

Advance Writing: Collaboration and Collaborative Writing in New Media

Junior-Senior Level Writing and Rhetoric Course

Expected Enrollment: 18-24

Class Discussion/Lab-Based Instruction

Introduction

Many of us find it reasonable and intuitive to understand writing as the solitary act of a lone author, perhaps working with an editor, who produces written work of their own accord. But new writing technologies have highlighted what many scholars have known for decades: that writing is in fact highly collaborative, and that some of the most effective forms of written communication today are the work of teams or collectives with similar goals and desires.

Collaboration and Collaborative Writing in New Media offers students a chance to work in writing and composition with a focus on collaborative writing in new media for contemporary digital audiences. Collaboration, as we will learn, is much than working with a group. It is an entirely different style of thinking and making. Beginning with the assumption that all writing is, in some way, a collaborative effort, this course emphasizes this understanding through an intense study of collaborative writing theory, engagement with different styles of collaborative work, and meaningful praxis in a digital writing lab setting. Assignments will from the beginning help students explore what it means to write together, with special emphasis on writing in and through multimodal technologies. The culmination of the course will be a fully-functional and publicly displayed web text built over the semester by the entire class. Smaller assignments will develop components of this project through different technologies such as shared writing platforms (Google Docs), Wikis, Version Control Systems, Content Management Systems, and online publishing platforms.

Assignments

This course asks students to work through a series of assignments that culminate in a larger, web-based project developed in collaboration with the entire class. The line of projects proceeds as follows:

- The Initial Topic Invention, Research, and Pitch will ask small groups of students to identify a topic that interests them and to write a literature review and “pitch” presentation that they will give to the class. Topics will focus on areas of civic action and/or social engagement with an eye towards rooting the project within the local community.
- Once the class as a whole has deliberated upon and selected a topic (or synthesis of topics), similarly small (but different) groups will put together a **Project Mock-Up** that includes what the project will do, say, and accomplish. This includes initial suggestions of format, audience, and effectiveness, and will primarily focus on developing visually persuasive media for presentation.
- Once Mock-Ups are presented, and the class has decided upon our project and course of action, groups will merge into development teams that will start researching and writing **Primary Project Content and Resources**. What material will be needed, in what format, and for what purposes will be decided in classroom meetings, with each team receiving an equal distribution of work.
- **The Final Project** will then incorporate the work of teams into one final product, the shape and scope of which will be further decided upon in collaboration with students and myself.

During each of these larger steps, students and I will hold regular meetings, presentations, and discussions on the constitution of each step. At the same time, students and I will draft our rubric for what constitutes proper collaborative work. This rubric will include the logistical, interpersonal, and ethical dimensions of how we will define collaboration. As we work through the project itself, we will return to and revise this document to include in the final project.

This rubric will inform another aspect of the class, **Self Review and Reflection** of our collaborative practices. Each student will, at regular intervals, submit a self-evaluation that uses our rubric to reflect on their work in their groups or with the class, with suggestions for future activities or improvement.

Finally, as this is a course reliant on collaboration and in-class work, **Participation** is a key facet. What constitutes participation will be decided by the instructor and will be defined within the bounds of the collaboration rubric.

Course Schedule (Tentative)

Week 1: Introductions

Students will briefly discuss what and how they understand “collaboration” as a practice. We will also work on small, introductory work that will introduce us to the benefits and pitfalls of writing in a group setting.

Sample Readings: Syllabus.

Week 2: Collaboration and Working Together

Students will begin to read introductory material on theory of collaboration and writing, with an emphasis on team-writing. Readings will also include case studies, and course work will involve studying different forms of collaborative work in real-life scenarios. We will begin forming teams for our initial assignments, and develop a rubric for assessing how we collaborate.

Sample Readings: Spiro, “Collaborative Authorship in the Humanities.”
Lunsford and Ede, *Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice*.

Week 3: Collaborative Technologies

*Students will study and engage a survey of different writing technologies and their collaborative capacities. Includes discussion of different platforms such as Wikipedia, Wordpress, GitHub, and Google Docs. We will also perform our group **Pitches** this week.*

Sample Readings: Selected Texts and Public Discourse from the Platforms.
Morgan and Murray, “Insight and Collaborative Writing.”

Week 4: Collaborative Technologies Continued

Continuing our survey, students will work towards creating small documents in collaborative technologies, which also involves a critical examination of authorship and identity. A beginning for further discussions of ethics, activism, and social identity as they are mediated through technology and in collaboration with others.

Sample Readings: Juris, “The New Digital Media and Activist Networking Within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements.”

Week 5: Rhetorics of New Media

A more theoretical week, students will read and discuss material that raises issues of circulation, distribution, community, and networks in digital media. Central questions for this week will involve how persuasion, deliberation, and argumentation function in large ecologies of professional and individual publishing.

Sample Readings: Brooke, *Lingua Fracta*.

Week 6: Cultures of New Media

A critical and analytical week focused on online communities, their discourses, and their technologies. Students will study artifacts from meme culture, online social networks such as Tumblr and Twitter, and discussion threads in message boards in a variety of public venues. Discussions on community formation and mediation will give way to practical analysis of genres and how they emerge from different technological platforms. This week is also the point in which groups will present their ideas for the direction of the group project.

Sample Readings: Kester, "Collaboration, Art, and Subcultures."

Week 7: Professional Collaboration and Community

An extension of earlier work in styles of collaboration, this week brings a more focused discussion of collaboration as a form of labor, with students engaging in community-building writing exercises that reflect their group projects and the issues contained therein. We will revisit our rubric for successful collaboration and revise our expectations as smaller groups form into larger ones and the overall course project congeals into a more well-defined form. We will form newer and more focused groups with a clearer direction of the larger class project.

Sample Readings: Malone, "Facilitating Groups Through Selective Participation: An Example of Collaboration from NASA."

Week 8: Authorship and Accountability

Students engage questions of responsibility and accountability in regards to authorship in collaborative settings. Under what auspices do authors "claim" authorship in a text? Where and how is collaborative authorship valued over single-author work, and vice versa? How is responsibility and accountability factored into public writing venues in which large conversations emerge?

Sample Readings: Foucault, "What is an Author?"
Lunsford and Ede, "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship."

Week 9: Identity in Collaboration and New Media

Furthering our deliberation on authorship, students delve further into identity and writing through styles of collaboration. How does gender, race, class, and nationality impact or structure our view of collaboration, how we collaborate, and how we write? Furthermore, what is the role of technology in this structuring? What forms of communication emerge in collaborative environments when medium and genre are taken in to account?

Sample Readings: Levernez, "Collaboration, Race, and the Rhetoric of Evasion."

Week 10: Identity in Collaboration and New Media

*Continuing from the previous week, we develop our understanding of collaboration and technology as questions of identity through the study of politics and identification in social networks such as Pinterest and Reddit, as well as ubiquitous technologies on phones and tablets (Snapchat, Instagram). We further revise our rubric for collaboration once again to account for the teams working on their project, and take final steps towards planning the courses final project. The **Content and Resources** assignments for each of the groups will also be due.*

Sample Readings: Selected Texts and Public Discourse from the Platforms.
Fotopoulou and O'Riordan, "Introduction: Queer Feminist Media Praxis."

Week 11: Break

Week 12: Deliberation on the Final Project

Students and I will spend the week discussing, planning, and mapping out our expectations for the final project. Following this week, all students will be working on aspects of this larger project, and lessons in the class will focus on applied work in information design, project management, and content publishing.

Sample Readings: None.

Week 13: Information Design and Community Work

Students will work with me on exploring design aspects with an eye towards application or the final project. Discussions will include analysis of design across visual documents and web texts to facilitate discussions of usability, accessibility, and effectiveness. Our main discussions will evolve around the applicability of our project to its intended audience, how it impacts said audience, and how we take into account the values and needs of that audience in developing our work.

Sample Readings: Tufte, *Envisioning Information*.

Week 14: Developing for the Future

With the project coming to near completion, we will spend the week deciding the future of the object we have created. Will it be maintained, and if so how? What and who is invested in this work, and how do we think about maintaining writing in new media with a long life-span and potential growing audience? Students will discuss upkeep, goals for future development, and potential recruitment of audiences and participants.

Sample Readings: None.

Week 15: Final Project Completion

Finalizing the project with an eye towards presentation to faculty and students in a roundtable format. Decisions made on spokespersons and presentation format and

media. Also, final completion of the project, with teams proofing completed parts, completing unfinished portions, and quality testing.

Sample Readings: None.

Week 16: Presentation