

DIGITAL LITERARY STUDIES

Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 • Spring 2020 • Dr. Eric Rettberg
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

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Basic Information

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Eric Rettberg
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REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- Your laptop and charger, which you must have with you and which will be used regularly in class
- Pen and paper
- Readings distributed as pdfs on the course site
- Other texts distributed in class

USUAL OFFICE HOURS

ABD: 9:00 a.m. – 9:55 a.m.; 1:20 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.
C: 9 a.m.-11 a.m.; 1:20 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.
I: 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
...or by appointment

CLASS MEETINGS

Section 1: Mod 1 ABD, A116
Section 2: Mod 3 ABD, A116
Section 3: Mod 5 ABD, A116
Section 4: Mod 7 ABD, A119

Course Description

How have computers, smartphones, and the internet changed culture? How have they changed the production and study of literature, and how do they promise to in the future? In this course, students will pursue a series of projects and discussions geared toward answering these questions, with specific attention to four major areas: digital culture; representations of digital culture in contemporary print literature; new forms of literature made possible by digital technologies; and methods of studying historical literature enabled by digital tools.

Along the way, students will discuss the varied approaches contemporary fiction writers take to digital technology and Silicon Valley culture, from utopian enthusiasm to dystopian terror to bland acceptance. They'll encounter and produce texts that depend on computation: hypertext novels with complex branching narratives, interactive fictions that blur the line between story and game, poems generated on the fly from a series of programmed possibilities, stories that intertwine English with programming language, and poems built from strange juxtapositions of improbable Google search results. They'll read about and perform their own humanistic experiments that use big data, search, and quantitative visualization tools to consider literary texts as data sets, to attempt to understand literary history by asking computers to process millions of texts at once, and to present historical texts in ways that take advantage of the possibilities of computing.

Instructional Design

Many aspects of this course will resemble a traditional English class: we'll read texts, discuss them, and write about them. We'll also learn by doing, though: the course will feature a series of blog posts, group projects, and experiential activities that introduce new methods of reading literature and new kinds of literature. We'll work together to form a writing community interested in issues of digital culture and digital literary studies. When we're writing and working on major projects, we'll regularly workshop each other's work and work to translate feedback into improvement.

Essential Content

This semester, we'll consider a number of key questions, including:

- How have digital technologies changed the ways we experience and participate in culture?
- How have digital technologies changed the possibilities for writing literature?
- How have digital technologies changed the possibilities for studying literature?
- How have contemporary authors represented digital culture and technologies, and how do their texts help us think about the impact of those technologies on our lives?
- How do new ways of studying literature defamiliarize more familiar ways of studying literature?
- How can we conceive of a field of literature beyond the familiar canon of authors and texts?

Major Assessments

- *Posts, comments, and flash presentations*: Students will regularly contribute posts to the class's Google Classroom stream in which they extend the conversation of the class to an online forum. They will also be responsible for engaging classmates in productive conversations in blog comments and in brief flash presentations in the classroom.
- *Computer Thing Explainer*: An essay/project in which students explain the cultural significance of a contemporary technological or digital artifact on a poster using images and only the most commonly used 1,000 words in English—an assignment that borrows the premise of Randall Munroe's *Thing Explainer*.
- *Electronic Literature Project*: A creative project in which students will work individually or in groups of up to 3 to produce a literary work that takes advantage of the affordances of computing. Students can use whichever software tools they'd like for this project, from Twine and Inform to their own programming.
- *Representations of Digital Culture Essay*: An essay assignment in which students analyze the ways a work of fiction represents computing history, internet culture, Silicon Valley culture, or cultures of technology more generally.
- *Digital humanities project*: An essay/project focused on digital methods in the humanities.

Policies

GRADING

While grades may show up in the gradebook as either point values, percentages, or letter grades, the primary logic of grades for major essays and projects is based on letter grades. Grades do not represent a starting point of 100 from which various deductions are made, but a qualitative assessment of the whole. Generally, A is the highest grade awarded in the class for major essays and projects. To translate letter grades into numbers, assume that A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, and so on. Using those translated numbers, the English department calculates final grades that roughly signify the following:

A (90-100): Exceeds course requirements

B (80-89): Meets course requirements

C (70-79): Credit awarded but needs improvement

D (69 or below): Does not meet course requirements; no Academy credit awarded.

Your semester grade will be calculated based on the accumulation of grades in the categories for the entire semester (that is, the quarter grade represents a snapshot in time, not a set percentage of your final grade).

Blog posts are graded according to a check plus, check, check minus logic that is described on the blog post schedule.

Instructors in the English department do not round quarter or semester grades.

GRADING CATEGORIES

Major Essays and Projects	60%
Posts and Presentations (6)	25%
Comments on posts	5%
Homework	10%

REVISIONS

Excellent writing and projects almost never emerge whole from the creator's mind on the first try. The strongest writers use an iterative process of planning, drafting, and revision. This class will scaffold assignments with a revision and feedback process. Revisions will give you an opportunity to rethink your essays and projects and to improve them.

"Revision" is not the same as "editing." Merely correcting a few superficial convention or style errors will not improve your essays. Rather, you should expect to rethink, restructure, and rewrite during the revision process.

Along with your finished revisions, I'll ask you complete process documents in which you stage and reflect on your writing process. Detailed requirements of reflective memos will be posted on the course site.

LATE ESSAYS AND PROJECTS

Late assignments in the homework and blog categories receive one letter grade off if submitted within 24 hours of the deadline, and half credit if submitted by the last class day of the semester. Until the last two weeks of the semester, penalties for late essays and projects are assessed as follows:

0 - 8 hours: no penalty

8-48 hours: 1 letter grade deduction

48-168 hours: 2 letter grade deduction

168+ hours: essay/project receives half credit

All work due in the last two weeks of class must be turned in within 72 hours of the due time to receive any credit. Unless there are severe extenuating circumstances, you should plan on presenting presentations on the day on which you are scheduled.

For essay and project deadlines, extensions of up to 24 hours may be granted to students who request an extension at least 12 hours before the deadline on a case-by-case basis. If the student fails to meet the extended deadline, late penalties are calculated according to the original deadline.

ATTENDANCE

Whether or not you are present in class, you are responsible for class activities, presentations, and assignments. Please refer to the student handbook for the full attendance/tardy policy.

COLLABORATION

I encourage you to seek and implement feedback on drafts of your writing and projects from a variety of readers— teachers, classmates, tutors, parents, and peers. You must be the one to actually write your sentences, responses, and essays, though, so those readers should not implement changes directly in your documents. That is, it's great to have a parent or peer comment on errors in a Google Doc—but it's not OK to have them simply correct errors in a Google Doc. It's great to have a parent or tutor offer suggestions for how to improve your topic sentences—but it's not OK to have them write your topic sentences for you. Seek feedback and guidance from readers, but take ownership of your own writing.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Writing classrooms depend on trust between students, peers, and teachers. It is always better to contact me about the difficulties you're having with an assignment than to plagiarize or have a classmate I trust my students, but that trust is matched by the seriousness with which I take academic honesty. Instances of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to Student Life for disciplinary action.

ANNOTATING TEXTS

Whether you are reading a print text or an electronic text, you should plan to have a system to annotate it in preparation for class. For print texts, you can use pen and post-its. You may print electronic texts or read them on screen—as long as you have a way to take notes on them.

LAPTOPS

We will use laptops regularly in this class, and you will need to use your laptop to access and annotate electronic texts. In general, I permit laptop use in class—but if I notice a pattern of distraction, I will ask you to forego your laptop in favor of printed copies of texts. If I ask you to bring printed copies of texts, you must have a printed copy of each text each day.

TECHNOLOGY EXCUSES

You live on a campus inundated with computers, and your IMSA Google Drive account lets you back up your work automatically. If you aren't working in Google Docs or another program that automatically saves your work, use Google Backup & Sync to make sure you always have a current backup of your work. Unless a technology problem is a system-wide failure, IMSA's fault, or my fault, please don't share it with me as an excuse. If you plan ahead and have good backup plans, you won't lose access to up-to-date copies of your work.

I can only grade what you turn in. If you submit an incomplete, corrupted, or outdated file, that is the file I will grade—so be careful with your submissions.

Course Objectives

Relevant SSLs

- I.A Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought.
- I.B Construct questions which further understanding, forge connections, and deepen meaning.
- I.C Precisely observe phenomena and accurately record findings.
- I.D Evaluate the soundness and relevance of information and reasoning.
- II.A Identify unexamined cultural, historical, and personal assumptions and misconceptions that impede and skew inquiry.
- II.B Find and analyze ambiguities inherent within any set of textual, social, physical, or theoretical circumstances.
- III.A Use appropriate technologies as extensions of the mind.
- III.B Recognize, pursue, and explain substantive connections within and among areas of knowledge.
- III.C Recreate the beautiful conceptions that give coherence to structures of thought.
- IV.A Construct and support judgments based on evidence.
- IV.B Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance.
- IV.C Identify and characterize the composing elements of dynamic and organic wholes, structures, and systems.
- IV.D Develop an aesthetic awareness and capability.

Relevant English Learning Standards

- A. Students studying English at IMSA will read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the many dimensions of human experience... [English A.1-14]
- B. Students studying English at IMSA will apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts... [English B.1-7]
- C. Students studying English at IMSA will employ a wide range of strategies in their use of spoken, written, and visual language to create print and non-print texts that communicate effectively with a variety of audiences...[English C.1-9]
- D. Students studying English at IMSA will conduct research on issues and interests, and communicate discoveries in ways that suit purpose and audience... [English D.1-5]
- E. Students studying English at IMSA will develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles... [English E.1-8]
- F. Students studying English at IMSA will participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities... [English F.1-10]
- G. Students studying English at IMSA will use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g. for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information) [English G.1-11]

IMSA ENGLISH OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of their IMSA English experience, students will be able to:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Compose texts in forms appropriate to their rhetorical situation, with attention to audience, purpose, context, and mode.
- Respond critically to a variety of rhetorical situations.
- Explain textual evidence to generate multiple meanings and support an argument.
- Compose arguments in a variety of modes and media that engage with, critique, or synthesize multiple points of view.

Reading

- Comprehend a range of informational and imaginative works.
- Evaluate the quality and legitimacy of sources of information.
- Read texts with attention to rhetorical situation and purpose, language choices and patterns, literary techniques, thematic patterns, context, genre, and structure.
- Ask questions to produce intellectual debate about and find meaning in texts.
- Connect the concerns of texts to their lives, to the lives of others, to larger cultures, and to other intellectual disciplines.

Composition Process

- Give critical feedback with empathy and awareness of audience.
- Consider and apply feedback to take ownership of their writing.
- Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing.
- Reflect on how composition processes influence their work.

Knowledge of Conventions

- Use conventions of grammar and language appropriate to the rhetorical situation.
- Cite sources using professional standards and demonstrate knowledge of the purposes of doing so.
- Demonstrate an understanding of distinctions between the conventions of different genres.
- Manipulate conventions intentionally for rhetorical, aesthetic, and expressive effect.

Literary Knowledge

- Describe the elements and features of a text using the methods and terminology of literary studies.
- Explain the relationship between a text and literary traditions, movements, styles, genres, and forms.

- Situate a text within historical, social, cultural, theoretical, and philosophical contexts.
- Apply knowledge gained from literature to understand contemporary issues and perspectives.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME

RESPECT: I assume that my students have ideas to contribute to our discussions and to the world. Even when students have difficulties in class, I believe in their capacity to improve their thinking, writing, and communication. I will strive to take your ideas seriously and to fully acknowledge you as a person with a complex life.

HELP AND GUIDANCE: I want you to succeed in my class, and I have chosen this profession because I want to work with you inside and outside of class to make that happen. If you are confused by an assignment or are struggling with something we are doing in class, stop by my office so we can talk about it. If you are having trouble understanding something, contact me early and often. Plan ahead so if you need help, you have time to get it.

AVAILABILITY: I will respond to clear, self-contained questions direct to my IMSA email within 24 hours during the working week. I will make myself available during office hours.

ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR IDEAS: As a teacher, I am interested in helping you understand my ideas and the ideas of authors. I'm even more interested, however, in helping you hone and communicate your own ideas. If you're having trouble connecting the content of the course with the things that interest and concern you most, please come see me during office hours so I can help you find the connections.

USEFUL FEEDBACK: I will spend a lot of time crafting comments and feedback on your assignments. It is important to me that you do your best to understand that feedback and produce work that responds to it. If you have trouble understanding my comments on your work, please see me during office hours.

HIGH STANDARDS: I believe that writing and literature are serious, important stuff that will be crucial to your life, education, and career whether you end up being a biologist, a mathematician, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, or a novelist. Grades in my class are not "given," and points in my class are not "lost" from some arbitrary beginning point. Instead, grades in my class are earned through hard work and the difficult process of completing excellent assignments and projects.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AND SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION: At the scheduled start time of class, you should be in your seat and ready for a conversation. Come prepared with questions and observations about the text, and be willing to share those questions and observations in small groups and in the large-group conversation.

INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY: This course will sometimes ask you to consider materials that seem weird, or to think of as weird aspects of life we usually treat as familiar, from the book to cat memes. It's important that you treat inquiry into those materials as a serious undertaking that can enhance our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CLASSMATES' IDEAS: Discussions of literature—and contemporary ways of thinking about literature—can involve challenging, contentious topics. Even when you disagree with your classmates, it is absolutely crucial to the success of our conversations that you treat them with respect. I will treat you like adults, and I expect you to treat your classmates like adults engaged in a respectful conversation.

HONESTY: I assume that you will tell me the truth and that your work represents your own effort. Please match my respect with your honesty.

COMMITMENT TO PROCESS: You will probably enjoy many of the texts we read in this class, but there are some you may not enjoy. Even if you realize a certain text is not your cup of tea, work through it and try to find what's interesting about it, even if it's hard. Similarly, commit to improving your writing, whether you believe you are a strong writer or a weak one. All of us, including me, still have lots to learn when it comes to writing.

WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP: I love nothing more than helping students improve their work. I can only do so, however, if students seek out my help. Taking advantage of my help—and, as importantly—the help of tutors at the writing center—will help you become a stronger writer, thinker, and communicator.