

Pathway 2: Take A Full-Semester Course

Instead of taking two half-semester mini courses, students may choose to take the full-semester course, **76-101: Interpretation and Argument**.

Please continue reading to learn about the specific course topics, schedules, and faculty information for 76-101 courses offered in Fall 2026.

Full-Semester Course Schedules and Descriptions

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76-101 At A Glance

76-101, Interpretation and Argument, is a foundational, inquiry-driven writing course that introduces students to a variety of strategies for making compositional decisions in writing and communication. Regardless of your section's theme, you will write in a variety of academic genres that introduce you to different ways to organize your work and produce thoughtful, ethical, evidence-based arguments with scholarly humility. The shared assignment sequence across these sections includes 3 major tasks:

- a [thesis-driven](#), academic text called a *Comparative Genre Analysis*;
- an original *research proposal* that presents a feasible question and plan of research, framed by a [literature review](#) of relevant work and a research gap or need;
- a *Research Article*, executing your proposed research plan through either a thesis-driven or an [IMRaD](#) organizational pattern to structure your *contribution*.

Faculty teaching 76-101 typically select texts—ranging from scholarly texts, journalism, and film—about an issue so that students can identify interesting questions for their own research projects. Students should expect explicit, research-based instruction, practice, and reflection to build knowledge in controlling their writing processes and writing clear, well-supported, reader-oriented arguments. Because the course emphasizes the real stakes of communicating with readers and listeners, students share with their peers both low- and high-stakes written work within an interactive and collaborative classroom environment.

76-101 Course Topics and Schedule

Instructor Name	Course Topic	Section	Days and Timeslots
Tina Cafasso	<i>Becoming and Un-Becoming Ourselves on Social Media</i>	A AA	MWF 8:00-8:50AM MWF 9:00-9:50AM
Rebecca Wigginton	<i>Politics and Ideology in the Marvel Cinematic Universe</i>	B	MWF 9:00-9:50AM
TBD	<i>TBD</i>	BB E	MWF 10:00-10:50AM MWF 12:00-12:50PM
Chris Mayer	<i>TBD</i>	C DD	MWF 10:00-10:50AM MWF 12:00-12:50PM
Maddy Nguyen	<i>"Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are": Constructions of Self and Taste through Consumption</i>	CC	MWF 11:00-11:50AM
Seth Strickland	<i>Food and Hunger: Navigating Rhetoric of Scarcity</i>	D HH	MWF 11:00-11:50AM MWF 4:00-4:50PM
Chad Szalkowski-Ference	<i>AI and Art: Can Machines Tell Our Stories?</i>	GG PP	MWF 3:00-3:50PM MWF 4:00-4:50PM
Andrea Comiskey	<i>Film & Media Style</i>	EE FF	MWF 1:00-1:50PM MWF 2:00-2:50PM

Rochel Gasson	<i>Digital Selves and Social Systems: Inquiry through Research and Writing</i>	F P	MWF 1:00-1:50PM MWF 9:00-9:50AM
Courtney Novosat	<i>Museums, Monuments, Fairs & Nation: The Politics of Cultural Memory</i>	G	MWF 2:00-2:50PM
Kat Myers	<i>Social Media & Identity</i>	H I	MWF 3:00-3:50PM MWF 4:00-4:50PM
Laura Deluca	<i>Archives and Afterlives: Interpreting Cultural Artifacts in the Digital Age</i>	II	TR 12:30-1:50PM
Rachael Mulvihill	<i>Writing in the Age of Burnout</i>	J	TR 9:30-10:50AM
Peter Mayshle	<i>The Rhetoric of Space: Places of Learning, Difference, and Public Memory</i>	K KK	TR 8:00-9:20AM TR 2:00-3:20PM
Barbara George	<i>The Environment: Making Meaning Across Disciplines</i>	JJ NN	TR 9:30-10:50AM TR 3:30-4:50PM
Elizabeth Dieterich	<i>Big Time Shakespeare: Legacies of "The Bard."</i>	L	TR 9:30-10:50AM
Laura McCann	<i>Fact, Fiction, and Friction: The Battle for Scientific Truth</i>	L	TR 9:30-10:50AM
Janine Carlock	<i>Being Human in the Digital Age</i>	M O	TR 3:30-4:50PM TR 2:00-3:20PM
Tony Luchini	<i>Becoming and Un-Becoming Ourselves on Social Media</i>	MM N	TR 12:30-1:50PM TR 3:30-4:50PM

Julie Pal-Agrawal	<i>Becoming and Un-Becoming Ourselves on Social Media</i>	OO	MWF 8:00-8:50AM
Jimmy Lizama	<i>Conflicting Visions of Democratic Dialogue</i>	Q	TR 9:30AM-10:50AM

76-101 Section Course Descriptions

Politics and Ideology in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Wigginton: Section B)

Since the success of *Iron Man* in 2008, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has expanded to include over 30 films, including several of the highest grossing films of all time. This extensive commercial success has spawned media discussion of the artistic and generic merits of the films, but also varied and rich scholarly and popular debate on the films' relationships to ideological issues as democracy, surveillance, heroism and authoritarianism, and representations of race and gender.

Building on critical work in rhetoric, political science, and media studies, in this course we will examine the role of the superhero film in contemporary society. Why are Marvel films so popular and what does this popularity say about our 21st century world? What is the relationship between pop culture and cultural values and ideals, especially those that are politically or intellectually-driven? Students are not required to have any prior knowledge or experience in this area, although the course assignments will include some film watching outside of class in order to highlight and deepen topics from the readings.

As we read both academic and popular press articles addressing these issues in and around the MCU, students will develop skills in the fundamental practices of critical reading and academic writing and apply them to complete assignments in which they will analyze arguments, synthesize perspectives on central problems, write an academic research proposal based upon those syntheses, and finally contribute their own research-based arguments to the debates surrounding the place the MCU holds in the current cultural and political imagination.

Conflicting Visions of Democratic Dialogue (Lizama: Section Q)

Dialogue in the public sphere is complicated – different people have different ideas about how it should be done. For example, should participants in a democracy act as "disruptive" protestors at a public event or engage in "polite" discussion at a town hall? What counts as reasonable evidence in public dialogue: should speakers limit their arguments to those based in science and logic, or should speakers also make use of personal narrative and emotion? In sum, in this class we will consider: What is the public sphere? To what degree is exclusion an integral part of dialogue in the public sphere and how can exclusions be remediated? What are the limitations of public dialogue and public opinion in promoting social change? Throughout the course, students can expect to read from scholars, activists, and/or thinkers with differing perspectives on democratic deliberation such as Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Derrick Bell, and Alex Zamalin. Students will also examine primary artifacts such as Op-Eds, public solidarity letters, speeches, etc. to understand the various forms democratic dialogue can take.

Ultimately, students will leave the course with enhanced critical thinking and communication skills as well as content knowledge about democratic dialogue and different styles for participating in it. Major course assignments will include a comparative genre analysis essay, a research proposal identifying a problem related to democratic dialogue that can be addressed through careful research, and a final

contribution essay building on the proposal. The final contribution essay should offer a well-researched discussion that contributes to debates about democratic dialogue in a "novel" and substantive fashion.

"Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are": Constructions of Self and Taste through Consumption (Nguyen: Section CC)

In this course, students will analyze how food acts as both a source of identity formation and social meaning making. From bespoke protein powders to the natural wine movement, this course answers the call that Roland Barthes issues when he notes that "[Food] is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior...it constitutes information; it signifies" (1961). In this course, students will be exposed to works within food studies, rhetoric, and philosophy to answer the question whether or not we really are what we eat.

Food and Hunger: Navigating Rhetoric of Scarcity (Strickland: Sections D & HH)

Is hunger a feeling or a physical state? Is it some third thing in complex combination? How does hunger reveal inequality or serve to trace lines of care and power in human society? How do desires and appetite relate to physical hunger? Is hunger a state of being or a lack of food? We'll discuss how hunger and food play an important role in our lives, in our communities, and how we can develop a coherent approach to questions of hunger and how developing such an approach can transform the way we interact with our goals, our communities, and even parts of ourselves. As early as the Middle Ages, poets divided society into 'winners,' that is, producers, and 'wasters,' consumers. In recent years, hunger and complex relationships with food appear in Tommy Pico's poetry, Roxanne Gay's memoirs, and countless films like *Spirited Away* and *The Menu*. The problem isn't distant or hypothetical, either: Pittsburgh has the highest levels of food insecurity among similarly sized cities. Nearly 13% of Pittsburgh residents (and 19% of children) live in food insecurity, which is on par with national rates in the US. In this, one of the most stupendously wealthy countries in the world, why are people still going hungry? In this course, students will begin to answer these questions through a variety of individual and collaborative research projects.

Students will analyze texts for their arguments, synthesize their ideas, and hone the academic skills needed to participate in a scholarly conversation. After reading and analyzing a variety of arguments on this issue, students will write a formal research proposal and paper by drawing upon their knowledge from this class and their own disciplines.

AI and Art: Can Machines Tell Our Stories? (Szalkowski-Ference: Sections GG, PP)

A man receives a direct message from his dead friend, who has become fully reanimated in the present, ChatGPT-style. Unknown to the judges, an AI-generated submission won a prestigious photography award. These situations come from contemporary literature and the art world, highlighting how artists are integrating algorithms and AI into creative texts. In this course, we will track debates on the ethics and aesthetics of machine learning in the creative arts. Much like scholars at Oxford, who have concluded that "human/[machine learning] complementarity in the arts is a rich and ongoing process," we will temper enthusiasm by exploring issues such as access,

originality, ownership, and the degree to which art exceeds the generation of grammar, syntax, and/or images through algorithms to include a deeper meaning rooted in human consciousness and interaction with others and the world.

Through three major writing assignments that include a proposal and academic paper, we will learn to read critically, synthesize productively, and apply theoretical lenses to texts to participate in an ongoing critical conversation. The emerging critical conversation we will enter centers on ethics, aesthetics, narrative/literary theory, and AI, which itself melds a range of disciplines from computer science to biology. Because the work we will be doing is interdisciplinary, students will be able to gravitate toward areas of the arts that interest them most and draw from research related to the academic disciplines they are pursuing at CMU, all culminating in an insightful contribution to the conversation taking place at the crossroads of technology and art.

Film & Media Style (Comiskey: Sections EE & FF)

What gives *Dune* a different look and feel from *Furiosa*? What distinguishes a YouTube explainer from a TikTok reel? One key component is *style*—how these works use the tools of their mediums to create unique audiovisual experiences. The fundamentals of style in modern moving-image media are camerawork, staging, editing, and sound, and these elements can be explored using a wide range of disciplinary perspectives (e.g. art-historical, psychological, philosophical) and methods (qualitative and quantitative). Drawing on this range of approaches, this class will address questions like: how and why does style change over time and across cultures? How and why do we judge a style as "good" or "bad"? To what extent does style interact with meaning and shape interpretation—or, is there a politics of style? In the process, we'll find that style—which is all too often dismissed as insubstantial—is in fact essential to appreciating the media we consume. This is a writing course, and no previous training in film or media studies is necessary. Because we need some shared examples to which we can apply key concepts, the course will require occasional out-of-class film and TV viewing.

Students will read academic writing on this topic as well as pieces intended for wider, non-specialist audiences. In the process, they'll analyze how different authors present information and construct arguments. This will establish a foundation for writing a project proposal that identifies a researchable problem or question in the field. Then, they'll develop their own contributions to the intellectual conversation on audiovisual style.

Digital Selves and Social Systems: Inquiry through Research and Writing (Gasson: Sections F & P)

In a world increasingly shaped by digital technologies, how do we write about the self, society, and systems of power? This course explores that question through both public-facing and research-driven writing, with a focus on how identity, technology, and social justice intersect. Drawing on conversations across diverse discourse communities—including those engaging artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI (GAI), explainable AI (XAI), and emerging ideas about AGI—we will investigate key concepts such as data colonialism, algorithmic bias, surveillance capitalism, along with the ethical dimensions of digital identity (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Murgia, 2024). Through an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based approach, we will also engage with both foundational and contemporary thinkers like Sherry Turkle (1995), Ray Kurzweil (2004), Bernie Hogan (2010), and Yuval Noah Harari (2024), to analyze how dominant narratives about

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technology and the self are constructed, circulated, and challenged.

Emphasizing writing as both a process and a practice of critical engagement, this course supports you in developing clarity, purpose, and an authoritative academic voice. You will learn to analyze rhetorical situations, identify exigence, and make intentional methodological choices as you bring your own experiences and questions into conversation with course materials. Through this work, you will synthesize complex ideas and craft compelling arguments about the cultural, political, and ethical impacts of digital systems. By the end of the course, you will be equipped with the research and writing strategies necessary to enter academic and public conversations, question prevailing narratives, and articulate your role as a thoughtful, critical participant in a networked society.

Museums, Monuments, Fairs & Nation: The Politics of Cultural Memory (Novosat: Section G)

Many of us are likely to have first encountered a museum or monument as a child—a strange, musty building full of attic curiosities or an oddly imposing metalwork tarnished blue or orange by time. Despite our nostalgic encounters with these sites, museums, monuments, and fairs were often immediately contested spaces of national identity and exclusion in their own cultural moment—and continue to foster controversy today. And yet, each year museums, monuments, and collections of artifacts (often preserved from the prime of international world's fairs), are frequented by millions of people. In fact, in the U.S. alone, the American Alliance of Museums found that in 2023 “28% of U.S. adults reported having been to a museum in the past year,” a remarkable recovery from Covid-era closures confirming museums’ persistent popularity. But why? Why do museums and monuments retain their popularity—and how has their purpose and approach, meaning and reception changed over time? What artifacts and histories has our culture elected to preserve, to commemorate—and to overlook? And how do these contrived curations privilege some voices at the expense of others? While some of our class examples and *excursions* will localize Pittsburgh (and the U.S. by extension), students will be encouraged to engage with and write about *any* museum, monument, or digital museum or fair of interest or significance to them.

Our shared podcasts and readings will draw from cultural theory (Michel Foucault, Agatha Beins), history (Julie Decker, Robert Rydell), museology (Sharon MacDonald, Tony Bennett), anthropology (Lee D. Baker), critical memory studies (Felix Berenskotter), and curators’ scholarship in the public humanities (Cheri Jones), readings that invite us all to revisit that curious space of our childhood with an equally-curious and critical adult sensibility. In this course, students will learn to write a comparative genre analysis, research proposal, and annotated bibliography *en route* to developing an original academic essay or IMRaD that uniquely contributes to a relevant field of cultural studies. Further, students will develop an assertion-evidence presentation of that written work for an end-of-term class symposium on the politics of cultural memory.

Social Media & Identity (Myers: Sections H & I)

Social media has become a play space for exploring new identities. Users have reveled in the opportunity to play a seemingly endless array of roles on multiple stages for global audiences. Sherry Turkle talks about the potential of leaving behind a solid, unitary identity and exploring more fluid identities online. For scholars like Annette Markham and Hugo Liu, social media hosts theatrical spaces where users can try out new identities and invest in their self-making. Conversely, others like Bernie

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Hogan and Danah Boyd have claimed that online spaces are not free and, in fact, maintain sensitivities to social indicators like race, class, and gender. Instead of a place of fantasy where people play multiple roles, people use social media to craft flat, safe, and unidimensional self-images.

This class seeks to understand the vexed relationship between using social media as a place of self-creation while having to assimilate into existing systems of networked and coded identities. We will answer questions like “Can the use of social media create and shape genuinely new selves, and to what extent are these selfhoods products of the communities we engage in?”; “How does the technology we use shape our behavior?”; “How are our social media presences wishful imaginings while also contributing to major shifts in culture?”

Our class objectives include synthesizing and evaluating various perspectives, organizing persuasive and well-structured arguments, and communicating these ideas in clear and effective prose. We will study a variety of genres such as opinion pieces, academic articles, clips from TV series like *Black Mirror*, *Ted Talks* etc., to craft nuanced arguments on the degree to which trying to create and maintain an identity on social media can influence our behaviors, communities, and realities.

Archives and Afterlives: Interpreting Cultural Artifacts in the Digital Age (Deluca: Section II)

Why do some stories get remembered while others disappear? Who decides what counts as history, and how does media shape the way we understand the past? Students will analyze examples of representation in both historical and contemporary media, such as how the British Library website presents and organizes its collections in ways that frame Britain’s historical past as coherent and largely unproblematic for public audiences, how librarians at institutions like CMU’s Special Collections determine which documents are preserved and made accessible, and how collaborative platforms like Wikipedia structure and revise information about public figures. For instance, pages on Queen Elizabeth II are continually updated as editors respond to shifting public narratives about women in power, shaping how female rule is represented, interpreted, and understood across time. These cases demonstrate that representation is never neutral: the ways materials are preserved, organized, and circulated shape what counts as historical knowledge and whose perspectives are included or left out.

Stemming from these cases, students will ask questions such as: Why are certain voices missing from the historical record? How do movies, websites, or online databases shape public understanding of the past? What happens when historical materials are edited, digitized, or circulated online? By studying how narratives are created and repeated across different forms of media, students will develop critical reading and writing skills that help them better understand the relationship between storytelling, power, and cultural memory. Throughout the course, students will develop their skills in genre-based analysis and collaborative discussion, deepening their understanding of how cultural biases influence the politics of representation. As the course progresses, students will identify a unique research gap within these discussions and compose a formal research proposal that articulates the significance of the gap that their research aims to fill. This proposal will serve as the foundation for a final academic paper, where students will investigate a topic related to archives, media, or cultural representation and write a research paper that explores how stories about the past continue to shape the present.

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Writing in the Age of Burnout (Mulvihill: Section J)

From hustle culture to “quiet quitting,” burnout has become a defining condition of contemporary life. This course invites students to critically engage with burnout as both a personal experience and a cultural phenomenon. Students will explore how states like boredom, anxiety, and overload influence interpretation, creativity, and argument, and how these experiences are entangled with systems such as education and digital technology. Crucially, this course asks the questions: how does burnout reshape our attention and our ability to make meaning? When does disengagement become resistance? Can writing itself become a space for reflection, recovery, or critique? This course uses burnout as a platform for creating problem spaces around themes such as productivity culture, emotional labor, attention economies, and the pressures of constant connectivity. Course topics may include how academic expectation structures writing practices; how digital environments like GenAI shape attention, distraction, and authorship; and how cultural narratives frame burnout as either an individual failure or a systemic issue. Students will read excerpts from contemporary fiction, journalism, and accessible academic writing. Readings may include sections from Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, journalistic accounts of burnout by Anne Helen Peterson, and short academic readings like Sianne Ngai's work on boredom and "minor feelings."

This is an academic writing course grounded in research, interpretation, and argument. Students will analyze how writers adapt purpose, evidence, structure, and tone for different audiences and contexts, and will practice developing their own positions within ongoing conversations about burnout. Major assignments include a comparative genre analysis, a research proposal, and a research article (thesis-driven or IMRaD). Through peer review workshops and low-stakes writing exercises, students will build genre-based writing skills while also experimenting with more sustainable and reflective writing practices.

The Rhetoric of Space: Places of Learning, Difference, and Public Memory (Mayshle: sections K & KK)

Places “speak” because places hold meaning. How places embody and convey their meanings is the subject of this course. Building on theoretical work in rhetoric studies and postmodern geography, we will consider how ideas about space and place inform literacy, difference, and public memory. How do the spaces and places where we learn inform and shape how we learn? What are the relationships between space/place and gender, race, social class, sexuality, and other categories of social identification or social experience? How does the way we experience built environments, particularly ones fraught with memory, inform the meaning-making practices that occur at these sites? We will investigate a variety of spaces/places, including classrooms, our neighborhoods, walking tours, museums, memorials, and even cyberspace. In short, this course will explore the question: how is space and place rhetorical? And because this is a foundational writing course, you will practice what it means to write for, within, and beyond the academy, as you develop skills in critical reading and academic writing and apply them to analyze arguments, synthesize various perspectives on central problems, and finally contribute your own argument to the conversation on rhetorical space.

The Environment: Making Meaning Across Disciplines (George: Sections JJ & NN)

This class explores how environmental research and communication appears across disciplines and for different audiences. We start by exploring an interdisciplinary topic: the environment. Often, environmental issues are framed as catastrophic: this might be natural phenomenon that we can feel, see & experience ourselves (flooding, wildfires, rapidly warming temperatures, drought, agricultural concerns etc.), but there are threads of other discourses as well: environmental policy considerations (the intricacies of the Paris Climate agreement or the racial concerns of environmental justice or the siting of data centers), or the science related to a myriad of environmental concerns about emerging human technologies (the Anthropocene). Other times, the environment is shared through various mediums as a place of peace, respite, and hope: once industrial towns like Pittsburgh are “greening” one neighborhood at a time; there is a rise in the sharing of environmental phenomena in an effort to protect it – from a sketchbook of a wildflower to a selfie in a National Park on social media.

The readings in this class help us to question our relationship with and understanding of the environment as an interdisciplinary introduction into research. How is our understanding of the environment mediated through various representations of environmental phenomena? This can be from our own observations about nature, to historical environmental texts, to environmental social media and real time campaigns that create opportunities for public participation, and to formal academic environmental research. How do new technologies complicate our understanding of the environment and what does that mean about ethics surrounding nature? How do various science claims complicate policy action surrounding different environmental controversies? In this course, students will analyze a variety of texts to explore features of different written genres. Students will then write a research proposal that poses a question on a real-world interdisciplinary concern that students identify and explore. The proposal then extends into a formal research paper, which students often connect to their future area of study, civic, community or workplace considerations.

Big Time Shakespeare: Legacies of "The Bard" (Dieterich: Section L)

Michael Bristol’s book *Big-Time Shakespeare* asks, “Is Shakespeare great, or is it all hype?” This writing class uses that question as a springboard to explore the position that William Shakespeare (in addition to other canonical literary figures) has occupied and now occupies in popular and academic culture throughout the past four centuries. Since Shakespeare is used to make persuasive cases for funding arts and humanities projects, we need to understand how Shakespeare has come to be a more persuasive figure than others. Together we will read texts on unresolved biographical questions about Shakespeare and unresolved interpretive questions about his work (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*; *Julius Caesar*). We will analyzing popular and academic genres about Shakespeare to write a Comparative Genre Analysis, an original Research Proposal, and finally a Research Article that contributes to this ongoing discussion regarding Shakespeare’s place in culture, academia, and the marketplace.

Fact, Fiction, and Friction: The Battle for Scientific Truth (McCann: Section LL)

In the lab, facts are non-negotiable; in the public square, they are a battlefield. **Fact, Fiction, and Friction** challenges the traditional view of science as a purely objective pursuit, demonstrating instead how scientific authority is built through rhetoric, debate, and social negotiation. As a first-year researcher, you won't just learn to write—you will learn to strategize, analyzing how experts communicate ambiguity amongst themselves versus how that same uncertainty is weaponized in the media and on social platforms. Through a series of projects—from genre analysis to a formal research proposal and a final contribution paper—you will investigate how to bridge the gap between complex data and public trust. This course provides the essential toolkit for the modern scientist: the ability to not only conduct groundbreaking research but to ensure it survives and thrives in the complex, often contradictory, public sphere.

Being Human in the Digital Age (Carlock: Sections: M & O)

“Technology doesn’t just do things for us. It does things to us, changing not just what we do but who we are.” — Turkle, “The Documented Life,” New York Times, Dec.15, 2013

In a world increasingly shaped by digital technologies, how do we inquire and write about the self, society, and systems of power? This course invites students to critically examine the intersections of identity, technology, and human systems through critical research writing. Drawing on conversations from diverse discourse communities—including those surrounding the integration of digital technologies in our daily lives—we will explore key concepts such as algorithmic bias, surveillance capitalism, and the ethical dimensions of digital identity and selfhood (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Murgia, 2024). Taking an interdisciplinary and inquiry-driven approach, we will read works from historic and contemporary thinkers like Deb Roy, Sherry Turkle, Bernie Hogan (2010), and Yuval Harari (2024) to investigate how dominant narratives are constructed and maintained, and how to effectively challenge them to gain new insights into the self and technology.

Emphasizing writing as both a process and a method of critical engagement, this course provides space for you to develop clarity, purpose, and voice in an active academic discourse. Shaping understanding of the world and ourselves, we will bring our own experiences and interests into conversation with course materials to synthesize complex ideas and craft compelling arguments. The research and writing skills gained in this course will equip you to move into your field(s) of study to question prevailing narratives and create new lines of inquiry to articulate your role as thoughtful, critical participants in a networked society.

Becoming and Un-Becoming Ourselves on Social Media (Cafasso: Sections A & AA; Pal-Agrawal: Section OO; Luchini: Sections MM & N)

Social media has become a play space for exploring new identities. Users have reveled in the opportunity to play a seemingly endless array of roles on multiple stages for global audiences. Conversely, others have claimed that our opportunities to explore our identities on social media are narrowing as we are increasingly subjected to more forms of power, regulation, and control. This class

seeks to understand the vexed relationship between using the Internet as a place of self-creation while having to assimilate into existing systems of networked and coded identities.

To investigate this potential contradiction, we will study the works of various scholars. Annette Markham and Hugo Liu have described social media as a theatrical space where users can try out new identities and invest in their self-making. Henry Jenkins and Abigail De Kosnik have discussed how participation in online communities has led to both individual empowerment and meaningful moments of societal change. In sharp relief, others have argued that our identities are becoming products of various coercive and disciplinary online processes. Eli Pariser argues that predictive engines work first to create theories of who we are and then control the information we see, thereby hindering opportunities for self-exploration and growth. Lisa Nakamura has found that online games and chat rooms often force players to embody negative stereotypes of women and minorities.

These and related topics will serve as the focus for this 76-101 course. We will study a variety of genres, such as opinion pieces, academic articles and influencer interviews to craft nuanced arguments on the degrees to which trying to become someone on social media can lead to self-assimilation and eventual “unbecoming.” Our class objectives include synthesizing and evaluating various perspectives, organizing persuasive and well-structured arguments, and communicating these ideas in clear and compelling prose.

Race, Place and the Meaning of Space (Gilbert: Section Q)

From city streets and neighborhood boundaries to maps, memorials, and everyday environments, space operates at the intersection of identity, power, and lived experience. We often move through neighborhoods, streets, campuses, and public spaces every day without stopping to consider how profoundly these environments shape our lives. A city block may feel inviting to some and exclusionary to others, while a neighborhood boundary may appear natural even when it has been deliberately drawn through policy, planning, and public discourse. And yet, these environments structure our most ordinary experiences, guiding how we move, where we feel at home, and how we understand our relationship to others.

In this section of 76–101, we will critically examine the spaces around us as sites of social negotiation and cultural meaning-making. Our shared readings and media will draw from rhetoric, race studies, urban history, journalism, and film, inviting us to reconsider the seemingly familiar spaces of everyday life with a more critical perspective. Through topics such as segregation, urban development, and public memory, we will investigate how cities and institutions regulate communities, how neighborhoods are claimed, contested, and reimagined by different groups, and how race shapes the ways we experience and interpret geography. While some of our examples will focus on Pittsburgh and the United States more broadly, students will be encouraged to engage with and write about any place, neighborhood, or contested landscape of significance to them. In this course, students will learn to write a comparative genre analysis, research proposal, and research article that contributes to ongoing conversations about race, place, and power.

76102 Course Description and Schedule

Advanced First-Year Writing courses are designed for students who have demonstrated an understanding of academic writing that most incoming freshmen have not. Because of the students' level of preparedness, the Writing & Communication Program provides intensive, advanced courses for students to work closely with senior faculty within the English department. Advanced courses assume that students have established strong reading and synthesizing skills, as well as a demonstrated interest in writing and communication, prior to entering Carnegie Mellon. The course topics shift each semester. Students enroll and are admitted through an application process that takes place before the Fall semester of each year.

76-102 B: MWF 11:00AM-11:50AM

Professor: Danielle Wetzel

Writing the Good Life: Perspectives on Flourishing

What is a good life? Is a good life synonymous with happiness? Is there a method for achieving a good life? And how do we define “good” in such a question? Is it cultural, personal, ethical, performative? Various academic disciplines and traditions focus on this question—and the practical implications, for us, are clear. Immanuel Kant said that there is inevitable tension between virtue and happiness, hence the need for a philosophy of a good life and its relationship to values. Philosophers like Meghan Sullivan would have us explore a reflective method for thinking through “big questions” so that we arrive at “loving attention and making meaning” to find our truth. Psychiatry professor Robert Waldinger and psychology professor Marc Schulz, based upon their longitudinal study of happiness, would tell us that the very simple answer to “a more meaningful and satisfying life” is relationships. Professor Laurie Santos draws us to strategies from theories of mind and the science of well being. What happens when we embed technology and progress into a narrative of the good life? Or Faith? Justice? Suffering? Sexuality? Intergenerational perspective? The discussion can bring us encouragement and sometimes, perhaps, sheer exhaustion.

This advanced academic research writing course uses questions about the good life to introduce students to communication methods to know the self and our campus community and to facilitate meaningful engagement with our community. In pursuit of the question “What is my good life?”, students will encounter a variety of oral, written and visual communication tasks, ranging from reflective pieces, research interviews, a research synthesis, a multimodal proposal, a poster, and public presentations. Within the course, we will use digital tools for feedback on our writing, including those that use GenAI. *If students do not wish to participate in a rigorous team writing project, they should not enroll in this section.*