why or how a subculture would wish to resist the mainstream, and what happens when a “subculture” gets incorporated into mass culture. We also ask how subcultures respond to and represent race, gender, and class in opposition to the "social" dominance of the mainstream. Using methods of critical reading and academic writing, students engage responsibly with the controversial topic of cultural resistance and discuss how effective that resistance can be. Students analyze arguments as part of an overall conversation of alternative or subcultural practices, synthesize perspectives on central issues within that topic, and finally contribute to the overall discussion, considering to what extent and why alternative or subcultures can or would wish to resist mainstream or mass culture.

Summer Session 2: June 27-August 4
*Please note that summer session 2 courses are cross listed. Undergraduate CMU students should sign up for sections U or V. APEA students should sign up for sections E or F.

Section E/U*
Jacob Goessling MTWRF 1:30-2:50
The End of Nature
Wildfires and tornadoes, hurricanes and tsunamis: while these natural disasters have traditionally been considered the result of forces beyond human control, a rising number of researchers have questioned whether their increase in frequency and intensity are a result of humanity’s influence on the earth and its climate. If we are in some way responsible for the significant human and financial costs of these disasters, how might we reevaluate our attitudes and beliefs regarding nature? This course will use the threat of a drastically changing climate as a lens through which to explore the relationship between humans, technology, and nature. How do our definitions of nature influence our use of it? How does the promise of technological advancement inform our responses to the threat of climate change? How do we reconcile our ideas of progress with the possibility of a much darker future? To examine these questions, we will engage with a variety of texts (news articles, academic and non-academic essays, fiction, and film) that address the problems of a changing environment from political, economic, and cultural perspectives. We will move from arguments on the policies and beliefs which led to our current situation (such as Timothy Mitchell’s Carbon Democracy) to current calls for action (such as Naomi Klein’s This Changes Everything), before finally considering how writers and artists have imagined possible futures (such as in the film Wall-E). Over the course of the semester, we will analyze and synthesize arguments written by experts so that we can make a unique contribution to the overarching question of how we can
negotiate the at times conflicting priorities of people, progress, and the environment.

Section F/V*
Craig Stamm MTWRF 3:00-4:20

Is this just a game to you?

In 2014, a series of events now referred to as Gamergate revealed widespread misogyny throughout the larger male-dominated gaming community. Initially debating the ethics of video game journalists, the conversation became loaded with violent threats and the defamation of female video game developers. While the outcome of Gamergate is still hotly debated in relation to the parties involved, one thing was made clear: video games are no longer a niche interest. With over half of the American population reported to play video games, they now outsell the global box office, making video games a new dominant form of media. The virtual societies of video games enable us to participate in experiences difficult to capture through other means, while also paralleling real world power structures and prejudices. How can we understand video games as tools for social change? How does a post-Gamergate gaming community move forward without abandoning the work of the past? How do we define video games? In terms of goals, interaction, or technology? The goal of this class is to investigate these questions surrounding video games, while also considering issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation in relation to the history of video games. The course requires no previous knowledge of or experience with video games, and some assignments will include playing relevant games that highlight the issues we'll be discussing in our readings. We will read various articles addressing the sociological issues of games, and students will be asked to write their own papers analyzing, critiquing, and synthesizing these perspectives, leading to a final paper where they will craft their own contribution on how we can understand video games as tools for sociological reflection and progress.