

Travel and Self-Discovery **UWS 66A-2**

Summer I 2025 (06/04/2025-07/03/2025)

Instructor: Collin Cook, Ph.D.

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Class Time: T, W, Th 1:50 P.M.-4:20 P.M.

Classroom: Zoom (link on Moodle)

Office: Rabb 227

Student Hours: By appointment via Zoom

Introduction:

Welcome to summer at Brandeis! This course introduces students to the power of writing as a means of communication and a process of thinking and understanding. As students complete a series of writing assignments, they will engage in a process of reading, drafting, reviewing and revising, working in peer groups and individually with their instructors.

The ocean, the open road, and the automobile all entice us to travel. From *Thelma and Louise*, a female buddy road crime film, to acclaimed food critic Anthony Bourdain, who samples foods from across the globe, travel has long worked in popular culture to offer the tantalizing possibilities of reinvention, of getting lost, of escape into the new. However, travel is more than just a romantic fantasy about self-transformation. In fact, British travel essayist Pico Iyer argues that our travel experiences are always structured by our preconceptions about ourselves and the world; for Iyer, we can never completely escape from ourselves. Building on the ideas of Iyer and others, we will investigate what we do when we travel and the motivations that drive the urge to explore. How does travel relate to identity, gender, and self-discovery? In this course, we will probe this question and others by watching films and reading texts from a variety of genres and disciplines, examining the desires, pressures, and delusions that propel us to hit the open road or take flight. Building on ideas from the course, students will be encouraged to write papers that engage with issues related to travel and self-exploration that they find compelling.

UWS Goals:

The University Writing Seminar introduces you to the power of writing as a means of communication and as a process of thinking and understanding. You will formulate meaningful arguments, support them with observations and evidence, and convey them clearly and persuasively. You will gain the tools to be a successful and confident writer in any discipline and become an active participant in critical conversations across the University and beyond. Most importantly, these skills will prepare you to engage as an informed citizen in a global society.

UWS Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Understand writing as a recursive process of thinking and communication
- Articulate elements of effective writing and integrate them into their own work

- Participate in critical conversations by responding to openings, problems or contradictions in existing scholarship
- Assess their own and others' writing with respect to audience and purpose
- Generate original questions and pursue independent research
- Identify and evaluate sources and use them responsibly
- Develop awareness of disciplinary differences in writing and adapt their writing to different genres and contexts

Required Course Texts

To promote equity and successful outcomes for all students, the Brandeis Writing Program has implemented a zero-cost program. All required materials will be available on LATTE.

Course Requirements

Major assignment 1: Lens essay. For this essay, you will analyze the film *Thelma and Louise* through the lens of a theoretical essay by Laura Mulvey or Mikhail Bakhtin and make a claim about how concepts from the essay help to shape your understanding of *Thelma and Louise*.

Major assignment 2: Annotated bibliography.

Major assignment 3: Research essay. For this assignment you will use your research proposal as a guide to make an argument about how your case study reflects societal norms and values.

Portfolio: At the end of the term, you will assemble all of your work (including pre-draft assignments, rough drafts, final drafts, and peer review sheets) in an electronic Word document and upload it to LATTE, together with a letter describing how your understanding of yourself as a writer has changed over the course of the semester and the ways that you will use the skills from this class in other disciplines. **This means that you need to save electronically all your writing from the semester.**

Drafting:

Four steps lead up to the final draft of each essay:

- **Pre-draft assignments.** Each essay will be preceded by two or three pre-draft assignments—short pieces of writing designed to help you develop ideas. These assignments will receive either a check or a note telling you to redo the work and will count as part of your overall grade. You can re-submit any work until the end of the unit.
- **First drafts.** You are required to turn in a first draft of each paper. These drafts are important opportunities for you to receive feedback from me and your classmates in peer review. I do not expect these drafts to be polished, but I do expect them to be complete—otherwise we cannot give you useful advice.

- **Peer Review.** After the first draft of each paper is due you will form a group with two of your classmates and read each other's drafts. In class you will give your partners feedback. I will collect your peer review letters and they will count as part of your grade. These activities increase your sense of audience awareness and give you an opportunity to reflect on the concepts we have discussed in class.
- **Conferences.** Each student will have two twenty-minute zoom conferences with me, one to discuss the first draft of each major assignment. Attendance is required; missing a conference is the equivalent of missing a class. Sign-up sheets will be distributed in class.

Class participation: Your consistent participation in class sessions constitutes a significant portion of your grade and is the most critical component of a successful course. Class participation includes:

- Your prompt, prepared, alert, consistent attendance
- The completion of reading assignments by the dates listed in the syllabus
- Your thoughtful contributions to class discussions

Grading:

Researched Essay (8 pages): 35%

Lens Essay (5 pages): 25%

Writing Community Membership: 20%

- Includes **Attendance (10%) *** and **Participation (10%) ****

Annotated Bibliography: 10%

Portfolio (Pre-Drafts, Peer Letters, Reflective Cover Letter): 10%

*** Attendance**

Your experience in our UWS writing community relies on collective attendance. Studies show that academic student success is highly correlated to attendance. One of the benefits of the UWS is its small class size, and this benefit is best realized when everybody regularly attends. That said, you are permitted to miss up to 3 classes. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Each additional absence beyond those permitted will lower your Attendance grade by one full letter grade. For example, if you miss 4 classes you'd earn a B. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate. It is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work.

You are a valued and integral part of our writing community and, as such, have important responsibilities to our class regarding on-time arrival and consistent participation. Your primary obligation is social in nature: your commitment is to our course community and to making it work well. Thus, you are expected to contribute to a community atmosphere that promotes a supportive exchange of insights and ideas. Before class, complete and puzzle over assigned

reading and/or viewing and finish all homework and/or other assignments. Since much of our class time will be spent in class activities and workshops, your preparation is critical both to your success and the success of others. While in class, (1) volunteer meaningful comments and contribute to small group discussions to move discussions forward, (2) listen actively, (3) give useful and thoughtful input to members of our writing community, and (4) welcome all community members to share, learn, think, and grow.

Each of you has something exceptional to contribute, and we look forward to learning from you.

Formatting

Please submit all essays to Moodle as Word documents (no pdfs!) and to your peers in a google doc. **Microsoft Office is available to all Brandeis students for free.** You can download it from the internet using your Brandeis login. Essays must use 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. Do not enlarge your punctuation—I can tell. Essays must have a title and be double-spaced. For every written piece of work please have your name, date, course name and my name in the upper left-hand corner.

Late Work, Extensions and Minimum Page Requirements

I am usually willing to offer extensions, given legitimate reasons. **If you are afraid your work will not be completed in time, please contact me more than 24 hours before the due date and arrange for an extension. You are entitled to a 24-hour extension on either the draft OR revision of their essay but not both.** Otherwise, late work, including first submissions, will lead to a reduction of third of a grade per day (B+→B→B- and so on) on the final paper. If a paper is due electronically at 11:55 PM and you submit it at 11:56 PM, it is late. In addition, final papers that do not meet minimum page requirements will receive a third of a grade reduction for each page that the paper falls short.

Laptops and Electronic Devices

Bring your laptops to class so that you can access materials on Moodle. **Please note that the instructor may need to significantly deduct participation and attendance points if a student uses their laptop, phone, or other electronic device in an actively or passively disruptive manner. Examples of disruptive behaviors include, but are not limited to, playing online games, chatting with others online, doing work for other classes, using the electronic device instead of participating in class discussions, or otherwise engaging in behaviors that negatively impact the overall atmosphere of the seminar.**

Email Etiquette

When you write to me or another faculty member or professional, please include a greeting (“**Dear Dr. Cook**”), full sentences, proper punctuation, and your name at the bottom of the email. If you include an attachment, always include a brief explanation. This is good practice for when you enter the world beyond college.

Accommodations for Documented Disabilities

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you have a letter of accommodation, or if there is any circumstance I should be aware of that may affect your learning this semester, please see me after class or come to my office hours. I want to support you.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually in section 5 of the *Rights and Responsibilities* handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Potential sanctions include failure on the essay, failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

Artificial Intelligence

In this class, we will use writing as a way to sharpen both our critical thinking and analysis skills as well as to develop communication skills that allow us to clearly communicate our ideas. While it is appropriate to use artificial intelligence (AI) for tasks like checking spelling or grammar and brainstorming ideas, you may **not** use AI to generate full sentences, paragraphs, or papers. For example, you may not use AI to generate pre-drafts and drafts/revisions, reflections, in-class exercises, peer letters, or communications with your instructor. This is because claiming the work of others as your own, whether created by another human or by AI, is regarded as plagiarism and therefore will be subject to the penalties outlined in the “Academic Integrity” section of the syllabus. If you have any questions about appropriate or inappropriate use of AI, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Comparative Genre Analysis (CGA)

Scholars from different disciplines make different choices when writing. These choices aren’t random, but reflect what people value in their writing. For example, the nature of *evidence* depends on the type of information that makes up a discipline. In science, evidence may be the results of an empirical study; in history, evidence might include primary sources such as historical newspapers and archival documents, in English, evidence may come from a single poem or novel. Understanding that different disciplines produce different genres of writing will help you better understand what you read. It will also help you have more awareness of your own writing in the future.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In this course, we will work together to ensure that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives will be well served. The diversity and identities which students bring will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. To this end, we will engage with materials and activities that respect and honor each student’s unique experiences and perspectives. If anyone says something in class that makes you feel uncomfortable, angry, threatened, and/or excluded, please talk to me

about it (anonymously, if you prefer). Furthermore, if you feel like your performance in this class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to contact me. I want to be a resource for you.

Four-Credit Course

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Zero Cost Program

To promote equity and successful outcomes for all students, the Brandeis Writing Program has implemented a zero cost program. All required materials will be available online.

Zotero Training

[Zotero](#) is a free, easy-to-use tool to help you collect, organize, cite, and share research. All students are required to complete one of the library's Zotero Training Sessions during the semester.

Please note: the following syllabus is subject to change:

Week 1

- June* 4 Read: Syllabus
- 5 “Why We Travel” by Pico Iyer
Write: Fill out questionnaire. In addition, be prepared to discuss the following questions: 1) why do you think I assigned this? 2) What is Iyer's stance on the possibilities of travel? 3) What is your analysis of Iyer's argument?
In-Class: Introductions, syllabus, close reading

Week 2

- 10 Watch: *Thelma and Louise*
Write: Prepare an initial response to *Thelma and Louise*. How does this film relate to the themes of this course? How does the film engage with questions about travel, identity, gender, and reinvention? Did anything surprise, provoke, or puzzle you?
In-Class: *Thelma and Louise*, discussion of initial responses, lens assignment sequence, close reading of different kinds of texts
- 11 Watch: *Thelma and Louise*
Read: None
Write: Pre-draft 1.1 due on Moodle on June 11 by 12:00 P.M.
In-Class: *Thelma and Louise*, thesis, motive

- 12 Read: “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey and excerpts from Introduction to Rabelais and His World by Michael Bakhtin
Write: Pre-draft 1.2 reverse outline due on Moodle BY 12:00 P.M. on June 12.
In-Class: Mulvey and Bakhtin

Week 3

- 17 Read: None
Write: Pre-draft 1.3 mini-lens analysis due on Moodle by 12:00 P.M. on June 17.
In-Class: Integrated discussion of Thelma and Louise, Bakhtin, and Mulvey,
Write Now essay “Condemnation of Female Hunger” by Carina J. Luo, thesis
Statement, discuss outline 1.4, **Draft of lens essay due on Moodle by 11:55 P.M. on June 17.**
- 18 Read: None
Write: None
In-Class: **Conferences and Explanation of Research Unit**
Final Copy of Lens Essay Due on Moodle by 11:55 P.M. on June 22
- 19 **Juneteenth-No Class**

Week 4

- 24 Library Session, search for sources,
Annotated bibliography of four sources due on Moodle by 12:00 P.M. on June 25.
- 25 Annotated bibliography presentations, workshop research papers (introduction and opening section)
- 26 Workshop and individual consultations on research papers
Draft of Research Paper Due on Moodle by 11:55 p.m. on June 30

Week 5

- July 1 **Individual conferences and Last Class**
Revised research papers and portfolio due by 11:55 P.M. on Moodle by July 6, 2025 at 11:55 P.M.