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# WRITING NEW JERSEY CULTURES

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## SYLLABUS

WRIT-106

The Writing Studies Department

Montclair State University, Spring 2023

With Professor Melanie Curran - email: [curranm@montclair.edu](mailto:curranm@montclair.edu)

Tuesdays and Fridays - 9:45 to 11 am

Schmitt 319

Virtual office hours available by appointment

## **Course Description**

New Jersey real, New Jersey imagined. New Jersey is thrown around in speech and popular culture, though it is seldom understood. The effort of our class is to write New Jersey as we understand it. To do this, you will conduct ethnographic research on a New Jersey Culture of your choice - most likely one that you are personally a part of. Through vast amounts of in-class work *doing writing*, and through the drafting, revision and research processes, you will produce original research projects. Your final drafts will be shining examples of undergraduate fieldwork. The skills you glean here will be transferrable to the rest of your college experience, as well as to your careers as writers, thinkers and citizens.

Just as New Jersey is indeterminate, is undefinable, is a place of possibility and marshes and hauntings and sprawl and language and music, so too will our course be a shifting realm of potentialities. Be prepared to write by hand, try out automatic writing, explore multimodality, and experiment ethnographically.

Welcome to *Writing New Jersey Cultures\**.

-Professor Melanie Curran

*\*Inspired by Writing American Cultures, a course by Nancy Koppelman, Chico Herbison and Sam Schragar at The Evergreen State College, 2012.*

## **Readings**

Our class will use the free, open source textbook called:

*Engaging Communities: Writing Ethnographic Research* by Suzanne Blum Malley and Ames Hawkins.

Find it here:

<http://www.engagingcommunities.org/>

I will assign readings to inspire and inform our work together. I will provide PDFs of any text assigned, via Canvas. Readings may include:

*New Jersey Dreaming: Capital, Culture, and the Class of '58* by Sherry B. Otner

*Lifeblood of The Parish: Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn* by Alyssa Maldonado Estrada

*The Body and the City Project: Young Black Women Making Space, Community, and Love in Newark, New Jersey* by Aimee Cox

*Born to Run* by Bruce Springsteen

*The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* by Amiri Baraka

*I Drum, I Sing, I Dance: An Ethnography of a West African Drum and Dance Ensemble* by Marissa Silverman

*Dr. Smartphones: An Ethnography of Mobile Phone Repair Shops* by Nicolas Nova and Anaïs Bloch

*Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture* by Michael Moffatt

*The Destabilization of Italian-American Identity on Jersey Shore* by Sara Troyani

*The American Diner Waitress: An Autoethnographic Study of The Icon* by Heidi Liane Hasbrouck

*Gentrification Down The Shore* by Mary Gatta and Molly Vollman Makris

*Class Action Park* directed by Seth Porges and Chris Charles Scott

## Schedule

### Module 1 - Self in Jersey

### Module 2 - Others in Jersey

### Module 3 - Jersey in The World

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

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Just as New Jersey is indeterminate, is undefinable, a place of possibility and wishes and hauntings and sprawl and language and music, so too will our course be a shifting realm of potential. Be prepared to write by hand, try out automatic writing, explore multimodality, and experiment ethnographically.

Prepare to celebrate New Jersey and the cultures which make up its vibrant reality.

Professor Carran

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## Readings

Our course will use the free, open source textbook called

- Engaging Communities
- WRITING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH -  
by Suzanne Blum Malley, Amos Hauerli

EngagingCommunities.org

\*C.O.L.I.C.K.\*

I'll assign readings to inspire & inform our work together! Readings may be from:

NEW JERSEY DREAMING: Capital, Culture, and the Class of '58 by Sherry B. Diner

The Anthropology of LeRoi Jones by Aminah Baraka

Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture by Michael Moffette

Lifeworld of the Parish Men and Catholic Devotion in Williamsburg, Brooklyn by Nisha Patel/Sheela Estrada

I BEM, I sing, I Dance: An Ethnography of Black African Drum and Dance Ensemble by Marissa Silverman

The American Diner waitress: An Auto-ethnographic study of the 'don't' by Heidi Jane Hoshorn

The Body and the City: Black Young Black Women Making Space, Community, and Love in Newark, New Jersey by Aimée Cox

DR. Smartphones: an ethnography of mobile phone use by Nicole Nara, Anali Black

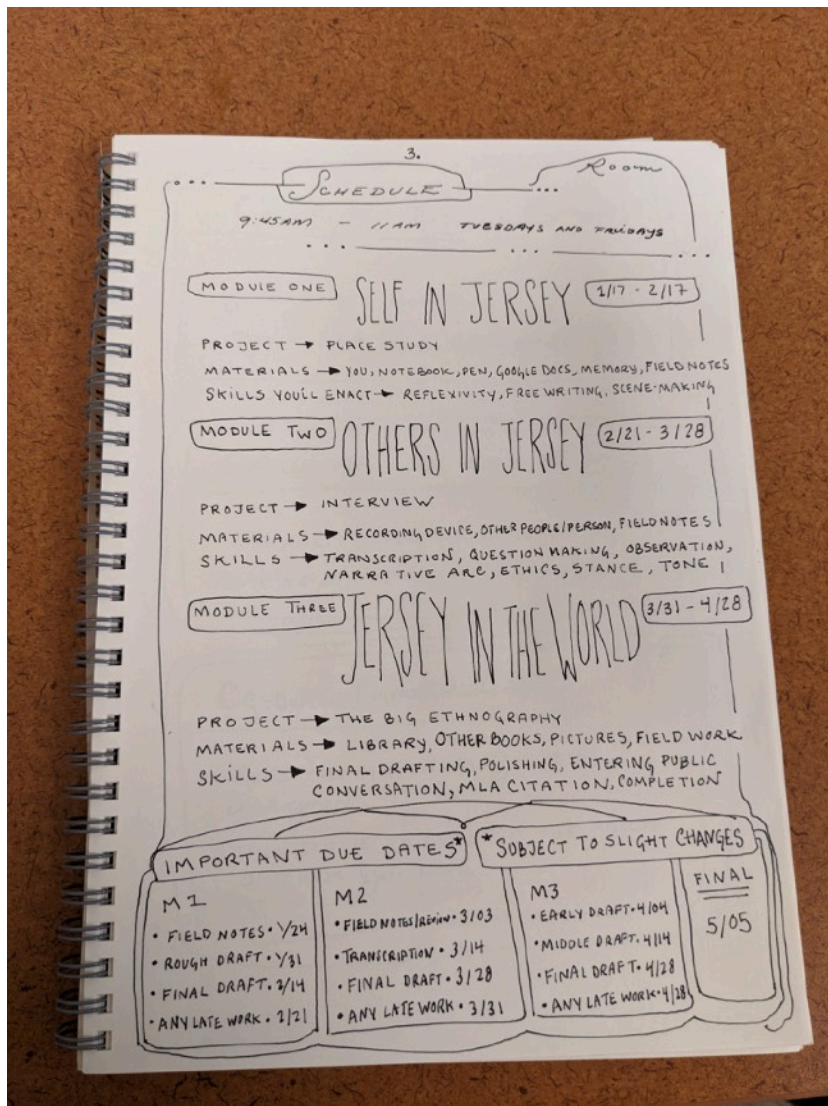
Class Action Film directed by Sean Fogarty + Chris Charlesworth

Born To Run by Bruce Springsteen

Maybe a book that you write someday!  
by YOU!

maybe a book that I write someday,  
by me!





### **M1 - Self in Jersey - 1/17 - 2/17**

*Project* - Place Study

*Materials* - You, Notebook, Pen(cil), Google Docs, Memory, Field Notes

*Skills You'll Enact* - Reflexivity, free writing, scene-making

### **M2 - Others in Jersey - 2/21 - 3/28**

*Project* - Interview

*Materials* - Recording Device, Other People / Person, Field Notes

*Skills* - Transcription, Question Making, Observation, Narrative Arc, Ethics, Stance, Tone

### **M3 - Jersey in The World 3/31 - 4/28**

*Project* - The Big Ethnography

*Materials* - Library, Other Books, Pictures, Fieldwork

*Skills* - Final Drafting, Polishing, Entering Public Conversation, MLA Citation, Completion

### **Final - 5/05**



## **Projects:**

### **1. Place Study**

- Field Notes [1/24]
- Rough Draft [1/31]
- Final Draft [2/14]

### **2. Interview**

- Field Notes and Human Subjects Review [3/03]
- Transcription and Notes [3/14]
- Final Draft [3/28]

### **3. The Big Ethnography**

- Reflexive Early Draft [4/04]
- Research-Heavy Middle Draft [4/14]
- Snazzy Final Draft [4/28]

### **4. Optional Assignments**

- Attend the American Ethnological Society's Spring Meeting at Princeton University, March 23-25
- Create a Brochure for your classmates
- Make a multimodal version of your ethnography

## **Learning Outcomes**

- Reconnect with the power of writing by hand
- Conduct original research - comfort in interview, field-research, reflection about participation and observation.
- Become a great navigator of library databases, collections, and resources both electronic and analog.
- Have some weird experiences with the time space continuum, grow to question the past, the present, and, of course, the future.
- Make conscious rhetorical choices.
- Analyze the world you are a part of.
- Understand the Process of revision, drafting, editing, word-cutting, and polishing. Understand, know, and trust the power of this process.
- Time and project management.
- Transforming a personal interest into a research project, into composition.
- Faith and trust in your personal brilliance and innate knowledge.
- Comfort with the medium of writing as a way to express your thoughts and ideas.
- Ability to conduct relevant and creative secondary research.
- Experience citizenship in the scholarly world.

### **Please come prepared. You will need:**

- A special notebook for use in class each and every time we meet.
- Your favorite pen or pencil.
- Yourself. Willingness. Curiosity.
- Access to your memories, especially Jersey ones.

### **You will not need:**

- A smartphone. Any phone. Phones are banned.

### **You will sometimes need:**

- Laptop.



## **Labor-based Grading Assessment Ecology**

From the research of Asao B. Inoue

<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/inoue/ecologies.pdf>

You're graded on the *labor* you put into your work and this class. You are not graded upon "the quality" of your writing. There is no good or bad or correct or incorrect writing. As your professor, I am not the arbiter of right and wrong. I love grammar. I love punctuation. I love formatting. I love when writing makes sense. My role is to show you where you can grow as a writer, and what habits you can let go of.

You will receive a letter grade which corresponds to how much you turn in, whether those assignments are complete, and how much you are here in class (attendance). Our class will have a grading contract we agree upon and sign together. As long as you do what is required of you and earnestly strive to better your work, one assignment at a time, you will succeed.

At any point, you can do a self-assessment to discover your own grade. Just check your work against the grading contract! I will give you a midterm grade and a final grade. Your grade will not be updated automatically in the online world as our class happens. When in doubt

-  
DO ALL OF YOUR WORK.

## 5. LABOR-BASED GRADING, ASSESSMENT

FROM THE RESEARCH-WRITING OF ASAD & HOVE

You are graded on the LABOR you put into your work and this class. You are not graded upon "the quality" of your writing. There is no good or bad or correct or incorrect writing. As your professor, I am not the Arbitrator of what is right & wrong. I love grammar & punctuation & formatting. I love when writing makes sense. My role is to show you where you can grow as a writer, and what habits you can let go of.

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At any point, you can do a self assessment to discover your own grade. Just check your work against the grading contract. I will give you a midterm + final grade. Your grade will not be updated automatically in the online world as our class happens. When in doubt -

DO ALL OF YOUR WORK.

## Learning Outcomes

- ⊙ RECONNECT WITH THE POWER OF WRITING BY HAND
- ★ CONDUCT ORIGINAL RESEARCH - CONFORT IN INTERVIEW, FIELD RESEARCH, REFLECTION ABOUT PARTICIPATION + OBSERVATION
- 📖 BECOME A GREAT NAVIGATOR OF LIBRARY DATABASES, COLLECTIONS, RESOURCES ELECTRONIC AND ANALOG
- ⊙ HAVE SOME WEIRD EXPERIENCES WITH THE TIME SPACE CONTINUUM, GROW TO QUESTION THE PAST + THE PRESENT + OF COURSE, THE FUTURE
- MAKE CONSCIOUS RHETORICAL CHOICES
- △ ANALYZE THE WORLD YOU ARE A PART OF
- ✂ UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF REVISION, DRAFTING, EDITING, WORD-CUTTING, AND POLISHING. UNDERSTAND, KNOW, AND TRUST THE POWER OF THIS PROCESS.
- 🕒 TIME AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT
- 🔍 TRANSFORMING A PERSONAL INTEREST INTO A PROJECT, INTO RESEARCH. INTO COMPOSITION
- ⊙ FAITH AND TRUST IN YOUR PERSONAL BRILLIANCE + INNATE KNOWLEDGE
- ! COMFORT WITH THE MEDIUM OF WRITING AS A WAY TO EXPRESS YOUR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS
- ! ABILITY TO CONDUCT RELEVANT, CREATIVE SECONDARY RESEARCH
- ⊙ Experience Citizenship in the Scholarly World

## OUR PROJECTS

1. PLACE STUDY
  - FIELD NOTES
  - ROUGH DRAFT
  - FINAL DRAFT
2. INTERVIEW
  - FIELD NOTES + HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW
  - TRANSCRIPTION + NOTES
  - FINAL DRAFT
3. THE BIG ETHNOGRAPHY
  - REFLEXIVE EARLY DRAFT
  - RESEARCH-HEAVY MIDDLE DRAFT
  - SNAZZY FINAL DRAFT

our projects will build upon one another

each project will inform the next

### WANT TO BOOST YOUR GRADE???

- EXTRA PROJECTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:
- ATTEND THE AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY'S SPRING MEETING AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY MARCH 23-25
  - CREATE A BROCHURE FOR YOUR CLASSMATES
  - MAKE A MULTIMODAL VERSION OF YOUR ETHNOGRAPHY

## Writing NEW JERSEY

Calluses ♀ or ♀ WRIT 106-01

THE WRITING STUDIES DEPARTMENT M.S.U. 2033

with Professor Melanie Curran

email: Curranm@montclair.edu

Tuesdays - Fridays 9:45 am - 11 am

OUR ROOM?? SCHMITT 314

..... IN-PERSON AGAIN.....

OFFICE HOURS ON ZOOM ARE AVAILABLE BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

### PLEASE COME PREPARED → you will need

- 📖 A special notebook for use in class each and every time we meet. Also, your favorite
- ✎ Pen or Pencil
- 🧠 yourself. Willingness. Curiosity.
- 🧠 Access to your memories, especially Jersey ones.

YOU WILL NOT NEED = 📱 A smartphone. Any phone phones are banned.

💻 BUT LAPTOP???. You will SOMETIMES NEED.



## ***Communication Preferences***

- Practice good, respectful writing in your emails with me. This is a chance for you to do your best writing in a casual setting.
- I read and respond to emails only on the days I teach- Tuesdays and Fridays. I am not available on other days to respond to emails.



## ***Earning an A***

You begin this course with a B. In order to maintain that grade, you must follow the terms of the grading contract we create in class. Based on criteria such as missing assignments and absences, you can slip to a C or below.

In order to earn an A grade, you must complete an Optional Assignment. You can increase your overall grade by one grade level by completing an Optional Assignment:

- *ATTEND AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING MEETING*
- *CREATE A BROCHURE FOR YOUR CLASSMATES*
- *MAKE A MULTIMODAL ETHNOGRAPHY*

Note that the optional assignments are optional—you should only complete them if you want an A in the class. If you want your grade to go up one letter, you have this happen by completing an optional assignment.



### ***Late Work***

All work for the module we're in is due at the end of that module.