

# Course Syllabus

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## Digital Literacies and Learning Across Educational Contexts (TLL 1702)

Dr. Veena Vasudevan

[veenav@pitt.edu](mailto:veenav@pitt.edu) (<mailto:veenav@pitt.edu>) | 412-383-0297

Office hours by appointment via Pathways

*WELCOME! This is our Annotated Syllabus. This syllabus—like our course—is incomplete without you and your feedback and commentary. This Annotated Syllabus is the start of a conversation about our course, your learning, and shared accomplishment. We will annotate our syllabus by: Asking clarifying questions; sharing opinions about readings and assignments; noting confusions and uncertainties; responding to policies; providing advice; and reflecting on what works and what can change. While your annotation may be critical, let us strive for commentary that is inquisitive and constructive. Your ongoing thoughts are welcome anytime so that this syllabus documents our learning together this semester.*

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will explore how literacy and learning are ever-changing as people utilize digital technologies and traverse an evolving media landscape. We will examine how people - particularly PreK-12 youth - are reading, writing, and making meaning with digital media and technology across educational contexts from schools to museums to library makerspaces. As we explore new literacies, we will also digitally compose a range of artifacts (e.g. digital stories, games, podcasts), engage in critical analysis and decomposition of these digital artifacts, and think about how to design digital experiences to nurture learning and literacy. We will explore how power is implicated in the use, production, and proliferation of digital media and technology and the implications for teaching and learning. This course will also interrogate the contours of the theoretical landscape of digital literacies like participatory cultures, multimodality, multiliteracies, algorithmic rights, and, attempt to examine and contend with Artificial Intelligence (AI), in particular LLMs by situating them within existing theoretical frameworks of digital literacies to understand their implications for learning and teaching.

### What will we do together?

1. Explore and understand literacies as multiple, socially situated, and multimodal.
2. Critically examine how participation, affinity/interest-driven

3. Examine the relationships between literacies, learning, and identities.
4. Interrogate the way literacies are taken up in schools versus how they are practiced outside of schools.
5. Compose and deconstruct a range of multimodal texts and consider the pedagogical possibilities of these texts for teaching and learning across educational contexts.
6. Engage in making, tinkering, play, composing, writing, reflection, feedback as critical praxis.

### **What can we know and learn together?**

Together, we will explore how digital media and technology shape and mediate our everyday personal, academic, professional, and social lives. We will use theory as an explanatory lens- to help us 'look' through it to notice what resonates and what conflicts with our own lived experience. By interviewing a person about their digital habits, we will examine different cases of the ways digital media and technology shape and impact how we live, communicate, solve problems, access information and participate in everyday social activities. Through our examinations of online practices, we will explore questions like: How are digital literacies practiced across spaces/places? What are young people doing with digital media, for what purposes, and to what ends? How are issues of race, class, gender, sexuality – and the intersections of these – intertwined in our digital lives?

### **What can we do together?**

Together we will construct our understanding of digital literacies. We will make and compose, deconstruct, and examine the assumptions, beliefs, and theories that inform our everyday literacy practices. We will also try out a variety of digital tools as we think together about the new mindsets and practices entailed in integrating them into classrooms, asking questions like: How can our understanding of youth participation inform teaching and learning? How are schools (and other learning institutions both formal and informal) incorporating digital literacies into institutional spaces? What role might we play in fostering and supporting critical participatory acts?

### **What are the theories or ideas that guide this course?**

This class is rooted in *Critical Constructionist Pedagogical Praxis*, a theoretical space I hope to develop further as we engage in this class together. To be critical is to examine, to look closely, to question why something is the way it is, instead of taking it at face value. Paulo Freire talked about criticality as the way we read both the *word and the world*. In other words, we can't engage in any discussion of literacies without recognizing the role of power and authority in what we can write, where we can write it, and even whose writing we can/can't access. Constructionism was coined by Seymour Papert, whose prescient work (detailed in texts like *Mindstorms*) predicted the powerful role that technology, namely computers, would have on how we learned and how we could make sense of ideas. But he also realized the potential for technology to facilitate creation. To that end, Constructionism is a theory of learning that

argues *we learn through personally meaningful making*. Paulo Freire (2003) defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Freire asks us to not just do but reflect and be actively engaged in the process of understanding and deconstructing our understanding of the world. We will engage in critical praxis throughout this course. We will read, write, reflect, make, play, and share, and continue to ask how, what, why, about our practices. In doing so we can deepen our learning. I am excited to teach this course, because as bell hooks argued, “the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” which resonates deeply with me. If we engage in critical and respectful dialogue we can learn more.

## COURSEWORK

As a student in this course, your role is to come ready and open to engage in the ideas, questions, and critical praxis, we are taking up from week to week. Each week we will engage in a topic of study that will build and relate to previous weeks. This is a seminar course **where attendance is required**. The reason being, we will be discussing, creating, and composing together during class, and those discussions will carry into your work outside of class. There are three ways we will engage in an exploration of digital literacies and learning in this course: 1) community and class participation 2) weekly activities and assignments 3) culminating multimodal compositions. Below I describe what each of these entails.

### COMMUNITY AND CLASS PARTICIPATION (25 points):

Throughout this class we will be cultivating a learning community that is rooted in respectful and thoughtful engagement of ideas, opinions, and experiences. We will be engaging both asynchronously, during the week through reading and discussions and other activities together, and synchronously when we are in class.

#### Class sessions

We will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30-3:45pm weekly. Canvas will be the place to find up-to-date information on what to prepare in advance of synchronous sessions. During class sessions be prepared to:

- Discuss the assigned readings and materials. Come to class having read/watched everything on Canvas so we can do a deep dive. We will have several text-based discussions as a way to model and engage in praxis around reading and sense-making around research literature within literacies and learning. Therefore, as you read/engage with course content, I encourage you to take notes, write down key quotes with page numbers and author information, so that you can refer back to those as we engage in these discussions.
- Reflect and interrogate what you understand or believe about teaching, learning, and teacher education in particular: your approach to curriculum, understanding and sense-making about literacies and learning, and your pedagogical praxis.

## Leading Class Discussion

- You will- with a partner – have a chance to lead a discussion on a specific topic during the semester. Each pair will sign up for one week during the second half of the semester. You will be responsible for reading course materials, posing discussion questions, and leading a short discussion about the week's readings. We will sign up in-class.
- **WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES (25 points):**
- Each week we will read and explore various topics together to deepen our understanding and perspectives on assessment and evaluation. We will do so in three main ways: 1) engaging in social annotation via a tool called Perusall 2) discussion posts 3) technology challenges.
- **Digital Journal:** Throughout this course you will keep a digital journal where you will respond/reflect/post examples. At times I will give you a specific prompt, where you might answer several questions and synthesize those responses into one paragraph as part of a class assignment. At the end of the semester, you will read and annotate this journal. Make sure you date entries and include the prompts so that you can follow your own journey of reflection and critical analysis of the texts, concepts, and theories we engage with in the course. This journal is guided by the underlying philosophy of *writing as thinking*.
- **Discussion posts & Perusall Assignments (1&2):** these are an opportunity to critique, reflect, make connections to practice/other ideas you are interrogating in other coursework and contexts, and pose questions. This is also an essential component of the community building and shared sense-making we are trying to build in this class. When we are reading more theoretical pieces, it's also an opportunity to engage more deeply and get feedback from your peers and engage in collective sense-making. On occasion, depending on the topic, we may engage in other tasks during the week, but the sensibilities of critical engagement remain the same for all weekly assignments.
- **Technology Challenges (3):** some weeks we will build something that we might start in class that you have to finish – a Scratch game, a digital story, a transmediation, and so on. Take these as opportunities to engage in *praxis*. Consider the process you have to engage in to make something, the design approach, the implications for teaching and learning. We will share everything we make, so embrace the challenges, be creative, and push our thinking with your creations.

- **Multimodal compositions (50 points)**

The written assignments are an opportunity for you to critically engage with the content of the course.

- **Assignment #1: Interview Project (25 points)**

The first assignment for this course is an investigation into a young person's practices with technology. The goal is to learn more about the ways that youth engage with digital media, focusing not just on the tools they use but the **how, where, when, and why of their engagements**. You should aim to learn

more about how this young person sees the world, using the method of portraiture that Davis (2011) describes in her article. Your final composition is a 3-4 minutes (max!) digital story. Other pieces of the assignment will include your interview questions, your storyboard, and a short data analysis of themes that emerge from your interview.

In terms of a process, here are the overarching steps you will engage in:

1. Read Katie Davis (2011) piece and identify a young person you will interview and a rationale for why. You will also give feedback to your peers.
  2. Create an interview protocol, give and receive peer and instructor feedback, revise your protocol.
  3. Conduct your interview (audiorecording or via Zoom, etc.) and then transcribe the interview (or clean up transcription if you use something like Zoom to conduct).
  4. Write a think piece that connects key themes in your interview to the themes/concepts/theories in the class materials.
  5. Compose a rough cut of your digital composition and give/receive peer feedback.
  6. Revise and finalize your digital lives project.
  7. Submit your own self-assessment on the digital lives project.
- **Assignment #2: Exploring an Online Community/App (25 points), Presentations in-class April 15th and 17th. Revised final projects and self-assessments due April 22, 2025.**

As a class we will explore the nature of digital literacies as participatory, multimodal, affinity-based, collaborative, and situated within complex networked publics (boyd, 2008; Gee, 2009; Ito et al., 2013;2020). For this project, you will become a member of an online community, moving from observer to participant as you learn to think, act, and communicate like a member of this particular “affinity space” (Gee, 2004). You will present your findings as a multimodal artifact (e.g. website, blog, digital story, etc.) and also present your key findings and insights to the class. Your final projects should integrate peer and my feedback before turning it in. More details and a process available in Canvas.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS:

We will read a number of articles, book chapters, and also engage with multimodal content including videos, podcasts, blogs, which will be available on Canvas. Below you will see a **tentative** list of reading assignments, but materials will change as we go along. **Always refer back to Canvas for what’s coming up from week to week that is where the most up-to-date content will be.**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Pitt Writing Center

I highly encourage you to take advantage of the writing center. Don’t be surprised if I recommend you go to them, I do this often for students because it helps to have more eyes on our writing (this includes me!). You can schedule appointments online or you can call them and schedule as well. They can be reached

at (412) 624-6556 or via web: <https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/graduate-services>  
(<https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/graduate-services>)\_.

**Center for Creativity** (<https://www.creative.pitt.edu/> (<https://www.creative.pitt.edu/>)\_)

The Center for Creativity seeks to foster connections between and among members of the University community whose scholarly efforts and passions are rooted in making: stories, pictures, music, scenes, statements, apps, messes, etc. C4C spaces and programs are intentionally and purposefully open to students, staff, and faculty in all programs of the University. They have two additional spaces I encourage you to visit:

### **C4C The Understory**

This space located in the bottom of the Cathedral of Learning is an incredible space where you can record films, reserve dance/performance space, create podcasts, practice instruments, and much more. It's meant to nurture the performing arts and it's a beautifully designed space.

### **Text and conText Lab**

This space brings you back into the world of print making. It is located on the 4th floor of the Hillman Library. The Text & conText Lab, a partnership between the Center for Creativity and the University Library System, provides an active environment for the creation, manipulation, and/or disassembly of text.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Student Expectations**

As I shared above, I hope you will be an active participant in this course and engage proactively in the community of inquiry we are trying to build. Active participation entails logging into your canvas course, interacting with instructional materials, and completing learning activities by specified due dates and times. Please know that I will work with you to extend due dates if the deadlines are challenging to meet. We strive to build a learning community by recognizing our strengths in our collective knowledge, personal and professional experiences. We can achieve this by sharing the artifacts we develop, experiences, strategies, and making contributions in the discussion forums.

We will conduct most of our work in class or on Canvas but you are encouraged to communicate privately with me via email. I will also use the announcement tool to disseminate course-related information. The assignments in this course consist of discussion forums and reflection activities to enable us to share and discuss our insights, ideas, strategies, and resources in the form of instruction-student produced content and/or external resources such as articles, podcasts, TedTalks, blogs, and YouTube videos, etc.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

## Inclusion and Diversity

The course aligns with the School of Education's mission to ignite learning and deliver a respective, inclusive, and equitable learning experience. We behave professionally, and we communicate mindfully while feeling free to share contrasting viewpoints and ideas. We create an open learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The diversity denoted by the intersections of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and culture that we all bring to this course is advantageous in serving as a strength and resource in our learning community.

“As the course instructor, I am committed to pedagogy that is anti-racist, non-sexist, non-classist, non-heterosexist, and non-gender-normative. This includes fostering an environment that is as safe and inclusive as possible. I intend to name and correct any actions on my part that fall short of these commitments as best as possible.

The University of Pittsburgh prohibits and will not engage in discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, disability, or status as a disabled veteran. The University is committed to creating a learning environment that is inclusive of all races, genders, socioeconomic statuses, religions, sexual orientations, nationalities, and languages.” (Roop, L., 2020).

In particular, we are committed to including the voices of minoritized groups in this class, including those of womxn and other people of color, transgender people, LGBTQIA+ people, non-Christian people, non-US citizens, and those who speak multiple languages. If you feel uncomfortable due to your social identities and background or how they are perceived, please let us know. If you do not feel comfortable talking with the instructors, you can contact the [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/about) (<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/about>).

**Preferred Names and Pronouns:** Feel free to share with me or the entire class what your preferred name / pronouns are.

## Attendance and Observance of Religious Holidays

This is a seminar class where **attendance is required**. If you can't make it to class- illness, traveling/away game, etc. e-mail me so I know what's going on!

Pitt guidelines on class attendance and observance of religious holidays:

- “The observance of religious holidays (activities observed by a religious group of which a student is a member) and cultural practices are an important reflection of diversity. As your instructor, I am committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, you should review the course requirements to identify foreseeable conflicts with assignments, exams, or other required attendance. If at all possible, please contact me (your course coordinator/s) within the first two weeks of the first-class meeting to allow time for us to

discuss and make fair and reasonable adjustments to the schedule and/or tasks.” *From Faculty Assembly, December 2020*

- We interpret this language to apply to cultural and spiritual observances, feasts, dances, ceremonies, etc., not covered by colonial notions of religion and/or culture.
- Please notify me in advance of any anticipated absences related to the guideline

## Late Submission

All assignments have due dates and times to keep us on track in the course. If you need an extension, please let me know as soon as you can. If you need more time particularly on larger assignments, it's better to get in touch with me so I can help you think through an action plan. Assignments are meant to be completed by class so that there's adequate time for peers to give and receive feedback. Points will be deducted for late assignments.

## Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please review the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](http://www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html) (<http://www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html>).

For this class, I ask that you don't use AI-technologies to complete assignments - because part of what I'm trying to learn about is who you are through your writing. We will play with AI and I will ask you to use it for specific assignments and we will engage in thoughtful dialogue but I want to first get to know you as writers and thinkers.

## Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, at 412-648-7890 or 412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible, but no later than the fourth week of the term or visit the [Office of Disability Resources and Services](https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drs/) (<https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drs/>) website as early as possible, but no later than the 4th week of the term. The DRS will work with you to provide accommodations.

Please let us know if you need resources or accommodations to complete this course. You may also seek campus-wide support, information, and/or services:

- [Disability Resources and Services](https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services%C2%A0) (<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services%C2%A0>)
- [Disability Accommodations](https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services/accommodations) (<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services/accommodations>)

**NOTE:** We recognize that while institutional resources can be useful and important support, interacting with the university can at times be experienced as an invasion of privacy or a source of distress. If you are uncomfortable interacting with the university, please feel free to communicate with us directly about

what would be helpful to your learning and participating in the community of the course (Source: Sabina Vaught).

Please review the [University of Pittsburgh Non-Discrimination Policy](https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix-compliance)  
(<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/civil-rights-title-ix-compliance>)

Pitt single-occupancy restroom map and  
information: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/lgbtqia/single-occupancy-restrooms/>  
(<https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/lgbtqia/single-occupancy-restrooms/>)

## Accessibility

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Learn more about [Canvas accessibility statement](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2061-accessibility-within-canvas) → (<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2061-accessibility-within-canvas>)

## Sexual Harassment

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to maintaining a community free from all forms of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment violates University policy as well as state, federal, and local laws. It is neither permitted nor condoned. It is also a violation of the University of Pittsburgh's policy against sexual harassment for any employee or student at the University of Pittsburgh to attempt in any way to retaliate against a person who makes a claim of sexual harassment. Any individual who, after thorough investigation and an informal or formal hearing, is found to have violated the University's policy against sexual harassment will be subject to disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, reprimand, suspension, termination, or expulsion. Any disciplinary action taken will depend upon the severity of the offense. For more information, see the Web site: <https://www.pitt.edu/~provost/har.html>.

**Please review in detail the Course and University policies page in the “Start Here” module in Canvas.**

## IL 1702 SPRING 2025 | SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Below are the broad topics that we will explore in the class. Specific readings and materials can be found in Canvas. The schedule may change based on other ongoing activities and events.

### ***Foundations of Critical Digital Literacies:***

*How do people participate across and learn in relationship to shifting social contexts and communities?  
How are social practices, relationships, and identities created, shaped, and negotiated across digital spaces?*

**Week 1** Exploring the nature of digital literacies

**Week 2** Participatory Cultures, Connected Learning, and Community

**Week 3** Digital Literacies and Identities

**Week 4** Multimodality

**Week 5** Critical Digital Literacies

**Week 6 +7** Composing Multimodally

**INTERVIEW PROJECT DUE: 2/25/25**

**Week 8 SPRING BREAK**

***Exploring Authorship & Audiences In Digital Literacies***

What are the civic and ethical dimensions for young people participating in a digitally mediated world? How do new mobilities afford flows of audience, texts, ideas, and capital afford and constrain meaning making across global and local contexts?

**Week 9** Reading, Writing, and Design

**Week 10** Remix, Restorying, Reimagining

**Week 11** Participatory Politics & Civic Engagement

**Week 12** Critical Data Literacies and Storytelling

***Composing and Communicating***

**Week 13** Digital composing

**Week 14** Readers' Theater | FINAL PRESENTATIONS

**FINAL PROJECT DUE: 4/22/25**