

Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

Communication 7/8616

Course Description

What makes a theory of rhetoric – itself a contested term – “contemporary?” Is it merely a question of historical location in an evolving tradition? Or is something more fundamental at stake in the emerging “new rhetorics” of the middle and late twentieth century? This course will take a sustained look at such questions by surveying a range of topics and thinkers that have been central to recent scholarship in rhetoric studies in Communication.

Course goals include: understanding challenges to classical and modern rhetoric study; becoming familiar with the work of Kenneth Burke and Chaïm Perelman; making links between rhetoric, subjectivity, and ideology; situating rhetoric in the context of social and critical theory; and, finally, demonstrating a strong historical and conceptual grasp of the approaches to contemporary rhetorical theory under consideration in the course.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class in addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional disciplinary procedures.

Description of Assignments

- Six (6) Argument Briefings: A polished and well-written short essay of between 400-500 words that explicates one (1) central passage from the week’s readings. See “CRT2020-Argument Briefings” for due dates and further guidance.
- Argument Pitch: The pitch, which is due by 5pm on 10/15, is your chance to test-drive the argument you are developing for your final essay, and to receive feedback and advice on your writing and research in its early stages. There is a guide which outlines this and the “Final Paper Presentation” and “Final Paper” assignments. See “CRT2020-Pitch, Present, Revise *then* Submit” for further guidance.
- Book Presentation: Each student selects a book in contemporary rhetorical theory. On 10/26 and 11/2 each student will deliver a ten (10) minute presentation reviewing the book for the class. See “CRT2020-Book Presentations” for a list of books to choose from and for further guidance.
- Final Paper Presentation: This ten (10) minute presentation, which you will deliver on 11/9 or 11/16, should be a polished and compelling version of the argument you make in your final paper. It offers you a chance to make your case at length, and to receive feedback to guide your revisions for the final paper.
- Final Paper: The 6000-7000 word paper, which is due by 10am on 11/23, must demonstrate a strong conceptual grasp of the approaches to contemporary rhetorical theory under consideration in the course.

Attendance and Grading

This course will meet remotely for the entire term. We will not have any “in-person” sessions. Class starts at 5:30pm on ZOOM. Follow instructions provided via email and on eCourseware.

Each assignment has a maximum number of total points (see below). You begin with zero (0). Throughout the term you accumulate points toward your final grade. The grade will be scored on a 100 point scale.

- Weekly Responses/30pts
- Book Presentation/15pts
- Final Paper Presentation/15pts
- Final Paper/40pts

Required Texts

- *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca
- *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, Kenneth Burke
- *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory (CRT)*, Porrovecchio and Condit (eds)
- *Sourcebook on Rhetoric (SR)*, James Jasinski (ed)
- All texts marked eC are on eCourseware under “Readings”

Exigencies of Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

- 8/17 Introductions and freewrite
- 8/24 **CRT** (1-13); **SR** (xiii-xxxv)
- McKerrow, "Research in Rhetoric" *eC*
 - Wanzer-Serrano, "Rhetoric's rac(e)list problems" *eC*
 - Anderson, et al., "Liberalism and its Discontents" *eC*
 - Simonson, "Short History of Rhetorical Theory" *eC*
- 8/31 **New Rhetoric** (pp. 1-195; 509-14; skim remainder)
- Frank and Bolduc, "Chaïm Perelman's 'First Philosophies and Regressive Philosophy': Commentary and Translation" (178-88, only) *eC*
 - Argument (esp. 38-51) *SR*
 - Argument Field *SR*
 - Dissociation *SR*
 - Epideictic *SR*
 - Presence *SR*
 - Values and Value Hierarchy *SR*
- 9/7 **Labor Day**
- 9/14 **Permanence and Change** (pp. xvii-172, 262-272; skim remainder)
- Burke, "Definition of Man", *eC*
 - Dramatism *SR*
 - Motive/Motivation *SR*
 - Perspective by Incongruity *SR*
 - Identification *SR*
 - Mystification *SR*
 - Recalcitrance *SR*
 - Scapegoating *SR*
 - Transcendence *SR*

Revisions of Rhetoric

- 9/21 **Meanings of Rhetoric**
- Leff, "The Habitation of Rhetoric" *CRT*
 - Charland, "Rehabilitating Rhetoric" *eC*
 - Chavez, "Beyond Inclusion" *eC*
 - Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion" *CRT*
- 9/28 **Rhetoric, Knowledge, Power**
- Farrell, "Knowledge, Consensus and Rhetorical Theory" *CRT*
 - McGee, "The Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology" *CRT*
 - Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic" *eC*
 - Cloud, "Rhetorical Criticism for Underdogs" *eC*
 - Critical Rhetoric *SR*
 - Epistemic, Rhetoric as *SR*
 - Ideograph *SR*

- Power *SR*
- Social Knowledge *SR*
- Subject/Subjectivity *SR*

10/5 Rhetoric, Audience, and Textuality

- Black, "The Second Persona" *CRT*
- Campbell, "Agency" *eC*
- Leff, "Things Made By Words" *eC*
- Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" *CRT*
 - Audience *SR*
 - Close Reading *SR*
 - Constitutive Rhetoric *SR*
 - Controversy *SR*
 - Discourse *SR*
 - Hegemony *SR*
 - Hermeneutics (and Rhetoric) *SR*
 - Interpellation *SR*
 - Intertextuality *SR*
 - Situation *SR*
 - Subjects/Subjectivity *SR*
 - Text *SR*

10/12 Rhetoric and COVID-19

- Baker et al., "Rhetorics & Viruses" *eC*
- Ceccarelli, "The Polysemic Facepalm" *eC*
- Condit, "Phronesis and Lockdown" *eC*
- Kennedy, "On Breath and Blackness" *eC*
- Walzer, "Novel Violence" *eC*

Doing Things with Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

10/15 Argument Pitch due by 5:00pm

10/19 One-on-One Meetings

(class will not meet as a group; schedule one-on-one meetings via Doodle poll on eCourseware)

10/26 Book Presentations (Group Purple)

11/2 Book Presentations (Group Red)

11/9 Final Paper Presentations (Group Blue)

11/16 Final Paper Presentations (Group Green)

11/23 Final Papers due by 10am

Note: Bulleted terms in small print are entries from the *Sourcebook on Rhetoric* (SR). While these are not required reading, they are encouraged reading – especially if you are having trouble with the primary readings and as you move toward building an argument for your final paper.