



## Spring 2020 Writing 102 Course Blurbs

Writ 102.01, 02

Prof. Magdalena Maczynska

F 11:30-2:21 pm, 2:30-5:21 pm

### ***Writing about Climate Change***

In this section of WRIT 102, we will look at how contemporary writers and journalists tackle the defining phenomenon of our times: climate change. We will start by reading and analyzing recently published long-form essays about climate change to see what emotions (fear? hope? sympathy? despair?) and rhetorical strategies (presenting scientific facts? invoking the beauty of nature? championing social justice?) appear to be most effective in communicating the urgency of the climate crisis. We will compare the approaches of various writers, look at climate communication statistics, conduct research, and produce our own texts—in a variety of genres, for a variety of audiences—designed to engage, inform, and move to action.

Writ 102.3

Prof. Monica Colbert

TTH 4:00-5:21 pm

### ***Persuasion & Influence***

This course introduces students to the art form of persuasion, exploring what makes communication effective. Course readings will illuminate modes of persuasion as rhetorical and literary devices, while affording emphasis on audience, effective organization, style, and oratory techniques. Readings will include political speeches by Frederick Douglass and Donald Trump, comedic monologues by Trevor Noah and Chris Rock, and short fiction such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." Analyses should inform students' own communication, both written and verbal, such that they can compose a semester-long guided research project developing a position on a particular topic, culminating in an oral presentation and a 10 page paper, in which they'll aim to influence an attitude or inspire action.

Writ 102.04

Prof. Mark Tursi

T/TH 1:00-2:21pm

### ***Sublime Uncertainties***

The word 'sublime' today is often used without much thought as a kind of superlative to describe any experience that is supremely and intensely good. But it actually has a long history dating back to Ancient Greece and has obsessed many philosophes ever since. On a conceptual and philosophical level, the sublime often refers to an experience that evokes some combination of awe & fear, beauty & terror, rapture & the unknown; it is a phenomenon so vast, magnificent, or ineffable that we feel paradoxically diminished and expansive simultaneously. For some thinkers, it suggests something transcendent, mystical, and beyond human comprehension. In our current era the sublime is often imbued with an odd and oxymoronic uncertainty regarding the role of language in tension with cultural/personal identity and even violence; it suggests something immanent rather than transcendent, and for a few thinkers, something even ridiculous. In this class, we'll explore literature, art, music, and film, as well as recent global events, both technological and natural, that evoke or sometimes challenge concepts of the sublime. For our final research projects, students will have the opportunity to explore their own unique interests—be it dance, theater, literature, music, politics, architecture, the environment, etc.—in combination with readings from throughout the semester, as well as some direct engagement with the city of New York (architecture, museums, etc).

Writ 102.5

Prof. Leanna McLennan

M/W 5:50-7:11 pm

### ***Creativity***

What is creativity? Is it the result of divine inspiration? Or is it a practical skill that can be taught? This course will explore different perspectives on creativity in psychology, philosophy, business, literary studies and art history. We will also discuss artists' statements about the creative process. Research projects will explore how creativity is defined and employed in a variety of contexts.

Writ 102.6, 14

Prof. Veronica Wong

F 8:30-11:21 am, T/TH 8:30-9:51 am

### ***Writing on Pop Culture***

This writing-intensive course focuses on pop culture by introducing students to the terms, analytical techniques, and interpretive strategies commonly employed in cultural studies. This class will use discussion, student-led research, and writing, to approach contemporary pop culture in their broader social, aesthetic, ethical, and political contexts. Using interdisciplinary approaches to examining television programs, movies, music and music videos, literature, and performance, this course explore how cultural processes and artifacts are produced, shaped, distributed, consumed, and responded to in diverse ways. Students will be asked what culture can tell us about our contemporary political moment and have the opportunity to choose a research topic exploring contemporary culture.

Writ 102.7

Prof. Michael Miller

TH 10:00 a.m.-12:51 pm

### ***Everyday Ethics***

The course readings, discussions, and writing assignments for this section will focus on theories of ethics and their applications to contemporary ethical issues and arguments. Among the many questions we will consider are: What is the relationship between self-interest and ethical action? Is it ever ethically defensible to use bad means to achieve good ends? Under what circumstances are we called upon to question or even to revise our own ethical positions? What are our ethical responsibilities to non-human beings and the unborn? What ethical principles, if any, are universal, and which are culturally and historically determined? How can feminist, non-Western, queer, and other non-dominant belief systems challenge the hegemony of white, Western, patriarchal and heteronormative ethical systems? Original research projects will explore these questions.

**Novel and Film**

This course will explore the concept of horror and its representation in novels and film adaptations. We'll start with traditional ideas of horror in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, studying how both texts use the horror genre to get at social concerns, especially the role of women in their respective time periods. We'll then examine a more contemporary take on horror and how it asks us to reconsider what horror means—moving it beyond the confines of monsters and haunted houses and into the real world. Possible texts include *No Country for Old Men* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep/Blade Runner*. Your original research project will focus on a Novel/Film pairing of your choice. Using our class readings and discussions as a guide, you'll need to consider how your choice of novel engages the world and how those themes are translated (explored, exploded, ignored) into film for a different audience/time period. In your research and writing, you'll be exploring what do we learn about the texts, the world, even ourselves and our society, by looking at the two works together.

**Telepathy**

This section takes for its focus literary representations of feeling at a distance, mind-to-mind communication, mesmerism, hypnosis, and psychic phenomena, collectively referred to as "telepathy." We will ask questions like: How do specific depictions of telepathy reflect or express an author's ideas about the relationships between science and the supernatural, body and mind, intimacy and alienation, or past and future? Do different instances of telepathy in literature speak to one another? For instance, does David Cronenberg's blood curdling twentieth century rendition of extrasensory perception in the horror film *Scanners* evoke, amplify, or criticize George Eliot's nineteenth century idea of telepathy as a "pitiable . . . disease" in the novella *The Lifted Veil*? What are the broader cultural, philosophical, and literary significances of such resonances, continuities, and ruptures? Asking questions like these are opportunities for students to develop nuanced relationships with texts and, further, to construct their own well-supported claims about how texts do whatever it is they do (delight? provoke? edify? bore?). The goal of *Telepathy* will be for each student to develop out of the consistent production of well-supported claims and mature interpretations broader critical apparatuses (for literature, culture, and life) that are uniquely their own. Students will produce an original research paper in this course.

***I, Writer***

Have you ever wondered why composition courses are a requirement in most colleges? In this course, we will work towards answering that very question by reading and responding to texts about the subject of writing (yes, writing is something people study). Through examining the subject of writing, we will dispel common writing “myths” by learning the basic concepts—otherwise known as “threshold concepts”—which are different and sometimes at odds with the rules you were most likely taught to adhere to in high school. We will use writing studies as a tool to utilize and strengthen your critical thinking skills, and as a vessel for crafting an argument and supporting it with research. Ultimately, this course aims to help you transfer the skills learned in this class to other academic disciplines as well as writing contexts outside of the classroom: situations where you must communicate—through writing—an idea, an argument, a proposal, a message. As a result, you’ll develop your voice both within and outside of the classroom.

***Imagining New York City***

New York City has long drawn artists, immigrants, capitalists, students, tourists, commuters, inventors, and reinventors, but what is it about this place that allows it to be so many things to so many different people? In this course, we will think about the New York of the imagination of so many, and what happens when dreamers come face to face with the reality of living in this challenging but inspiring place that explores and tests the notion of what it means to be American. Focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth century decades when New York emerged as a city of international importance, our topics include the collisions between the urban and natural environments; evolution of some of our ideas about different kinds of work, and how working men and women have defined themselves; racial and cultural differences and the role that immigration has played in New York’s history; and the stories of outsiders of many varieties to ask what it means to be considered a New Yorker. The course will culminate in an original research project that engages with the history of the city and visions for what it could become.

***Dystopian Film and Fiction***

How will the technologies and social forces of today transform our lives in the decades to come? Will we soon be living in a technological paradise or fighting for survival against the very forces we have too eagerly released on the world? In the mid-twentieth century two now classic novels helped to define these questions for modern society: George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldus Huxley’s *Brave New World*. From Orwell’s chilling total surveillance state to Huxley’s vision of happy but soulless genetically engineered drones, these novels continue to provoke debates about the fundamental values and practices of today’s society. The genre has seen a resurgence in our time, from Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* to Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* series. In this course we will read and view key dystopian novels and films, using these texts as tools for imagining a better future and asking both deep and urgent questions about the forces shaping our society. The final project is a research paper in which you will investigate a dystopian novel, film, or television show of your choice, the critical and popular reactions to its vision of the future, and how real-world political and social issues can be more deeply understood through the lens it presents.

Writ 102.15

Prof. Deanna Twain

M/W 8:30-9:51 am

### ***On Certainty***

“For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream.”-  
Vincent Van Gogh

Religion, science, philosophy, law, love, and the tooth fairy: is anything certain? In this section of WRIT 102, we will explore the concept of certainty. Can anything actually be proven? How does certainty relate to trust or faith? Is a lack of doubt the same as a sense of denial? In this course students will read texts, view films, and write on this topic, with an eye towards developing an original research paper by the end of the semester.

Writ 102.16

Prof. Ryan Everitt

M/W 10:00-11:21 am

### ***Representing Evil***

While evil seems a fundamental concept to our ideas of right and wrong, its nature is anything but straightforward. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s Satan articulates the concept’s difficulty when he declares, “Evil, be thou my good!”—phrasing that prompts us to ask, how can evil ever be good? In this course we will take up this question, along with others, with regards to how literature, philosophy, and the social sciences have explored the concept of evil as we pay attention to its evolution across time and genres. Throughout the second half of the semester, students will embark on their own independent reading and research project that will culminate in a final research paper.

Writ 102.17

Prof. Mary Brown

T/TH 5:50-7:11 pm

### ***Immigration***

Even when it’s limited to American history since 1820 (the first year ship manifests reported newly arriving immigrants), immigration is a topic with something for every major and personal interest. Resources for researching immigration at MMC are so abundant that each student can develop a personalized reading list, bringing greater depth to each WRIT assignment. Connections between topics make for research presentations that are useful for both the presenter and the audience. Past successful topics have been as varied as President John F. Kennedy’s immigration policies and how to encourage environmentalism in an immigrant neighborhood in the Bronx.

Writ 102.18

Prof. Keith Meatto

F 8:30-11:21am

### ***Climate Crisis***

This course will investigate climate change, arguably the most serious and urgent problem now facing humanity. How have we radically altered the planet? How has climate change already affected us, and how will it affect us—individually and collectively, locally and globally? What are our moral responsibilities to current and future generations? How might we act boldly to mitigate catastrophe? Through nonfiction readings and discussion, students will deepen their knowledge of the problem and potential solutions, and the course will culminate in a self-directed research project related to our themes. No scientific background is required; this is a subject that concerns everyone.

***Society through Film***

Throughout its history, the Hollywood film industry prided itself on capturing and presenting an image of American society, turning it into a popular product that it sold to the world and to Americans themselves. The image has often switched from an idealized dream to a dark reflection depending on the film genre and the temper of the decade. Writ 102: Society through Film, is designed to acquaint students with academic research and documentation techniques, and improve their writing and analytical skills. We will practice and hone these skills on the subject of American society throughout the 20th century and how it was represented in contemporary popular film, and will design and complete a final research paper on the topic. Readings will include essays on cinema by renowned critics and Hollywood writers such as Pauline Kael, Roger Ebert and William Goldman; as well as film reviews, both historical and contemporary, and analyses of the film industry and its impact on the nation. We will also look at movies that obsessed our grandparents and dominated dinner party conversations of their day, but are forgotten today...and ask why. By analyzing film clips and texts, we will explore the complex cause-and-effect relationship between the visionaries who make movies, and the society at large that both enjoys and inspires their work.

***Heroines in Adaptation***

Fictional heroines adapt according to the feminisms and the needs of their times. Todd Haynes' film *Safe* updates Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic story "The Yellow Wallpaper" by sharing a woman's experience of a mysterious illness that destroys her mind and body. Margaret Atwood creates the character of Offred in the dystopic fantasy novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in the 1980s, and then Offred is recreated in a Hulu television adaptation over 30 years later which makes her immediately, alarmingly relevant. M.R. Carey imagines Melanie, a brilliant young zombie, in his short story "Iphigenia in Aulis," then rewrites her in a novel, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, which is in turn adapted for a critically acclaimed film of the same name. In all three versions, Zombie Melanie proves the depth of her humanity and establishes her heroism, but she does so differently each time. Through study of these heroines' written and filmed stories, we will analyze their empowerment. As we practice and master (or mistress?) skills for academic research and writing about these characters, and others of your choice, we will learn how good ideas deepen in our own multiple drafts.