

## **First-Year Composition Section Themes Fall Semester 2026**

### **American Pop Culture**

We will be exploring “popular culture” in America, asking questions like: What is “pop culture”? How does it differ from other forms or aspects of culture? We will also engage a number of elements that constitute this theme, such as music, film, literature, and advertising, investigating how pop culture has evolved over time and some of the ways that these aspects influence our perceptions, ideas, choices, and lives.

### **Beyond the Game: Rivalries and Sports Culture**

Why do sports rivalries matter so much? In this First-Year Composition course, we will examine how rivalries function as a central component of sports culture and why they produce some of the most significant moments in athletics. We will consider how rivalries shape fan loyalty, intensify competition, and transform regular games into events that are remembered for years to come. We will also analyze well-known rivalries in college and professional sports and explore how these matchups contribute to the formation of traditions, identity, and strong connections between teams and their communities.

### **Deconstructing Disney**

In this First-Year Composition section, we will focus on the work and influence of the Walt Disney Co. on U.S. and world cultures while developing our writing and communication skills. For generations, Disney has been an American icon. We will begin the semester by analyzing the ways in which individual Disney films construct value messages within particular historical contexts before examining the larger impact of the Disney Company as a corporation and a force of cultural export. Topics may include: the line between homage and appropriation, the politics of representation, the influence of media on childhood, the impact of the Disney Corporation on copyright law, the globalization of American culture, and more.

### **Food: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly**

Food plays a huge role in our everyday lives. In this section of First-Year Composition, we will look at food differently, including where your food comes from and the value of eating locally. We will consider if eating locally full time, or most of the time, is overly difficult, or even possible. Other issues that will be explored include how food may contribute to the poverty cycle and the cost difference of healthy vs. less healthy food. We will end with how food affects culture. What will you be eating over winter break?

### **Heroes, Followers, and Philosophical Truths: Leadership Theory in Popular Media**

As Uncle Iroh once said, "While it is always best to believe in oneself, a little help from others can be a great blessing." Together, in this class, we will explore leadership theory (power, authority, ethics, persuasion, followership, and globalization) through popular TV shows and films. We'll closely analyze visual narratives like Avatar: The Last Airbender, Superman, Stranger Things, and The Office alongside texts that probe individual motivation, global forces, and moral dilemmas. From these materials, we'll examine how leaders are made, how followers respond, and how cultural values and global systems shape individual and organizational choices. Fun is a prerequisite for developing critical reading, argumentation, and multimodal composition skills while connecting leadership theory to meaningful philosophical questions in a global context.

### **Inside the Matrix: Writing and Rhetoric in the Age of AI**

This First-Year Composition course examines how language shapes reality in an age when machines can generate text. Using generative artificial intelligence—and cultural touchstones such as the film The Matrix—as both subject and tool, students will explore questions of authorship, agency, ethics, and power. Through

rhetorical analysis, reflective writing, and sustained revision, students learn how AI systems produce language, what assumptions they embed, and how human writers can critically engage, guide, and resist automated text. Rather than avoiding AI, the course teaches students to use it responsibly and thoughtfully as part of the writing process while developing strong academic reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. By the end of the course, students will be better equipped to navigate an algorithmic world as reflective, ethical, and rhetorically aware writers.

### **Into the Archive: What Do We Keep?**

While humans have kept written records for thousands of years, no period of history is as documented as today. This section of First-Year Composition will focus on the incredibly varied ways we technologically and culturally write things down. We will discuss a range of media including protest songs, thriller novels, holiday postcards, surveillance tapes, and more in an effort to learn more about what, how, and why we keep what we keep.

### **Law in Popular Culture**

This First-Year Composition course explores the intersection of law and society relying on current and classic books (both fiction and non-fiction) and films. Taught by a political scientist, we will discuss how popular culture shapes public understandings of law and legal institutions and the ways in which pop culture might affect the law itself. Students will have voice in selecting at least one of the films and one of the texts.

### **Politics and Animals**

This First-Year Composition course explores the relationship between humans and non-human animals. We will discuss political theories of animals and how humans should treat them. Topics will include animal welfare laws, animal domestication, wildlife conservation, cloning, the ethics of animals as food, zoos, and more.

### **Reality?**

This epistemologically oriented First-Year Composition class will explore one of the fundamental challenges of our time: how do we know what's real? We will examine how this question has been addressed historically and what it means to "keep it real" in a "post-truth" era. We will also discuss and write about conspiracy narratives, artificial intelligence, fakes, counterfeits, and con artists, and what it takes to build a good baloney detector.

### **Reality TV: Dating Games**

In this section of First-Year Composition, we will examine popular reality television dating shows and associated social media. We will apply media and interpersonal communication theories and discuss cultural values and media ethics of production, content, and audience reception associated with these shows. Topics will include political and economic environments in which reality television is created, and the implications for public understanding of race, class, and gender.

### **Writing About Japanese Media**

Do you enjoy Japanese modern popular culture; indulge in anime, JRPGs, manga and the like? Weirdered out by Japanese commercials? Have a strong opinion on the cancellation of Super Sentai!? Then this First-Year Composition class is for you! You will have a chance to explore these topics, learn critical thinking skills, and analyze rhetorical situations as we tackle important topics in writing and discuss Japanese media. You will grow as aspiring college writers while focusing on the topics within Japanese media that matter to you. Topics may include but are not limited to: gender representation in media, Westernization, impact of Japanese media on global society, how Japanese media appeals to both domestic and foreign audiences.