**But First, Let Me Take A Selfie**

In conversation with colleagues, they often question my willingness to “friend” students on different social networks. It’s worth noting that I typically don’t seek them—if they friend request me, I generally accept. Nothing on my profile is hidden. You might say I’m an open book or a narcissist (a distinction I just heard from Amazon’s new show Betas). I’ve thought a lot about this “openness” and it’s driven by my desire not to separate my “teaching/research” self from my “online self”—I see them as part of the same “me”. I’m not “constructing” an identity online, per se, but rather expressing what I like, have to say, converse, whatever

Constructing identity: what defines the “selfie”? Does the person have to be fully in it? Face? Body parts (sexting)? What does selfie mean? That I took a picture of myself by myself? But then, what’s the “self” that’s being captured? I think that’s something we need to focus on first. I’ll admit, I’m not sure what “selfie” means exactly (and I’m certainly not alone in this). I’ll start asking around, especially to my students—they might have a better idea (or at least a more comprehensive understanding of what it means.)

Here’s some (completely scientific ha) feedback I got from asking friends on facebook.  
How do you define selfie? (their posts follow)  
*• At least 75%of the face, and from the nipple up  
• I just had an interesting debate about whether the selfie is little more than the old photo booth series revisited w new technology.  
• I think people tend to stretch the term more than they should -- selfies are solo pics and should involve the face because that's the effort behind the positioning - making sure your face is in the pic was always the hardest thing to do before front-facing cameras. It's really too bad the term "groupies" already existed ... Haha  
• Well, front-facing smart phone cams, I mean (of course)   
• Enough of your face to be recognizable. Usually for silly hair shots or feeling happy with my appearance (once in a great while when that happens)  
• it has to be taken by the subject of the photo...  
• Oxford says: ""A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website."  
• Yes. you have to take it and be in it. I'd say.  
• I don't think the camera device is relevant to the resulting selfie.  
• I don't think it requires being uploaded to social media. The photo may also be sent privately by text or PM.  
• Also, I travel alone quite a bit in foreign countries or in the back country when there's no one to ask for a photo. It's nice to have a couple shots that have a human element.  
• My teenage daughters say their generation takes the selfie to document when they look good.*

As teased above, and following the lead of Mark Marino and Miriam Posner (they both teach well respected and open access courses on selfies), I’ll also be teaching a course on selfies in the winter 2016 semester. I mean, after Kim Kardashian’s *Selfish* was released, how could I resist? But really, Selfish is a focused (and actually very interesting) visual narrative of her life over the past few years. In the Winter 2016 semester, I’ll be asking my students to “write” using selfies. Self-reflection is key in the writing classroom, but visual self-presentation is often ignored. Not anymore. We’ll be investigating the use of self-presentation in the contemporary age. Sure, these aren’t new ideas, but there are new tools with which interrogate them (did someone say selfie sticks…?).

More specifically, my course will follow closely the existing structure designed and used by the [Selfie Researchers Network.](http://www.selfieresearchers.com/the-selfie-course/) While their course only had six weeks, I’ll be following and expanding upon the themes discussed in that course: Identity and Interpellation; Celebrity and Branding; Dataveillance, Biometrics, and Facial Recognition; Gender, Sexuality, and Dating; The Subaltern, Criminal, and “Others”; and Place, Space, and “Appropriate” Selfies. Since my course is ultimately a writing course, the innovative aspect of it will rely on using selfies to write about these topics. I’m imagining a multi-modal approach to my assignments—integrating selfies about the topic (of oneself and others) with more traditional writing interspersed to explain the narrative connection of the images. Students will likely use digital platforms to construct all assignments—they won’t be submitting “Word docs” as essays. Instead, I’ll be interested in the intersection between the images they use/create/combine alongside the text they choose to explain the images. Most major assignments will be heavy on the imagery, so validating this as a writing course might be a tough sell. (I know when I ask my students to do a bunch of small writing assignments, they don’t think of it as writing, even though by the end of the semester they’ve done much more writing than they would’ve if they had written a few long essays.) The question of “quantity v. quality” will be something I’ll have to think through carefully as I continue to plan this course. Another approach to using selfies in my course will be something I haven’t seen in other selfie courses—documenting the writing process via selfies. How cool would it be to ask students to continuously take selfies as they’re composing?! I’m imagining lots of frustrated images (probably multiple images of people with blank screens behind them). As a writing instructor, I often ask my students to partake in meta-cognitive exercises about their writing process—questions along the lines how did you feel? what was the most challenging? the most rewarding? We all have our own method of “getting through” writing—but I’m imagining the “writing process selfies” will showcase an entirely different affective display of how individuals “do” writing. I’m interested in their settings, their facial expressions, even dress. In my opinion, I think this will be the most interesting aspect of the course. I’m very curious to see how my students document their writing with selfies.

Some of the challenges of this course will be trying to figure out how to “grade” such narratives. I’m not an art prof (ahem, Mike), so composition or quality of images won’t be high on my list. But teaching students to write with images and then grading them not on the image itself but on how well a collection of images tells a story will cause chaos, I’m sure. At least, chaos on my end. To address this issue, we’ll be looking at a bunch of examples of selfie narratives, including but definitely not limited to Kim Kardashian’s book. Students are great at creating visual narratives in spaces like Snapchat and Instagram, but getting them to think about casual images as narrative will be the challenge. Once that paradigm shift starts to happen, I think the grading issue will fall into place. Once everyone understands the importance of using images to craft a narrative, I anticipate that grading images will be very similar to grading writing.

And so, to close this talk let’s take a selfie!