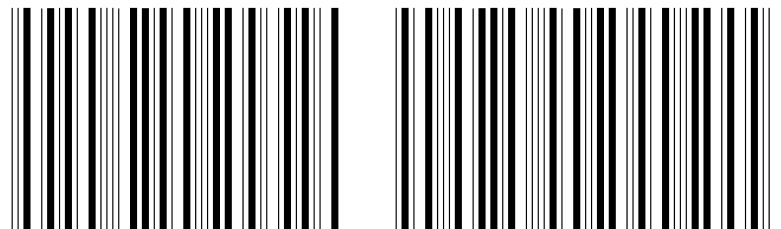




English 105-01
Mon/Weds 2:30-3:50pm
Palamountain 401
Professor Paul Benzon
pbenzon@skidmore.edu



DIGITAL IDENTITY

Office: Tisch 327
Office Hours: Monday 12:00-1:30pm, Thursday 9:30-11:00am, and by appt.
Course Blog: <https://digitalidentity105.wordpress.com/>

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. Through analysis of a range of texts including fiction, film, photographic images, blog posts, critical writings, and the everyday objects of the digital world, we'll explore how digital technology plays a role in reshaping issues such as personality, privacy, gender, race, sexuality, and anonymity. Through an intensive process of drafting, workshopping, and revising, we'll write critically and reflectively about our own constantly shifting positions and identities within the increasingly complex network of the web. 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

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:	15%
Course Blog:	12.5%
Paper 1:	10%
Paper 2:	15%
Paper 3:	17.5%
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 completing all reading and viewing before class, bringing any relevant texts to class, and being prepared to discuss them thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these on your own as well as in being called on in our conversation. Strong class participation includes contributing regularly to class discussion in a range of ways, 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; conversely, late or missing feedback for your peers will have a substantial negative impact on your participation grade. 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.

In order to facilitate a productive experience for everyone in class, please be in your seat and ready to start at the beginning of class time. Unless I indicate otherwise or there is an emergency, please remain in your seat during class so that we can all remain focused on our work at hand (this means using the restroom, getting water, etc., **before or after class** rather than during class).

Although I will lecture relatively rarely, 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. In order to help facilitate and encourage productive note-taking, I will periodically ask students at the beginning of class to recap our previous discussions and collective thinking.

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 their 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, and research. Even if you are using such a device for class work, please put it away promptly if and when I ask so that we can turn our attention to specific other things. 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, you will 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 independent course website at <https://digitalidentity105.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 current 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. The more engaged an approach you take, the stronger your posts will be and the more you will be able to bring to our discussions.

Each of your posts should be **at least 250 words** (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page—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.

Blog Scheduling. Unless I specify otherwise, each week's blog post will be due before Monday's class (consult the course schedule below for specific details). In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to read comments and absorb the online discussion before we meet on Monday, **posts are due by 11:59pm on Sunday night. Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts will not receive credit.**

Blog Grading. I will grade your blog posts on a scale of 0-4 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

Grade Characteristics

- 0 The post is missing or late.
- 1 The post is severely underdeveloped: it shows superficial thought and/or minimal or no engagement with the text and the issues it raises.
- 2 The post is underdeveloped: it uses textual material in a minimal, incorrect, or overly generalized manner, consisting mostly of summary, generalization, and/or personal response rather than close analysis of or critical thinking about the text.
- 3 The post is successful: it uses correctly integrated textual material to make analytical claims that demonstrate a clear, solid understanding of the issues at stake, but does not engage those issues at the level of an exceptional post.
- 4 The post is exceptional: it uses correctly integrated textual material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections, and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

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. In order to make the most of this process, it is necessary to approach both stages of the essay writing process fully and seriously: rather than a “rough draft,” your first draft should be a full-length essay, with an argument that you develop through consistent close analysis of the text in question. Similarly, your revised draft should go beyond mechanical and stylistic editing to make substantive changes to the essay’s argument, structure, and/or use of text.

In grading papers, I focus on the issues and characteristics described in the rubric at the end of this syllabus. I will provide more specific information on each paper assignment over the course of the semester. **Papers will lose one grade level (e.g., from a B+ to a B) for each day past their due dates for both first and revised drafts. Work submitted after the due time on the due date is considered one day late. 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 each assignment. Your portfolio should include a revised version of Paper Four, further revisions of earlier papers, 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 **two 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 four 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, the English major or the Media and Film Studies minor, 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 Monday from 12:00-1:30pm and Thursday from 9:30-11:00am in Tisch Hall 327—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. 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 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

- Wed. Sep. 5 **Course Introduction: What is Digital Identity?**
Course Diagnostic
- Mon. Sep. 10 Steven Edward Doran, "Identity"
They Say 1-14 and 163-166
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday
- Wed. Sep. 12 Jill Walker Rettberg, "Filtered Reality"
Zizi Papacharissi, "Without You, I'm Nothing: Performances of the Self on
Twitter" (excerpts)
They Say 19-28 and 55-67
Introduction to Paper One
Blog Due 11:59pm TUESDAY
- Mon. Sep. 17 Lisa Ehlin, "The Subversive Selfie"
They Say 42-51 and 92-100
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday
- Wed. Sep. 19 **No Class: Yom Kippur**
- Mon. Sep. 24 **Draft Workshop: Paper One First Draft Due Sunday, Sept. 23 by noon**
Peer Critique Letters Due in class
- Wed. Sep. 26 **No Class: Draft Conferences**

Section Two: Digital Images

- Mon. Oct. 1 Spike Jonze, *Her* (Screening in Emerson Auditorium, Sunday Sept. 30, 7:30pm)
"Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy: Writing About Film" (read before film)
Watch "How to Speak Movie Part 1: The Camera," "How to Speak Movie Part
2: Mise en Scène," "How to Speak Movie Part 3: Editing" (watch before film)
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday
- Wed. Oct. 3 Spike Jonze, *Her* (discussion continued)
Adrienne LaFrance, "Why Do So Many Digital Assistants Have Feminine
Names?"
Introduction to Paper Two
Paper One Revised Draft Due with Reflection
- Mon. Oct. 8 Owen Harris, "Be Right Back" (*Black Mirror*, Season 2 Episode 1 – available on
Netflix)
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday

Wed. Oct. 10 Owen Harris, “Be Right Back” (discussion continued)
Film Analysis Workshop: Bring a sequence to discuss

Mon. Oct. 15 **Draft Workshop: Paper Two First Draft Due Sunday, Oct. 14 by noon**
Peer Critique Letters Due in class

Section Three: Digital Bodies

Wed. Oct. 17 Neil McArthur, “The Case for Sexbots”
Blog Due 11:59pm TUESDAY

Mon. Oct. 22 Emily Witt, “Internet Dating” and “Live Webcams”
Paper Two Revised Draft Due with Reflection
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday
Introduction to Paper Three

Wed. Oct. 24 Amy Adele Hasinoff, “Sexting as Media Production: Rethinking Social Media and Sexuality”

Mon. Oct. 29 Writing Workshop: Arguments and Counterarguments
They Say 78-91

Section Four: The Self as Data and the Politics of Digital Surveillance

Wed. Oct. 31 *Do Not Track* (watch/play selected episodes online)
Blog Due 11:59pm TUESDAY

Mon. Nov. 5 **Draft Workshop: Paper Three First Draft Due Sunday, Nov. 4 by noon**
Peer Critique Letters Due in class

Wed. Nov. 7 Alexis Madrigal, “I’m Being Followed: How Google—and 104 Other Companies—Are Tracking Me on the Web”
Sara M. Watson, “Data Doppelgängers and the Uncanny Valley of Personalization”
Introduction to Paper Four
Blog Due 11:59pm TUESDAY

Mon. Nov. 12 Library Research Workshop
Paper Three Revised Draft Due with Reflection

Wed. Nov. 14 Glenn Greenwald, “The Harm of Surveillance”
Blog Due 11:59pm TUESDAY

Mon. Nov. 19 **Research Workshop: Paper Four Annotated Bibliography due Sunday, Nov. 18 by noon**

Wed. Nov. 21 **No Class: Thanksgiving**

Mon. Nov. 26 Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”
Blog Due 11:59pm Sunday

Wed. Nov. 28 Writing Workshop: Topic TBA

Mon. Dec. 3 **Draft Workshop: Paper Four First Draft Due Sunday, Dec. 2 by noon**
Peer Critique Letters Due in class

Wed. Dec. 5 **No Class: Portfolio Conferences**

Mon. Dec. 10 Portfolio Workshop

Wed. Dec. 12 **Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations**

Mon. Dec. 17 **Course Portfolio Due**

Grade Range	Thesis/Argument	Textual Analysis	Organization and Structure	Language and Mechanics
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument raises thought-provoking, surprising, independent ideas about the topic that go well beyond the scope of class discussion Thesis engages issues raised in the texts but also looks beyond them, addressing larger implications in complex ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes text in unexpected ways and/or using unexpected sections/facets of the text, raising independent ideas that go well beyond the scope of class discussion Textual material is used consistently throughout the paper and-integrated and incorporated in a controlled, correct manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops your argument in a way that is flexible and open to different perspectives and arguments Paper is rationally and coherently organized, with fluid, clear transition and structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is polished and sophisticated in a way that suits the complexity of the topic and argument Very few mechanical errors
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument makes a substantive independent claim about the topic, addressing ideas and issues that may partially repeat class discussion or be more immediately obvious than those in an A-range paper, but also expands, complicates, and/or adds to those ideas and issues in substantive ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes some more basic dimensions and more obvious sections of the text, but also introduces some new material and/or new interpretations of the text Textual material is used consistently throughout the paper and-integrated and incorporated in a controlled, correct manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movement through the paper is logical and coherent, with few instances of repetition or digression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is clear but not as sophisticated as in an A-level paper Mechanical errors are relatively few and minor
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument largely repeats or summarizes ideas from class discussion or texts without augmenting or responding to them in substantive ways Thesis is closer to summary or observation than argument, and/or makes claims about the topic that are overly broad, binary, simplistic, or one-sided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely works with passages already discussed in class without adding any new analysis Analysis is generalized, superficial, or infrequent, containing some moments of misreading, un-analyzed or “backup” text, or summary of the text Incorporation of text is disjunctive, disorganized, or incorrect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument in a way that is repetitive or disorganized Movement through the paper is often difficult to follow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is largely competent Mechanical errors are frequent and serious in some cases Paper may be shorter than the assigned length
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little to no recognizable analytical argument Argument consists mainly of summary or uncritical personal reactions to the topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not work with the text frequently enough or in enough depth to support argument Frequent moments of misreading, under-reading, or summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization is largely random, repetitive, or discontinuous Movement through the paper is unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is too casual and colloquial for the assignment Mechanical errors are severe and frequent enough to partially impede meaning Paper is considerably shorter than the assigned length
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No recognizable argument Relies on serious misreadings or misunderstandings of the text or topic Shows little or no comprehension of or engagement with the specifics of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no textual analysis Textual analysis shows serious misunderstandings of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization and structure are largely absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language shows little care or attention to correctness Mechanical errors impede meaning Paper is much shorter than the assigned length Paper may include plagiarized material