Writing / Communication 350: Critical Digital Storytelling

Syllabus

Instructor: Logan Middleton   Section: D
Please Call Me: Logan (He/His/Him)   Tues./Thurs.: 9.30a-10.45a
E-mail: lpmiddl2@illinois.edu   Office Hours: Thurs., 11.00a-12.00p
Class Location: Allen Hall 151   Office Hours: Th., 12.30p-1.30p

Note: This syllabus is interactive! Please read and respond to it before our first class so we can better discuss and negotiate how we want to work together this semester. In addition, your responses will help me better support your learning and growth over the next 16 weeks.

Course Description:

Whether in university strategic plans, corporate boardroom meetings, or grassroots activist contexts, storytelling is often cited as a practice of the utmost importance. But what does it really mean to tell a story? What work do stories do in the world? In what ways does it matter who tells stories—and for what ends?

In this class, we'll examine these questions to better understand the relationships between storytelling, the digital, and movements for justice. Drawing from perspectives in design thinking, writing studies, critical race theory, sound studies, communication, disability studies, sociology, Indigenous studies, and digital humanities, we'll spend time exploring how people make meaning together through stories. As these narratives will be presented through all sorts of multimedia—video games, DJ sets, data visualizations, zines, videos, maps, soundscapes, and more—we'll stand to better comprehend how the boundaries of storytelling can be expanded (and constrained) by digital tools and technologies. Along the way, we'll compose our own multimedia stories that help us better understand ourselves, our communities, and processes of institutional change.

Note: You do not need expertise in specific digital technologies, platforms, software, or tools in order to enroll or participate in this class.

Student Learning Outcomes for Critical Digital Storytelling:

I approach learning as a life-long process, and as such, I think it's difficult to achieve specific learning outcomes within the course of a single semester. That said, after completing this class, here are some things I hope you'll be able to better be able to do:

1.) Simultaneously understand how storytelling resources have been curtailed for marginalized people and how marginalized people have, in turn, cultivated rich, theories of storytelling in the face of these oppressions.

2.) Comprehend the role of digital technologies and tools in both enabling and constraining potential for storytelling

3.) Compose, present, and circulate stories across a variety of media, platforms, technologies, and genres

4.) Reflect upon and write about one's own places in networks of power—personally, in one's communities, and institutionally—when it comes to narrative-based work.

5.) Reflect upon, reconsider, and revise your thinking, learning, and multimedia work in response to course texts, class readings, and peer and instructor feedback

What you're reading above is what I've set out as goals for this course. Your objectives, however, may or may not match my desires for this course. What do you personally want to learn and/or achieve in this class?

Course Texts:

Most course readings and materials will be available online through our course website; you won't need to purchase any (text)books. There may be a few points in the semester where you'll need to purchase materials for some of our projects, but these instances will be few and far between.

It is imperative, though, that you do have access to course readings and related media during our class meetings. Whether you print these materials out or access them via a laptop, tablet, or other electronic device is up to you.

Grade Breakdown and Major Assignments (*):

This class uses a modified version of labor-based contract grading to review and holistically assess your work. This system of assessment, which is fleshed out in greater detail on a separate handout, operates from the understanding that learning always requires labor. While putting time and energy into course assignments doesn't always yield "successful" work—satisfying genre requirements, fulfilling all of the assignment criteria, etc.—labor-based contract grading seeks to honor individual effort put into learning. That is to say, you will be evaluated in this course based on your work and what you choose to complete as opposed to the actual content of your submissions.

I believe that this research-supported approach to assessment is beneficial for a number of reasons. It's my hope that this system will allow you to focus on learning in this course as opposed to being overly guided by evaluation and assessment—the likes of which I believe often

overtake learning as primary goals of education in university spaces. In addition, contract grading affords you opportunities to take risks and play with new ideas as a writer and learner. From my perspective, this system also helps me, as an instructor, focus my efforts on responding to you, your writing, and what you're trying to do in your work as opposed to evaluating it for a letter grade.

Though I've tried to make this grading process as transparent as possible elsewhere, please don't hesitate to ask me questions if you are ever unclear about my expectations or your work. If I'm concerned about the work you're submitting, I will let you know.

With the exception of the first project, the major assignments for this class ask you to engage with digital storytelling through whatever media, platforms, or technologies you choose. Throughout the term, you'll craft and present three stories: one of yourself, one of a community you're involved in, and one of institutional change—either real or imagined. More information will be included on the relevant assignment sheets for these projects.

*Project I: Theorizing Storytelling[1]
    —Project Assigned: Tuesday, September 12
    —Project Proposal Due / In-Class Proposal Workshop: Tuesday, September 19
    —Project Due: Tuesday, September 26

*Project II: Who Are You?
    —Project Assigned: Thursday, September 28
    —Project Proposal Due / In-Class Proposal Workshop: Thursday, October 5
    —Project Due: Tuesday, October 17

*Project III: Who Are We?
    —Project Assigned: Thursday, November 2
    —Project Proposal Due: Saturday, November 11
    —Project Due: Thursday, November 28

*Project IV: Who Can We Be?
    —Project Assigned: Thursday, November 16
    —Project Proposal Due: Saturday, November 30
    —Project Due: Thursday, December 17

*Homework (Blurbs):

Eight times over the course of the semester, you'll be required to submit homework in the form of "blurbs," each about 400-500 words in length, in which you'll reflect on the week's readings. Blurb questions will be shared each week through our course site.

---

[1] Every major project for this class will include both a media text (e.g., a map, an audio composition, etc.) as well as a reflective statement that explains the rhetorical decisions that guided your composition. Details for each project will be provided in individual assignment sheets.

I describe these responses as blurbs because I envision them as relatively unstructured, low-stakes, free-flowing, journal-style responses to what we're reading in class. I also call these responses blurbs—and deliberately avoid calling them "reading responses," "response papers," "reading reflections," or other similar terms—because (a) I don't see them as formal as papers and (b) writing assignments with these names often feature fuzzy genre requirements that can cause confusion for students.

We'll talk about these assignments in more detail throughout the semester, but at this point, what assignment(s) are you most looking forward to? Which one(s) are most worrisome to you?

<div style="border:1px solid black; height:180px;"></div>

Assignment Submission Guidelines:

All digital projects and homework assignments will be submitted on your course blog or Compass 2G. When submitting files to Compass 2G, please title your files as follows: "LastName_NameofAssignment.docx" (for example, "Middleton_Graffiti.docx"). You will receive more specific submission instructions for all projects and assignments throughout the semester.

Whether submitting assignments for homework or delivering in-class presentations, plan ahead for technological requirements and potential pitfalls. Technology can be wonderful, but it is never reliable. Always have a back-up plan. I highly recommend backing up your multimedia files to a flash drive, external hard drive, and/or cloud storage.

Late / Incomplete Work:

Given that we are never only students—many of us are parents, caretakers, workers, and people with complex needs—I understand that work might sometimes be submitted later than intended. If you feel as if you won't submit an assignment on time, please do get in touch with me. On the whole, late work will be negotiated with students on an individual, case-by-case basis to allow for maximum flexibility.

Attendance:

Your presence and active participation in this course is critical to your success in this class since most of the course consists of in-class discussion and peer feedback.

That said, I do not keep track of or grade attendance because attendance guidelines and policies are inherently ableist. They're prejudiced against students with mental, physical, sensory, and/or other disabilities that might prevent them from making it to class, on time, or at all.

If there's something going on in your life that's regularly making it difficult to participate—whatever that means to you and whether disability-related or not—please let me know and we can figure out a system of accommodations that'll work for you.

How do you generally participate in your classes? What either helps or encourages you to participate, and what prevents you from participating more than you do?

<div style="border:1px solid black; height:180px;"></div>

Personal Devices Policy

It is abundantly clear that we live in an increasingly technology driven and enabled world. This is perhaps nowhere else as clear as in this course. We are lucky enough to hold class in a room with a set of laptops, the likes of which you are encouraged to use during our meetings. Of course, you may bring your own laptop / tablet to class in order to read, annotate, write, and/or search for materials relevant to the course.

For many of us, our laptops, tablets, and phones are an integral part of our lives, and of course, we (unconsciously) check them dozens of times per day. I recognize these habits and urges, in part, as informed by literacy practices, especially in a class like this where you might be very well using your phone as a media technology in its own right. As such, I do not wish to police cell phone use during class. If you feel like you might be inclined to use your phone briefly during class, all I ask is that you leave your device on your desk and be acutely aware of when, how, and how much you use it during class.

Access Statement:

Everyone learns differently and benefits from different kinds of support. Please feel free to reach out how best you can if you would like to discuss your individual learning style and/or needs and how this course can best accommodate them, whether you have a disability or not. Participating in any university course is, for me and possibly for you, a new way to learn. So please do whatever you need—and communicate those needs to me if you feel comfortable doing so—to feel supported in your learning throughout this semester.

How best do you learn? Is there anything you'd like me to know about your learning style / course access whether disability-related or otherwise?
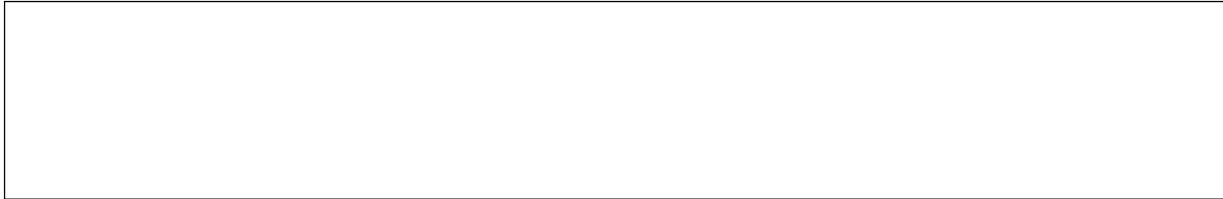
Language Statement:

The ways in which people are socialized into White Mainstream English and Academic English—both language varieties that are largely promoted unquestioningly in academia— are often violent, damaging processes for multilingual and non-multilingual individuals alike. As such, I'm open to and encouraging of student work that represents or draws upon your full linguistic repertoires. That is to say, if you know multiple languages or codes or slang and want to use them, I want you to know that I wholeheartedly support this decision-making and writing work. If there's anything I can do to be more supportive of your language needs, please do let me know me so I can better support you. At any point in the semester, feel free to ask me about how I'd respond to work that isn't communicated in ways that are traditionally valued in university or educational spaces.

Statement on Multimodality and Genre:

As is the topic for this class, I recognize that we make meaning beyond just words; we do so through image, video, sound, gesture, and other means in addition to written and spoken language. As such, you're not required to complete the work for this course through *just* written language or any sort of standardized genre format unless otherwise specified. You're welcome to write creatively, journalistically, doodle, illustrate your answers, or answer assignment questions through any means you can so long as you respond to them in full.

Statement on Communities and Identities:

You will undoubtedly be working and in community with students who differ from you in terms of identity, whether that's in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, document status, sexuality, nationality, language background, age, ability, neurodiversity, and beyond. Regardless of these differences, you must absolutely respect the attitudes and contributions of your classmates, even if their perspectives differ from your own. As such, (cis)sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or xenophobic writing or actions will not be tolerated, nor will any additional form of harassment. These attitudes, while sometimes borne out of genuine ignorance, are not only counterproductive to learning but they're simply unacceptable and have no place in our learning space—much less anywhere else. Please be respectful of your peers' contributions to class and their work, as we will all be working together to promote a rich learning environment to the extent that we can.

Should we encounter material that might be emotionally challenging or potentially traumatic, I will provide a content warning in advance. If you find yourself having difficulty dealing with a

particular class topic or reading, feel free to disengage with the material and, if comfortable, try to let me know.

Academic Integrity and Documentation (Plagiarism):

Giving credit to the sources—including words, phrases, information, and ideas—that appear in or otherwise inform your work is standard practice in academic writing. Therefore, you must use a documentation style, such as MLA or APA (see The Purdue Online Writing Lab for guidance) in order to avoid plagiarism.

But what actually is plagiarism? The University of Illinois has high standards of academic integrity set out in Article 1, Part 4 of the University Student Code. Unfortunately, some of that code itself is plagiarized…

Fun fact: if you do a phrasal Google search on the first sentence ("Every direct quotation….), you will find this sentence appearing in a number of institution's policies. In fact, it is a direct quote from a legal journal article's model policy (Pavela, 1978). However, that fact is not indicated in the university policy by either quotation marks or citation. (In fact, a general acknowledgement of the article that appeared in earlier versions of the code was removed at some point, and the sentence was left unchanged although the committee knew it was copied word for word from the article.) Based on the policy's own definitions, the policy is intentionally engaging in plagiarism.

To complicate things further, the above section of text was originally derived from a white paper that a colleague of mine co-authored with the staff of the Center for Writing Studies at this university; I later revised her language a little, but imported it nearly wholesale into this syllabus. Where a use like this may be punishable under the university policy, it is common in many workplace settings to reuse boilerplate language without attribution.

So, does that mean you're excused from any effort toward academic integrity or source citation? Absolutely not. It does mean that the reality of authorship is more complicated than it tends to be represented in policy or understood in punishment.

There are, in fact, multiple norms for source use, citation, and authorship. It is my responsibility as your instructor to help you develop sophisticated and flexible understanding and practices for source use, citation, and authorship, just as it is your own central responsibility to learn how to understand and employ norms, to determine what norms are appropriate for a given setting, and to respect those norms in their context of work. Cultivating this understanding is crucial to our shared goals of making knowledge and organizing learning, and we will work on understanding and enacting sound practices together. I do not expect you to know and apply all norms perfectly the first time, but I do expect you to take responsibility for learning them, and I will not take lightly academic integrity violations with evidence of deception.

Later in the term, we will speak about academic and course-specific norms. Because it is so important, and since citation is particularly tricky in continually changing in multimodal contexts (more on this later in the semester), this conversation will crop up often. Do raise questions about

citation in your particular projects throughout the semester; we'll all learn from figuring it out together.

Pavela, G. (1978). "Judicial review of academic decision making after Horowitz." *NOLPE School Law Journal*, *8*(1), 55-75.

Any additional questions about any of these policies in this section?

Digital Course Components:

*WordPress Course Site: I will use our course site to post announcements, assignments, resources, and other related content. The course syllabus and schedule are also available on this site, which you are responsible for keeping up to date with. Feel free to follow the blog if you prefer to receive e-mail updates when I post new entries (most likely homework assignments and the like).

*Individual Course Blog: You will all need to create a course blog as well, either through WordPress or another blogging site of your choice. Your blog will serve as a platform to post your own thoughts on class readings as well as homework assignments. In addition, your site will be attached to the course blogroll. In other words, it will be public to both me and your classmates, so be sure to keep that in mind when posting.

*Compass 2G: I expect reflective statements—those that are composed in alphabetic text, anyway—to be submitted through our campus's learning management system, Compass 2G, since it's generally more secure and private than our WordPress course site. I will also use Compass 2G to post your grades and to provide feedback on your projects. In the chance that you produce a non-digital project (a hand-painted map, for example), please make arrangements with me to turn it in if there's not an explicit due date on the course calendar. If you're unfamiliar with Compass 2G or don't know how to submit files or access grades through this platform, please don't hesitate to ask me for assistance.

*E-mail: On occasion, I will send brief e-mails to your university e-mail addresses with reminders, resources, and/or clarifications on assignments. I check my e-mail daily and usually respond within one business day; I expect you to do the same. Legally, I'm not permitted to give out or discuss grades via e-mail, so if you'd like to discuss these matters, please set up a time to meet with me face to face instead.

*Media Commons: UIUC's Media Commons, located in the Undergraduate Library, can assist you with your media projects. It's a great space for learning more about media technology, and it

additionally houses top-notch video and audio recording studios. Feel free to check it out or make a media consultation appointment to take advantage of this resource.

*Loanable Technology: If you don't have the requisite software or hardware you feel like you need to succeed in this class, you can check out select technologies from the Media Commons at UGL. If you're struggling to come up with the necessary technological resources to complete a project, please let me know ahead of time to the best you can.

*Lynda.com—Since this class is not a "how-to" course in terms of learning the nuts and bolts of tech or software, you might find yourself a bit lacking in the requisite skills when it comes to creating media projects. Fortunately, UIUC offers free access to lynda.com, an online software training service for software (Linux), video editing (iMovie), audio editing (Audacity), and more (Python, Twine). Follow the link and log in with your UIUC ID to access thousands of video tutorials.

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the digital course components of the class?

Writers Workshop:

The Writers Workshop provides free, one-to-one help to all UIUC writers. The Workshop's consultants can help with any kind of assignment, in any class, and at any stage of the writing process. While the Writers Workshop is not an editing service, tutors will help students with anything related to their writing, including grammar, brainstorming, organizing, polishing final drafts, citing sources, and more. Bring a draft to revise or just stop by for help with getting your ideas together.

The Writers Workshop offers 50-minute sessions by appointment at the Undergraduate Library (251 UGL) during the semester. Both online and face-to-face sessions are currently offered, so feel free to make an appointment if you'd like to talk through your work with someone.

Main Location: 251 Undergraduate Library   *E-mail*: wow@illinois.edu
Website: https://writersworkshop.illinois.edu/   *Phone*: 217.333.8796

Have you been to the Writers Workshop before? If so, what was your experience like?

Changes to Syllabus / Course Schedule:

This course syllabus and its corresponding schedule are subject to change. You will be notified of any such changes in class and in writing (most likely through e-mail or the course website).

Course Calendar

Week One	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, August 29 —Course Introduction	- - -	- - -
Thursday, August 31 —Who Are You?	- - -	Bring in a favorite story to share in class today (any medium)

Week Two	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, September 5 —Critical Approaches to Storying: Critical Race Theory	Martinez, Ch. 1, "A Case for Counterstory" *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*	- - -
Thursday, September 7 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Cultural Rhetorics	Hidalgo, Jennings, Ribero, and Weisser, "Constellating Stories and Counterstories"	Blurb #1

Week Three	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, September 12 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Feminism I **Theorizing Storytelling prompt introduced	Hidalgo, Ch. 2, "The Principles of Feminist Filmmaking," *Cámara Retórica*	- - -
Thursday, September 14 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Feminism II	Steele, Introduction, *Digital Black Feminism*	Bring in or be ready to access personal media inventory worksheet

Week Four	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, September 19 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Blackness	Banks, Ch. 1, "Groove: Synchronizing African American Rhetoric and Multimedia Writing through the Digital Griot," *Digital Griots: African-American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*	Bring Theorizing Storytelling project proposal to class for in-class proposal workshop
Thursday, September 21 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Data Visualization	Danner, "Storytelling With and Around Data"	Blurb #2

Week Five	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, September 26 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Indigenous Perspectives I	Wilson, Ch. 6, "Relational Accountability" *Research as Ceremony*	- - -
Thursday, September 28 — Critical Approaches to Storying: Indigenous Perspectives II	Haas, "Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice"	Blurb #3

Week Six	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 3 —Storytelling and the Self I	Milburn, "Sunk in the Method: There's a Groove to the Theory"	Theorizing Storytelling assignment due
Thursday, October 5 —Storytelling and the Self II **Who Are You? prompt introduced	Ceraso, "Sound Never Tasted So Good" (explore / read around for a bit)	Blurb #4

Week Seven	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 10 —Storytelling and the Self III	*The Stanley Parable* (Play around / explore the game for an hour or so)	- - -
Thursday, October 12 —In-Class Tech Production Workshop	- - -	Bring Who Are You? project proposal to class for in-class proposal workshop

Week Eight	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 17 —Storytelling in / with / through Communities I	Bravo, "TEST-TEST-TESTIMONIALISTA: Stories of Sound, Space, Place, and the Body in Compton"	- - -
Thursday, October 19 —Storytelling in / with / through Communities II	Rodriguez, "Terrible Melodies Telling Me Beautiful Things"	Blurb #5

Week Nine	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 24 —Storytelling in / with / through Communities III	Adams, "Affective Connections to Place: Digital Storytelling in the Classroom"	- - -
Thursday, October 26 —Storytelling in / with / through Communities IV	Costanza-Chock, Intro, "Introduction: #TravelingWhileTrans, Design Justice, and Escape from the Matrix of Domination," *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*	Who Are You? assignment due

Week Ten	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, October 31 —Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change I **Who Are We? Prompt introduced	*Papers, Please* (Play around / explore the game for an hour or so)	Blurb #6
Thursday, November 2 —Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change II	Craig, "Black Sound Matter(s): The Sonic Soundscape of Black Auditory Liberation"	- - -

Week Eleven	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, November 7 —Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change III	Sano-Franchini, Fernandes, Adams, and Kim, "Sounding Out in a Predominately White Institution: Circulating Asian American Sound for Institutional Change"	Bring Who Are We? project proposal to class for in-class proposal workshop

Week Eleven	Reading	Assignments Due
Thursday, November 9 —Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change IV	Flores and Durá, "The Border Soundscapes Project"	Blurb #7

Week Twelve	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, November 14 —Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change V	Jackson, "Multimodal Un/Composition's Queer Performativity: Curating Queer Zines and a Politics of Im/Possibility"	Blurb #8
Thursday, November 16 — Stories and Institutions: Transformational Change VI **Who Can We Be? prompt introduced	Hamraie, "Mapping Access: Digital Humanities, Disability Justice, and Sociospatial Practice"	- - -

No Class on Tuesday, November 21 and Thursday, November 23 due to Fall Break—Have a great week off!		

Week Thirteen	Reading	Assignments Due
Thursday, November 28 —Storytelling with Code and Arduinos	- - -	Who Are We? assignment due
Thursday, November 30 —In-Class Who Can We Be? Project Workshop	- - -	Bring Who Can We Be? project proposal to class for in-class proposal workshop

Week Fifteen	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, December 5 —The Future(s) of Digital Storytelling	Benjamin, Ch. 5, "Retooling Solidarity, Retooling Justice," *Race After Technology*	- - -
Thursday, December 7 —In-Class Who Can We Be? Project Workshop	- - -	Bring in a working draft of your Who Can We Be? project. Be prepared to talk about your work in class.

Week Sixteen	Reading	Assignments Due
Tuesday, December 12 —Last Day of Class + Course Wrap-Up	- - -	- - -

**Final Who Can We Be? projects are due by Sunday, December 17th at 11.59p. If you need to make any special arrangements for your submission, please contact me to do so before the time listed above.