WRT 301, Section M001: Civic Writing—
“Accessing Civic Spaces for (Self-)Advocacy”

“How has a society been created and perpetuated which has excluded so many of its members?” — Irving Zola

“Without rhetorical competence, citizens are disabled in the public arenas of citizen exchange—the marketplace, the representative assembly, the court, and public institutions—and democracy turns into a ruse disguising the reality of oligarchic power.” — George Hauser

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Course Description

Welcome to WRT 301, a course that focuses on the rhetorical skills necessary for effective civic or advocacy writing. This course examines the nature of public(s) and applies theoretical understandings to practical communication scenarios. That is, the course will offer you opportunities to communicate—actively, competently, and with critical awareness—in public life through a range of civic spaces. Throughout the semester, we will collaboratively define what civic participation is, how particular issues are framed as civic concerns, where these issues are discussed, and who is granted (or denied) access to participate within these conversations. We will think critically about the spaces available in the 21st century that allow us to advocate for ourselves and for others about issues that we value. Through analysis and engagement with a variety of civic spaces (eg. Twitter, blogs, newspapers, zines), you will have opportunities to voice your own civic concerns while deepening your understandings of rhetorical strategies, audience, and the politics of public space.

“Graffiti Alley,” Ann Arbor, Michigan – What counts as a civic space?
Inquiry: Accessing Spaces for (Self-)Advocacy

“Many books and articles celebrate Millennials (born, roughly, 1982 to 1999) as helpful, civicly oriented young people who want to save the planet. Others argue the polar opposite, that Millennials are entitled, self-centered, and uninterested in much outside their own Facebook page. Which view is right—are Millennials Generation We or Generation Me?” — Jean Twenge

In an increasingly polarized society where good arguments frequently aren’t made or heard and where we have greater access to information than ever before, caring about issues may take different forms than what we have traditionally conceived of as civic discourse. Although traditional civic spaces still exist, there are new spaces where we can voice our concerns about the issues that matter to us as individuals, as community members, and as citizens.

Whether the issues we care about are global or national—such as environmental or human rights concerns—or localized to our hometowns or even the Syracuse University campus, we all have something. It’s important that we have access to spaces where we can share our opinions and have them heard and respected. We are not always granted those rights, however, and individuals and collectives have historically been denied those rights.

This semester, then, we will push on what it means to be civically involved and who has access to civic spaces. We will also read texts that challenge what it means to have a civic consciousness or to be a concerned citizen—to reimagine what it means to participate. In this course, we will explore how civic writing extends beyond traditional forms of writing to include digital collaborations and embodied actions that occur in spaces beyond the print page.

We will spend time in unit 1 defining and redefining what civic participation is and how it applies to current issues. In unit 2, we will look at the historical context of how particular bodies (eg. women, the disabled, African Americans, queers, the poor and working class) have been both granted and denied access to civic spaces and have created spaces to advocate for themselves. In unit 3, we will spend time developing your own interests in a particular civic issue, taking the time to analyze what the issue is, who it affects, and how it can productively be advocated for through different genres.

Drone Protest, Westcott Street Cultural Fair – How is civic participation embodied?

1 “Millenials: The Greatest Generation or the Most Narcissistic?”
Course Goals for WRT 301

1. Students will develop the topic expertise, situational knowledge, and rhetorical abilities needed to play civic and public roles (e.g., concerned citizen, elected or appointed official, taskforce member, government professional, or community activist).

2. Students will critically consider democratic public life, broadly defined (e.g., citizenship, political representation, community activism, voluntary community).
   - Students will selectively read and discuss concepts important so civic life (e.g., democracy, public, community, civil society, advocacy, public interest, or public service).
   - Students will hear from and interact with practitioners and commentators who are engaged in civic and professional roles through interviews, class presentations, etc.

3. Students will produce real-world genres for real-world audiences.
   - Students will practice writing and speaking in the genres of civic communication appropriate to their project (e.g., letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, fact sheets, media kits, protest posters, white papers, legislative proposals).
   - Students will practice writing for varied audiences, editing for different styles and contexts and presenting in diverse publication formats.

4. Students will engage in sustained projects and produce a number of products carefully calculated for rhetorical effectiveness as civic writing within particular contexts.
   - Students will learn research strategies for developing knowledge of topics, issues, and contexts (e.g., observing public events, interviewing group members, accessing and assessing sources, or researching government records).
   - Students will analyze target audiences.
   - Students will study and produce concise products that are appropriate for particular audiences in specific public contexts, settings, and situations.

Course Texts & Materials

There are no required books for this course. Instead, I will upload all readings as PDFs to Blackboard (http://blackboard.syr.edu). This means you will be expected to access Blackboard regularly and also have the readings available (as either print or digital copies) in class.

We will use Twitter as a medium to post artifacts relevant to our readings and class discussions and for you to follow interesting accounts that discuss civic issues. You will need a public Twitter account. If you already have an account but prefer to keep it private, you will need a new one. We will use the hashtag #wrt301.

“Freedom,” West Virginia Cultural Center – Who has access to civic participation?
Assignments

Unit 1: Definition Essay—What is civic writing?
Drawing on three readings from this unit, you will map out your understanding of civic writing and what it means to participate in civic issues, applying that understanding to something concrete. You can choose a current issue and discuss how it is framed rhetorically as a civic issue. Or you can define civic discourse in terms of your own experiences, critically reflecting on your own engagement with civic issues. 1000 words.

Unit 2: Access Analysis—Who has access to civic participation?
We will explore how particular groups have historically accessed (or been denied access) to civic spaces and what kinds of writing they have employed to make themselves heard. You will choose an issue and explore how it has been addressed using different media outlets (eg. Twitter, Facebook, CNN, Fox News, political blogs, local and national newspapers, public art). Using Storify, you will curate the different ways this issue has been represented, whose voices were included and excluded, and analyze the situation in order to highlight the tensions within civic participation across different sites. 1000 words.

Unit 3: Advocacy Portfolio—How can I productively engage an issue?
For the final project, you will choose a local civic issue that interests you and create a portfolio of advocacy materials that ethically and productively address that issue. You should plan on a minimum of 4-5 pieces that demonstrate your understanding of the genres discussed in class that are most appropriate for your issue and target audience. You will also compose a critical reflection detailing the rhetorical choices you made and how your products productively engage the chosen issue. 4-5 products + 3-page reflection

Artifact Sharing.
At some point in the semester, you will bring an artifact to class that represents a civic issue (eg. a news article, video, song, flyer posted on campus). This could be relevant to your personal experiences, class research, or just something you find. You will informally present it and write a critical reflection about how your artifact frames a civic issue, whose voices it includes, and how it reaches a particular audience. 2-page reflection.

Homework.
You are responsible for completing and submitting all assigned homework. If you miss a class, you are responsible for the work assigned that day and are responsible for finding out what you missed, which will be posted on a Blackboard discussion board each day.

Participation.
Not everyone is a talk-in-class-every-day person, and participation isn’t limited just to talking in class. Participation also means coming to class prepared, engaging with the material, being a thoughtful peer reviewer, tweeting regularly, and posting class notes.
Course & SU Policies

Accessibility. This is a course designed to welcome different learning and composing styles as well as create an inclusive space. Let me know if I can make the classroom more accessible.

Accommodations. If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Ave, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty. The academic community requires ethical behavior from all of its participants. For writers, this means that the work we claim as ours must truly be ours. We are expected to credit others for their contributions and to clearly indicate the boundaries of our own thinking. In cases where academic dishonesty is detected (the fraudulent submission of another’s work, in whole or part, as your own), you may be subject to a failing grade for the project or course and to academic probation or expulsion. (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu)

Attendance. Absences do happen, and please let me know in advance if you know you will be absent. If you miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Class time cannot be reconstructed and your performance, work, and final course grade will be affected by absences. If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of classes without any official documented excuse, it is unlikely you will pass the course.

Computer Use & Email. Most of the work you hand in for this class will be typed and should follow MLA formatting (Times New Roman, size 12 point, one-inch margins). You are welcome to bring a laptop to class with you for taking notes and in-class writing exercises. We will also use email for contact outside class. Contact me (ahhitt@syr.edu) about your coursework, to set up appointments to meet with me outside class, or to ask a question.

Religious Observance. SU’s religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any exam, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. An online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm)

Student Writing. All texts written in this course are generally public. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me during classroom activities or for homework. You will also be asked to sign a consent form requesting the use of your writing for professional development, teacher training, and classroom instruction within the S.U. Writing Program.

The Writing Center. Experienced writing consultants at the Writing Center (101 HB Crouse Hall) are prepared to work one-on-one with you at any stage of your composing process. Face-to-face and online appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the semester and can be reserved up to seven days in advance via WCOntsine (http://wc.syr.edu).