

## WR 120 First-Year Writing Seminar: Art, Existentialism, and Authenticity

**Instructor Name:** Jordan Kokot

**Office Location:** Mugar 446

**Office Hours:** M/F 2-3

**Contact Information:** [jdkokot@bu.edu](mailto:jdkokot@bu.edu)

**Course Dates:** Sept 4-Dec 20 (Fall 2019)

**Course Location:** CAS 223

**Course Time:** MWF 3:35-4:25

**Credits:** 4 credits + 1 BU Hub Unit (Writing)

### Course Description

The First-Year Writing Seminar will help you cultivate skills and habits of mind essential to your academic success and to your future personal, professional, and civic life. Writing is a way not only to express what you have to say but also to discover and evaluate it. You will write a great deal at BU and beyond, and each occasion will present you with a range of questions: Who is my audience, and what kind of writing does the occasion call for? How should I structure my writing to engage, inform, persuade, and perhaps even entertain my audience? How can I judge sources wisely and use them effectively and responsibly? How can I clearly express my ideas? In this class we will review general principles about how to address such questions, and we will put those principles into practice as we read, talk, and write about our topic: *Through a Glass Darkly: Art, Existentialism, and Authenticity*

In this class, we will take a journey the history of Western Existential thought by focusing on one of its driving questions: what does it mean to be *me*? What is authenticity? Is it possible to be an “authentic self,” or are demands for authenticity hopelessly confused? In what ways do the experiences involved in creating and encountering works of art reflect or require authenticity? If art can be “authentic,” what would that authenticity entail?

Over the course of the semester, we will explore these questions and others like them through close engagements with literature, film, and other works of art that are themselves responses to the existential questions of freedom and authenticity. In addition to reading central existential figures, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Simone de Beauvoir, we will analyze films such as Ingmar Bergman’s *Through a Glass Darkly*, Ron Fricke’s *Samsara*, and Louis Malle’s *My Dinner with Andre*; novels like Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha* and Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*; and the paintings of Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Caravaggio. We will also consider how conversations are able to cross genres, media, and generations and how the practices of writing and producing art are themselves existential projects.

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### Course Objectives

You will develop your abilities to:

- read a range of genres with understanding, appreciation, and critical judgment;
- express yourself orally and converse thoughtfully about complex ideas;
- craft responsible, considered, and well-structured written arguments;
- produce clear, coherent prose in a range of genres and styles, using different media and modes of expression as appropriate;
- plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively, and help your peers do the same by responding productively to their work;

- reflect on your own reading, writing, and editing practices.

### **Instructional Format, Course Pedagogy, and Approach to Learning**

Although they differ in their subject content, all WR seminars share common goals and lead you through a sequence of assignments that emphasize planning, drafting, and revising informed by feedback from your classmates and instructor. You will work on the college-level writing process, from understanding and analyzing sources to organizing your ideas, responding effectively and responsibly to the ideas of others, and revising your prose for clarity and impact. This seminar will also give you opportunities to engage in focused scholarly inquiry and conversation, and to participate in workshops and other activities designed to help you make informed rhetorical choices. Reflecting on your approach to the writing process will help you adapt it for future occasions.

### **Books and Other Course Materials**

Turabian, Kate L., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010. (Required in all Writing Program classes; available for sale at the BU Bookstore.)

**Note:** Some of these texts are available online. You are welcome to use an online source rather than buying texts but you **MUST** clear the online text with me first. There are multiple translations of these works and some are better than others.

**Note:** Other course texts will be available on Blackboard. On Blackboard, texts in **black** are required. Texts in **blue** are recommended.

### **Courseware**

Our class has a Blackboard site that contains the syllabus, assignments, and other course-related materials. You can log in to our Blackboard page at: <http://learn.bu.edu/> All additional coursework will be posted on blackboard.

### **Assignments and Grading Criteria**

You will be given a range of assignments in this course, including a self-assessment, various reading and writing exercises, three major assignments, and a final portfolio. Much of this work will not be graded, but that does not mean it is unimportant. Students who prepare diligently for class, participate actively, and take the homework exercises and drafts seriously learn more and produce better work than those who do not. Assignments will be submitted and returned via Google Drive.

**Exercises:** These are low-stakes assignments and activities that are designed to help you make progress on assignments that will be graded. You will do some of these exercises in class; others will be given as homework. You may or may not receive direct feedback on these exercises. They will not receive explicit grades, but you will receive credit for completing them on time.

All exercises should be submitted to google drive using the following naming convention: "Exercise # (Last Name)"

For instance, if your last name is Martinez, and you are trying to submit Exercise 3, the name of the document should be “Exercise 3 (Martinez)”

If you are submitting an assignment, replace ‘Exercise’ with ‘Assignment,’ if you are submitting metacognitive work, replace ‘Exercise’ with ‘Metacognitive,’ etc.

**Major Assignments:** You will complete three major assignments: two academic essays and a piece in a different genre (the “Alternative Genre” assignment). You will write at least one draft of each major assignment. These drafts will receive comments from me and your classmates. They will not receive explicit grades, but you will receive credit for completing them on time. Your course grade will be determined primarily by the quality of the final versions of these assignments. The Alternative Genre Assignment will be a written piece in a genre of your choice, to be planned and discussed with the professor early in the third unit.

**Oral Presentation:** As the semester advances, you will be asked to speak about your work with the class. You will receive feedback from your instructor and classmates, which you will apply to your alternative genre assignment.

**Metacognition:** You will have opportunities throughout the semester to reflect on your reading and writing practices. The self-assessment you write at the beginning of the semester will take stock of your writing skills and establish personal goals you wish to pursue over the course of the semester. You will also reflect on your experiences and assess your progress as you complete each major writing assignment, ultimately leading to a final reflective essay in your portfolio.

**Portfolio:** At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio containing your self-assessment, major assignments (drafts and final versions), other supporting artifacts, and an introductory essay. The portfolio provides you with an opportunity to document and reflect on your development as a reader and writer over the course of the semester. Your portfolio will contain work that has already been graded. This work will not be re-graded in the portfolio. Rather, your grade for the portfolio will be based on those things that make the portfolio itself a coherent work: the introduction and additional framing (annotations, captions, etc.), the selection of and reflection on artifacts, and overall organization.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Three major assignments:	70%
- Academic essay 1	15%
- Alternative genre assignment	25%
- Academic essay 2	30%
Exercises and Handouts	10%
Attendance and Participation	5%
Presentation	5%
Portfolio	10%

### **Participation and Attendance**

Since this course is a seminar, your regular attendance and active participation are essential both to your own learning and to your classmates’ learning. Under ordinary circumstances, missing more than one week of class (that is, missing three days of

class) will lower your final grade by 1/3. Missing more than two weeks (five or more class periods) may lead to failing grade the course. If you have a special obligation that will require you to miss several classes (e.g., religious observances, varsity athletics), please talk with me at the beginning of the semester. Missed conference appointments will be counted as absences.

### **Late and Missed Assignments**

Unless you make other arrangements with me in advance, graded assignments will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late. Please note too that we will regularly work with our exercises and drafts in class. If you are habitually late with your assignments, you will be unable to participate fully in the class.

I am committed to providing you with timely written or verbal feedback on one draft of each major paper and written feedback and a grade on the final version of each major paper. You can generally expect my responses to your drafts within four or five days of your punctual submission of them; graded final versions will be returned to you within a week.

### **CAS Writing Center**

The CAS Center for Writing (100 Bay State Road, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, with a satellite location at Mugar Library, 1<sup>st</sup> floor) offers one-on-one consultations for students to discuss their work for WR courses with well-trained writing consultants. Consultants will work with you at any stage in your writing process, but they will not edit or correct your paper for you. They will work with you to help you do your own best work, so you should expect to be actively involved in your session. The center is a resource for all WR students. Whether you consider yourself to be a strong writer or a weak one, you can benefit from meeting with a writing consultant.

The CAS Center for Writing is open Monday through Friday. Hours for the current semester are posted on the website below. While the center accepts walk-in visits, you are strongly encouraged to reserve an appointment in advance. Because of the high demand for consultations, students are limited to one reservation per week. You may schedule a session online:

<http://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/the-writing-center/>

You may also schedule a session in person at the front desk of CAS Center for Writing or by calling 617-358-1500 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Cancellations must be made at least 9 hours in advance.

### **Academic Integrity**

In this class, we will discuss conventions for using and citing sources in academic papers. Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures described in Boston University's Academic Conduct Code. All WR students are subject to the CAS code, which can be read online:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

### **Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns**

This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender expressions and identities. While class rosters are provided to instructors with

students' legal names, please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name than that listed in the StudentLink. You are also invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/their/theirs, etc.) you feel best fits your identity. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### Office of Disability Services

I assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. Whether or not you have a documented disability, BU provides many support services that are available to all students.

Disability Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. Disability Services will work with you to determine appropriate accommodations for your courses, such as additional time on tests, staggered homework assignments, or note-taking assistance. This office will give you a letter outlining the accommodations you need that you can share with your teachers; specific information about your disability will remain private. If you have any questions about accommodation, or what constitutes a disability, I invite you to speak with me or to Disability Services.

**Course Schedule.** This schedule is intended as a blueprint and is subject to change based on the needs of the class. Any changes will be announced in class and will be posted on Blackboard.

### Unit 1: God, Faith, and Madness

This unit will focus on characterizing the central existential question of "faith," how it relates to madness and the loss of god and connects to the looming specter of nihilism. We will begin with a brief reading of the biblical story of the *Akedah* (also called the "Binding of Isaac") and excerpts of Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, accompanied by Caravaggio's interpretation of the scene in his *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. We will then examine excerpts of Dostoyevsky's *The Brother's Karamazov* and begin comparing Dostoyevsky's understanding loss to Nietzsche's "death of god," first announced in *Gay Science*. An important subtheme of this unit is how topics and themes develop across genre, generations, and locations. In this unit, you will be asked to compose a short interpretive and analytic paper on a passage of your choosing.

#### Central Works:

*The Akedah* (or, *The Binding of Isaac*, Gen. 22: 1-19)  
*Fear and Trembling* (Søren Kierkegaard, 1843)  
*The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Caravaggio, c. 1598-1603)  
*Through a Glass Darkly* (Ingmar Bergman, 1961)  
*The Madman* (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882/86 excerpted from *Gay Science*)  
*Notes from the Underground* (Fyodor Dostoevsky)

Date	Learning goals	Readings/viewings Due	Assignments Due
Wednesday, 9/4	- Define course goals - Introduce topic and approach	<b>Recommended:</b> - Fassio, "How to Read Philosophy"	

	- Discussion: what is writing and why do we do it?	- This syllabus	
Friday, 9/6	- Review syllabus - Existentialism and the question of God - What is <i>academic</i> writing? What is academic reading?	<b>Required:</b> - Fassio, "How to Read Philosophy" - <i>The Akedah</i> (Gen. 12: 1-9, 15, 22: 1-19) - Turabian 1.1-1.3 (pgs. 12-22). - This syllabus <b>Recommended:</b> - Erich Auerbach, <i>Odysseus' Scar</i> - Gen. 12-25 (all)	- Exercise 1: Getting to Know You/Self-Analysis (due) - Come with questions about the syllabus and the course - Essay 1 assignment sheet will be handed out - Schedule mini conference to discuss paper
Monday, 9/9 (last day to add a WR class)	- What is an (academic) argument and how does it work? How do we ask and answer questions? - The question of (moral) freedom	<b>Required:</b> - Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> , Preface, Prelude, and "A Panegyric Upon Abraham" (pgs. 1-10) <b>Recommended:</b> - <i>Introduction to Fear and Trembling</i> (found in the Penguin Classics edition)	- Exercise 2: Reading Log
Wednesday, 9/11	- Summarization and Critical Reading - Existential themes in renaissance art (Caravaggio and the <i>Sacrifice of Isaac</i> ) - The issue of cross media conversations	<b>Required:</b> - Bergman, <i>Through a Glass Darkly</i> (watch film) <b>Recommended:</b> - Turabian 5.2-5.7, 9 - Bergman Packet - Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio" - J. M Bernstein "Remembering Isaac"	
Friday, 9/13	- Planning your paper and crafting your argument - Existential dread	<b>Required:</b> - Turabian 5.1, 6.1-6.6 <b>Recommended:</b> - Turabian 3, 8.1-8.5	-
Monday, 9/16	-	<b>Required:</b> - Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> (excerpts) § 1, 4, 26, 44, 57, 58, 76, 108, 121, 124-127, 151 - Maïa Stepenberg, <i>Against Nihilism</i> , pgs. 26-34 <b>Recommended:</b> - Maïa Stepenberg, <i>Against Nihilism</i> , Introduction	- Exercise 3: Critical Summary
Wednesday, 9/18		<b>Required:</b> - Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from the Underground</i> (2-10, 18-20, 27-41, 54-56) - Maïa Stepenberg, <i>Against Nihilism</i> , pgs. 34-46	
Friday, 9/20	- Contributing to a conversation - In class Peer review	<b>Required:</b> - None	- Exercise 4: Mini Prospectus - Schedule conference to

			review paper (optional)
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## Unit 2: Nihilism, Suffering, and Response: Rejection, Withdraw, and Affirmation

In this unit, we will continue to discuss the “Death of God” and its consequences for human psychology and action by engaging with alternative views of the self/world dynamic, suffering, joy, meaning, and the existential weight of convalescence. After reading two chapters from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, we will examine the similarities and differences between three responses to nihilism and the problem of suffering: Buddhistic rejection of worldly desire, the withdrawal evident in Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, and Nietzsche’s aesthetic “Affirmation of Life.” We will pick up the concepts *Amor Fati* (love of fate) and the “free spirit” from Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* and we will discuss more directly the issue of cross-media and cross-cultural conversation. In this unit, you will be asked to take many of the lesson’s you learned in the first paper and apply them to a more open world of questions. You will be asked (with the help of the instructor) to select your own topic and construct your own position in defense of a claim or a set of claims.

### Central Works:

*The Brothers Karamazov* (Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1879-1880)

*The Dhammapada* (or, *The Sayings of Buddha*)

*Siddhartha* (Hermann Hesse, 1922)

*On the Vanity of Existence* (Arthur Schopenhauer, 1850)

*Samsara* (Ron Fricke, 2012)

*The Gay Science* (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882)

Date	Learning goals	Readings/viewings Due	Assignments Due
Monday, 9/23	- Wrap up Unit 1 - Introduce Unit 2	<b>Required:</b>  <b>Recommended:</b> - Schopenhauer, <i>On the Sufferings of the World</i> - Schopenhauer, <i>On the Vanity of Existence</i> - Dostoevsky, <i>Rebellion</i>	- <b>Final Draft of first paper due at midnight (submitted electronically)</b> - <b>Metacognitive work/revised papers due 6 days after paper review conference</b>
Wednesday, 9/25	- Background and perspective: Identifying background assumptions and differentiating perspectives - Argumentation part II	<b>Required:</b> - Schopenhauer, <i>On the Vanity of Existence</i> - Dostoevsky, <i>Rebellion</i> <b>Recommended:</b> - Schopenhauer, <i>On the Sufferings of the World</i>	
Friday, 9/27	- Sentence and Argument Flow	<b>Required:</b> - Dostoevsky, <i>The Grand Inquisitor</i> <b>Recommended:</b> - <i>The Dhammapada</i> Preface and Introduction by <i>Bhikku Bodi</i>	- Essay 2 Assignment Sheet posted on BB. We will discuss Monday
Monday, 9/30	- Introduce Portfolios - Paper review discussion	<b>Required:</b> - <i>The Dhammapada</i> , (§1-15, 21-24, 33-41, 33-41, 46, 75,	- Mini exercise: Aphorisms and the <i>Dhammapada</i>

		80-99, 103-105, 109-114, 129-135, 138-141, 145-225)	
Wednesday, 10/2	-Challenging authority and expanding conversations: finding problems and growth points in arguments -Finding a thesis.	<b>Required:</b> - <i>The Dhammapada</i> , (§235-252, 267-289, 294, 302, 339, 360-362, 421) -Fricke, <i>Samsara</i> (watch film) <b>Recommended:</b> -Fricke, <i>Baraka</i> (film) -Bowen, "The Transient Experience with Art"	-Exercise 5: Samsara Reflection
Friday, 10/4	-Art and Transience (Mandalas and Film)	<b>Required:</b> - Cairns, "The Philosophy and Psychology of the Oriental Mandala" -Liddell, "Transience of Art in Life" <b>Recommended:</b> Turabian ch. 6-8	
Monday, 10/7		<b>Required:</b> -Academic Argumentation Handout (on blackboard) -Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i> (Ch 1 & 2)	
Wednesday, 10/9 (no class)		<b>Required:</b> -Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i> (Ch 3-6) <b>Recommended:</b> -Turabian ch. 6-8	
Friday, 10/11 (no class)		<b>Required:</b> -Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i> (Ch 7-10)	
Tuesday, 10/15 (Substitute Monday)	- In class thesis workshop	<b>Required:</b> -Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i> (Ch 11 & 12)	-Exercise 6: topic paragraph and rough draft of thesis due -Exercise 7 (Essay Planning 2) handed out
Wednesday 10/16	-Planning and drafting more complex papers	<b>Required:</b> -Turabian ch. 6-8	
Friday, 10/18	-Wrap up Siddhartha	<b>Required:</b> -None	
Monday, 10/21	- Introductions - Conclusions	<b>Required:</b>  <b>Recommended:</b> -Beatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche and Amor Fati" - <i>Gay Science</i> "Joke, Cunning, and Revenge," and Book 1 (all)	-Exercise 7: Essay Planning 2 -Schedule optional conference by this date or earlier



Wednesday, 10/23	- Sentence Flow - Amor Fati	<b>Required:</b>  <b>Recommended:</b> - Bernard Reginster, "Perspectivism, Criticism, and Freedom of Spirit" - <i>Gay Science</i> Books 2 and 3 (all)	- Exercise 8: Introductions & Conclusions
Friday, 10/25		<b>Required:</b>  <b>Recommended:</b> - Bernard Reginster, <i>The Affirmation of Life</i> (Ch 1) - Turabian, ch. 14 <i>Gay Science</i> , Books 3 and 4 (all) and Appendix	- Rough draft due for paper exchange. Exercise 9: Peer Exchange (due Saturday, 10/26/5 at Midnight)
Monday, 10/28	- Sentence Flow - The Free Spirit	<b>Required:</b> - Nietzsche, <i>GS</i> Preface, 7, 8, 11, 19, 26, 56.	

### Unit 3: Art, Criminality, and Authenticity

In this unit, we will more directly discuss the relationship between art, authenticity, and audience. We will begin with a brief exploration of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and the tension between the criminal "Dionysian" and the more orderly "Apollonian" aspects of experience and art, and then relate our findings to the nature of choices, decision making, and "being" via Ruth Chang, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Martin Heidegger. We will close by looking at a few specific artists and artists' reflections on what they are doing *as artists*.

Likewise, our project for this unit will engage directly with the issue of writing to a specific audience and with certain genre constraints in mind. Students will have the option of either writing a philosophical "dialogue" between two of the authors or artists we have studied, an existentially oriented art exhibit or film review, or a longer academic essay.

#### Central Works and Figures:

*The Birth of Tragedy* (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1872)  
*The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Simone de Beauvoir, 1945)  
*Origin of the Work of Art* (Martin Heidegger, 1935-1960)  
*Works from Abstract Expressionists* (incl. Robert Motherwell & Mark Rothko)  
*Marina Abramovich: The Artist is Present* (Matthew Akers)

Date	Learning goals	Readings/viewings Due	Assignments Due
Wednesday, 10/30	- Recap Unit 2/Introduce Unit 3	<b>Required:</b> - Nietzsche, <i>GS</i> , 76, 78, 93, 107, 116, 261, 276, 285, 290, 310, 319, 340, 341 <b>Recommended:</b> - Turabian ch. 15 - Maia Stepenberg, <i>Against Nihilism</i> , pgs. 147-156	- <b>Second Essay Due.</b> <b>Metacognitive work due 6 days after paper has been returned.</b> - Bring laptops to class
Friday, 11/1	-	<b>Required:</b> - <i>Birth of Tragedy</i> , excerpts (sections 1-5) - Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , excerpts (pgs.	

		24-26, 36-37)	
Monday, 11/4		- Maïa Stepenberg, <i>Against Nihilism</i> , pgs. 1-24	
Wednesday, 11/6	- Audience and Genre	<b>Required:</b> - Ruth Chang, "How to Make Hard Choices" (TED Talk) <b>Recommended</b> - Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"	
Friday, 11/8		<b>Required:</b> - Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" - Ruth Chang, "How to Make Hard Choices" (TED Talk)	Project 3 assignment handed out
Monday, 11/11		<b>Required:</b> - Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"	
Wednesday, 11/13		<b>Required:</b> - Heidegger, on Authenticity ( <i>Being and Time</i> , section 53 [pgs 304-311]) - SEP on Heidegger and Authenticity	- Exercise 10: Heidegger on Authenticity
Friday, 11/15		<b>Required:</b> - Heidegger, <i>Origin of the Work of Art</i> (selections on blackboard) <b>Recommended:</b> - Lee Braver, Commentary on <i>Origin of the Work of Art</i> - <i>Origin of the Work of Art</i> (full text) - David Campbell, "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Meaning" - William Bossart, "Heidegger's Theory of Art"	- Exercise 10: Heidegger on Authenticity
Monday, 11/18		<b>Required:</b> - Marina Abramovich, <i>The Artist is Present</i>	
Wednesday 11/20		<b>Required:</b> - Heidegger, <i>Origin of the Work of Art</i> (selections on blackboard)	
Friday, 11/22	- Portfolio Preparation	<b>Required:</b> - de Beauvoir, <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , (excerpts, TBD)	- Exercise 11: Statement outlining your final project due - Preliminary Work for Assignment 3 due Schedule meeting by this date
Monday, 11/25		<b>Required:</b> - de Beauvoir, <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , (excerpts, TBD)	
Wednesday, 11/27—	Fall Break	<b>Recommended:</b> -	

Friday 11/29 (Fall Break)			
Monday, 12/2	-Presentations/Workshop		- Rough Draft of Project due
Wednesday, 12/4	-Presentations/Workshop		
Friday, 12/6	-Presentations/Workshop		
Monday, 12/9	-Presentations/Workshop		
Wednesday, 12/11 (last day of class)	-Wrapping up and looking ahead	<b>Required:</b> -TBD	- In class writing reflection - Final Project Due Wed. at Midnight Final Portfolio Due Wed. at Midnight