DESCRIPTION:

If you are a Facebook user, you know what it means to “friend” someone. But how old is this practice? Some might say a decade, and they would be technically correct since Facebook didn't exist until 2004. But the practice of establishing – what some might call superficial – friendships through written correspondence has a long history that extends beyond the surviving material record. Yet, we do have an abundance of evidence about the history of “friending” preserved in manuscript archives throughout the world, which maintain collections of earlier modes of epistolary exchange, or what we now call “social networking.” While such letter writing stretches back into antiquity, the form and function of such correspondence experienced a revolution in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Italy, when medieval teachers began instructing their students in the rhetorical forms of written persuasion called the artem dictaminis. These treatises, the first of their kind in the western world, survive in manuscripts and early printed books that not only explain the art of establishing social networks through letter writing, but also include marginal glosses written by later readers, which indicate how the practice was evolving over time. Additionally, these manuals were often accompanied by the works of the ancient Roman rhetorician Marcus Tullius Cicero, whose theories about speaking were adapted for written communication throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance. In particular, the prevalence of his treatise On Friendship indicates that establishing friendships and letter writing were increasingly considered to be complementary activities. The archival record
demonstrates that letter writers were actively “friending” each other to establish social networks beyond the scriptorium.

This course will examine the literary, cultural, and material life of written correspondence from the poetic epistle to the snarky tweet. And while we will be reading and analyzing epistolary literature (both fiction and nonfiction) such as Ovid’s *Heroides*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and Alice Walker’s *A Color Purple*, we will focus our efforts on “real” letters of writers that are held in the Rare Books Room of the Boston Public Library. The BPL is a treasure trove of such correspondence, ranging from the stately epistles of Queen Elizabeth to the cryptic scribblings of Emily Dickinson. Much of the course will be devoted to handling, describing, and transcribing these fragile texts, all the while characterizing the place of letter writing within the history of the book. As we examine this life of letters, we will consider the rhetorical principles that shape authors and audience over time, as well as their implications for our understanding of the past, present, and future of epistolary friendship. Drawing on the innovative methods of the digital humanities, we will contextualize our archival research within read-write platforms, such as blogs, wikis, *Facebook* status updates, and *Twitter* feeds, in order to identify the shifting character and global significance of written correspondence today.

OBJECTIVES:

In this course you will learn or enhance your understanding of:

- the tensions between public and private forms of epistolary practice
- the roles letters play within histories of friendship and social networking
- the pedagogical histories of letter writing instruction
- the performative, accumulative, and interactive nature of epistolary exchange
- the intellectual, reading, writing, and research implications of working with rare print, manuscript, and digital sources
- literary, historical, and cultural contexts that influenced manuscript, print, and digital forms of written correspondence
- research and writing skills and processes in printed and digital contexts
- how archival materials can enhance literary and rhetorical study
- the historical and theoretical issues raised by the differences between manuscript, print, and digital cultures

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Please try to acquire the specified editions (e-versions are acceptable if you bring your reading device to class) of the following works because we will be using the materials found in these particular editions. Some readings, labeled “wiki,” are on the course wiki.


Two particularly useful online resources for this class are:
*Early English Books Online* (EEBO)
*Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO)

[Both are freely available online via the “Databases & Indexes” page on the Healey Library website.]

**INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH AND EXPECTATIONS:**

In this course we will use a wiki ([http://engl606-mueller.wikispaces.umb.edu/](http://engl606-mueller.wikispaces.umb.edu/)) that will primarily serve as a repository of course material, which all of us will collectively compile throughout the semester.

Before class each week, I’ll expect you to
- Complete the assigned readings.
- Create, review, and/or respond to materials posted to the ongoing “social networking” assignment (see below).

Requirements will include:

**Reading:** Since the readings are challenging (some will be in early English forms, spellings, and scripts), I have attempted to keep the required reading to a minimum. This does not mean, however, that the time it will take to complete the reading will be less than the standard graduate course. **Be sure to bring the assigned text (in print or e-form) to every class meeting.**

**Attendance and Participation:** It is expected that you attend class on time and come prepared to participate, which means completing the reading and assignments, listening attentively, asking questions, bringing the assigned text to every class, and actively discussing the readings. Discussion will not be as useful or engaging if not all participants are in attendance or prepared for class.

**More than one absence will result in a penalty in regards to your participation/attendance grade for the course.** You are responsible for keeping up with the syllabus and/or changes to the syllabus.

If you know you will be absent on a certain date, due to any sort of conflict, let me know as soon as possible. We can work together on a plan for make-up work **before** you are absent. If you have a last-minute absence, a courtesy phone message or email to me, alerting me to your absence, is appreciated.

**Social Networking Assignment:** For each of our class meetings, you will be responsible for:
1. **Creating** one of the “social networking” posts (see below)
AND/OR (depending upon when you are scheduled for #1)

2. **Responding to ALL** of the “social networking” weekly posts.

*Creating (Task #1):* As a means to engage with the course readings and each other, we will use four current modes of digital epistolary exchange: **e-mail, blogging, Facebook, and Twitter.** During the first class meeting, we will decide on the schedule for creation, which requires each of you to create a post in each of the four modes throughout the semester. For example, one week you may be responsible for creating the e-mail post, while the next week you may be responsible for creating the Facebook post. **At the end of the semester you will have created four posts, one in each epistolary mode.** Details about posting in each mode will be provided in class. **Posts for each week will be due the Friday before class,** which will give the rest of us time to read and respond (*Task #2*) before class. Having engaged us in online correspondence, the four of you assigned to post for the week will be responsible for:

- **Reflecting** upon the conversations that emerged in your mode. This will just be an informal oral summary of the correspondence.
- **Posing** new questions about the reading that were inspired by the online conversation. We will then have a short discussion based on these questions.

While each of the “creators” are responsible for offering us starting points each week, all students are required to contribute to our discussions.

*Responding (Task #2):* Whether or not you are scheduled to “create” a post, you are responsible for responding to each post of the four creators before class time. These responses could be elaborations, questions, challenges, or even links to other relevant materials. Please try to post your responses before Monday so that the creators have time to prepare their reflections of the online conversation.

*Final Project:* This project includes two distinct but interrelated parts:

- **Exhibition:** You will be responsible for a rare book or manuscript to be exhibited in the display cases outside BPL’s Rare Books Room. Your responsibility extends to the selection, investigation, and presentation of the work. You will
  - **choose,** in consultation with me, a book or manuscript available in the BPL Rare Books Room, which relates in some significant way to the “Social Networking in the Scriptorium” theme of the course
  - **compile** a list of materials and sources relevant to understanding that book or manuscript; and
  - **present** the work to other students and the general public, sharing an original example of the work with the class, and then writing a curatorial description which will be included with the work in the display cases outside the Rare Books Room.

- **Formal Paper:** A formal researched paper (12-15 pages) on the exhibited work, which offers an “archival” contribution to a scholarly question or debate. By “archival,” I mean a seminar paper that explains the significance of the material context of the work at the BPL (its appearance, marginalia, arrangement, illustration, etc.) for larger interpretative questions. This paper should therefore pursue an argument in response to archival evidence and secondary scholarship.
Evaluation of Student Performance

- Attendance, participation in class discussion 25%
- Social Networking Assignment 25%
- BPL Exhibition 25%
- Final paper 25%

Grading Policy, Withdrawals, Incompletes: All work assigned in the class must be submitted on time for satisfactory completion of the course. An assignment can be handed in late only by prior arrangement with me; such arrangements must be made a week in advance of the assignment’s due date. It is almost impossible to receive an incomplete; incompletes are strongly discouraged, require documented physical or psychological illness, and are given only at my discretion.

Accommodations: If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services (M-1-401) at (617)287-7430.

Plagiarism: Using someone else’s work or work you have written for another class without clear documentation is forbidden. Plagiarism is the most serious of academic crimes. Plagiarism is taking what the academic community considers its most important resource: ideas. You cannot present someone else’s ideas as your own. You must document even the shortest of phrases and sentence fragments, the “borrowed” argument/theme/thesis, all quotations, and all notes, citations, and references used. You must document your use of another source, no matter what the source—including a web site. If you plagiarize in my course, as a graduate student, at the very least you will fail the course. I will also undertake a full judicial investigation, seeking further sanctions. For a list of possible sanctions, see the Student Handbook (2002-3), 157-158.

SPECIAL NOTES ON USING THE RARE BOOKS ROOM

Beginning with Week Five, sessions will be held in the Rare Books Room in the main branch of the Boston Public Library, Copley Square. To reach the Rare Books Room, go through the main doors of the McKim Building and ascend the staircase to the right. When you reach the second floor, continue up another staircase, go through the exhibit room, and make a right, following the signs to Rare Books.

Our ability to conduct class sessions in the Rare Books Room is the result of extraordinary generosity on the part of its staff. To preserve our productive collaboration with Rare Books, which has included previous courses with Cheryl Nixon, Leonard von Morzé, and Sari Edelstein (among others), you will need to be respectful users of the archive, which contains fragile, unique, and irreplaceable items. Please familiarize yourself with the archive’s policies and procedures early in the semester.

1 Much of this syllabus is indebted to the previous teaching and work of these three colleagues.
To access the room, you will be filling out registration cards. You will be asked to show a Boston library card or a photo ID.

Because all items are stored in a restricted area, they will need to be “paged” by a librarian, which takes time. Please submit your requests well in advance of when you would need them. Please remember that the library closes promptly at 4:45pm.

Visitors to the Rare Books Room are permitted ONLY laptops, pencils, and loose leaf paper. Because we cannot bring our own books (or notebooks) into the room, we may sometimes spend the first part of some class sessions meeting in another part of the library in preparation for our explorations. Please check your e-mail regularly to find out about changes to our meeting place.

When we visit Rare Books, you’ll discover that items are not electronically catalogued. That’s right—we will need to use the old-fashioned card catalog. As you’ll see, though, this will have some advantages for research. . .

COURSE SCHEDULE* (Readings are due on the date listed):

**Week 1: Introduction [W-6-95]**
January 27  Plato, *Phaedrus* [selection to be read in class]

**Week 2: Before (Letter) Writing [W-6-95]**
February 3  Derrida, “Envois”; Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (wiki)

**Week 3: Dead Letter Office [W-6-95]**
February 10  Ovid, *Heroides*; Derrida, “Notices (Warnings)”

**Week 4: Presidents Day**
February 17  NO CLASS

**Week 5: The Art of Letter Writing [*First day at the BPL*]**
February 24  *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*; Derrida, “Freud’s Legacy”

**Week 6: Epistolary Friendships [BPL]**
March 3  Cicero, *De Amicitia* (wiki); Derrida, “Paralysis”

**Week 7: Renaissance Letter Writing [*Meet at Harvard’s Houghton Library*]**

**Week 8: Spring Break**
March 17  NO CLASS

**Week 9: Detective Fiction and Epistolary Desire [*Back at the BPL for remaining classes*]**
Week 10: The Dracula Diary
March 31    Stoker, *Dracula* (I-XIII); Derrida, “Du tout”

Week 11: The Dracula Diary (continued)
April 7    Stoker, *Dracula* (XIV-XXVII); richard Burt, “Derrida Breathes His Last? la double séance continue” (wiki)

Week 12: Letters to God
April 14    Walker, *The Color Purple*; Burt, “Is there Publication as such? Archiving the Post Card” (wiki)

Week 13: Patriots Day
April 21    NO CLASS

Week 14: In-Class Presentations
April 28    *Research statement due identifying the scholarly “target” for your final paper*

Week 15: In-Class Presentations
May 5    *Compile a bibliography of sources relevant to the work you are presenting*

Week 16: In-Class Presentations
May 12    Last day of class
May 19    **Final project due**

*The course schedule is subject to change.

RESOURCES:

See "Databases and Indexes" for access to:
*Oxford English Dictionary*
*MLA Bibliography*

Academic Support Services [http://www.academicsupport.umb.edu](http://www.academicsupport.umb.edu)
Campus Center 1-1100 to 1-1300 Phone: 617.287.6550