

Rhetorical Theory
ENGL 7350/8350
(Same as Comm 7350/8350)
Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
PT 229
Dr. Joseph Jones

The catalog description for this course reads: “History of rhetoric from the sophists through the present; includes readings from Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Erasmus, Ramus, Campbell, Blair, John Q. Adams, and others.” Such a course description is commendable for its ambition. But cramming the “history of rhetoric” into fourteen weeks is like stuffing an elephant into a duffel bag.

Rhetoric is both a cause and an effect, and rhetorical theory interrogates both by developing philosophical and practical knowledge about the ways human beings use language to understand the world and relate to others. Our curated readings will include foundational texts from ancient Greece and Rome; texts associated with the Scottish Enlightenment; and selected contemporary texts that explore some applications for rhetorical theory. Our especial emphases throughout will be rhetorical invention (“the process and art of creation, discovery, or problem solving”), and the relationship of rhetoric and virtue. Those emphases have been matters of importance and enduring inquiry in rhetorical theory; each has relevance for our current, troubled cultural moment.