

**ENGL 212: Topics in Critical Writing**  
**Selfies<sup>1</sup>**  
**Winter 2016 – M/W 10:00-11:20 am – C 227A**

**Professor:** Dr. Kim Lacey (please, call me Kim!)  
**In-person office hours:** M/W 12-2 pm  
and by appointment  
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**Course hashtag:** #SelfiesW16

**Course style:** This course will be conducted as a seminar, meaning you are expected to come to class ready to participate. There will be very few lectures—your inquiry, confusion, and interests will drive our in-class conversations. Be ready to talk each day we meet.

**Course Definitions:** For the purposes of this course, we'll define the term "selfie" as any photograph an individual (or a group) takes of themselves, regardless of whether that photo is privately held (or is thought to be privately held), transferred to others, or is displayed via social networks like Facebook and Instagram.

The fact that "selfie" was Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year for 2013 indicates that the selfie is a topic of popular interest. Yet for scholars, the selfie phenomenon represents a paradox. As an object, the selfie lends itself to cultural scorn and shaming. As a cultural practice, however, selfie circulation grows by the moment, moving far beyond the clichéd province of bored teenagers online.

### **Course Questions**

*Selfie as discourse:* What is the history (or histories) of the selfie? How do these histories map to contemporary media and scholarly discourses regarding self-representation, autobiography, photography, amateurism, branding, and/or celebrity?

*Selfie as evidence:* What are the epistemological ramifications of the selfie? How do selfies function as evidence that one attended an event, feels intimate with a partner, was battered in a parking lot, is willing to be 'authentic' with fans, or claims particular standing in a social or political community? One uploaded, how do selfies become evidence of a different sort, subject to possibilities like 'revenge porn', data mining, or state surveillance?

*Selfie as affect:* What feelings do selfies elicit for those who produce, view, and/or circulate them? What are we to make of controversial genres like infant selfies, soldier selfies, selfies with homeless people, or selfies at funerals? How do these discourses about controversial selfies map to larger conversations about "audience numbness" and "empathy deficit" in media?

*Selfie as ethics:* Who practices "empowering" selfie generation? Who does not? Who cannot? How do these questions map to larger issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion and geography? What responsibilities do those who circulate selfies of others have toward the original creator of the photo?

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<sup>1</sup> Course adapted from the Selfies Research Network, available under Creative Commons licensing.

What is the relationship between selfies and other forms of documentary photography, with regard to ethics?

*Selfie as performance/presentation of self:* While this aspect might be considered self-evident. We must pay attention to the tension between spontaneity and staging in the way that selfies serve as a performance and presentation of self in global and social media contexts. Also – when does the selfie as genre become a standard and format for staging authenticity in marketing and social activist campaigns across cultures? To what effect and what purpose?

**Texts:**

All texts are located on Canvas under “Pages” → “Readings”

**A note about the content of our course:** We will be dealing with very complex and mature subject matters this semester. A lot of the content we read will be *profane, graphic, violent, and sexually explicit*. If such topics bother or deeply offend you, this is probably not a course that best fits your needs. Please know that I do not expect you to agree with everything we discuss, but I do ask that you have an open mind and engage with the texts in an appropriately professional and academic manner. Some of the material we will be discussing is highly sensitive and incredibly personal. Please note that you are never under any circumstance expected to self-disclose any information you do not want to. As a member of this class, you must also respect others who do self-disclose information (this includes but is not limited to sexual orientation, gender identification, social and personal experiences, etc.). Confidentiality is an important aspect of our classroom experience.

**Grading (assignment details are on Canvas under the “Assignments” tab):**

**Assignments**

Discussion questions (5): 4% each (20% total)

Reflection essays (5): 5% each (25% total)

Image Production Assignments (5): 5% each (25% total)

Case Studies (5): 4% each (20% total)

In-class professional work ethic: 10%

**Grading Scale**

↑95%: A

↑90%: A-

↑87%: B+

↑83%: B

↑80%: B-

↑77%: C+

↑73%: C

↑60%: D

0%: F

*Special note on the grading scale:* SVSU does not assign C-, D+, D- grades. Anything below a 73% will result in a D. Anything below a 60% will result in a F.

*Special note about professional in-class work ethic:* Full credit requires that you show thorough preparation and focused participation in all required activities, arrive to class prepared with your work completed. Although I do not take attendance in this course, you are *required* to arrive on time. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, you will be asked to leave the class for the day. It is disrespectful to me and to your classmates. If you cannot respect your classmates and me by showing up on time, then you are not welcome to participate in that day's activities. I do notice when you're not in class. If missing class becomes a regular habit, your professional in-class work ethic grade will be effected.

*Special note about extra credit and extensions:* I do not give extra credit or extensions. Please complete all assignments to the best of your capabilities on time.

**Course Policies:** The decision to take this course is yours, but once you make that decision, you have responsibilities to everyone else in this community of learners. It is your responsibility to abide by the following course policies in order to contribute to our classroom's productivity.

**Attendance:** It is in your best interest to attend class regularly. Attendance means much more than simply showing up to class. Attendance in ENGL 212 means being present in class through active participation, sharing insightful ideas, completing homework, and willingness to ask questions. Please find a classmate and exchange e-mail addresses. In case you miss class, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate to find out what you missed. You will miss something each class you do not attend. Do not email me asking "Did I miss anything?" because the answer will always be "Yes." You need to take responsibility for your actions—absences included. My office hours will not be used as a "make-up" class period.

**E-mail:** Check your e-mail daily. It's the university's official mode of communication, and there is no excuse why you shouldn't check it often. You need to have internet access for this course. Our campus is wireless and many other locations off campus also have free Wi-Fi, so be sure to take advantage. If you are having difficulty connecting, make sure you call my office (989-964-2016). Not having access is not an excuse.

**Grade Postings:** All grades will be posted on Canvas. I will not share grades on social media.

**Technology Policy:** I encourage you to use whatever note taking system you prefer. If, however, you choose to use a personal computing device, you are asked that it be used for class work and not for homework for your other classes. Phones must be turned to silent during class time. If you are expecting an important phone call during class, please sit near the door so you can leave the room without disrupting others. I understand the need to feel connected, so cell phones are not banned in our class. However, you are required to be an active member of our learning community. If you feel that you can multi-task effectively and participate in class discussions, then feel free to do so. Just be aware that I will call on people at random if the discussion is dead. If you are not prepared to participate because you are distracted, this may affect your final professionalism grade.

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**Late Work: Late work is unacceptable.** Please ensure that your work is submitted on time. The deadlines are clearly marked on all assignments and on the syllabus. If you know a due date conflicts with something outside of class, plan ahead and submit your assignment early. I will send a confirmation e-mail by 8 am the next morning. If you do not receive a confirmation e-mail, I did not receive your paper. If Canvas is not working, please email me your paper. I will not accept the excuse that you couldn't log on to Canvas.

**Drafts:** I encourage you to submit drafts of your papers to me via email for feedback. I will accept drafts up to 48 hours before the due date. I will provide feedback, but I will not give a "grade" on a draft.

**Special note about in-class work:** Because a lot of our writing will take place in class, you are expected to participate. I will only allow you to make up work for extenuating circumstances and only if you provide sufficient documentation by the next class meeting.

**Disability and Non-Discrimination Clause:** Students with disabilities which may restrict their full participation in course activities are encouraged to meet with the instructor or contact the SVSU Office of Disability Services, Curtis Hall, Room C-112, Phone: 989-964-4168. SVSU does not discriminate based on race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, physical impairment, disability, or veteran status in the provision of education, employment, and other services.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** According to the *SVSU Student Handbook*, "Academic integrity is undermined whenever one is dishonest in the pursuit of knowledge. Dishonesty takes many forms, including cheating, plagiarism, and other activities for undermining the educational process and will be reported to the Academic Conduct Board for further sanctions.

Forms of plagiarism include directly transcribing (copying) without quotation and attribution, summarizing without attribution, paraphrasing or patchwork paraphrasing without attribution, patching electronic materials (including pictures, graphs, and/or charts) without attribution. In ENGL 212 deliberate plagiarism or cheating in any form will result in the grade of zero (0) for the entire assignment

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**Writing Center Information:** One of the many advantages of this University is the Writing Center. You are strongly encouraged to meet with a tutor to discuss your writing. Sessions at the Writing Center are available on a first come, first serve basis. Please stop by the Writing Center anytime you need additional help.

Writing Center Hours: M-R 9am-7pm; F 10am-2pm  
Location: Zahnow 308 (3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the library)  
Phone: 989-964-6061  
Website: [www.svsu.edu/writingcenter](http://www.svsu.edu/writingcenter)

## Course Calendar

Please note: all readings must be completed before that day's class. Not coming prepared with the reading completed will affect your in-class work professionalism grade.

A note on the reading: You will have a reading assignment almost every day. Make sure you plan time in your homework schedule for reading. Please have access to the assigned readings in class. We will use them at different times for different in-class activities.

Date	Reading, etc.	Assignment due
<b>Part I: Identity</b>		
M, 1/11	Introduction to course	
W, 1/13	Syllabus details Introductions Course questions	
M, 1/18 No Class: University Closed	No Class: University Closed	
W, 1/20	Rettberg: <i>Seeing Ourselves through Technology</i> (the whole thing): 1-88	
M, 1/25	"Questions of Identity"	
W, 1/27	Goffman: "Presentation of Self In Everyday Life"	Part I: Image production due
M, 2/1	In-class case studies	
W, 2/3	In-class discussion question and image production share	Part I: Discussion questions due
<b>Part II: Branding and Celebrity</b>		
M, 2/8	Saltz, "At Arm's Length"	Part I: Reflection Essay Due
W, 2/10	No Class: Kim's at a conference	
M, 2/15	Swift, "Swift, "For Taylor Swift, the Future of Music is a Love Story." Franco, "The Meaning of the Selfie"	
W, 2/17	In-class image production share	Part II: Image Production Due
M, 2/22	In-class case studies	
W, 2/24	In-class discussion question share	Part II: Discussion questions due
<b>Part III: Dataveillance, Biometrics, and Facial Recognition</b>		
M, 2/29	Van Dijck, "Datafication, Dataism, and Dataveillance" Lomas, "Smile: Your Selfie is a Mugshot for the NSA"	Part II: Reflection Essay Due
W, 3/2	Losh, "Beyond Biometrics"	
M, 3/7	No class: Spring break	

W, 3/9	No class: Spring break	
M, 3/14	In-class case studies	
W, 3/16	In-class discussion question and image production share	Part III: Image Production AND Discussion questions due
<b>Part IV: Sexuality, Dating, and Gender</b>		
M, 3/21	Albury, Funnell, Noonan, "The Politics of Sexting"	Part III: Reflection Essay Due
W, 3/23	Tindenberg, "Bringing Sexy Back"	
M, 3/28	boyd and Marwick, "Social Privacy in Networked Publics"	Part IV: Image production due
W, 3/30	In-class case studies	
M, 4/4	In-class discussion question and image production share	Part IV: Discussion questions due
<b>Part V: Space, Place, and Appropriateness Debates</b>		
W, 4/6	boyd, "super publics"	Part IV: Reflection Essay Due
M, 4/11	Watts, "The Audacity of No Chill" Kara Walker's <i>A Subtlety</i>	
W, 4/13	Auschwitz selfies Selfies at funerals	
M, 4/18	In-class case studies	
W, 4/20	In-class discussion question and image production share Last day of class	Part V: Discussion Questions Part V: Image Production
M, 4/25	No class: Exam week	Part V: Reflection Essay Due