

## **WRA 330 Writing Research in Communities and Cultures**

**John Monberg**

**Fall 2014**

### **Contact Info**

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### **Course Description**

This course will focus on writing and research methods in and with local, global, and online communities and organizations. We have always lived in a world where collective stories provide our lives with meaning and identity. Who gets to tell these stories today? What makes a powerful story? How do stories circulate through digital flows and social relationships?

The course is meant to give you the skills you will need as a creative professional, which include sophisticated theories to make sense of culture, community, and identity; research skills to answer complex questions through data collection, analysis, and theory building; a deep understanding of new media affordances for presenting content.

This course will introduce students to a range of research practices in writing. Students will study both methods (ways of conducting research) and methodologies (theoretical perspectives on research methods). Students will read both theory and practice (e.g., case studies, ethnography, narratives, material culture, historiography, essays) from a wide range of perspectives and approaches (e.g., anthropology, sociology, feminism, ethnic studies, cultural studies). We will literally be writing the future of East Lansing as we coordinate our work with the East Lansing 2030: Collegeville Re-Envisioned exhibition at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

We live in an increasingly messy world with a complex interpenetration of subjectivities, performances, practices, objects, hybrids, infrastructures, ecologies, representations, and communities. The boundaries between digital technology and culture overlap ways that can no longer be analytically isolated and do justice to the lived experience of contemporary social life.

Because these factors are tightly entangled, the readings and contexts in this class will also be entangled. Instead of treating gender, class, digital technologies, or race as distinct independent variables, we will explore and develop methodologies for generating knowledge that is accountable, rigorous, and productive.

### **Course Goals and Objectives**

1. A deep theoretical understanding of how media and globalization changes contemporary experience, power, and identity in terms of culture and community.
2. An appreciation of a range of specific urban writing contexts, and how they've been transformed by technology, culture and economics.

3. Practice representing data in different ways, for different audiences, contexts, and purposes/goals so that you can act as an advocate for that audience.
4. To understand, generally, how theories and methods of research shape research projects and to learn how we may apply specific theoretical approaches and research methods to our own work.
5. To draw upon these theories to formulate your own research questions, generate empirical data, and analyze the data in a way that extends the theoretical horizon of the discipline--to develop these well enough to incorporate in your own research, leading to conference presentations and publication.

## **Course Materials**

### **Texts to Print Out**

Selected readings posted on our [ANGEL](#) online course site. *Note: do the readings before class--come prepared with specific questions about how you'll apply concepts from the readings to your semester projects!*

## **Course Requirements**

**Reading Responses.....100 points**  
**Due dates across the semester.**

**Presentation: Research Method.....150 points**  
 For this short presentation, you'll find a method that supplements class readings and discussion (or not addressed in a particular way), and introduce it to the class. (Hint: my twitter feed (@jmonberg) is a useful place to start at to find research methods and case studies. **Due dates will be assigned second week of class.**

**Persona/Scenarios ..... 200 points**  
 As part of a group, you will use a range of qualitative methods to conduct an observational study to explore the habits, behaviors, communication styles, and other aspects of a community group in East Lansing. Report on what we need to know to write for our audience so that our content will be useful. **Due September 25.**

**Brainstorming/Prototyping ..... 200 points**  
 You will work in group. Develop a range of mockups that represent your content in ways that you think work for your audience. Get feedback from your audience to discover what works and what doesn't work. Present your findings. **Due October 16.**

**Research Project ..... 350 points**  
 You will create something--a website, experience map, social media strategy or another genre you develop--that will present content from the East Lansing 2030: Collegeville Re-Envisioned exhibition. **Due December 11.**

### **Course Grading**

- 4: 1000-900 points
- 3.5: 899-850 points
- 3: 849-800 points
- 2.5: 799-750 points
- 2: 749-700 points
- 1.5: 699-650 points
- 1: 649-600 points

## **Course Policies**

### **Attendance**

This class relies heavily on your input as a student participating in class discussions. What we do in class is important for meeting the course objectives and many class sessions will depend on your participation. Attending class requires not only your being physically present; it also depends on you being mentally present: having prepared reading and writing assignments well enough to be able to talk about it, and participating in whatever activities the class entails. You are allowed three unexcused absences. Every additional absence will subtract 50 points from your semester total. If you see me in advance, absences maybe excused for sanctioned university activities or religious holidays. Absences may be excused in the case of a medical emergency if a doctor's note is provided.

### **Assignment Due Dates**

You must complete all major assignments. If you do not submit all materials for each project, you will not pass the class. No late work will be accepted. Any exceptions to this policy must be made by written petition and approved by me before the due date.

### **E-mail Correspondence**

If you need to contact me by e-mail, please include "WRA 330" in the subject line of your message. This will ensure your e-mail reaches the appropriate folder in my in-box. Please remember that faculty members (like you) juggle multiple commitments. I will do my best to respond to e-mails within 24 hours, Monday – Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. Because of privacy issues, instructors are discouraged from corresponding with students about their grades over e-mail.

### **Office Hours**

Please feel free to come see me during office hours to discuss readings, projects, and any problems that may arise. If my office hours are not convenient, we can arrange another time to meet.

### **Plagiarism**

Stealing and passing off as your own someone else's ideas or words, or using information from another's work without crediting the source, is called "plagiarism." Some specific examples of actions that constitute plagiarism include pasting together uncredited information from the Internet or published sources, submitting an entire paper/project written by someone else, submitting a paper written for another class (and thus not original work), and copying another student's work (even with the student's permission). In order to avoid unintentional plagiarism and to represent your work honestly, you will need to be meticulous about giving credit to any and all sources, whether directly quoted (even a few words) or paraphrased. Students who plagiarize will receive a failing grade on the assignment and may fail the course. For specific MSU policies on academic honesty, see *Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide* (<http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm>), especially General Student Regulations 1.0, "Protection of Scholarship and Grades," and the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades and Academic Honesty.

### **MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD)**

Students with disabilities that may interfere with completing your course work should consult with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodating your needs. You will also need to contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities:

<http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/>

122 Bessey Hall

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## **Tentative Daily Schedule**

### **August 28 Course Overview**

#### **September 2, 4 Writing the Future**

Streets as Places  
The Art Loop Experience  
East Lansing 2030 (<http://el2030.tumblr.com>)  
Loic J. D. Wacquant, "The New Urban Color Line"

#### **September 9, 11 Theorizing Cultural Identities**

Sherry Ortner, "Generation X: Anthropology in a Media-Saturated World"  
Ben Casselman, "The Poorest Corner of Town"  
Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny, "Framing Cultural Questions"

#### **September 16, 18 Ethnographic Skills to Understand Community**

SITRA, Ethnography Field Guide  
Desmond Manderson and Sarah Turner, "Coffee House: Habitus and Performance"  
Arlene Davila, "The Marketable Neighborhood"  
Richard Lloyd: "Neo-Bohemia; Art and Neighborhood Redevelopment in Chicago"

#### **September 23, 25 Experience Economy Skills and the Creative City**

**Persona/Scenarios Due September 25**  
Richard Florida, "The Rise of the Creative Class"  
Design Thinking Process Guide

#### **September 30, October 2 Cultural Intermediaries**

Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, "Cultural Intermediaries and the Media"  
Michael Moss, "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food"  
David Owen, "The Soundtrack of Your Life"

#### **October 7, 9 Ethnographic Urban Research**

Jane Jacobs, "The Uses of Sidewalks"  
Dalton Conley and Miriam Ryvicker, "Race, Class, and Eyes Upon the Street"  
Julia Klein: "Elijah Anderson, Man on the Street"

#### **October 14, 16 Urban Scenes**

**Brainstorming/Prototyping Due October 16**  
Daniel Silver et al, "Scenes: Social Context in an Age of Contingency"  
Laura R. Oswald, "The Place and Space of Consumption in a Material World"  
South Works Redevelopment

#### **October 28, 30 Cosmopolitan Canopies**

Elijah Anderson, "The Cosmopolitan Canopy"  
Jack Katz, "Time for New Urban Ethnographies"

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“Telling Stories: The Arts and Wellbeing in North Liverpool”

**October 28, 30 Web 2.0 Liberal Arts**

Tim Brown, “Design Thinking”  
UNDP Workshop Toolkit

**November 4, 6 Analyzing Qualitative Data**

John Adams et al., “Qualitative Methods Analysis”  
Art Loop Open- Designing for the Intersection of Art and Technology

**November 11, 13 Writing Publics**

Carl DiSalvo, “Design and the Construction of Publics”  
Ash Amin, “Collective Culture and Urban Public Space”

**November 18, 20 Assessing Community Design**

Xavier de Souza Briggs, “Social Capital and the Cities: Advice to Change Agents”  
Conducting a Community Assessment

**November 25 The University and the Creative City**

Richard Florida, “The University and the Creative Economy”

**December 2, 4**

Final Project Presentations

**December 11**

**Final Project DUE at 5:00 p.m.**