

Course Guide for Fall 2021

All LSWA students are expected to enroll in an LSWA class each semester. LSWA 125 fulfills LSA's first year writing requirement. Students who are enrolled in the College of Engineering, the Honors College, and students who have fulfilled the first-year writing requirement over the summer can enroll in LSWA 151.001.

If you have any questions, please contact LSWA staff at LSWA@umich.edu.

LSWA 125.001: *Writing in the Surreal World*

Instructor: Scott Beal

Credits: 4

Class Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:30am-1:00pm

Location: TBD

Through all that has happened since 2020, the idea of “making sense” may seem like a quaint notion of yore. Certainly the events of the last year have shaken many of us out of our customary ways of sensemaking in our daily lives, in our understanding of relationships, of country and society and economy. And the word “surreal” has been used repeatedly to capture how strange the world recently began to feel—in response to the [pandemic](#), racial justice [protests](#), the presidential [election](#) and its [aftermath](#), and the Capitol [insurrection](#), to name a few prominent examples. But what does it mean to be *surreal*? Did things ever make sense, or had we just been deluding ourselves all along?

As scholars for writing and the arts, we are positioned to pursue two complementary objectives: (1) to appreciate more fully the precise ways our experience fails to make sense, and (2) to strive to make more sense of those things that we can. In this writing course, we will use writing to explore art and literature that evokes the nonsensical and surreal, and to unravel the seemingly nonsensical elements of our own observation and experience that might help us navigate a surreal world. Along the way, we will engage with all aspects of the writing process, from brainstorming and research to collaboration and revision—to strengthen our writing voices and build skills and strategies for communicating persuasively with academic audiences and beyond.

LSWA 125.002: *Creative Obsessions and Writing***Instructor:** Carol Tell**Credits:** 4**Class Time:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:00-2:30pm**Location:** TBD

What are your obsessions? Are they quirky and unique (and maybe embarrassing) (a schlocky song, a character from a book, your family recipe for meatloaf), or more mainstream but no less haunting (a love interest, a social identity, a sports team, the number of likes you get on Instagram)? From childhood crushes to white whales, our obsessions can be self-defining and often drive us to write/create beautiful things. But as much as they define us, they can occasionally delude or even destroy us.

This introductory writing class will allow you to explore—and write about—intellectual, aesthetic, and personal obsessions—both your own and those of writers, artists, filmmakers, and musicians. We'll read texts (from such writers as Claudia Rankine, David Foster Wallace, Jeanette Winterson, Toni Morrison, and Maurice Sendak), watch a film or two (*Brokeback Mountain* or *Parasite*), and listen to podcasts, all of which will explore obsessive love, work, and creativity. We'll also be thinking about how our current global health crisis may have inspired or shifted our own obsessions, particularly with health, isolation, and anxiety. But most of all, you'll be figuring out how to write effectively for college—and hopefully become obsessed with how to parse a writing prompt, what words like “argument” and “revision” really mean, and how to move (quickly) beyond the five-paragraph essay to create complex and challenging essays.

LSWA 125.003: *Border Crossings***Instructor:** Naomi Silver**Credits:** 4**Class Time:** Mondays & Wednesdays 10:00-11:30am**Location:** TBD

Walking across a bridge from Ciudad Juarez to El Paso. Starting to take T. Marrying someone who isn't Jewish. Finding just the right word for the line of poetry you're translating. Driving south across 8 Mile to go to a club downtown. Coming out. Letting your new friends think you're white. Leaving your small town for a prestigious college in another state.

What do these actions have in common? They can all be read as examples of border crossing – some literal, some metaphorical, some more dangerous or more policed, some more liberatory or more mundane. In this class, we will investigate border crossings in all of these forms. We will ask: What are the dominant narratives we have been told about borders and border crossing? What stories do we tell ourselves? What makes a border appear threatening or inviting? How do personal and social identities play a role in who gets to cross which borders, and how safely? How do history, politics, and power structures play a role?

To help us answer these questions, we will explore materials from fiction to film, from historical documents to contemporary journalism, from visual art to live performance. By composing analytical essays, narratives, and multimedia, we will think and write about others' border crossings and our own. We will also test the "border" between writing for academic and more general audiences, learning to shape our own voices as we also practice thorough research, precise argumentation, and other habits important for college writing.

LSWA 125.004: *Monsters and Beasts*

Instructor: Angela Berkley

Credits: 4

Class Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30-4:00pm

Location: TBD

Zombies, vampires, werewolves, cyborgs, yetis, witches, ghosts, demons and countless others—they stalk us relentlessly from the pages of our favorite novels and stories. Their creepy images haunt us from movie and TV screens—and we love every minute of it, however frightened we might be. Plenty of these monsters are beastly, but many of the beasts we love just as much as we love monsters aren't scary at all. What, if anything, do the monsters who scare us and the beasts who charm us, have in common? Why do we fear these beastly monsters, and why do we love them? What's behind our enduring urge to create and consume narratives of these inhuman imaginary beings? *Are* they as inhuman as they seem—or is what captivates us about monsters the unsettling suggestions and foreboding images they offer us about who and what we really are?

In this course, we'll be reading plenty of fictions and critiques about monsters and beasts and writing some of our own. We'll read and discuss and write towards expertise about the cultural and political meanings of the monsters we create and the literary and multimedia genres they haunt—from academic works of literary scholarship to online fan fiction forums; from novels taught in college English courses to comic books. We'll engage with each other as we develop insights and conclusions about what it means to be a monster-and-beast lover in 2021, practicing our readerly and writerly skills together—skills that you'll readily be able to apply to the writing that awaits you beyond this course.

LSWA 125.005: *Weird Things: Critical Thinking about Extraordinary Phenomena*

Instructor: Cat Cassel

Credits: 4

Class Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:30-4:00pm

Location: TBD

[Three out of four Americans believe in the paranormal.](#) [One in four Americans believe in haunted houses.](#) [One in eleven Americans believe in Bigfoot.](#) In Michigan alone, there have been [over two hundred purported sightings](#) of Bigfoot, seven of which were recorded in Washtenaw County, according to the Bigfoot Researchers Organization. A recent [poll](#) of Americans asked whether they believe that “a group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media”—17% responded yes, and 37% said they didn’t know. Superstitious, magical, pseudoscientific, and conspiracy thinking all share in common ungrounded beliefs not supported in current evidence. Pitting reason against faith, credible claims against anecdotal evidence and personal beliefs, these ways of thinking have the capacity to unravel our sense of shared social reality.

We will explore critical thinking and writing through the lens of “weird things.” To do this, we will investigate a range of analytical, evaluative, argumentative, and creative strategies for writing. We’ll also dabble in a range of perspectives and cultural documents, including television, film, fiction, poetry, art, research-based podcasts, Reddit’s r/changemyview, philosophy, long-form popular journalism, and academic writing from a range of disciplines. Topics include the paranormal, the fantastic, cryptozoology, lore, urban legends, mentalism, cognitive biases and fallacies, baloney and bullshit detection, skepticism, illusions of causality, speculative futurism, superstition, magic, pseudoscience, and conspiracy thinking.

You can expect to explore the concepts raised in our course in essays that target core college-level analytical and argumentative writing skills, including developing intriguing and original claims, supporting those claims with credible and clearly explained evidence, conducting independent research, structuring the progression of your argument, anticipating and responding to counterarguments, and more! We will understand writing as a process and a practice, and you’ll have abundant opportunities to share ideas and writing with myself and peers.

LSWA 125.006: *Our TV, Our Selves: The Rhetoric of Television*

Instructor: Shelley Manis

Credits: 4

Class Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:00-11:30am

Location: TBD

How many times have you heard someone say (or have *you* said), “It’s just TV!” In this class, those, as they say, are “fightin’ words.” Television—from high drama like *Breaking Bad* to goofy animation like *Bob’s Burgers*—makes *meaning*, makes *arguments*. Television both reflects and creates current attitudes about public issues; and it can and should inspire important, sometimes difficult, conversations. I’ve designed this course around one major question that should be important to those of us who love TV (or who hate it!), who *live* for the next episode of *Riverdale* or the next season of *Queer Eye*, or who would rather eat glass than watch *Game of Thrones*: How does TV make meaning? How does it contribute to our senses of self—as individuals, as citizens or residents of the U.S. and/or other home nations, as [you-fill-in-the-blank]?

The content that we study will be television; the end result of our study will be an intimate relationship with rigorous thinking, writing, and revising processes.

We will practice strategies of close reading, thick description, research, analysis, reflection, revision, and responding in writing to a variety of texts: television episodes and series (some chosen by me, some by you), academic articles, podcasts, and mainstream publications. We will engage in the kinds of tasks you will be asked to do often as a college student: blogging, social media writing, informal writing, planning and conducting research, review writing, analytical essay writing, etc. We will argue about the virtues and shortcomings of the shows we watch. We will disagree (respectfully but enthusiastically) about all manner of things. We will “live every week like it’s shark week.”

This will all help you look anew at something you likely know well (tv) as you practice making dynamic, savvy, even artistic academic arguments. And we’ll hopefully have a lot of fun doing it.

“Clear eyes, full hearts, can’t lose.”

LSWA 151.001: *Mini-Course on Creativity and Creative Projects*

Instructor: Carol Tell

Credits: 1

Class Time: Fridays, 2:00-3:00pm

Location: TBD

College is a time not just to pursue a major or profession, but to ask big questions of ourselves and our world: Who are we? What do we want? What kind of creative work might we produce that helps us explore these questions?

In this discussion-based seminar, we will explore how different writers and artists interpret such topics as identity, purpose, community, and aesthetics. But the major focus of the class will be your creative work. Students will work on their own long-term creative project in the genre of their choice, get feedback on their project, and reflect on the experience.

LSWA 230.001: *Creative Communities*

Instructor: Mark Tucker

Credits: 3

Class Time: Fridays, 11:00am-2:00pm

Location: TBD

LSWA Student Assistants (SAs) in this class will co-design a creative community within Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts while collaborating and building community connections in the Ann Arbor region. This year we will be working closely with the Youth Arts Alliance, helping to develop arts- and writing-related projects we can share virtually with underserved youth in after-school programs, community centers, and carceral settings. Through inventive planning, organizing, and implementation, SAs will also collaborate to create their own community-oriented public artworks. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to attend professional arts events and theatrical performances on- and off-campus. Throughout the course SAs will analyze and synthesize their creative experiences via dynamic group discussions and reflection projects.

Note: LSWA 230.001 is limited to sophomore student leaders in Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts.