

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

COMS 717.98
Digital Life Writing

Winter 2017
Tuesday, January 10th to April 11th, 2017
(No class on Feb. 21st Reading Week)

Tuesday 11:00-1:45

Instructor: Lorry W. Felske
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Office Hours: T 2-3:30 or by apt.

Course Description

Digital life writing encompasses a broad range of activities. Life writing, perhaps understood more clearly as a better term for the practice of autobiography in the wake of postmodernism, has been supercharged by the explosion of digital technologies, applications created for those technologies, and the digital cultures that have emerged from them. Life writing is a term that encompasses new forms of autobiography, but also biography, and the practicing of these genres through social media, and in other venues as well. Once considered elite pursuits, with biography dominated by academics and autobiography reserved for exceptional people, these genres are now mixed practices that are used widely on social media platforms. The users of Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, Storify, Tumblr, Flickr, LinkedIn etc. produce their own auto/biographies and contribute to other people's biographies by friending/liking/ commenting/connecting/adding etc. Also relevant to the popularity of life writing is the democratization of data sources connected to personal history. A host of digitized information (censuses, ship records, military records, birth/marriage/death records etc.) is now available through the websites of governments, museums, non-profit organizations, and privatized online services such as Ancestry or FindMyPast, along with DNA analysis to "scientifically" confirm aspects of "the life" written about. Genealogical research, an element of life writing, is now among the top three uses of internet activity. The focus on the individual, whether in autobiographical or biographical perspective, can be understood as supported by neo-liberal perspectives in which individual uniqueness is central. This course explores the nature of these developments and the epistemological and methodological research issues associated with them.

Objectives of the Course are to:

Understand the field of life writing unfolding in the online world.

Comprehend the historical development of issues associated with autobiography and biography

Explore the academic venues (journals, conferences etc.) generated by these approaches.

Develop a critical perspective towards the area of life writing

Enhance the writing and speaking abilities of students

Critically assess the dominant cultural frameworks involved in the area of life writing.

Textbooks and Readings

Readings will be posted on D2L for each class.

Internet and electronic communication device information

All devices of an electronic nature are allowed in class as long as they do not disrupt class activities.

Assignments and Evaluation

1. Participation: This course is a seminar in which discussion is the main in-class activity. Regular attendance and participation in these discussions is crucial. 15%

Students will be also be asked to provide weekly, one page responses to questions lodged in the readings. The five (5) best submissions during the term will be used to calculate the final mark in this category. 10%

2. Students will submit two (2) papers during the term:

Paper 1: This will be an exploration of a research area/issue that is dealt with in the reading by McNeill and Zuern. This reading will be posted on D2L. The paper will be a minimum length of 10 pages (2500 words) for MA students and 15 pages (3750 words) for PhD students. 25% Due Date: February 7th, 2017.

Paper 2: The second paper will be an analysis of a life writing/auto/biographical website or application. The paper will be a minimum length of 15 pages (3750 words) for MA students and 20 pages (5000 words) for PhD students. 35% Due Date April 11th, 2017

More details about the papers will be discussed in class.

3. Presentation: Each student will give a 20 minute class presentation on their second paper research topic. These talks will be schedule in the last three weeks of class: March 28th, April 4th and April 11th. 15%

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: NO

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.]

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf>.

Please note:

1. Students seeking accommodations for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors directly. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
2. When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
3. For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

Support Services

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237,

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading System

Work in this course will be graded using [choose one] letter grades, GPA values (using any value on the 0 to 4.0 scale, including, e.g., 3.2 or 2.8). The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%

1.00		D	50 - 52.99%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	0-49.99%

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

If this course requires (or allows) students to conduct (or act as participants in) primary research involving surveys, interviews, or observations, state that here, describe the nature of students' participation, and indicate whether you have received course-based ethics approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee or if you expect students to apply for ethics approval themselves. ***NOTE: If you have not received course-based ethics approval and do not expect your students to apply on their own for research ethics clearance, then your course outline should not include any assignments requiring surveys, interviews, or other research with people. (One approved exception is for usability studies in COMS 363 in which students may conduct anonymous online usability surveys to get their classmates' opinions on the usability of a website.***

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES	http://grad.ucalgary.ca/home or 403-220-4938
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints <p>If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</p>
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Ombudsman 	http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/ http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/ombudsperson (403) 220-6420 or ombuds@ucalgary.ca
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps 	http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html
SU WELLNESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health 403-266-HELP (4357) http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Enter information here or direct students to D2L if the information is posted there.