

The Invention of Writing: Cuneiform to Computers

Welcome to our Student Poster Presentation!

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The invention of writing is one of the most momentous events in the history of human civilizations. Its consequences far exceed what was merely “intended” with this invention, and they reach deeply into all aspects of our lives and selves. The magic of writing has always fascinated humans. But writing is also consistently allied with social and political power. Cities, economies, bureaucracies, religious and legal institutions, industrial automation, as well as Google, Facebook, and Twitter bots would all be unthinkable without it. Writing is a technology of power. We need a critical discourse to understand how this complex phenomenon shapes our worlds and our minds.

We ask **BIG** questions:

- * How do civilizations change when writing is introduced?
- * How has literacy re-shaped our brains?
- * Would mathematics as we know it be possible without writing?
- * How does music change when music notation is introduced?
- * Logographic systems have thousands of characters. Alphabets have about 30. Our DNA has 4. Computer Code has 2. What difference does that make?
- * How do writing systems train the populations in which they circulate?
- * How can a “deep history” of writing and our current concerns about the digitization of society illuminate each other?

We study **SPECIFIC** writing systems:

Students choose their own research topics. Through shared readings, student research, and guest presentations by UI faculty, we explore a rich panorama of diverse writing systems in international and interdisciplinary context.

We develop:

- * critical thinking skills about written representation and reading practices
- * an increased awareness that each notation system is unique, predicated on a given culture, material, language, and the purpose for which it was created
- * respect for the richness and diversity of human civilizations throughout history
- * flexible and creative thinking across disciplinary boundaries.

What do we
do in this
class?

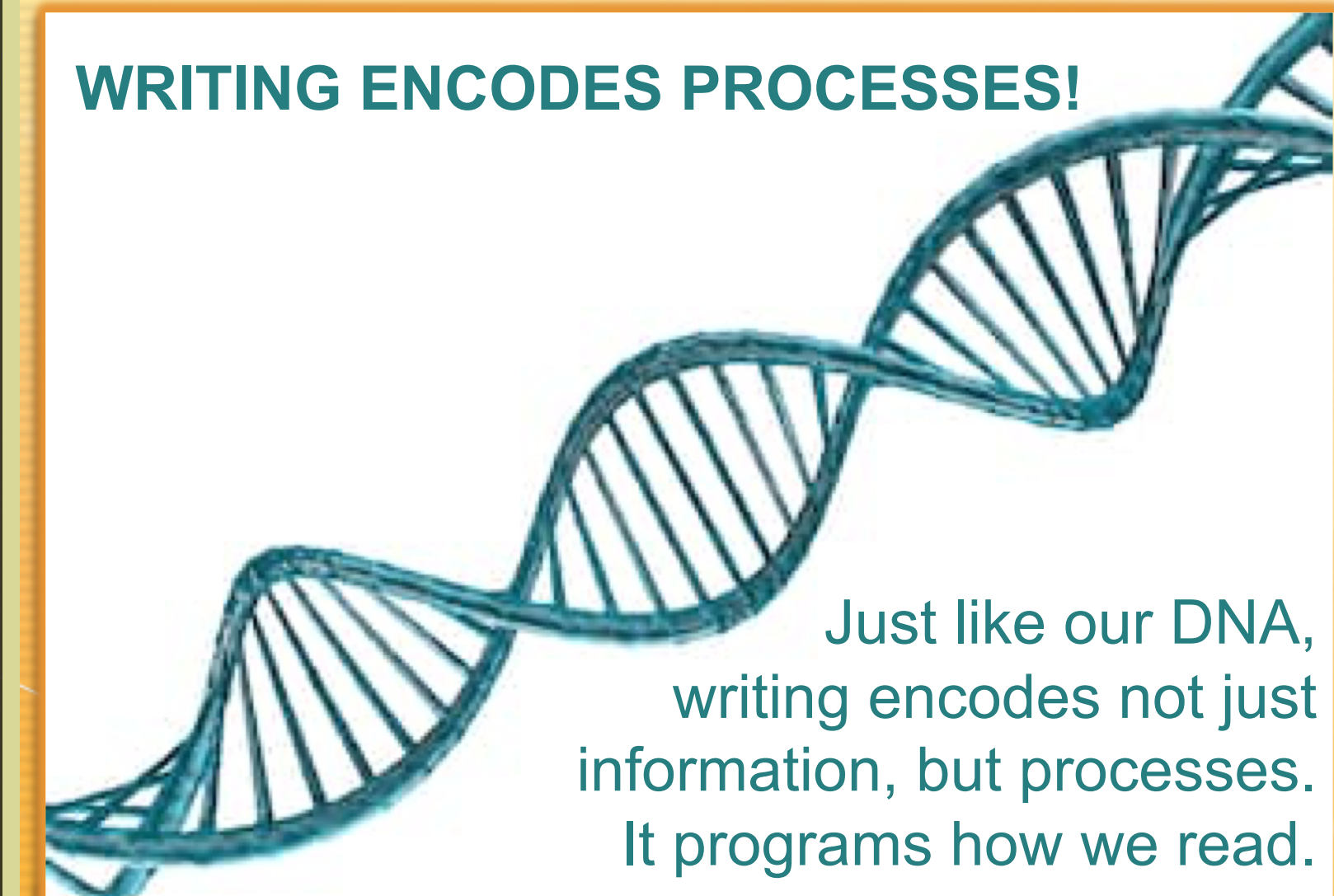
Perspectives for

“The Writing University”

We all write. We all use notation systems. An inquiry exploring the implications of this can bring scholars across the university together in an exciting and broadly interdisciplinary conversation. This also would add new depth to the University of Iowa’s brand as “The Writing University.”

- * Since 2015: Course on “The Invention of Writing: Cuneiform to Computers,” taught by Assoc. Prof. Sabine I. Gölz. (Next time offered in spring 2021.)
- * Since 2018: Obermann Faculty Group on “Systems of Writing and Notation.”
- * Under Construction: *The CASSANDRA Project* (**C**ritical **A**pproaches to the **S**tudy of **S**cripting and **R**eadin**A**pparatuses)

WRITING ENCODES PROCESSES!



Just like our DNA,
writing encodes not just
information, but processes.
It programs how we read.