Course Description

This engaging course will cover rhetorical texts and concepts that span almost 2,000 years—from Alcidamas (5th century BCE) to Erasmus (16th century CE), a bus tour of sorts, with several fascinating stops along the way. Because, in some respects, we are doing history, we will begin with a few necessary historiographical and methodological considerations, and then begin reading, in chronological order, Alcidamas, Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle and develop historical, political, philosophical, rhetorical, and educational contexts within which these texts and the rhetorical concepts within them emerged. We will then move on to excerpts from the anonymous ad Herennium, a few selections from Quintilian’s Institutes (chapters 1, 2, and 10), emerging early Christian rhetorical and editorial practices, Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine, and, time permitting, rhetorical practices within the early Renaissance. We will also follow three threads: one is mimesis / imitatio (imitation) and the extent to which ancient authors and speakers relied upon this rhetorical devise from (at least) Isocrates through the Renaissance; the second is how teachers taught and how students learned and practiced rhetorical and compositional concepts in antiquity, and the third are the variety of conceptions of rhetoric over these periods.

Proposed Texts


Additional course materials will be provided.

Course requirements in addition to the readings and class discussions:

- Five bi-weekly summary / responses on the assigned readings
- A semester research paper with annotated bibliography
- Lead one class discussion on an assigned text relevant to the course material