Writing in the Age of Digital Surveillance

Time and Location TBD

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Concentrated work in composition with readings in which students write at least four revised essays in addition to completing several exercises emphasizing writing as a process. Stress on active reading, argumentation, the appropriate presentation of evidence, various methods of critical analysis, and clarity of style.

Writing in the Age of Digital Surveillance

In this course, we will examine the legal, social, and economic pressures regularly exercised on us by various groups, not all of them benign, as we live our digital lives. In particular, we will explore writing as a means of taking back control in a world that is increasingly surveilled and policed. How can we become not only responsible digital consumers but also active contributors to publicly unfolding humanist pursuits on the Internet? What happens when Big Brother stops watching and starts reading? A variety of sources, journalistic, public, and academic will frame course discussions, and we will also explore a few digital humanities methods for critically examining digital information. In addition to extensive practice with critical writing, the course will also offer an option for pitching and crafting a piece of writing for a public venue. (FW Walsh)

Course objectives:

The goals of this course are to:

1. Produce writing on a regular basis.
2. Strengthen the quality and consistency of your writing.
3. Learn to give and receive criticism about writing in a productive manner.
4. Learn the basic research and rhetorical skills necessary to write persuasively for a variety of audiences and contexts.
5. Gain the ability to assess, integrate, and cite properly the evidence necessary for research papers.

6. Use writing to explore, develop, and articulate your own thoughts about the course material.
7. Consider writing as a public activity, with an audience.
8. Think critically about your own relationship to technology and, in particular, the Internet.

Student progress towards these objectives will be measured by in and out-of-class writing responses, formal graded papers, outlines, peer-review workshops, presentations, and conferences with me.

Required texts:

The following texts are required and can be found at the bookstore:

- Gerald Graff, *They Say / I Say*
- Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style*

Additional readings may be found online or on our course Sakai website, available at https://sakai.wlu.edu/.

Course requirements:

The basic requirement of this course is active, creative, and consistent engagement with the course material in both written assignments and discussions. Because much of our class time will be devoted to discussion, you must come to class having done the readings for that day and be prepared to discuss them.

By the same token, this is a writing course. You are expected to be actively writing for the course almost everyday, and you will be writing numerous assignments for the course. You should expect to have your writing discussed in front of your peers on a regular basis so that we can all benefit from the example as well as from critique.

For this course, you will write four formal, graded papers of 5-6 pages. One of these will also be a substantial research paper. For the fourth and final paper, you have the option of either writing another argumentative paper or creating a pitch for a piece of equivalent length to the public venue of your choosing. Such a paper must be related in some way to the course topic, but students are encouraged to explore widely to find a topic that accommodates their own interests.

Each paper will involve preliminary assignments such as an outline, drafts for in-class workshopping, presentation and discussion of your ideas, or mandatory conferences with me. In addition, short writing assignments, in and out of class, will fill out our schedule on the weeks when no formal graded writing is due. Students can expect to produce something every week, though not all of it will be graded. Students will turn in a portfolio of all these pieces of writing at the end of the course.

Grading:

Paper 1 – 15%
Paper 2 – 15%
Paper 3 – 20%
Paper 4 – 20%
Portfolio of Responses, in/out of class writings, and Scaffolding Assignments – 15%
Participation – 15%

If you do not complete all assignments you may fail the class. If you do not complete all portfolio pieces you will receive an F for the portfolio grade.

Class participation:

Your participation grade is based on both the quantity and quality of your participation. In particular:

- An **A** means that you contribute to the vast majority of the discussions, that you have both done the readings and thought about them, and your contributions are highly productive. That is to say, you push the discussions in new, important, and interesting directions, raise substantive questions, and make links between readings and some of the larger themes of the course. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly.
- A **B** means that you contribute to most of the discussions. You have done the readings and can talk about them. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished.
- A **C** means that you don't participate a lot. When you talk, you show that you have done the readings, but do not fully engage with them. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be somewhat diminished.
- A **D** means that you rarely contribute to class, and that when you do, your contributions do not reflect knowledge of the readings.

- An **F** means that either I don't know who you are or that your contributions are detrimental to class discussion (i.e., disruptive or disrespectful).

In-class exercises may also count towards your participation grade.

Course policies:

- The syllabus is only a draft: there may be corrections and changes as the course goes along. You are responsible for any changes mentioned in class, including changes to the class schedule or course policies. If you have to be absent, be sure to find out what went on.
- Cell phones should not be seen or heard in class. Don't even think about texting in class.
- Computers are great! And useful! And fun! But they can be detrimental to the quality of class discussions. Please do not use a computer to take notes in class, unless you receive prior approval from me. If you do use a computer, you must turn off your wifi and commit to doing work for this class and only for this class. Your participation grade will suffer if it appears that you are using your laptop for anything other than engaging with the course.
- All papers must be typed, double-spaced, with 1-1.25 inch margins and in a 12-point font.
- For every day (including weekends) your paper is late, I will deduct a third of a grade. That is, an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+, etc. Papers handed in on the day they are due but after the deadline are also late.
- If you need an extension on a paper, please contact me 24 hours in advance of the paper's deadline. Note that you must have a valid reason, such as an illness or a family emergency.
- If it becomes clear that the class as a whole is not doing the assigned readings, I may give unannounced quizzes on the readings.
- You must hand in all work by the last day of classes.
- If you fall asleep in class, I will lower your course grade. Please reschedule your nap time.
- I will also lower your grade if you have problems coming to class on time.

Absence policy:

- There are two types of absences in this class: excused and unexcused. Excused absences are granted if you are ill or have a family emergency. Unexcused

absences cover all other types of absences, including those due to away games or extracurricular events.

- Please let me know before class if you have a situation that merits an excused absence.
- You are granted one unexcused absence without penalty. After that, your final course grade goes down by a third of a grade for each additional unexcused absence. That is, an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+, etc.
- In some cases, you may make up an unexcused absence. You must have a valid reason for missing class, such as an away game if you are an athlete. (Valid reasons do not include having a test/paper due that day or travel for personal reasons.) You must also contact me at least one week prior to your absence to arrange how you will make up the class you miss.

A Note on Plagiarism:

The following is taken from the Washington & Lee Catalog, as well as the Executive Committee website (http://www.wlu.edu/x8198.xml):

"'Plagiarism' describes the use of another's words or ideas without proper acknowledgment. The students of Washington and Lee University have considered plagiarism a violation of the Honor System in the past; therefore, all forms of plagiarism including Internet plagiarism are taken very seriously….Plagiarism takes many forms, including the wholesale copying of phrases or texts, or the use of ideas without indicating the source. Certain facts must also be properly acknowledged."

The library also has the following page with links to cites discussing what plagiarism is and how to avoid it: http://library.wlu.edu/research/ref/cite_plag.asp.

As your papers approach, I will be talking about this subject in more detail, as well as how to properly cite your sources.

Accommodations policy:

Washington and Lee University makes reasonable academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All undergraduate accommodations must be approved through the Office of the Dean of the College. Students requesting accommodations for this course should present an official accommodation letter *within the first two weeks of the term* and schedule a meeting outside of class time to discuss accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely

fashion and to follow up about accommodation arrangements. Accommodations for test-taking must be arranged with the professor at least a week before the date of the test or exam, including finals.

Sakai site:

The syllabus, along with any classroom handouts and assignments will be on the course's Sakai site, available at https://sakai.wlu.edu/.

Schedule

Week 1 **Evidence/General**

- Nicholas Carr, "[Is Google Making Us Stupid?](#)"
- Graff, Intro, "Entering the Conversation"
- Hayot, Chapter 6, "A Materialist Theory of Writing"

- Clay Shirky, "[Does the Internet Make You Smarter](#)"
- Graff, Chapter 1, "They Say"
- Hayot, Chapter 7, "How do Readers Work?"

Week 2

- Edward Mendelson, "[In the Depths of the Digital Age](#)"
- Graff, Chapter 4, "Yes/NO/Okay, But"

- **Paper 1 outlines due. Class canceled for mandatory conferences on them.**

Week 3 **Argument/Surveillance**

- Alex McCown-Levy, "[Apple gets patent to disable cell cameras at concerts, and it's super evil](#)"
- Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, Chapter 3, "The Googlization of Us: Universal Surveillance and Infrastructural Imperialism," available from Sakai.
- Graff, Chapter 2, "Her Point Is"

- Ewen Macaskill and Gabriel Dance, "[NSA files decoded](#)"
- Hayot, Chapter 8, "The Uneven U"

Paper 1 due

Week 4

- Excerpt from George Orwell's *1984* available from Saki (about 25 pages)
- Graff, Chapter 5, "And Yet"

- Niran Abbas, "CCTV: City Watch," available from Sakai
- Hayot, Chapter 13, "Paragraphing"
- Hayot, Chapter 14, "Three Types of Transitions"

Week 5 **Analysis/Gender**

- Jessica Valenti interviewing Anita Sarkeesian: "The word 'troll' feels too childish. This is abuse"
- Graff, Chapter 3, "As He Himself Puts It"

- **Paper 2 Drafts due. Peer review drafts in class.**

Week 6

- Alec Couros, "Identity, Love, and Catfishing"
- Graff, Chapter 6, "Skeptics may object"
- Kashmir Hill, "You can Hide Your Pregnancy Online, but You'll Feel Like A Criminal"

- Ryan Khosravi, "The Feminized Digital Body (On Consent and Gender Policing)"
- Hayot, Chapter 27, "Repetition"
- Hayot, Chapter 31, "Weight"

Paper 2 Due

Feb 20-24 off

Week 7 **Citation/Race**

- Interview with Safiya Umoja Noble, "'Surveillance Literacy:' The Political Economy of the Internet and Black Death"
- Graff, Chapter 7, "So What? Who Cares?"

- Megan Smith, DJ Patil, Cecili Muñoz, "Big Risks, Big Opportunities: the Intersection of Big Data and Civil Rights"
- Hayot, excerpt from Chapter 17, "Ending Well"

Week 8 **Style**

- Michael Nuñez, "[Former Facebook Workers: We Routinely Suppressed Conservative News](#)"
- Julia Angwin, Jeff Larson, Surya Mattu, and Lauren Kirchner, "[Machine Bias](#)"
- Graff, Chapter 8, "As a Result"

- **Paper 3 drafts due in class for peer workshop**

Week 9 **Organization/Access**

- Richard Ovenden, "[Virtual memory: the race to save the information age](#)"
- Graff, Chapter 9, "Ain't So / Is Not"

- Joseph Michael Reagle Jr., *Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia*, Chapters 2 and 6
- Hayot, Chapter 32, Work as Process

Paper 3 Due

Week 10

- Reagle Jr., "*Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia*", Chapter 7
- Graff, Chapter 10, "But Don't Get Me Wrong"

- **Class canceled for mandatory conferences on paper 3.**

Week 11

- Dan O'Sullivan, *Wikipedia: A New Community of Practice?*, Chapter 4, The Republic of Letters; Chapter 7, Wikipedia: Aims; available from Sakai
- Graff, Chapter 11, "He ~~Says~~ Contends"

- Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, "Conclusion: The Human Knowledge Project," available from Sakai
- Hayot, Chapter 33, "Becoming a Writer"

Week 12

- **Presentations on final papers in class.**

- **Presentations on final papers in class.**

Paper 4 due