ENGL4230: special topics in rhetorical theory

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Overview

Kenneth Burke inaugurated modern rhetorical studies in 1950 when he published his landmark book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Central to Burke's argument is the concept of *identification*, which explains the process by which humans assign properties to individuals, objects, and spaces (for example) in order to form or break apart communities. Burke adapted the concept of *identification* from Sigmund Freud who, as we will learn, deployed it consistently throughout his prolific career. Burke liked how *identification* signaled a layered explanation of human consciousness. Yet, Burke wanted to locate the layers of human consciousness in the complexities of language, not in an originary sexual trauma that called human subjectivity into being. So, Burke adapted Freud's concept for his own purposes and remained committed to explaining human motivation in terms of language use. He believed that identification helped explain the transhistorical impulse toward conflict that was rooted in language and thereby unified all human societies.

In the meantime, psychoanalysis flourished as Jacques Lacan revised Freud's theories. Like Burke, Lacan was keenly sensitive to the complexities of language and its inability to fully correspond with reality. But unlike Burke, Lacan was much more interested in calling attention to the limits of language and the impossibility of transhistorical unity. Indeed, Lacan would argue that unity is a fantasy that, however impossible it may be, organizes our social world. Recently, scholars such as Diane Davis and Christian Lundberg have called rhetorical scholars to pay closer attention to Lacan's contributions to rhetoric. And so we will follow their lead and see what Lacan can teach us about the phenomenon of rhetoric.

This course will be organized around the major concepts that distinguish psychoanalytic theory. Our assignments reflect this purpose. As often as possible, we will gather artifacts and study materials that help concretize what these concepts are designed to illuminate. Ultimately, in studying rhetoric's in relationship to psychoanalysis, we will begin to grasp how difficult it can be to define the parameters of language and human motives. This difficulty will call our attention to the need for carefully conceived and delivered argumentation that attends is organized around a range of ethical imperatives.

If you have questions about this course, please feel free to contact me: [kyle.jensen@unt.edu](mailto:kyle.jensen@unt.edu).

Required Reading

*Ecrits* by Jacques Lacan

*Introductory Lectures on Pscyho-Analysis* by Sigmund Freud

*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* by Sigmund Freud

*Lacan to the Letter* by Bruce Fink

*The Freudian Subject* by Mikkel Borch-Jacobssen

*Lacan in Public* by Christian Lundberg

*The Sublime Object of Ideology* by Slavoj Zizek

Assignments

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (10%)

You are allowed to miss no more than two classes this term before it begins to affect your grade. For every missed absence beyond two, you can expect to have a full letter grade deducted from your final grade. Participation consists of being active in class discussion and producing work consistently in your notebook.

PSYCHOANALYSIS DICTIONARY (20%)

The purpose of this assignment is to help you track the terms that distinguish psychoanalytic theory. To navigate this terrain adequately, you will need to be rigorous in your effort to locate, follow, and define each key concept. Basically, you will need to identify the concept, trace its appearance in each book, locate associated terms, cite a key passage, and provide a glossed definition. Initially, I will help you with this process. But as the semester unfolds, you will begin to assume responsibility for identifying and explaining the relevance of each concept to writing studies. Developing this dictionary before each class is how you will prepare to participate in discussion. You may complete this assignment digitally. If you have any questions, please speak to me after class or stop by office hours.

QUIZZES (30%)

Quizzes will consist of a handful of concept identifications. I will discuss in class which concepts you need to learn in order to pass the quiz. I would encourage you to study as a group outside of class in order to adequately prepare for the exam.

FINAL EXAM (20%)

Your final exam will consist of concept identifications that we've discussed throughout the term. I will discuss in class which concepts you need to learn in order to pass the exam.

FINAL PROJECT (20%)

Your final project will consist of a one page single-spaced essay in which you synthesize our course readings with an artifact of your choosing, explaining how the artifact constitutes a form of rhetorical action and the implications for reading it as such. We will discuss details on this final project throughout the term.

Grading Policy

My policy is to leave final grade determinations open until the day grades are due to the university. This means that if you receive a grade that you would like to change, you may revise the assignment in order to earn a higher mark. The final project is, as the title indicates, final, but you may bring drafts of your project in during office hours to gauge the type of grade you might receive.

Attendance Policy

You may miss up to *three* classes unexcused during the semester. After three, you final course grade will be reduced one full letter grade.

Academic Dishonesty

For UNT’s policy on academic honesty, please visit:   
http://www.vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm

Drop Policy

For information regarding UNT’s course drop policy, please visit: http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.htmlDisability Concerns

Disability Concerns  
The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at http://www.unt.edu/oda. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.