

# "It Don't Move Me": Putting Writers in Motion with Course Inquiry

Scott Campbell and Kyle Candia-Bovi with Kate Avcollie (and Howard Fisher)

## Three Parts

1. **From Theme to Course Inquiry:** introduction and overview of course inquiry and goals for the session
2. **Crowdsourcing a Course Inquiry:** large group generation of one or two course inquiries
3. **Small Group Workshopping**

## Part One: From Theme to Course Inquiry

- Course inquiry is the heart of UConn FYW courses and one of the bright spots in ECE English. But not everyone is in the conversation yet. This session comes out of some confusion over or questions about just what a course inquiry is or how it works. Ultimately, **course inquiry animates intellectual work and situates writing as contribution to a community, emphasizing the social, and rhetorical aspects of composition.**
- Course inquiry differs from theme—a theme is static, inert; course inquiry suggests impetus, motion, development; also, not just questions *about* texts but, rather, questions *with or through* texts (e.g. "how do these writers" questions aren't yet course inquiry).
- Course inquiry models academic, disciplinary work (not just academic forms of writing). But it's equally attuned to student interests, experience, knowledge. Arguably, the whole point of FYW is to practice situating oneself as a contributor to a context that *matters*—to oneself and to others. Writing, here, is a social, knowledge-making practice, an exploration and a testing of frameworks, concepts, and language informed by engagement with cross-disciplinary texts and contexts but also local, ready-to-hand materials and terms.
- When creating a course inquiry, we need to anticipate the ways (both contextual and methodological) that we will invite students to approach a question. Course inquiry must be more than the question/problem/theme. It shapes the conditions and the tools writers will use for making meaning.

### Course inquiry matches:

1. **Readings or course texts**
2. **Field research or student-generated texts and contexts**
3. **Sequenced assignments designed for contribution or extension of the course ecology**

- Student work in FYW can be assessed by contribution, impact, usefulness, rhetorical effectiveness.
  - Compliance (or non-compliance) with formal expectations is a part of engaging audiences but not in itself a priority. Rather, *project* in FYW foregrounds creativity and new thinking, which necessitates new forms or at least critical engagement with existing forms.
  - Much of the work students have done to this point in other courses can serve these projects—skills, practices, insights about writing, thematic links, and so on. But we try put those discrete practices to work, to join them to intellectual work which necessarily fosters critique and revision.
- On-campus courses have a single course inquiry over an entire semester, but ECE courses, which often run a full year, may work best with a course inquiry that breaks into two or three related "sub" inquiries or phases or even a course that has two distinct inquiries (although most anything can be related with a step or two of revision).



## Part Two: Crowdsourcing a Course Inquiry (an Analog Exercise)

Steps to take in imagining a functional & meaningful course inquiry:

**I. Assigned Readings/Texts.** *What assigned texts or materials can set up the terrain or territory for the inquiry?*

- Course texts should include a range of voices, points of view, cases, theorizations, or whatever. *Varied in length, approach or methodology, genre or mode, and content.*
- Literary texts can work well within a course inquiry, but be sure to bring them in with a sense of what roles they might play. They should not be the center of the inquiry, nor should they be the *sole* readings.
- Some texts should model academic habits of practice or modes. How is some relatively current scholarship engaging with this context or question? (ECE English can help you find these.)
- Some texts should be immediately accessible or legible to students. This could be popular culture materials: videos, social media, sports, etc. It could also be local or familiar materials: the school website, a map of the town they live in, something Connecticut-y or related to family. If your school has an emphasis or common pathway for students, you could draw on that.
- While choosing assigned texts, consider where there are pressures, tensions, unexplored areas, and real (or latent) interest. Course inquiries tend toward things students have a vocabulary for and experience with: family, America, work, games, art/creativity, home, education, gender/identity, technology, and so on.

### Sample ECE English Course inquiries

- What does it mean to be human?
- What is real and what is an illusion?
- How is language power?
- What drives human behavior?
- Identity, education, and activism
- How do our relationships shape our sense of self?
- How do we define womanhood?
- What role does language play in our understanding of ourselves and the world around us?
- What is the role of memory in shaping who we are, what we value, and how we choose to live?
- What is beauty and how does it shape one's identity and place?
- Who is society for?
- Identity, otherness, and discrimination
- What does it mean to be an engaged, active viewer in the 21st century?

**II. Field research or student-generated texts and contexts.** *What additional texts will students add to or generate for the course inquiry? What we call "field research" in FYW courses describes those activities that students do to add materials beyond (but usually related to) the assigned course texts. This work can include interviews, photographs, or really any discovered or generated new materials, such as:*

- New examples, cases, or demonstrations to test or try out ideas or concepts from assigned readings or from students' own projects
- Documentary work (audio, video, interviews, stories, photographs)
- Objects or artifacts (clothing, technology, places, tools, evidence)
- Things found online (on/via social media platforms or YouTube, on websites, in apps or games, etc.)
- Work generated in studio sessions (collaborative work on an aspect of the course inquiry)
- Research students do within and beyond the UConn Library tools (while not really *field* research, any academic research can fit in here, too) But beware of the "open" research assignment.

**III. Sequenced assignments designed for contribution or extension of the course ecology.** *What sorts of assignments will work to advance this course inquiry? What will students be making and doing?*

- What genres seem in play here as ways students might contribute? (E.g., an inquiry focused on identity will often incorporate more narrative or documentary—genres that allow for heterogeneity and variation, not just a *thesis*.)
- What sorts of artifacts or materials might students create as assignments? (For example, an inquiry about place might lead to an assignment that asks students to create a map.)
- Does writing an essay here make sense? How or why might an essay assignment work in this course inquiry? (FYW courses should have at least one major project that takes the form of an academic essay.)

## Moving from Theme to Inquiry: Group Design Worksheet

**Goal:** Today you will work in small groups to move a theme or topic into a **workable course inquiry**. You are creating a **thumbnail sketch** of a course ecology by selecting texts, considering contexts, and anticipating projects. Your task is to practice exploratory thinking for course design. Don't worry about arriving at any polished or "final" course inquiry; instead, use this activity to consider how ideas begin to take shape.

**Group Note:** Each group will be given a large piece of chart paper to collaboratively, and perhaps messily, sketch out an inquiry. It is divided in thirds. Use the **top third for Step 1** and the **bottom two-thirds for Steps 2-3**. You will receive a sticky note for **Step 4**.

**Assigned Topic/Theme:** \_\_\_\_\_

### 1-Thinking Around the Edges of a Topic

Because topics and themes often imply something stable or already resolved, start **reimagining yours as a site of possibility**. At the top of your chart paper, map your thinking in response to these prompts: What interests, puzzles or challenges you about this topic or theme? What new questions emerge when you approach it from different perspectives (historical, cultural, personal, political, etc.)? Revisit your map periodically, revising and extending your ideas as you work through the ecology in Step 2.

### 2-Imagining the Course Ecology

<b>Context:</b> What real-world, civic, or local contexts might allow students to see themselves <i>in</i> the topic/theme? to contribute meaningfully?
<b>Readings</b> (at least <b>three</b> ) Identify a mix of perspectives, genres, and disciplines that open up multiple ways of seeing, questioning, and understanding the topic/theme.
<b>Field Research or Student-Generated Texts</b> (at least <b>one or two</b> ) What might students add, document, or make to extend this inquiry. These are the raw materials students bring into the course to extend or complicate the assigned readings.
<b>Sequenced Assignments</b> (two short thumbnail drafts) How might students contribute to or expand the course ecology through deeper engagement? These are the more structured projects that guide students through the stages of inquiry. They are scaffolded so that each project builds on or revises the previous one, drawing from both the course readings and field research.

**3-Name it.** What tension, conflict, or central question within this topic might surprise, challenge, or complicate students' existing assumptions about it? What would you call this course inquiry? Is it framed as a question, a tension, or a zone of exploration? How does it help students locate themselves within a meaningful context?

**4-Reflect & Share.** Use your sticky note to jot down any new questions or areas where you'd like to discuss with the group at large.

**Possible Extension:** Repeat this process independently with a new topic or theme. How does your approach shift when you're working on your own? What different contexts, texts, or questions emerge? If you're interested, partner with someone from this session to co-author a one-page version of your course inquiry [for our shared archive??].

# MOVING INTO INQUIRY

## HOME

A broad, settled starting point. Doesn't yet require reading, writing, research, or theory.

### THEMES ARE STATIC

- Themes are broad concepts.
- They don't create tension or spark investigation yet.
- They're useful starting points, but not inquiry.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ARE LIMITING

- Essential questions live outside the texts.
- They prompt introspection, but do not require academic inquiry, theory, or engagement with course readings.

## WHAT DOES HOME MEAN TO YOU?

Invites personal reflection, but students can answer it before they read anything.

## WHAT IS A HOME?

How is *home* constructed, disrupted, or contested across stories, theories, and lived experiences, and what's at stake in those constructions?

### INQUIRIES MOVE

- Emerges *from* our texts.
- Opens into tensions (belonging, trauma, identity).
- Requires theory and fieldwork.
- Supports multimodal, public-facing work.
- Students can't answer it on Day 1.

# What is a home?

In *The Odyssey*, the promise of home drives Odysseus through trial after trial, yet the home he returns to is no longer the one he left. Across centuries, writers have returned to this paradox: home as a place of belonging and estrangement, comfort and constraint, memory and imagination, an in-between space where identity, memory, and belonging are constantly negotiated.

*So what does it mean to make, lose, and return to home?* For many of you, this is a question that already feels personal. You know home more intimately now than perhaps you will again at any other point in your lives. In this course, we will treat writing as both a record and an act of home-making, as a way to locate ourselves in stories, spaces, and communities that are always changing.

We'll also study how writers, artists, and thinkers have used language to represent and imagine home. We'll consider what happens when language itself becomes a kind of dwelling. Through this lens, writing becomes our method *and* metaphor—a means of tracing how homes are built, abandoned, remembered and a way to cross from experience into understanding.

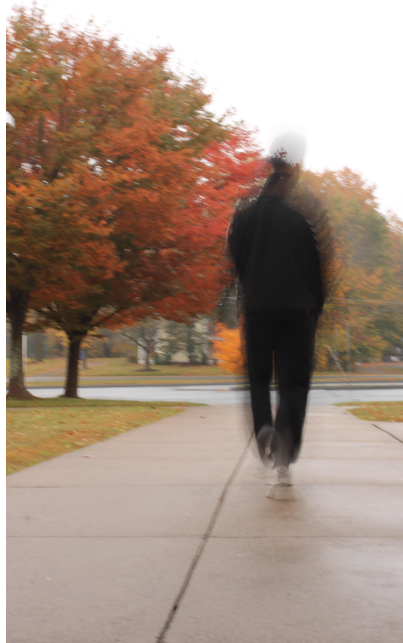
## Texts\*:

- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- *Pizza, A Love Story* (Gorman Bechar, dir.)
- Annie Dillard, "The Wreck of Time" *New Humanities Reader*

- Leila Ahmed, "On Becoming an Arab" *New Humanities Reader*
- Local maps, archives, and walking tour materials

## Selections from

- Homer, *The Odyssey*
- Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*
- Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*
- Joseph Harris, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*
- Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*
- Dacher Keltner, *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder*
- *The Great British Bake Off*
- *This American Life*



## Major Assignments

### Mapping Home Narrative *What makes a place feel like home?*

By collecting the places, objects, and stories that shape your idea of home, writing and visual design become ways to notice and name what you *already* know.

### Threshold Essay

*What does it mean to leave?*

Building from reflection, engage and contextualize two texts that explore crossings and transformations. You'll analyze how language marks a shift from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Writing becomes a form of ethical seeing, or how identity, culture, and belonging are tested at the edges of home.

### Research-Based Multimodal Project

*How can research become a story worth telling?* Here, you'll theorize questions that grow from earlier readings and field work. You'll create a public-facing artifact, a short documentary or podcast and promo poster.

### Analytical Essay: (Un)Making Home

*How do we theorize home?*

Returning to literature and theory, you'll contextualize and theorize questions about creation, responsibility, and freedom. This essay builds on your earlier work to develop an informed claim supported by textual and conceptual evidence.

### Portfolio with Preface

*How do we return home to our own writing?* At both the midway point in the course and in the final weeks, you'll curate your work and reflect on your learning, tracing how your understanding of home, and of writing, has changed across the year. The Portfolio is both archive and essay.

\* A complete list of texts with full citations will be provided on the course syllabus.

# WHOSE UNIVERSITY?

---

Horace Mann, a pioneer of American public schools in the 19th century, famously called education the “great equalizer” of the conditions of men.” However, institutions of higher learning occupy a paradoxical place within the history of the United States. On the one hand, universities are part of a settler colonial project. That is, they make up part of the history of land theft and the use of land to generate wealth for the already wealthy. On the other hand, universities have been the birthplaces of some of the most radical and the most successful social and political movements of the last two centuries. Students—people in their late teens and early twenties—have often been at the forefront of these movements.

Within this conflicted history, writing functions as a way for people to reframe narratives about the role of universities within the broader culture. They ask, What is the university, as a type of institution, for? Whose is it? Whom does it serve? Through questions like these, writing also becomes a way to characterize the political needs of young people and center them as an urgent matter. In this course, we will learn with and through these writings, so that we can better avail ourselves of writing to expand our thinking and act meaningfully in the world.



## **Manifestos: The Faces of Student Movements**

Students for a Democratic Society, “The Port Huron Statement (1962); twLF, “Third World Liberation Front Constitution” (1969); CSP-Consultants and the Union Sindical Solitaire, “Manifesto of International Student Struggle” (2012); University Liberation Front, “Pedagogy for Our Future” (2013); Humanities Action Committee, University of Puerto Rico, “Ocúp(arte): The Humanities Manifesto” (2010)

## **Liberation Conversation: Telling the Story of the Contemporary University**

Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994); Roderick A. Ferguson, *We Demand: Thue University and Student Protests* (2017); la paperson, *A Third University is Possible* (2017)

## **Student Activism as Cultural Text**

Mark Kitchell, *Berkeley in the Sixties* (1990)  
Stanley Nelson, Jr. (dir.), *Freedom Summer* (2014)

## **Project 1: Troubling Student Life**

Using interviews with peers, students design a poster that defines a problem that students at UConn face today and selectively draws on their findings. In the process the students come to terms with the extent to which being a student entails a political identity.

## **Project 2: Situating Struggle**

Students rework the poster into a slide presentation that develops a comparison between the problem that comes into focus through interviews and the problems outlined in one of the four manifestos. The project culminates in a question about the relationship between the different findings (from interviews and archive).

## **Project 3: Theorizing Change**

Students locate and incorporate two additional sources into an essay that explores their research question. Students draw on Freire, hooks, Ferguson, or paperson to frame engagement with sources.

## **Project 4: Activist Artifact**

Drawing on their understandings of historical transformations around the university, students design an artifact to be used as part of efforts to enact change around one of the problems observed in project 1. Artifacts are developed over two prototype phases: the first is focused on creating an artifact that responds appropriately to the situation established through prior research; the second is focused on the time, place, and manner of the artifact’s circulation

# WHAT'S LONELINESS GOT TO DO WITH US?

In 2023, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy published *Our Epidemic of Isolation and Loneliness: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. There Murthy states that, since even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have reported significantly high rates of emotional and social disconnection. Murthy's advisory appears in the wake of several decades of reporting on disparate patterns that we may now recognize as part of the same phenomenon. For instance, Daniel Cox, writing for the National Review in 2021, reports a "friendship recession" among men. Research Psychologist Jean Twenge has similarly documented the exponential rise in rates of depression among teenage girls.

All these thinkers and others use writing to forge connections between the subjective experience of isolation and some more encompassing aspect of the crisis of loneliness, such as its roots in American culture or its effects on civic participation. As we study the loneliness epidemic through others' work, we'll develop our own capacities to approach challenging questions from multiple angles and at multiple scales. We'll focus especially on Murthy's hypothesis that community plays an essential role in our happiness and is the necessary level of social organization at which we must intervene if we are to resolve the crisis. We'll therefore ask, what's loneliness got to do with US?

Our course will work backward in time, beginning with accounts of the current loneliness epidemic before shifting attention to the history of attempts to intentionally form communities to address social ills. As the course aims to use writing to formulate multifaceted answers to research problems, your personal engagement with the course's question will be central at every step.



## TEXTS

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Excerpted Accounts of the Crisis of Loneliness:

**Vivek Murthy**, *Our Epidemic of Isolation and Loneliness* (2023) **Michael Hobbes**, "Together Alone: The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness" (2017); **Rhaina Cohen**, *The Other Significant Others: Reimagining Life with Friendship at the Center* (2024)

### Extended Look at the Role of Community in Cultivating a Meaningful Life:

**Kristen R. Ghodsee**, *Everyday Utopia: What 2,000 Years of Bold Experiments Can Teach Us about the Good Life* (2023)

### Philosophical & Social-Theoretical Frames for linking Emotional Life and Community Life to Something More:

**Agnes Callard**, "Everyone Desires the Good" (2017); **Karl Marx**, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan (1961); **Ingmar Bergman** (dir.), "Scenes from a Marriage" (1973)

**Curation on Loneliness.** An interpretive essay in images, this assignment asks students to use found images to communicate the connections between the personal experience of loneliness as described by Murthy, Twenge, or Callard.

**Presentation on a Community Case Study.** In a slide presentation, each student draws on preliminary research to create a brief profile on one of the communities mentioned in Ghodsee's book. These presentations collectively create a class archive to be used for further projects.

**Theorizing a Case Study.** Students compose a short essay that discusses how one of the communities from the archive engages with ideas similar to those in the theoretical readings. The essay culminates in the creation of a new research agenda (reformulated questions), to be taken up in the final project.

**Contextualizing Inquiries through a Group Podcast Project.** Students are sorted into groups based on convergences and tensions among their questions from previous projects. Group members work together and individually to create episodes that situate their analyses of a particular community, supplemented with additional research.

# Immersion, Immediacy, & the Borders of the Self

## A Seminar in Academic Writing and Multimodal Composition



There's a chapter on "immersion" by Mary Ann Doane that would make an excellent key text for a course inquiry.\* She's writing from a film studies space about the growing excitement about "immersive" media—IMAX, surround sound, virtual reality, spatial audio, etc. But what's erased when the illusion of total immersion is in place? As she puts it, "The ideas of total immersion or total art...speak to a symptomatic crisis of location, a despatialization, a reconceptualization of position, scale, and infinity that undergird the mechanisms of late capitalism and its incessant expansion of commodification" (176).

It's a tricky piece, but it would unlock a very wide range of questions and projects about space and our participation in these various modes and media. It would connect very easily to a sound project (as sound is famously harder to locate and control), and a more classic frame and case essay assignment could come out of it—something like: *Use Doane to explore a very specific example you find of this call to "immersion" in our popular culture.* Perhaps my course inquiry "question" at this point is something like: **Why does so much of our media and technology seek to "immerse" us in its worlds?**

*What strategies should we pursue to maintain a critical engagement with this call to immersion? What other metaphors for close, intense engagement might be more fruitful or supportive of individual choices and experiences?* Anna Kornbluh's *Immediacy* describes something similar. Her piece even explores writing program pedagogy that centers student experience.

### TEXTS

- Mary Ann Doane, "The Concept of Immersion: Mediated Space, Media Space, and the Location of the Subject" (2021)
- Steph Ceraso, *Sounding Composition* (2018)
- Donna Haraway, "Crittercam" from *When Species Meet* (2007)
- Anna Kornbluh, "Writing" in *Immediacy, or the Style of Too Late Capitalism* (2024)
- Hal Foster, "Player Piano" and "Robot Eye" from *What Comes After Farce?* (2020)
- Hito Steyerl, "The Terror of Total Dasein: Economies of Presence in the Art Field" or "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise" or "Digital Debris" from *Duty Free Art* (2019)
- <https://xhairymutantx.whitney.org/>

### MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

- **Close reading and extension of Doane.** Use Doane to explore a very specific example you find of this call to "immersion" in our popular culture.
- **A piece that explores a cultural object via Doane and Kornbluh.** Develop a project that explores a specific example of this will toward immersion or immediacy.
- **A sound project,** maybe a variation on Ceraso's "Sonic Objects" Reverberation. Make a "thing" that performs a contribution to these notions we've been developing here. (Studio: Sound Audit)
- **An outro project on technology and the body.** Late semester essay that comes with final portfolio and "places" these projects within a developing idea or usage

\*Doane, *Bigger Than Life: The Close-Up and Scale in the Cinema* (2021).

### COURSE ARC

immersion and immediacy



sound and sound objects



technology and sense

Course Inquiry

# Place and Possibility

ENGL 1007: Seminar & Studio in  
Academic Writing  
& Multimodal Composition

Environmental topics are notoriously cross-disciplinary, but, even beyond this, they exert pressure on what it even means to “know” a subject or capture it in language. Anna Tsing, for example, describes her influential book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, as a “riot of short chapters,” a series of necessary experiments in figuring the world she seeks to describe in writing. “I wanted [these short chapters] to be like the flushes of mushrooms that come up after a rain; an over-the-top bounty; a temptation to explore; an always too many....”

Likewise, Mary Louise Pratt describes her fascination with science fiction and fantasy writing in the Anthropocene as an appropriate literary response to the “non-analogue state” of living in a world transformed by climate crisis. She references Amitav Ghosh, who argues, in *The Great Derangement*, “an imaginative and cultural failure lies at the heart of the climate crisis” (8). Pratt’s take on this brings her back to writing: “this quest [of reimagining and remaking] is as much about writing as doing. It requires experiments in thought and action, as well as in storytelling, language, and genre. What new narrative and expressive forms will express this radically transformed relationship of humans with the planet and the future?” (121)

An ENGL 1007 course inquiry built in this context offers opportunities for engaging with place and exploring how words, modes, media (re)present place and our experience of it but also *fail* to (re)present place without loss. The inquiry at the heart of this course would be something like: **What role does language (e.g., rhetoric, narrative, genre) play in our experience or apprehension of place?** More specifically, students would be asked to choose a site to explore and “compose”: **What is the story of the future of this place, and who gets to tell it?**

## COURSE TEXTS

- Schneider-Mayerson and Bellamy, eds., *An Ecotopian Lexicon*
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*
- Elizabeth Kolbert, “Climate Change from A to Z”
- Gary Snyder, “Language Goes Two Ways”
- Mary Louise Pratt, “Anthropocene: Concept and Chronotope”
- Edward Burtynsky, photographs
- Jennifer Baichwal, Nicholas de Pencier and Edward Burtynsky, dirs, *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*

## SHORT ASSIGNMENTS & STUDIO

- Contribute an Alphabet Annotation (extend Kolbert)
- Develop a term we need today (modeled on the *Lexicon*)
- Chronotopes in popular culture: an exploration of “new narrative and expressive forms” (Pratt)
- Photography exercise (grounded in Burtynsky)

## MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

1. Choose and document a site (multimodal “capture” exercise)
2. Situate that site within the stories and rhetoric that surround it (essay)
3. Develop a rhetorical object designed to make a contribution to the story being told about the site’s future (with an accompanying essay that speaks to process but also includes gestures at situating this work within the intellectual context set up in the course)

## ENGL 5100 INFLUENCES

Threshold Concept 1.1, Bruce Horner, *Failing Sideways*, Steph Ceraso, Stacey Waite: “beyond the quagmire of the present”

# VOICES MATTER

ENGL 1007: Seminar and Studio in Academic Writing and Multimodal Composition

## COURSE ARC

### Semester 1: Constructing Identity Through Composition

- Fieldwork & documentary methods
- Rhetorical analysis of founding ideals vs. lived realities
- Introduction to academic research & inquiry

### Semester 2: Challenging & Reshaping the Narrative

- Sustained research projects
- Multimodal composition & public engagement
- Reflection & portfolio curation

## MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

### Project 1: Documentary Fieldwork – Mapping Voices

Who speaks for America in your community? Students conduct interviews, gather photographs, or document local sites to explore how "American identity" is lived and narrated in their own context. Produce a multimodal artifact (poster, photo essay, audio story) that introduces a voice or perspective often missing from dominant narratives.

### Project 2: Rhetorical Analysis – Ideals vs. Realities

How do creators use rhetoric to bridge or expose the gap between American ideals and lived experiences? Building from fieldwork, students analyze how a text (speech, film, essay, song, etc.) uses rhetorical strategies to reinforce or critique core American values. Essay incorporates findings from Project 1 and course readings.

### Project 3: Sustained Inquiry Essay – Theorizing American Identity

What does your research reveal about how identity is constructed? Students develop a research question emerging from earlier projects, locate additional scholarly and primary sources, and compose an extended academic essay that situates their inquiry within larger conversations about American identity, rhetoric, and composition.

### Project 4: Public-Facing Multimodal Project

How can composition reshape the conversation? Students create a public-facing artifact (podcast episode, short documentary, digital zine, website) that contributes to ongoing discussions about American identity. Includes a reflective essay situating the project within the course's intellectual work and explaining design choices.

## HOW IS "AMERICAN IDENTITY" CONSTRUCTED, CHALLENGED, AND RESHAPED THROUGH DIFFERENT MODES OF COMPOSITION?



### Course Inquiry

In a nation built on the promise of freedom, equality, and justice, whose voices get heard? Whose stories shape the national narrative? And what happens when the lived reality doesn't match the founding ideals?

This course treats identity not as something fixed or inherited, but as something made—through stories, speeches, images, songs, and silence. We'll explore how composition (writing, speaking, creating) functions as a tool for claiming space within (or against) American culture. Students will analyze how creators across history and media have used rhetorical strategies to reinforce, challenge, or reimagine what it means to be American. Writing here is an act of inquiry and contribution: we ask not just what is America? but who gets to define it, and how? Your work will respond to this question through research, documentary fieldwork, multimodal projects, and sustained engagement with diverse voices—including your own.

### Texts

#### Foundational Voices & Media

- Poetry (Whitman, Lorde, Gorman, Plath, etc)
- James Truslow Adams' original 1931 definition (primary source)
- Barack Obama's 2004 DNC speech excerpt (optimistic perspective)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates' "The Case for Reparations" excerpt (systemic critique)
- Selections exploring the gap between American ideals and lived experiences across race, class, gender region
- What is Code-Switching? (from Linguistic Society of America)
- The Power of Code-Switching (from Psychology Today)
- Code-Switching in Pop Culture: How Celebrities Do It (from The Conversation)
- NPR's Code Switch, "The Invention of the 'Model Minority' Myth"
- There There by Tommy Orange
- FDR's "Four Freedoms" vs. contemporary libertarian manifestos
- Frederick Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"
- Mill's "On Liberty" excerpts vs. contemporary debates about hate speech

#### Theoretical Frames for Composition & Rhetoric

- Statement on Language, Power, and Action – Conference on College Composition and Communication
- Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing – Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, National Writing Project
- Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers – Nancy Sommers
- Thesis statements, topic sentences, and "good" writing – Patricia Roberts-Miller
- Failing Sideways: Failing to be Commodified – Stephanie West-Puckett
- Wanderings – David Bartholomae

## STUDIO COMPONENTS

- Interview techniques and documentary ethics
- Rhetorical analysis practice across media (visual, audio, written)
- Digital composition tools (podcasting, video editing, web design)
- Research workshops (library databases, source evaluation, citation practices)
- Revision and peer workshop sessions for all major projects