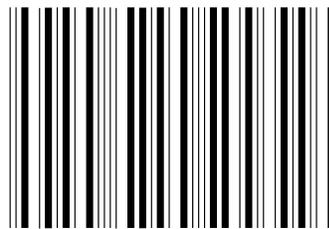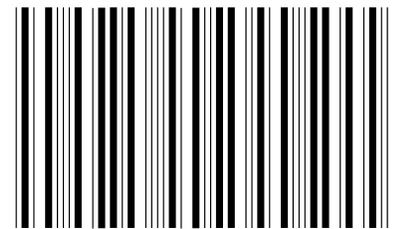English 105-02
Tues/Thurs 9:40-11:00
Bolton 102
Professor Paul Benzon
pbenzon@skidmore.edu

Office: Palamountain 316
Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30-12:30, Thursday 11:15-12:15, and by appt.
Course Blog: https://digid02.wordpress.com/

DIGITAL IDENTITY

Image: "Infinite Regress Selfie," CC-licensed photo by Kent Williams

The twenty-first-century world is a digital culture. The social transformations set in motion by our connection to the web raise far-reaching questions for our identity. How is the rise of digital culture redefining how we understand ourselves as individuals and as social beings? Who do we become when we're constantly connected to family, friends, and strangers across global space and time? What roles do images, data, and devices play in the construction of our identities? What does it mean to live, work, play, love, and die online?

In this course, we will explore these and other questions of digital identity as a way of developing critical writing and reading skills. We'll read a range of texts that explore how digital technology and connectivity play a role in reshaping crucial issues of personality, privacy, gender, race, sexuality, and anonymity. We'll consider how authors, filmmakers, and other artists represent and respond to the new possibilities and questions that digital technology poses for identity in a global context. And we'll write critically and reflectively about our own constantly shifting positions and identities within the increasingly complex network of the web. To explore these issues, we'll study, discuss, and write about a diverse collection of texts, including novels, films, images, theoretical writings, blog posts, works of digital art, and the everyday objects of the digital world.

In addition to drafting, workshopping, and revising traditional essays, we'll also experiment with a range of different technologies—from blogs and Twitter to digital tools for research and writing—in order to keep a critical engagement with our own digital identities at the forefront of our thinking and writing. Our ultimate goal will be to become stronger critical readers and writers as well as sharper, more engaged participants in the digital culture around us.

Course Goals
Through this course, you will learn to
- Think critically and creatively about the relationship between digital technology and identity, with regard to both yourself as an individual and larger social groups and categories
- Engage with primary and secondary sources in critical ways through active reading, group discussion, and analytical writing
- Deepen your understanding of the scholarly conversation on a particular subject through research
- Develop original, independent arguments in your written work
- Incorporate and respond to source material in your writing in ways that are thoughtful and responsible
- Approach revision as central to academic writing, taking advantage of feedback to transform your work in substantive ways
- Become aware of your own strengths and weaknesses as a writer through continuous reflection

REQUIRED TEXTS
Course Reading Packet
Recommended: Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* (9780312542542)

COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Welcome to our course! The following pages explain the course policies and procedures so that you will be able to do your best work, learn as much as possible, and enjoy yourself in our class. If you have any questions about the course policies (or anything else) at any time, please don't hesitate to ask me in class, via email, or during my office hours.

Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

Class Participation and Peer Workshopping:	12%
Course Blog:	12%
Digital Exercises	6%
Paper 1:	10%
Paper 2:	15%
Paper 3:	15%
Paper 4:	20%
Course Portfolio:	10%

Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including but not limited to full-class discussions, small-group discussions, viewings of images and video clips, and in-class writing exercises and workshops. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means printing out (if necessary) and completing all reading before class, bringing the reading to class, and being prepared to discuss the reading thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these and to be called on in our conversation. Strong class participation includes contributing regularly to class discussion, listening respectfully and attentively to others, responding thoughtfully to their comments, and working diligently during in-class work both on your own and with others—in order to do well in the participation element of the course, you should expect to do each of these each day. Workshopping one another's drafts will also be an important part of our work in class, and sharing timely, thoughtful feedback with your peers is also central to strong class participation. More generally, the more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

Although I will rarely lecture, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Having a record of the class' comments, concerns, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and arguments for further writing and thinking in the course. More broadly, consistently remaining actively engaged in our discussions, even if only as a listener and note-taker at certain moments, will help you to develop as a critical thinker and writer.

During class discussion, I expect you to be attentive to what your classmates have to say and respectful of their ideas and opinions. Thinking critically and openly about complex issues is a crucial part of college education—we all have a responsibility to create a classroom atmosphere where everyone is free to offer his or her opinion, as long as we all do so respectfully and kindly.

Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for class-related work such as note-taking, class writing or reading, and research. If I ask the class to put away electronic devices so that we can focus on other material, please do so. If inappropriate computer or electronic use becomes a problem for some members of the class, I will revoke permission to use them for the class as a whole. If you have questions about whether a certain use of technology is appropriate or not, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Course Blog
Over the course of the semester, we will all post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve several purposes: firstly (and most immediately), it will give you a chance to think critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you or that you are curious about or confused by. Secondly, it will give us all first-hand experience with one of the technologies that are central to the creation and expression of identity in the digital world. Third, by giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will help you to generate topics, ideas, and arguments for papers. Finally, it will give you concrete practice with the skills of critical writing we will be learning before you apply those skills in papers.

Blog Posting. Note that the blog is located on our course website https://digid02.wordpress.com/, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post, and you should include your name or other identifying information in your posts so that we can all follow the conversation online and I can give you credit for your work. The most recent main post will appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your writing.

Blog Content. Your work on the blog will take different forms at different points in the semester. Sometimes I will post a question for you to respond to, while at other times your posts can be more open-ended; sometimes I will ask you to address a particular passage or other element from the reading, while at other times I will ask you to think about a broader issue or question that connects several texts. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should offer interpretations and questions rather than summaries or solely personal responses.

Each week on the blog, you should submit **one post of your own and one response to a classmate's post.** Your own post should be at least 200 words—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer. I encourage you to include images, links, video clips, and other media elements in your posts—this is fairly easy to do and we will discuss it in class at the beginning of the course. Your response can be shorter than your post, but should engage your classmate's post thoughtfully and substantively.

Blog Scheduling. In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to post, comment, and absorb the online discussion before we discuss a given text in class, blog posts are due **by 10:00pm the night before we discuss a text in class**, and comments are due **by the time we meet in class** (see the course schedule below for specific due dates). **Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts and comments will not receive credit. Plan accordingly to make sure that you can be responsible for getting your writing online on time.**

Blog Grading. I will grade your blog posts on a scale of 1-5 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

Grade Characteristics
1 The post is missing, late, or severely underdeveloped, consisting of only a few sentences.
2 The post is underdeveloped: it meets most the technical requirements of the assignment (use of text, use of media, length, etc.), but only engages with the material and the issues it raises in a passing or overly general sense.
3 The post is sufficient: it meets all of the technical requirements of the assignment, and addresses the material and the issues it raises in reasonable depth, but does not do much to develop or respond to them.
4 The post is successful: it uses textual or other material to make analytical claims, and begins to develop them, but those claims or connections are not fully developed or analyzed.
5 The post is exceptional: it uses textual or other material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

I will grade blog comments on a credit/no credit basis.

Digital Exercises
For each of the first three sections of the course, you will complete a short digital exercise online. These activities are a chance for you to experiment first-hand with elements of your own digital identity in order to deepen your critical reflections on the issues we will be discussing as a class in that section. These exercises will ask you to construct a piece of digital identity, document it, submit that documentation to Blackboard and bring it to class as a hard copy. They will not require in-depth writing, but they will serve as useful inspirations and objects of analysis for our class discussions and your papers. I will grade these exercises on a credit/no credit dependent on your completing them fully and on time. **Because of the time-sensitive nature of these exercises in relation to class discussions, late submissions will not receive credit. Plan accordingly to make sure that you can be responsible for submitting your materials on time.**

Papers
The main focus of our work over the semester will be on four analytical papers, each of which will give you the opportunity to practice the skills of writing we will develop by extending and responding to our class readings and conversations in directions that interest you. Our process for these papers will emphasize the importance of revision and constructive critical dialogue to the writing process: for each assignment, you will submit a first draft for peer workshopping (and in some cases an annotated bibliography), followed by a revised draft that I will grade and comment on. I will provide more specific information on each paper assignment over the course of the semester. **Late drafts or papers will lose one grade level (e.g., from a B+ to a B) for each day past their due dates. Late or missing peer critiques will negatively impact your class participation grade.**

Course Portfolio
As a culmination of your work and your development as a critical thinker and writer over the semester, your final assignment will be a course portfolio. This portfolio is a chance for you to show how your writing has improved throughout the course, both generally and in terms of particular assignments. Your portfolio should include a revised version of Paper Four, further revisions of two papers of your choice, one peer critique letter of your choice, and a final reflection cover letter discussing your work over the semester.

Attendance
You are permitted a total of three absences for any reason without penalty over the semester. For each subsequent absence, your final course grade will drop one-third of a letter (e.g., from an A- to a B+), and after five absences, you risk failing the course. Repeated or excessive lateness will also count as an absence.

If you miss all or part of a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work for the course—make sure to follow the syllabus, stay on track with the reading, turn in any written work that was due for the day,

and consult a classmate, check the course website on Blackboard, or come see me during my office hours to talk about what you might have missed in class.

Office Hours and Additional Help
I want each of you to be successful in this class. Helping each of you develop as critical readers, writers, and thinkers is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals and succeed in my class. More importantly, I have a great deal of interest in the material we will be working on this semester, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment and excitement from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, life at Skidmore, future academic or career plans, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we're doing in class, please come see me. I encourage you to think of meeting with me not just as a last resort or something to do when you need help, but as a central part of making your learning more productive, meaningful, and enjoyable. My office hours are Wednesday 10:30 am-12:30 pm and Thursday 11:15am-12:15pm in Palamountain Hall 316—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren't free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient—I'm also happy to talk via Google Chat, Skype, or other means. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help, or for any other reason at all.

The Writing Center
The Writing Center, located on the fourth floor of Scribner Library, is an incredibly valuable resource for gaining feedback and guidance on your writing, and I recommend that everyone in class take advantage of their offerings. They provide individual sessions as well as open sessions covering a range of important topics (dates and times for these are in the course schedule below). Visit https://www.skidmore.edu/writingcenter/ for more information.

Accessibility
If you anticipate needing accommodations regarding any element of this course, please come talk with me early in the semester so that we can work together to address these issues. You should also visit the Office of Student Academic Services at http://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php for more information.

Academic Integrity
Independent thinking and writing are crucial elements of both your work in this course and the intellectual culture of Skidmore more broadly. Violating these principles through plagiarism or other academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may result in more serious consequences as well. If you have any questions about citation, attribution, or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me before you hand in your work. For more information about Skidmore's academic integrity policy, visit http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.php.

Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct
Skidmore College is committed to providing a learning, working, and living environment that reflects and promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect. Members of the Skidmore community have the right to be free from all forms of abuse, assault, harassment, and coercive conduct, including sexual and gender-based misconduct, as defined in this policy. Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Skidmore College will not tolerate sexual or gender-based misconduct in any form. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. In accordance with Title IX, Skidmore College does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any of its programs and activities.

Course Schedule

The schedule below may change over the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class and/or via email. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email and the class blog regularly, and coming to my office if you have any questions.

Section One: Selves and Selfies	
Tues. January 26	Course Introduction: What is Digital Identity? Course Diagnostic
Thurs. January 28	Steven Edward Doran, "Identity" View Walter Woodman and Patrick Cederberg, *Noah*, at bitly.com/en105noah *They Say* 1-14 and 163-166 **Introductory Blog Due Wednesday 10 pm**
Tues. February 2	danah boyd, "Identity" *They Say* 19-28 and 55-67 Introduction to Paper One **Blog Post on Boyd Due Monday 10 pm**
Thurs. February 4	Jill Walker Rettberg, "Written, Visual, and Quantitative Self-Representations" Jill Walker Rettberg, "Mirrors and Shadows: The Digital Aestheticisation of Oneself" *They Say* 42-51 and 92-100 **Digital Exercise One Due: Selfie**
Tues. February 9	**Draft Workshop: Paper One First Draft Due Mon., Feb. 8 by noon** **Peer Critique Letters due in class**
Thurs. February 11	**No Class: Draft Conferences**

Section Two: Digital Selves and Digital Others	
Tues. February 16	Spike Jonze, *Her* (screening day and time TBA) Introduction to Paper Two **Blog Post on *Her* Due Monday 10 pm**
Thurs. February 18	Spike Jonze, *Her* (discussion continued) **Paper One Revised Draft Due with Reflection** **Digital Exercise Two Due: Profile**
Tues. February 23	Writing Workshop: Arguments and Counterarguments *They Say* 78-91

Section Three: Digital Surveillance and the Self as Data	
Thurs. February 25	Alexis Madrigal, "I'm Being Followed: How Google—and 104 Other Companies—Are Tracking Me on the Web" **Digital Exercise Three Due: Graph**

Tues. March 1	**Draft Workshop: Paper Two First Draft Due Mon., Feb. 29 by noon** **Peer Critique Letters due in class**
Thurs. March 3	Nicole Cohen, "The Valorization of Surveillance: Towards a Political Economy of Facebook" **Blog Post on Cohen Due Wednesday 10 pm**
Tues. March 8	*No Place to Hide* Exhibition Tour and Discussion: Meet at Tang Museum at class time **Paper Two Revised Draft Due with Reflection**
Thurs. March 10	Writing Workshop: Topic TBA
Tues. March 15	**No Class: Spring Break**
Thurs. March 17	**No Class: Spring Break**
Tues. March 22	Library Visit **Blog Post on Paper Three Topics Due Monday 10 pm**
Thurs. March 24	Zeynep Tufecki, "Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes." **Blog Post on Tufecki Due Wednesday 10pm**
Tues. March 29	**Research Workshop: Paper Three Annotated Bibliography due Monday 5pm**

Section Four: The Culture and Politics of Digital Identity

Thurs. March 31	Lindy West, "What Happened When I Confronted My Cruellest Troll"
Tues. April 5	**Draft Workshop: Paper Three First Draft Due Mon., April 4 by noon** **Peer Critique Letters due in class**
Thurs. April 7	Lisa Nakamura, "Racism, Sexism, and Gaming's Cruel Optimism" **Blog Post on Nakamura Due Wednesday 10pm**
Tues. April 12	Zip, "My Name Is Only Real Enough to Work at Facebook…" **Paper Three Revised Draft Due with Reflection**
Thurs. April 14	Writing Workshop: Topic TBA
Tues. April 19	**Draft Workshop: Paper Four First Draft Due Monday, April 18 by noon** **Peer Critique Letters due in class**
Thurs. April 21	**No Class: Portfolio Conferences**
Tues. April 26	Portfolio Workshops
Thurs. April 28	Portfolio Workshops
Tues. May 3	**Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations**
Mon., May 9	**Course Portfolios Due**