

What?! Plato, Aristotle in an English course? And, what is ‘rhetoric’ anyway?

History of Rhetoric (ENGL4625)

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T/Th 11:20-12:25

### Course description

This engaging course will cover rhetorical texts and concepts that span almost 2,500 years—from Alcidas (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) to Martin Luther King Jr.—a bus tour of sorts, with several fascinating stops along the way. After consideration of the origin of rhetoric in ancient Greece, we will examine the argument between Alcidas and Isocrates as to whether speaking or writing is the more intellectually challenging and valuable means of communication. Plato then jumps into the fray, and we will read his *Apology of Socrates*, the *Gorgias*, and *Phaedrus* and try to determine if he is a fan or foe of rhetoric. Aristotle was a student of Plato, and we’ll try to understand what his *Rhetoric* says about rhetoric. Moving on from the Greeks to the Romans, we will read excerpts from the magnum opus of one of the most influential teachers of speaking and writing in the Western tradition, Quintilian’s *Institutes*. About the same time that Quintilian’s *Institutes* was in circulation (90s CE), early Christian authors were employing a variety of rhetorical techniques into their composition of texts that would become the canonical New Testament, so we will examine some of these rhetorical practices, including Greco-Roman mimesis, before moving onto the Renaissance and considering Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly*. Margaret Fell’s and / or Sarah Grimke’s rhetorical compositions are next, followed by Pauline Meier’s *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, which will help us to understand some of the rhetorical conventions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that are evident in the crafting of our nation’s founding document. We will close out the semester with a rhetorical analysis of Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

Assignments include:

- 4 quizzes (20%)
- mid-term (take home) (25%)
- final exam (take home) (25%)
- 10 pg research paper (30%)

Some of the texts to be purchased include:

Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Penguin Classics, ISBN 978-0140446081

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin Classics, ISBN 978-0140445824

Plato, *Phaedrus*, Stephen Scully, trans. Focus Publishing, 2003, ISBN 978-0-941051-54-5

Plato: *Gorgias and Aristotle: Rhetoric*, Joe Sachs, trans. Focus Publishing, 2009, ISBN 978-1-58510-299-0

Pauline Meier, *American Scripture: The Making of the Declaration of Independence*, Vintage Books, 1998, ISBN 978-0679779087

Quintilian, *On the Teaching of Speaking and Writing*, James J. Murphy, ed., Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, ISBN 0-8093-1378-2

Many of the shorter texts will be provided via pdfs.