

UNST 108C: PORTLAND Winter 2026



Monday/Wednesday 11:00am-12:40 pm
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Office hours: Mon/Wed 9:00-11:00AM

Location: Cramer Hall 101
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First Year Inquiry (FRINQ) is a year-long course that explores a particular theme (ours is the city of Portland) from an **interdisciplinary** (incorporating two or more types of knowledge) perspective. In this course, we will use the city of Portland to uncover how place shapes our lives, and how we, in turn, shape the places we live in. We will examine the city as a context for human development and cultural expression; as an urban area of diverse communities; and as part of the larger natural, material, and social environment of the Pacific Northwest. We will discuss what connects people to their place(s) as well as what makes their place(s) part of their social, cultural, spiritual, economic and political life. We will read broadly, touching on the social sciences (urban studies, sociology, political science) and humanities (history, literature, arts). We will use the city as our laboratory as we explore the communities and spaces of greater Portland.

University Studies Learning Goals: University Studies courses focus on four main learning goals:

Communication: Students will enhance their capacity to communicate in various ways—writing, graphics, numeracy, and other visual and oral means—to collaborate effectively with others in group work, and to be competent in appropriate communication technologies.

Critical Thinking and Inquiry: Students will learn various modes of inquiry through interdisciplinary curricula—problem-posing, investigating, conceptualizing—in order to become active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.

Diversity, Equity and Social Justice: Students will explore and analyze identity, power relationships, and social justice in historical contexts and contemporary settings from multiple perspectives.

Ethics, Agency and Community: Students will examine values, theories and practices that inform their actions, and reflect on how personal choices and group decisions impact local and global communities.

Course Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Analyze the various political, environmental, economic, and social factors that shape Portland.
- Explore the concepts and contributors to both a “sense of place” and displacement.

- Recognize the importance of equity as we explore Portland as a city and the significance of a multidisciplinary approach to investigating the city.
- Develop inquiry and critical thinking skills that help us address important social issues.
- Use evidence as a means to deepen understanding of an issue, solve problems, discover new ideas, develop perspective on a topic, and/or effectively convey a point of view to others.
- Develop skills of observation, civic engagement, dialogue, and analysis; practice being a deep listener.
- Find, evaluate, synthesize, and analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources, and use appropriate means of documentation for those sources.
- Synthesize materials, developing your own perspective as you integrate your own ideas and experiences with those of others.

The following course learning outcomes meet the state requirements for WR121Z:

- Apply rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts.
- Engage texts critically, ethically, and strategically to support writing goals.
- Develop flexible composing, revising, and editing strategies for a variety of purposes, audiences, writing situations, and genres.
- Reflect on knowledge and skills developed in this course and their potential applications in other writing contexts.

Student Success Pilot Course

This FRINQ course is part of a pilot project focused on student success. In this pilot, the curriculum also includes assignments and activities with campus partners, such as Advising, Career Services, and the Student Health Center (SHAC), among others. These activities introduce you to the many resources available to you as a PSU student, and they help you learn about and develop the practical skills to navigate this institution with confidence and become a productive and well-organized, professional student.

Social Action Course

Additionally, this course is a **social action course**. Social action is a form of experiential learning where students identify an issue or problem on their campus or in the community that they want to address. They develop and launch a social action campaign aimed at creating a policy change to positively impact the issue. In social action courses, students select the issue or policy they want to work on. They can choose to examine issues from a conservative, liberal, radical, or non-ideological perspective. Social action is not political indoctrination. In this type of class, the role of the professor is to support students through the process of social action, not to influence students' choice of issues or to determine how these issues should be addressed or solved. We will begin working on social campaigns during Week Seven, and the campaigns will continue through the end of Spring Term.

Course Transfer Credit Equivalencies: In this course, you will earn 5 credits each term (Fall, Winter, and Spring) for a total of 15 credits. Completion of the full 15 credits represents:

- 4 credits writing (WR 121Z: Composition I)
- 4 credits social science
- 4 credits arts & letters

- 3 credits science literacy

Required Materials:

All of the assigned readings and materials you need for this class are linked to the course Canvas shell. We will be using the following texts:

Urban Literacy: Learning to Read the City Around You by Leanne Serbulo (Open Access Textbook available through the PSU Library)

Change! A Student Guide to Social Action (Second Edition) by Scott Myers-Lipton (Optional this term, required next)

FRINQ Course Policies: This is an inquiry-based learning course. Unlike traditional modes of learning where the instructor presents information and students are tested on their ability to retain or understand that information, in an inquiry-based class, students explore ideas through discussion or other participatory activities. This style of education requires student engagement and active participation. Our goal is to create a community of teachers and learners where everyone's unique perspectives and experiences contribute to our collective understanding of key ideas and concepts. For this type of learning to work well, everyone has to participate and be involved. The following course policies are designed to facilitate inquiry-based learning:

Participation:

Please come to class on time, prepared, and ready to participate. In this class, we will be engaged in discussions and other forms of active learning where every student's contribution matters. Your questions, insights, and ideas will help us build our collective knowledge base.

Mentor Session:

Each student who is enrolled in the course is also enrolled in a co-listed Mentored Inquiry section. Mentor sessions are smaller workshop sections where a talented undergraduate student leads you in discussions and activities that are designed to support your success in this class. Mentor session attendance and participation is mandatory.

Electronics:

Research shows that even when laptops or tablets are being used for an academic purpose, they can distract from class discussions. ***No laptop, tablet, cell phone, or earbud use is permitted during class unless we are completing a writing or research task.*** While class is in session, you should put your electronics away. If we are working on an activities that requires technology use, I will let you know, and you can get out your phone or laptop. If you do not have a laptop, you may use a computer in the mentor lab.

Assignments/Late work:

"Finished crap can be edited. Unfinished greatness languishes forever" — Margarita Gakis

In other words, get it done, and get it done on time! This year, you are learning how to be a successful college student, which involves prioritizing your work and managing your time effectively. Homework assignments must be turned in on time. They are usually due before class begins. I will not accept late homework assignments.

There will be a 24-hour grace period for all major assignments. Assignments that are not turned in after the 24-hour grace period will receive an automatic 50% reduction in points. Assignments will not be accepted if they are turned in more than a week after the due date.

Let's Talk

No matter how much time and effort you devote to your schoolwork, sometimes life just gets in the way. If something unexpected comes up that prevents you from attending class or completing an assignment, please come and talk to me. If you find yourself struggling to stay motivated or to get work done, let's chat. If you don't understand an assignment or can't make sense of a reading, let me know. FRINQ courses are designed to be supportive. Our goal is to help you develop the skills you will need to be successful in higher education. We don't expect you to be a stellar college student right away, but we also won't necessarily know that you are struggling if you don't talk to us.

Your mentor and I are both available to talk to you. You can chat with us before or after main or mentor sessions or during the class break. I also hold regular office hours. Feel free to drop in during my office hours or make an appointment if those hours don't work for you. You can also send me an email and I will respond promptly.

If you have a question about course assignments or grades, come talk to me. If you need support in this or any of your other classes, you might chat with your mentor. Mentors are trained to help students navigate campus resources. But don't worry about who to go to with which question. If your mentor or I don't have an answer, we will refer you to someone who does. So, if you have questions or need some support, just reach out to either one of us. That's what we are here for.

Academic Integrity:

Higher education is about far more than just getting a piece of paper and hopefully a decent job. In college, you learn to think critically and systematically, to ask the right questions and determine how you can answer them, and to collaborate with others to solve problems and expand both your own and our collective knowledge. Some of the knowledge that is generated in our classrooms and on our campus has a broader impact. PSU's motto is: "Let knowledge serve the city." Much of the thinking and learning we do can improve people's lives. For example, in recent years, PSU faculty and students have worked to reduce traffic fatalities, identified communities where residents are most at risk of dying of heat-related illnesses, and helped stop local manufacturers from producing harmful emissions.

In order to develop the skills that are necessary for producing knowledge that serves our community, we have to practice them. That means taking risks and avoiding short cuts. Learning isn't about perfection. Making mistakes or getting the wrong answer is part of the learning process. To truly learn, you have to do your own work, which includes your own reading, writing, and thinking.

PSU defines academic misconduct as: "actual or attempted, fraud, deceit, unauthorized use of materials prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment, or any act that aims to achieve

an unfair academic advantage. Unless otherwise specified by the faculty member, all submissions, whether in draft or final form, must either be the Student's own work, or must clearly acknowledge the source(s)." (<https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/psu-code-student-conduct-and-responsibility>)

If you commit academic misconduct, you will receive a zero for your assignment. Academic misconduct may also result in stiffer penalties.

Artificial Intelligence

"For the machine, because of the way it is built, can work only in a given direction, no matter who pulls its levers" - Rudolf Rocker

"[T]he point in education is not to generate text artifacts. Rather, the point is to help us develop our own ability to think critically. Writing is a means to critical thinking, and we must do our own writing to cultivate our own true, not artificial, intelligence." —Loretta Notareschi

Artificial Intelligence tools may not be used to do your reading, writing, or thinking for you in this course. We will have a class discussion about appropriate uses of AI this term.

PSU Student Resources and Support:

Portland State provides an array of support for students. If you are struggling academically, financially, emotionally, or socially, there are free resources available to you on campus. If you scroll down on the [Student page](#), you will find links to campus resources. Throughout the year, your mentor and I will highlight various programs and resources on campus. If you are having academic or life difficulties and aren't sure where to get help, please reach out to me or your mentor.

Disability Resources and Accommodations:

If you need accommodations, please visit the Disability Resource Center. If you are already registered with the DRC, they will contact me with a list of accommodations. If you have not yet registered with the DRC, but need accommodations, please reach out to me to let me know how to best support you as you go through their process.

Grading Guidelines

In this course, I will be using a variation of a *specifications grading system* (also called *specs grading*). In this type of grading system, all assignments are graded pass/fail. If you complete a homework assignment according to the specifications outlined for it, you get all of the points associated with. For major assignments, I will allocate points based upon a list of specified criteria that are tied to the assignment objectives. If you meet the specifications within that criteria, you will receive points for it. For example, in a research assignment, you may be asked to cite your sources using APA or MLA format. If you make an honest effort to cite the materials you used, you will receive the points for this category.

Course Grade:

Total Points	360-400	320-359	280-319	260-279	259 or below
Final Grade	A	B	C	D	F

Grade components:

- *Attendance (40 points):* Attendance will be taken in both main and mentor session.

If you....	Attendance Points
<i>Miss no more than 3 total (And no more than 2 main or 2 mentor) sessions</i>	40 points
<i>Each additional session (main or mentor) missed</i>	Deduct 5 points

- *Homework Assignments (80 points, 10 points each):* Graded P/F
- *Major Assignments (280 points): The number of points you earn for each assignment is dependent upon the number of specifications you meet.*

Major Assignment	Due Date	Points
RTC editorial/testimony proposal	Wed. January 14th	10
Initial Draft RTC editorial/testimony	Wed. January 21st	25
Research Journey	Wed. February 4th	35
Representation Analysis Presentation	Wed. February 11th	60
RTC editorial/testimony final paper	Mon. February 16th	60
Campaign Group Assignment #1	Wed. February 25th	10
Campaign Group Assignment #2	Wed. March 4th	25
Campaign Group Assignment #3	Wed. March 11th	25
Fall E-Portfolio	Wed, March 11th	30
Total		280

Course Schedule (*Subject to change. See Canvas modules for most up to date schedule.*)

Date	Class Activities (topic, readings, what's due)
Week One	
Monday, Jan. 5th	<i>Welcome Back!</i>
Wednesday, Jan. 7th	<p><i>Urban Development Issues</i> Read: Urban Literacy Chapter 3: Development Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 3 Reading Response due before class begins
Week Two	<i>Sunday, January 11th: Last day to add/drop a course online and receive full refund</i>
Monday, Jan. 12th	<p><i>Representation in Portland</i> <i>SHAC Guest Presentation</i> Read: Urban Literacy Chapter 4: Representation Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 4 Reading Response due to Canvas before class begins • Calendar and Term Planning Assignment due by the end of the day
Wednesday, Jan. 14th	<p><i>The Right to the City, Right to the City Debate</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to the City Editorial or Testimony Proposal due by the end of the day

Week Three	
Monday, Jan. 19th <i>MLK Day no class</i>	
Wednesday, Jan. 21st	<p><i>Assumptions Analysis and Intro to Representation Analysis Group Project</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTC Initial Draft of Editorial or Testimony due to Canvas before class begins AND bring a printed copy to class with you
Week Four	
Monday, Jan. 26th	<p><i>Library Workshop and Academic Support Services Guest Presentation</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumptions Analysis and Research Questions due before class begin
Wednesday, Jan 28th	<i>OJMCHE field trip (tentative date)</i>
Week Five	
Monday, Feb. 2nd	<i>Data Workshop and Advising Guest Presentation</i>
Wednesday, Feb. 4th	<p><i>1:1 Writing Conferences with Dr. Serbulo and Group Project work session</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Journey due before class begins
Week Six	
Monday, Feb. 9th	<p><i>Writing Workshop: Argumentation and how to write editorials or public testimony</i></p> <p><i>Progression Team Guest Presentation</i></p>
Wednesday, Feb. 11th	<p><i>Representation Analysis Group Project Presentations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All groups need to be prepared to present
Week Seven	
Monday, Feb. 16th	<p><i>Introduction to Social Action</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTC FINAL Editorial or Testimony due by the end of the day
Wednesday, Feb. 18th	<p><i>Issue Development</i></p> <p>Read: <i>Change! A Student Guide to Social Action Chapter One</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Response and Issue Proposal due before class begins
Week Eight	<i>Sunday, Feb. 22nd: Last day to change a grading option or withdraw from a course</i>

Monday, Feb. 23rd	<i>Choosing campaigns</i>
Wednesday, Feb. 25th	<p><i>Setting the Tone and Developing Demands</i></p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Change! A Student Guide to Social Action Chapter 2: Setting the Tone</i> • <i>Organizing Guide: People, Power, Change</i> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Action: Individual Reflection #1 due before class begins • Campaign Group Assignment #1 due by the end of the day
Week Nine	
Monday, March 2nd	<p><i>Power Mapping</i></p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Power Mapping in Community Organizing</i> • <i>Change! A Student Guide to Social Action, Chapter 4: Building Power, pages 43-50 only</i> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Action Individual Reflection #2 due before class begins
Wednesday, March 4th	<p><i>Building Power Event Planning and Organizational Rap Development</i></p> <p>Complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign Group Assignment #2 due by the end of the day <p><i>Spring Term Priority Registration for Freshmen begins</i></p>
Week Ten	
Monday, March 9th	<i>Building Power Event and Campaign Planning</i>
Wednesday, March 11th	<p><i>Course Wrap-up and Building Power Reflection/Campaign Planning</i></p> <p>Complete (by the end of the day)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Action Individual Reflection #3 • Campaign Group Assignment #3: Campaign plan for next term • Winter E-Portfolio