

## COMM 367, Sec. 20W: Rhetorical Criticism MWF 12:35-1:25 SOC 014

### Scope of Course:

Rhetorical criticism entails the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of persuasive discourse. Its original and primary focus is directed towards social and political discourse and raises questions such as: How does public discourse persuade? What is the relation between persuasive texts and their social and cultural contexts? What counts as an argument in a public controversy? How can we assess the force of an argument? What is the relation between reason and emotion? How does style or genre enter into persuasion? How is character constructed in a rhetorical text and what impact does it have?

Persuasion is an aspect of virtually all human communication, but this course will focus primarily on the most obvious form of rhetorical activity, speeches or written texts designed to influence social or political beliefs within some specific context. We will focus on understanding variables of situation, audience, and rhetor and how they influence the production and reception of persuasive messages. Case studies of significant rhetorical acts will be used to introduce and make tangible important concepts. Students will be expected to develop an understanding of the nature and function of rhetoric in various forms as a pragmatic tool that is used by rhetors to influence audience perceptions of symbolic reality.

Each student will write an original piece of rhetorical criticism on a text of his/her choice (with my approval). Students are expected to be doing independent research and analysis on their own text throughout the semester. To aid the scholarly process of learning how to do rhetorical criticism, we will engage in close reading of a collection of shared texts. Our close readings of the shared texts will be informed by reading and discussing a variety of rhetorical theories and critiques.

Many of these texts can be challenging for undergraduates. I do not ask you to master the readings by class time, I just ask you to actively engage the readings by class time. By "actively engage" I mean that students will make an effort to make sense of the reading that includes looking for definitions of terms that

are unfamiliar and formulating questions about aspects of the readings that they find unclear or difficult. In your attempt to understand the readings, come to class having attempted any homework I have assigned.

This is a writing-intensive course: This designation reflects both variety in types of writing assignments and efforts to help you improve your writing skills, not the sheer quantity of pages that you will write.

### **Course description & learning outcomes:**

This course examines theory, research, and application of critical methods for analyzing historical and contemporary persuasive discourse. Successful students will be able to analyze rhetorical situations and critically assess efforts to respond to them. They will be able to conduct research to find primary and secondary resources relevant to understanding historical and contemporary rhetorical situations.

### **Required Texts:**

Available online at Sakai site for COMM 367.

### *Recommended Websites*

American Rhetoric, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>.

Speeches on Social Justice, <http://www.sojust.net/speeches.html>

SOC Subject Guide, [http://libguides.luc.edu/sb.php?subject\\_id=13834](http://libguides.luc.edu/sb.php?subject_id=13834) (links to databases of journal articles, newspapers, etc.)

Use these sites to find inspiration for your research papers.

### **Class participation, structure, and preparation:**

- Class participation is essential for your learning in this class. Your class participation grade is a combination of attendance (both body and mind), in-class group participation, and individual contributions to class discussion. Just showing up is a basic fundamental part of class participation, but you will need to do much more than just show up to

get an A in class participation. Your input means a great deal to me, and to the other students in class.

- To be prepared adequately for class you should arrive with your handouts, readings, completed homework, and the notes necessary to participate in and/or lead discussions. You will need access to your readings during class sessions, please print out all readings from Sakai or bring a laptop or e-reader with the files downloaded.
- All absences are counted as unexcused except for: death in the family or documented illness. The more classes you miss, the lower your class participation grade and the harder time you will have being successful. Mental absences (e.g. falling asleep in class, web surfing, using social media) may sometimes (when extreme) be counted as absences.

### **Rights and responsibilities:**

I firmly believe that this course depends on our cooperative effort. As the instructor, I work to provide you with structures and resources so that you may learn all that you can and want. Your job is to take advantage of those structures and resources to the extent that you desire to do so. I will come each day prepared to help us navigate difficult course content. You are responsible to come each day having read the day's assigned material and prepared to contribute to our time together by: asking questions, participating in discussions, and completing exercises and assignments. Your involvement in the content of the course and the quality of your interaction within the classroom is crucial for our success together.

### **Late assignments:**

An on-time paper assignment is submitted via Sakai prior to the beginning of the class period when it is due. If I receive an assignment after I leave class it is considered a day late. An assignment that is one day late receives a 1/3 letter grade penalty. An assignment that is two days late receives a whole-grade penalty. EVERY subsequent day of lateness adds yet another whole-grade penalty. Saturdays and Sundays count as days of lateness here. After one week no assignments will be accepted. If you believe that you have a legitimate

reason for an extension of an assignment, you should contact me about it BEFORE the assignment is due. Extensions will be provided (or not) at my discretion. NB: FINAL PAPERS will NOT be accepted late. I have 48 hours to grade them and submit final grades.

### Policies:

- Students are expected to be actively engaged in class discussions and to study all assigned readings by the due date.
- Students are responsible for all readings whether or not they are discussed in the lectures.
- All written assignments must conform to the MLA style manual and be typed, double-spaced, and proofread meticulously. Errors in grammar, spelling and organization will cost you points.
- Students should retain a copy of all written assignments. Given the vagaries of USB drives and the like, you may consider keeping a hard copy. If you rely solely on electronic copies, be sure to have multiple backups (e.g., on a USB, on a hard drive, saved on Sakai, saved to a cloud). My computer hard drive crashed or my thumb drive is corrupted will not be accepted as excuses for not having assignments submitted.
- University & SOC standards regarding academic integrity, examinations and grading will be observed in this course. The SOC Academic Integrity policy is posted at <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>. It is your responsibility to read it, and to assure that you understand it. If you are unsure about its meaning, or about its application to a particular instance, it is your responsibility to contact me about it in advance of submitting your work. The university writing center also offers support on these issues. *Plagiarism in academic work or dishonest examination behavior will result in an "F" grade for the course and will be reported to the dean, who might issue further sanctions. Avoid any behavior that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academic dishonesty (e.g., failing to*

credit a source, or using somebody else's ideas without clarifying that they are not yours).

- The use of cell phones or laptops (unless required for a presentation or taking notes) will NOT be tolerated in this class. I reserve the right to confiscate any technological toys being used for purposes other than education in my classroom. I may periodically require those using laptops to turn them around so I can see the screens, and may bar individuals from using them in class.

### Assignments-Percentage-Due Date

Class Participation	15%	Ongoing
Text selection	0%	September 12
Description	10%	September 21
Historical/Context	15%	October 12
Critical Perspective	10%	October 31
Evaluation	15%	November 14
Final Paper	35%	December 16 by 11am

Schedule (date indicates **week** that readings, assignments due; all readings will be available on Sakai or through library databases; dates may be changed to adjust to what happens in class)

*Unit One: What is Rhetorical Criticism?*

**August 25** Introduction to course and each other.

What is Rhetoric/Rhetorical Criticism?

READING: Campbell & Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Chapter 1

Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address

*Unit Two: The Purpose of Rhetorical Criticism*

**Sept 1** Rhetoric and Audience

Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory"

**Sept 8** What should rhetorical critics study?

READING: Wraga, "Public Address"

Campbell, "Criticism Ephemeral and Enduring"

Black, "Excerpts from *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*"

Campbell & Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Ch 2  
"Description"

Bush address to Congress, 9/20/2001

ASSIGNMENT: Discuss readings and how to determine what texts will become the focus for your own research papers. **Text selection due 9/10.**

Examine Bush speech in class and work on description.

*Unit Three: Foundations of Rhetorical Criticism*

**Sept 15** "Traditional" Criticism

READING: Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation"

Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument"

ASSIGNMENT: First short paper due **9/19** (3-5 pages). This paper focuses on description of your text.

**Sept 22** "Traditional" Criticism (cont.)

READING: Leff and Mohrmann, "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text"

Abraham Lincoln, "Cooper Union Address"

Campbell and Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*, Ch. 3

ASSIGNMENT: What arguments do your texts make? **No class Friday**

#### *Unit Four: Ideological Criticism*

**Sept 29** What is ideology?

READING: Black, "The Second Persona"

Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy"

Nixon, Vietnamization/Silent majority speech

Obama, "A more perfect union"

**Oct 8** What is ideology? (cont.)

Pfau, "Evaluating conspiracy"

Second short paper due **10/10** (3-5 pages) detailing history and context of your selected texts.

#### *Unit Five: Narrative Criticism*

**Oct 13** The importance of stories to the human condition.

READING: Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm"

Lewis, "Telling America's Story"

Pollock, "The Battle for the Past"

Barack Obama, "President-Elect Victory Speech"

Reagan, "First Inaugural Address"

Bush, "Address to U.N., 10/1/1990"

ASSIGNMENT: Locate and discuss narrative components in assigned readings and how they succeed/fail to persuade.

#### *Unit Six: Dramatic Criticism*

**Oct 20** Humans Tell Stories AND Love Drama

READING: Burke, *Beginning of A Grammar of Motives*

Burke, "Identification" Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle"

ASSIGNMENT: What the heck is Burke talking about? Could Burke have

prevented the Holocaust with rhetorical criticism?

**Oct 27** Dramatism (cont.)

**READING:** Tonn, Endress, and Diamond, "Hunting and Heritage on Trial in Maine: A Dramatistic Debate Over Tragedy, Tradition and Territory"

**ASSIGNMENT:** What current rhetorical texts might be best understood by using the dramatistic paradigm? How does dramatism help us as rhetorical critics?

Discuss benefits and detriments of dramatism, narrative, traditional, ideology as they relate to texts we examined in class and some contemporary examples (TBD).

Third short paper due **10/31** (2-3 pages) detailing the critical perspective you think is best suited to your selected texts.

*Unit Seven: Genre Criticism*

**Nov 3** Introduction to Genre – Apologia and Inaugurals

**READING:** Jasinski, "Genre"

Ware and Linkugel, "The Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia"

Campbell and Jamieson, "Inaugurating the Presidency"

John F. Kennedy's "Inaugural"

Barack Obama's "Inaugural"

**ASSIGNMENT:** What are your favorite public apologia? Bring in ideas/links to apply our readings to current practice. For example, Bill Clinton's apologies about the Monica Lewinsky "scandal;" Tiger Woods; Chris Brown; etc.

Compare/contrast JFK and Obama's inaugurals.

*Unit Eight: Metaphors and Tropes*

**Nov 11** Metaphors and Tropes

**READING:** Lakoff and Johnson, "Metaphors We Live By"

Osborn, "The trajectory of my work on metaphor"

Ivie, "The metaphor of force in prowar discourse"

**ASSIGNMENT:** Locate metaphors, tropes and stylistic language in previous

texts and/or your own texts.

Fourth short paper due **11/15** (3-5 pages) that evaluates your text.

*Unit Nine: Non-traditional texts*

**Nov 18** Iconic images of women: Postcards, toys, greeting cards, etc.

READING: Palczewski, "The Male Madonna & the Feminine Uncle Sam"

**Nov 25** Iconic images (cont.)

SCREENING: Murphy, A Question of Habit

**Dec 1** The Letter that Launched a Thousand Criticisms

READING: Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Fulkerson, "Public Letter as a Rhetorical Form: Structure, Logic and Style in King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'"

Martha Solomon Watson, "The Issue is Justice"

Michael Osborn, "Rhetorical Distance in 'Letter . . .'"

John H. Patton, "A Transforming Response"

Michael Leff and Ebony Utley, "Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in

Martin Luther King's 'Letter . . .'"

ASSIGNMENT: Who is right?!

**Dec 12** Final Papers Due 11 am

\*Readings or viewings may be added or subtracted at the instructor's discretion.