

RWS 411 FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS

Due: Dec 14

Length: approximately 10-14 pages double-spaced (longer is acceptable). For multimodal projects, talk to me about requirements.

Task: You will develop a paper or media project that explores a class topic. Consult with me as early as possible so I can provide resources, guidance, and feedback. Collaborative projects (pairs or groups) are encouraged, and we can discuss tailoring the assignment to your interests *if you speak to me early in the semester*.

Important Dates

- **October 12:** Draft of [proposal](#) and brief presentation
- **October 19:** [Proposal](#) due
- **December 07/09:** Final paper/project Presentations
- **December 14:** Final paper/project due

Sample Student Papers/Projects

A collection of [sample student final papers/projects is available on the wiki](#). See also articles from issues of the journal [CODEBREAKER](#), which feature many final papers by 411 students ([2024](#), [2025](#), [2026](#)).

Final Paper/Project Ideas

You are invited to consider these “off-the-shelf” paper ideas. They connect to the coursework and are a good fit for potential publication in the next issue of the journal [CODEBREAKER](#). They will also provide an opportunity for you to get started early. I have collections of texts and resources connected to these projects and will share them upon request.

1. A “rhetorical review” or “review essay” on a popular or scholarly text about A.I. and writing/education.

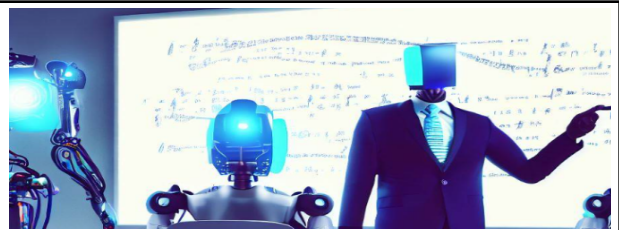


- Cory Doctorow, [The Reverse Centaur's Guide to Life After AI: How to Think About Artificial Intelligence Before It's Too Late](#). Verso, 2026.
- Dustin Edwards' [Enduring Digital Damage: Rhetorical Reckonings for Planetary Survival](#). University of Alabama Press, 2025.
- Ethan Mollick, [Co-Existence: The Next Phase of AI](#). Portfolio-Penguin, 2026.
- Karen Hao, [Empire of AI](#). Penguin. 2025.
- Josh Tyrangiel, [AI for Good: How Real People Are Using Artificial Intelligence to Fix Things That Matter](#). Simon & Schuster 2026.
- Tim Wu, [The Age of Extraction](#): How Tech Platforms Conquered the Economy and Threaten Our Future Prosperity. Knopf, 2026.

- Anna Mills et al (eds). [Bad Ideas about AI and Writing: Generative Practices for Teaching, Learning, and Communication..](#) [Link to the PDF.](#)
- Annette Vee, Marc Watkins, Derek Bruff. [The Norton Guide to AI-Aware Teaching.](#) Norton, 2026.
- Gil Durán, [The Nerd Reich: Silicon Valley Fascism and the War on Democracy.](#) Simon and Shuster, 2026.
- Jacob Silverman, [Gilded Rage: Elon Musk and the Radicalization of Silicon Valley.](#) Bloomsbury, 2025.
- Sam Illingworth, "[Slow AI: Knowing When to Use AI and When to Leave It Alone.](#)" 2026.
- Sebastian Mallaby [The Infinity Machine: Demis Hassabis, DeepMind, and the Quest for Superintelligence.](#) Penguin, 2026.
- [Rewired: McKinsey's Playbook on How Leading Companies Win with Technology and AI.](#) 2026.
- Priten Soundar-Shah, [Ethical Ed Tech: How Educators Can Lead on AI & Digital Safety.](#) Jossey-Bass, 2026.
- Emily Bender & Alex Hanna, [The AI Con: How to Fight Big Tech's Hype and Create the Future We Want.](#) Harper, 2025.
- Cindy Cohn [Privacy's Defender: My Thirty-Year Fight Against Digital Surveillance.](#) MIT Press, 2026.

You could also consider reviewing an AI tool or course. For example, you could review Khanmigo's new "[AI certification course](#)" for teachers.

2. Analyzing the impact, dangers, and affordances of AI in writing & education



Over the past year, a range of studies and arguments have been made about AI and writing/education. While some areas of consensus exist, there is a great deal of controversy, uncertainty, and debate. In this paper, you will focus on one such debate. You will select some texts and use them to help your reader understand the debate and why it matters. You should include some analysis of claims and persuasive strategies, and relative strengths and weaknesses. You can present your own thoughts or contribution to the debate. You can also explore other options (talk to me). I have a list of texts that will be useful.

3. Rage Against the Machine: The Rhetoric of the AI Backlash



Opposition to data centers and AI projects has sprung up across the nation and become a serious election issue. Writers note that new forms of “AI populism” have emerged, and that they span the political spectrum. You could examine some of the rhetorical strategies used, the frames, narrative themes, arguments, and persuasive tactics. How and why are people mobilizing to oppose data centers? How are politicians scrambling to leverage this and weave it into their political narratives? (You could focus on a political race from the upcoming mid-term elections). How are tech companies working to craft new persuasive strategies in the face of the backlash? Which arguments are the most common and most effective? (You may find [Data Center Watch](#), which tracks grassroots opposition to data center development, useful.)

4. A.I. and creative work: possibilities, perils, and perspectives



The question of how A.I. can advance, reconfigure, or undermine creative work is important. Your project could explore a dimension of this. For example, you could join and analyze one of the many Reddit forums on creative writing and A.I. Or you could explore arguments about the dangers of A.I. for creative workers. One option might be to join the Facebook group “[Artists Against AI](#)” and analyze their fears and concerns, the arguments they make, the stories they tell, and how they frame the issue.

Alternatively, you could focus on creative projects that are “AI-native,” or created largely with AI tools. Some examples: Mark Marino’s [Hallucinate This! An Authorized Autobotography](#), a funny, fictionalized account of the life of ChatGPT, written using ChatGPT, and Stephen Marche’s murder mystery *Death of an Author*, composed with creative writing A.I. tools. Or, you could consider a creative project of your own. Jaren George Raquel, a recent 411 student, created the video “[Recreational AI: Creating Video, Music and Art with New AI Tools](#),” which explores the possibilities and limits of AI tools for producing art, and also reveals the process he used to craft his own original music video. If you do produce a creative work, you will need to include documentation and reflection on the process. Talk to me if you are interested in pursuing this.

5. Digital rhetoric in contemporary politics: persuasion, power, and political struggle



In a sign of how important social media has become, prominent social media influencers were recently invited to share the podium with senior politicians at both the Republican and Democratic national conventions. The use of social media by individuals, parties, and organizations provide rich opportunities for analyses of digital rhetoric. You could examine the

role of social media influencers in elections, or how political parties are using them as part of their electoral strategies. You could, for example, examine how particular political figures or organizations use social media to persuade voters, particularly as we approach the November 2026 mid-term elections. Or you could consider the rhetorical strategies President Trump uses on X/Twitter over the next few months. You could focus on narrative themes, frames, persuasive tactics, imagery, patterns of linking, retweeting, etc. (Alternatively, you could compare his current rhetoric on X/Twitter to the ways he used the platform in the 2020 election, or to how he uses Truth Social.) If you have a strong stomach, you could join a Facebook group for a political candidate or sign up for the social media feeds of a politician, political organization, or advocacy group. It might also be interesting to compare the social media strategies of two different politicians or groups. There are many possibilities.

If you are interested in misinformation, disinformation, and information warfare, there is much to write about. Scholars have already collected data on the activities of hostile foreign actors. These actors are posing as progressive and conservative news outlets/organizations/individuals to stoke division and conflict. You could examine the strategies, tactics, and rhetoric used, how they understand and leverage cultural and political fault lines, and how they seek to impact elections. Alternatively, you could explore how A.I. is being deployed. What issues and problems are emerging, and how are they talked about? How are these tools being used for mass customized persuasion, and what can be done to mitigate harms?

6. Boomers gone wild: persuasion, politics, & paranoia on NextDoor.com



As Brown et al. note, there is “little research on Nextdoor, the world's largest and most important local social media network.” Yet the site is widely used, especially by older Americans, and impacts many people. It is home to countless petty squabbles, but also a place where news is shared, social issues are negotiated, and everything from crime to politics to “neighborhood values” debated. You could join your local Nextdoor community and analyze communication on the site. You could look for themes or “micro-narratives” - how older Americans talk about young people, or crime, for example, or what the “hottest” topics are. You could look at how Nextdoor users frame issues, attempt persuasion, and police behavior. There are many other questions to explore. I have a large collection of source texts to use, so if interested, contact me.

7. Rhetorical analysis of a key problem social media scholars are debating



Drawing in part on texts/topics from class, select several representative texts to analyze. Your analysis should include attention to a) rhetorical stases (representation of the problem, its causes, effects, and solutions), b) persuasive strategies, and c) the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments. One option might be the “debating Haidt” project below, which focuses on arguments about social media and mental health. Attention to rhetorical issues would need to be a substantial part of such a project.

8. Debating Haidt: analyzing arguments and rhetorical strategies in debates about social media and mental health



The U.S. Surgeon General recently called for warning labels on social media to alert parents and children of their dangers to adolescent mental health. Jonathan Haidt has done more than any other scholar to make the case that social media damages teen mental health, and serious reforms are needed. His work, along with SDSU’s professor Jean Twenge, has been highly influential. You could analyze some of his arguments, the persuasive strategies he uses, the main challenges to his work, and his responses to those objections. Attention to rhetorical issues would need to be a substantial part of such a project.

9. Critical A.I. literacy



Scholars have argued we urgently need “critical A.I. literacy,” and some scholars have provided accounts of what this should consist of (for example, see [Buyserie and Thurston](#) and [Vee et al.](#), as well as work by Maha Bali and Anna Mills.) You could examine arguments about why this matters, how critical A.I. literacy should be defined, what is at stake, and how it should be taught.

10. Social Media, Authoritarian Populism, and Demagoguery



As Tufekci notes, social media platforms have provided fertile ground for authoritarians and demagogues. Demagogues and authoritarians have discovered powerful ways of leveraging the affordances of these platforms and adapted their rhetoric to new media ecosystems. You could focus on a single authoritarian or demagogue or compare pre-social media figures with current ones. You could explore how and why certain platforms seem particularly useful to authoritarians/demagogues (Brian Ott’s work on Twitter/X may be helpful for this.)

11. Advertising of/with A.I.

How Chinese influencers use AI digital clones of themselves to pump out content

Questions over honesty and legality as livestreamers, particularly in online shopping, use avatars to boost their earnings



Advertisements for A.I. are everywhere - at the Superbowl, the Oscars, and on social media. Tech companies advertise to students on Instagram and TikTok, and social media influencers are paid to sell “learning shortcuts” and “relief” from homework. As [Marc Watkins](#) writes, students are bombarded by “influencers peddling AI tools that straddle the line between aiding study and blatantly enabling cheating.” Conduct a rhetorical analysis of select advertisements. Describe patterns you see, persuasive strategies used, and how audiences are targeted. You could analyze the language used, the values promoted, and assumptions made about education. Alternatively, you could consider how educational A.I. platforms have been marketed to school districts, leading to scandals in [San Diego](#) and [L.A.](#) You could also examine how advertising is being reconfigured by A.I. but would need to make sure you include rhetorical analysis.

12. *Rainbow's End*: literary explorations of social media and A.I.



Vernor Vinge is a highly acclaimed science fiction writer who taught at SDSU for decades. His novel *Rainbow's End* won the 2007 Hugo award for best science fiction novel. The book is set in a future San Diego and imagines what social media and AI might look like thirty years from now. Surprisingly, very little has been written about it. You could be a trailblazer and analyze Vinge’s vision of the future, connecting this to some issues discussed in class. You could examine his representation of social media’s evolution, use, possibilities and dangers, or what it means to be literate in Vinge’s future San Diego. You could discuss the way media technologies are shown to influence culture, identity, and knowledge, or explore more traditional literary concerns (characterization, plot, style, tropes, etc.) You could examine his depiction of future San Diego. There are many other possibilities, so suggest alternatives. I can supply copies of the text.