COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Every faction conditions its members to think and act a certain way. And most people do it. For most people, it's not hard to learn, to find a pattern of thought that works and stay that way. But our minds move in a dozen different directions. We can't be confined to one way of thinking.”

--Veronica Roth, *Divergent*

This course explores how media forms and mediations of perspective shape audiences' understanding of events in modern American culture. Students will examine the defining characteristics of different media forms (i.e. television, photojournalism, short and long fiction and non-fiction works, popular music) and will examine how the construction and projection of textual, aural and visual images shape meaning and influence broader discussions of events. The course will proceed through a series of units: the examination of a particular media event, exploration of texts that examine the mechanisms of media and a discussion of a particular historical phenomenon from several mediated perspectives (i.e. a work of non-fiction, a graphic novel, a film). This trajectory will enable students to understand the relationship between form and content and will allow students to become more intellectually engaged participants in contemporary cultural debates.

**Section Description:** This section focuses on media forms and audience perspectives with specific emphasis on depictions of utopia/dystopia. We will use

- A variety of music and music videos as well as selected photographs, advertisements, and television programs, all of which we will interpret as “texts” that work to create, construct, and deconstruct the media’s portrayal of the American ideal.
- The novel *The Hunger Games*, which we will examine in its entirety while paying close attention to media influence in post-apocalyptic “utopian” America.
- The film *The Truman Show*, which we will examine in its entirety while paying close attention to the staged nature of reality television and utopia in America.

In addition to these primary texts of analysis, we will read and analyze brief essays (available online), as well as any other media suggested by either myself or students during class discussions.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the characteristics that define and differentiate literary, filmic and visual texts.
- Students will be able to apply this understanding to analyze the relationship between form and meaning.
- Students will be able to explain how diverse modes of humanistic and artistic endeavor contribute to an understanding of the media in America.
- Students will be able to produce written work that synthesizes evidence effectively in organized, specific, and focused paragraphs to support analytical claims.
- Students will demonstrate the ability in informal and formal writing contexts to express ideas using concise and rhetorically appropriate academic English.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to produce a thesis-driven essay that analyzes text in relation to larger “real world” questions of social, cultural, or thematic significance.
As a writing-intensive XIDS class, the writing exercises will foster individual exploration of ideas, analytical critical questions, cultural or historical contexts, and ultimately thesis-driven argument. Writing assignments will build on each other and will engage students in discussion of the characteristics of visual media, written text and the construction of performances. Please keep in mind that I am dedicated to assisting you throughout the learning process and supporting your transition from high school to college (and beyond). Hopefully, while we work on writing, you will explore some interesting concepts about the relationship between our beliefs and the media’s influence on those beliefs.

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**Expectations**

Imagine me as your manager for this course. When you are hired, the manager has high expectations for your abilities as well as your professionalism; each time you disappoint your manager, her opinion of your professionalism goes down. As your manager, I expect you to:

- Display a working knowledge of the syllabus
- Attend all classes, arriving on time with relevant materials in hand
- Participate fully and respectfully in class discussions
- Remain attentive and engaged throughout the class period
- Offer constructive critiques on your classmates’ work and respond graciously to constructive criticism
- Improve your writing during each step of the process
- Avoid repeating mistakes addressed in feedback
- Submit quality work, complete and on time
- Communicate promptly with me about any concerns

Ultimately, your success depends on how much time, energy, and effort you are willing to put into the class. I am only in control over one hundred percent of my own effort, but I promise you will always receive my full effort. I hope to see the same level of dedication in you.

**COURSE MATERIALS, ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING**

**Materials**

- Novel: *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
- Film: *The Truman Show* (screenings of this film will be made available on campus)

**Assignments**

**Course Participation:**

Your success greatly depends on your full attention and willingness to discuss ideas and materials. This grade includes in-class discussion, attentiveness, quality completion of assignments and activities, and timely attendance and attentive involvement at evening study hall sessions.

**Reading Journal:**

Students will respond individually in writing (100-150 words per entry) to daily reading assignments (print, film, and visual), demonstrating

a. expressive writing (your personal response to the section assigned), and
b. analytical questioning (look at one part of the reading you found confusing, upsetting or interesting, and then use a section of the text you’ve already read to attempt to answer that question, explain how the text creates these feelings within the reader, or examine the comments the text is actually making on media and dystopia).

Visual Image Analysis (Writing #1):
A brief writing assignment, paragraph length at least, based on an observation, description, and analysis of a visual print ad or photograph or drawing/painting. This assignment fosters intellectual curiosity and analytical questioning through a medium they know well and instills confidence in “analysis” before they move on to academic writing about written texts.

Short Essay (Writing #2):
2 pages in length, this essay explicates a scene or section from a course film and its function in the text as a whole. This assignment builds upon the skills learned from the visual image analysis, transfers it to a written text and moves the writer toward understanding how to build a thesis from critical analysis.

Final Essay (Writing #3):
4-5 pages in length, this essay moves from the text itself to consider contexts: social, cultural, or thematic issues that the text raises in connection to the “real world” of individual experience.

Creative Project and Presentation:
Students will develop a creative project at the end of the semester on a topic of their choosing that is related to the course content. Students will develop a presentation related to this project at the end of the semester.

Grading

Grade Chart: 90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; Below 60 = F; Not Submitted = 0

Your final grade will be determined as follows:
Course Participation 15%
Reading Journal 20%
Visual Image Analysis 10%
Short Essay 15%
Final Essay 25%
Creative Project 15%

COURSEWORK POLICIES

Turning in Work

Although class materials are available through CourseDen, all assignments must be submitted through TurnItIn (www.turnitin.com). There are no waivers for computer, program or user errors.

Office Meetings and Discussion of Work

Out of respect for other students’ class time, as well as your privacy, I will never discuss your personal grades in class. However, I implore you to come to my office and discuss your work as soon as you have any
questions; being proactive is the best way to improve your grade! Please prepare specific questions and never ask me to proofread your essay—that's your job. Asking clear, precise questions helps you understand your own writing process and therefore makes meetings much more productive and valuable for you. Please note that I will not be able to offer any substantial assistance if you wait until the day before an essay is due to meet with me. Writing takes time. I want to help you make the grade you desire; I promise that you will receive the grade you earn.

**Extra Credit Policy**

Extra credit is not available for this course; the final grade reflects your understanding of the coursework.

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

The Department of English and Philosophy defines plagiarism as taking personal credit for the words and ideas of others as they are presented in electronic, print, and verbal sources. The Department expects that students will accurately credit sources in all assignments. An equally dishonest practice is fabricating sources or facts; it is another form of misrepresenting the truth. Plagiarism is grounds for failing the course.

The University policies for handling Academic Dishonesty are found in the following documents: *The Faculty Handbook*, sections 207 and 208.0401 [http://www.westga.edu/~vpaa/handrev/](http://www.westga.edu/~vpaa/handrev/)

*Student Uncatalogue*: "Rights and Responsibilities"; Appendix J. [http://www.westga.edu/handbook/](http://www.westga.edu/handbook/)

Excessive Collaboration:
By the end of the term, students should demonstrate the ability to produce *independent writing* (writing without collaborative assistance of peers, writing tutors, or professionals in the field) that shows a level of competency in both ENGL 1101 and 1102. Although classroom activities and out-of-class assignments may highlight collaborative learning and collaborative research, *excessive collaboration* (collaboration that results in the loss of a student's voice/style and original claims to course-related work) is considered another form of academic dishonesty and therefore will not be permitted.

Plagiarism *always* results in an automatic F for the course, regardless of circumstances, reasons, or extent. I will also report the case to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

**The Writing Center**

The Writing Center offers consultation in which tutors question, respond to, offer choices, and encourage revision in student essays. Tutors do not evaluate or prescribe solutions to problematic areas in student essays, and tutors are specifically trained to avoid appropriating the student's work.

*The Writing Center*: [http://www.westga.edu/~writing/](http://www.westga.edu/~writing/)

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**CLASSROOM POLICIES**

**Attendance**

Since this class meets so few times, each absence is like missing a week of a normal class. Students should be in attendance for every class period, especially since this is an IGNITE class. No assignments can be submitted late or made up, so even one absence will also affect participation and reading journal grades. Be aware that no
distinction exists between excused and unexcused absences. Failure to attend all classes may result in a failing grade for the course. Two late arrivals count as one absence; leaving early applies in the same manner.

**Disruptive Behavior and Electronic Devices**

Students will be dismissed from any class meeting at which they exhibit behavior that disrupts the learning environment of others. Such behavior includes—but is not limited to—arriving late for class, allowing cell phones to ring, speaking disrespectfully to the instructor and/or to other students, checking email or surfing the web, and using personal audio or video devices. Laptops and tablets may be used for class-related work only; use for other purposes will result in your dismissal from class. Each dismissal of this kind will count as an absence and will be applied toward the attendance policy.

For the sake of transparency, my biggest pet peeves are off-task electronic usage, sleeping, and class disruption. Students who exhibit such behaviors will automatically be counted absent. I readily dismiss students who sleep or disturb our learning environment. If you are disrespectful to other students or excessively disruptive, we will meet to discuss whether or not you may continue attending the class. Discussion requires attention and thoughtful participation, and most importantly, demands a safe learning environment.

**Communication**

University of West Georgia students are provided a MyUWG e-mail account. The University considers this account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. The purpose of the official use of the student e-mail account is to provide an effective means of communicating important university related information to UWG students in a timely manner. It is the student’s responsibility to check his or her email. In order to guarantee your privacy, I do not respond in detail to emails sent from alternate email providers.

**OTHER INFORMATION**

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Disability Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please notify your instructor in writing by the end of the second full week of class and include a copy of your Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Disability Services. Students are entitled to accommodations if they deliver the SAR to the instructor no later than the end of the second full week of class.

**Credit Hour Policy**

The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes.
associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

University of West Georgia Honor Code

At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West Georgia students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing.

Additionally, you are responsible for safeguarding your computer account. Your account and network connection are for your individual use. A computer account is to be used only by the person to whom it has been issued. You are responsible for all actions originating through your account or network connection. You must not impersonate others or misrepresent or conceal your identity in electronic messages and actions.

Departmental Policy on Severe Weather

The University of West Georgia is committed to the personal safety of its students, faculty, and staff in the event of severe weather. University policy regarding severe weather and emergency closings is posted at http://www.westga.edu/police/index_2277.php and official announcements about class and/or examination cancellations will be made only by the President and/or the Department of Public Relations. Although it is not possible to develop policy to address every weather-related emergency, these guidelines are intended to provide some general direction about such situations. For immediate severe weather situations, especially when classes are in session, faculty, staff and students are advised to follow the emergency procedures identified below:

1. Direct occupants to remain in the building and to seek shelter immediately on the lowest level of the building in interior rooms (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls.
2. Instruct occupants to not leave the building.
3. Evacuate all offices, rooms or hallways with windows and glass or with exterior walls.
4. Provide assistance to persons with disabilities.
5. Accompany occupants to the nearest designated shelter area in the building.
6. Comply with departmental severe weather policies/procedures.
7. Wait for an “all clear” signal before resuming activity.
8. Occupants will: a) proceed to the nearest designated shelter area in the building by the closest route; b) move quickly but in an orderly manner so that all will arrive safely; c) will not attempt to vacate the premises, drive or seek shelter in cars; d) take a seat in the shelter area; e) remain cooperative with those in charge; and f) wait for an “all clear” signal before resuming activity.

In the event that classes are cancelled or disrupted for less than one calendar week, each professor, at his or her discretion, will make adjustments as needed to cover material missed during those cancelled sessions. This may or may not involve the use of rescheduled or online classes. If the closures exceed a single calendar week, students should contact the Chair of the Department of English and Philosophy at 678-839-6512 or the professor of the class for updated information regarding changes to the schedule in the Department. It is the intention of the Department of English and Philosophy to handle every concern seriously and as effectively as possible.
READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

M 06/30
Intro to course basics: syllabus, major assignments, course theme: meaning of media in American culture; utopia/dystopia; diagnostic exercise: response to The American Dream
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 1-2), Journal Entry 1

T 07/01
What is dystopia? Dystopian Ads analysis; 3-Ied Monster; "What We Are to Advertisers".
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 3-4), Journal Entry 2

W 07/02
Discussion of the utopian/dystopian nature of the American Dream.
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 5-7), Journal Entry 3

Th 07/03
Continue discussion of media and the American Dream with paragraph exercise and peer review; First writing assignment (Writing #1 draft due Monday, 07/08)
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 8-10), Journal Entry 4

F 07/04
No Class/Independence Day
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 11-13), Journal Entry 5

WEEK TWO

M 07/07
Journal Check
Draft Workshop (bring a printed copy of your full draft to class); introduction to The Truman Show: analyze movie poster and trailer; introduction to film analysis; "The Hollywood Sign"
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 14-15), Journal Entry 6

T 07/08
Writing #1 due
Discussion on reality TV and the media; The Truman Show; Cases of 'Truman Show' Delusions.
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 16-18), Journal Entry 7

W 07/09
Second Writing Assignment; The Truman Show; Film Analysis; Link to Script
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 19-21), Journal Entry 8

Th 07/10
Essay Construction: Writing an Introduction; Thesis Construction
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 22-24), Journal Entry 9

F 07/11
Drafting Workshop
Reading: The Hunger Games (Chapters 25-end), Journal Entry 10

WEEK THREE

M 07/14
Journal Check
Draft workshop (bring a printed copy of your full draft to class); initial discussion of The Hunger Games: major characters.
Journal Entry 11

T 07/15

Writing #2 due
The Hunger Games Discussion

Journal Entry 12

W 07/16

Continued novel discussion
Read before class: Stanley Fish’s NYTimes article; “The Hunger Games” REVIEW: “Truman Show” meets ‘American Idol’ meets Charles Darwin

Journal Entry 13

Th 07/17

Third Writing Assignment; discussion of The Hunger Games: context; themes; culture; plot design, naming, settings (small group work)
Read before class: “Fast Entertainment” and “Yootopian Dream”.

Journal Entry 14

F 07/19

Writing #3 drafting

Journal Entry 15

WEEK FOUR

M 07/21

Draft workshop (bring a printed copy of your full draft to class)

Tu 07/22

Writing #3 Due
Journals Due Today!

Final Creative Project assignment; return to visual image response (from first day): Write about how your perspective and ability to “read” this image has changed at this point of the semester. What have you learned that you did not expect to learn? In what ways has this course prepared you for college-level coursework?

W 07/23

Preparation for Final Creative Project

Th 07/24

Final Day of Class; Class Evaluations; Preparation for Final Creative Project