Fall 2025: ENG 461-01

Crafting Nonfiction Narratives:
Digital Storytelling and the Rhetoric of the Past

Thursdays: 4:00 – 6:45 pm
Professor Steve Ferruci

We are born storytellers, and we all have personal and generational stories we want to tell. I had a grandfather who grew up in a *soddie*, a house built of soil and grass. You might have a relative who was a Vietnam vet, a cousin who struggles with addiction, or a grandmother who came to this country alone at the age of 14. These stories become family lore, shaping how we understand where we come from.

But not every story is about family. Maybe the story you want to tell is about an event, person, or place in your hometown. Or maybe you're drawn to a story with no personal connection to you at all, but one that feels important to share.

These stories, whether personal or distant, help us make sense of ourselves and the world around us.

But even non-fiction stories are never just about what happened – it's about how we shape events and personalities into meaning. What choices do we make and why *those* choices? How would different choices alter the story, its meaning and reception? In this seminar we'll explore how the answers to those questions, the rhetorical choices we make, shape how the past is remembered and understood. We'll explore the intersection of narrative, memory, and rhetoric, examining how we construct meaning from archival documents, oral histories, and other traces of the past. We'll consider how the story's medium shapes how we understand it and what rhetorical strategies make digital narratives compelling.

To do all that, we will study narrative and rhetorical theory, exploring how writers and creators craft nonfiction narratives. We'll read and watch compelling examples – from memoirs and personal essays to documentaries and other forms of visual storytelling – to analyze their techniques and rhetorical impact. In workshops we will develop skills in archival research, interviewing, and the use of digital tools (audio / video recording and editing). And don't worry: if you have no experience with digital tools or archival research – you'll have plenty of time and help to develop those skills.

At the end of the fall semester, you'll propose a project to develop in the spring, expanding on the research, storytelling techniques, and digital tools introduced in this course. During the spring semester, you'll be working on that independent project through a combination of independent research and peer workshops.