Course Overview

Welcome to COMM 4040 – Rhetorical Theory. This is a course in exploring the relationships among rhetoric, community, and culture. This course will explore intellectual histories of what is commonly called “rhetorical theory.” Far from a universally agreed upon term, the idea of what “rhetoric” is, can be, and is becoming sparks a wide variety of stimulating and consequential debates. Scholars have long disagreed about the function of rhetoric, its role in producing knowledge, and the components necessary to engage in cultural critique. In this class we examine how rhetoric produces, and functions within, the boundaries of public cultures. This class focuses on intersections between theory and practice, as rhetoric can only be understood through its uses and absences. More productively thought of as critical heuristics (rather than concrete models), this class offers a range of approaches to thinking about rhetoric as theory and practice.

In the Greek tradition, rhetoric emerged as a type of discourse practice relevant to and necessary within increasingly democratic political conditions. As opportunities and demands to practice rhetoric increased, so, too, did the need for instruction and training in rhetoric. From the surviving “training manuals” of the Sophists and other writings of these early instructors was borne rhetorical theory as it is understood in the Western context. The literature of rhetorical theory is immense, and has been expanding for nearly three thousand years. Certainly, a true survey of Rhetorical Theory would be impossible. Instead, the course follows some themes, traditions, and touchstones in rhetorical theory from ancient to more recent times so as to expose students to the theoretical "conversation" about rhetoric that has run throughout Western history. The course seeks to offer a blend of readings considered widely to be “canonical” in the field of rhetoric/communication with essays and perspectives that often get overlooked or ignored by those who might otherwise assert what belongs in the “canon.” Although no one class can cover all of the theories that influence the study of rhetoric, this class provides a productive starting point for engaging some of the major ideas currently at play in rhetorical theory.

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**Course Objectives**

As a collective, we will pursue a number of objectives. While all classes are expected to be responsive to the needs and expectations of students, this is the type of class that truly does ebb and flow based on the contributions of all class members. In general, the goals we shall seek in this course will include the expectation that each student achieve the following by the end of the term.

1. To help you develop a rhetorical sensibility about the world.
2. To introduce you to the intellectual histories of rhetoric.
3. To become familiar with paradigms and vocabularies for describing, explaining, and shaping the social arena of discourse and rhetoric.
4. To gain an appreciation of the connections between rhetoric and social responsibility.
5. To theorize multiple, competing, and complementary identities.
6. To survey a wide array of debates and literatures relevant to rhetorical theory and consider seriously their critical implications for life in a multicultural world.
7. To cultivate an appreciation of rhetorical practice and theory as they affect our everyday lives.
8. To apply theories of rhetoric to contemporary social problems. To improve our understandings and validations of the achievements, experiences, and perspectives of non-dominant individuals and groups.

**Assignments**

**Active Participation (10%)** This course will be a challenging one. This class will benefit students who are motivated to read, write, and engage in discussion. This class is motivated primarily through dialogue and discussion. Thus, your active participation in discussions and in engaging the materials is essential to this course. Merely attending class is not the same as actively participating in the course. If you attend every day but rarely engage in the materials in a way that is responsive to others in the class, you will earn a poor participation grade by the end of the semester. Likewise, if you are not in class, you certainly cannot engage our discussions fully. In short, come to class prepared (meaning having read, taken notes, and are ready to speak about what you have read in an engaged manner). Please, speak out, speak often, and speak intelligently.

**In-class Quizzes & Assignments (15%)** This grade will take into consideration various assignments not listed on the syllabus (e.g., reading quizzes, reading prompts, in-class group work, homework assignments).

**In Class Exams (30% – 2 exams x 15% each)**. Twice this semester you will have in-class writing opportunities to demonstrate your comprehension of course concepts. These will be comprised primarily of short answer and essay questions and cover readings from the class in addition to lecture & discussion materials.

**FINAL PROJECT (45% Total of Final Grade)**

This final project asks you to take seriously the connections between rhetoric, identity, and social responsibility. As such, your final project asks you to do two things. To begin, you are to pick a social problem to which there is active public contestation and/or organized resistance of some sort (e.g., abortion/anti-choice, global warming, domestic violence, heterosexism). To think through this social problem, you are expected to theoretically engage this issue by using materials learned in this class. The first part of this project is a paper. In 10-12 pages, analyze the social issue as you understand it by applying theoretical concepts learned in this class to your research on this problem. The final part of your paper should conceptualize how we might better respond to (or “fight against”) your chosen social problem.

The second aspect of this project expects a “practical application” of rhetorical theories to your problem (as you have explained them in your paper). For this part, you are being asked to envision an alternative way of addressing your social problem. For this part of the project, you might choose any number of creative approaches to responding to your given social issue. You might, for example, design a brochure, create a public service announcement, layout a website, design a t-shirt, etc – be creative!
Step 1: Proposal (5%) – Due by midnight on March 14 through TURNITIN on BLACKBOARD (though you are certainly encouraged to turn this in sooner). For this part of the project, you need to provide a well-supported and thought through proposal. This 2-page paper should lay out the basic argument you seek to explore in your final project. As such, it should address the following points:

1. Describe the social issue you plan to examine for your final project (this should be a well-researched aspect of your project).
2. Offer a preliminary explanation of the rhetorical aspects of your social problem (i.e., how might you explain why this problem is not being “solved” from a rhetorical perspective?).
3. Offer a brief overview of the rhetorical theories you plan to explore more fully in your final project.

Incorporate at least 5 scholarly sources (read: non-internet sources) into this proposal and append a preliminary bibliography with at least 10 scholarly sources you plan to use in your final project. You cannot turn in a final project unless you have had a proposal cleared by Dr. Enck.

Step 2: Present your Project (15%) – During the last three weeks of the semester. Consider this day a chance to vet your projects with your colleagues (and you professor) and receive robust, helpful feedback. This professional oral presentation should elicit helpful ideas from your audience. This is your opportunity to make an argument to your audience and demonstrate your original, creative efforts. We will assign specific dates as the time gets closer.

Step 3: Final Project (25%) Due by 5:00 on Wednesday, May 9th

All formal written assignments need to follow these basic guidelines:

- Your layout should include 1” margins, a 12 point font, and be double-spaced.
- Use quotations meaningfully. While I strongly encourage you to incorporate helpful quotations and passages, they do not substitute for your analysis of the materials.
- Proofread your paper carefully for language choices, grammar, and spelling.
- Follow APA format (in line with the expectations of the department).

Readings

The readings for this course vary in length, difficulty, and origination. Many readings are theoretical in nature and are drawn from journals in the fields of communication/rhetoric. Other readings will be primary documents (speeches, letters, etc.) selected from various time periods of U.S. history; working with primary sources, especially ones whose language that seems outdated, can be challenging but also quite rewarding. And still other readings will not be “readings” at all and will be visual texts (pictures, quilts, movies, etc.). Due to the diverse nature of our texts, there will be some day-to-day variation in terms of your reading load. Some of the essays are complex and will likely challenge you – they are not included to frustrate you – they have been chosen because they are strong examples of the positions we are discussing, and they lay out arguments in ways that are especially nuanced and sophisticated.

Our activities in class will be based upon the assumption that you have read and thought about the material. With this in mind, you should plan to give yourself plenty of time to read carefully, take notes appropriately, and be prepared to ask questions when necessary. Students are expected to complete and process, to the best of your ability, any assigned readings before coming to class and to bring readings to class with you. Do not give up on a reading just because you’re feeling challenged by it; read the entire assignment and come to class with questions. Quizzes will be used as necessary to ensure that students are reading all assignments.

Required Readings:


To keep your costs at a minimum, all additional course readings will be posted on BlackBoard.
Printing
You can print out essays either from your home computers or in a General Access Lab on campus. Please see this website, http://www.gacl.unt.edu/pol.php, for more information about where to find labs, print quotas, etc. There are two labs in the General Academic Building (GAB 330 and GAB 550) along with quite a few labs spread throughout campus. It is expected that you will bring your readings to class each day as we will actively use them in class.

COMM Library Copier Use Policy
Students conducting research in the Communication Studies Library associated with departmental coursework have access to a printer/photocopier located in the office adjacent to the library. We encourage students to make use of this resource to print research accessed online in the library or to copy essays from any of the department’s holdings. Students may not use this resource for other purposes, such as printing courses assignments, class notes, scripts, etc. Students who use the copier for uses other than those outlined above will lose copying privileges.

Class Climate

The types of issues we will discuss in this class range from the writings of 19th Century activists to the politics of the breastfeeding and representations of raced and sexualized bodies. Some of you will undoubtedly have strong reactions to some of our readings and discussions—strong reactions are not discouraged. However, the ways in which reactions get framed and presented must be respectful and civil. In order for us all to glean the most from this course, we must create an environment in which individuals feel comfortable speaking their minds and relaying their experiences. Constructive criticism and responses are welcome (and expected). Disrespect of any kind will not be tolerated.

UNT Acceptable Student Behavior Statement:
Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr

Accountability

We will spend the bulk of our time discussing the ideas raised in the readings and in class and presenting arguments to one another. Especially where presentations are concerned, having an audience in active attendance is essential to the success of this class. I will act primarily as a facilitator and each of you will bear some responsibility for the educational experience of the entire class. If you are not here, you will not gain as much from or contribute as much to the class; your experiences are important to our collective learning experience. Therefore, there will be a strict accountability policy. You have 2 personal days (one academic week) to use as you need/wish. These days should be saved to account for illnesses, interviews, upcoming trips, holiday break plans, etc. If you take more than two days off of class, your final grade will reflect a full letter grade deduction for each class missed (10%./absence). However, if you are here for every class meeting (i.e., if you take no personal days) your final grade will reflect a grade increase of 2.5%. I do not discriminate between “excused” and “unexcused” absences (in other words, you don’t need to get doctor’s excuses, etc). Use your personal days wisely!!

There are only two exceptions made to this policy. The first exception is in line with the state of Texas regarding observations of major religious holy days (as identified by Section 11.20 of the Texas state tax code) – these absences do not count against your personal days. Additionally, “University Authorized Absences” (i.e., travel in accordance with a University-sponsored event) do not count as personal days. HOWEVER, it is your responsibility to alert me by the second week of class, in writing, if you plan to miss class due to a University Authorized Absence or religious observation over the course of the semester. In this memo, you must include specific dates and your reason for absence. If you are traveling for a University Authorized event, I will also need official documentation from your campus advisor.

Regardless for your reason for missing class, you are still responsible for that day’s materials and deadlines.

COMM 4040 (Rhetorical Theory)
Deadlines

Please pay close attention to deadlines as you will be held to them. This policy is in place to assist you in your life—deadlines are important and reflect on your credibility and professionalism (please treat this course as a priority). We all depend upon machines to get our work done. We all know that machines break down. When they do, it does not constitute an “excuse” or an “emergency.” It is expected that you will prepare your assignments far enough in advance so that when your computer malfunctions (as it inevitably will), you will still have time to rectify the problem and turn in the assignment on time. Since you will turn your papers in to Turnitin on BlackBoard, you must abide by all deadlines. Turnitin on BlackBoard has an automatic submission cutoff and will not accept late work. If you miss the deadline (by even a minute), your paper will not be uploaded and will not be accepted.

“On Time” means at the beginning of class on that specific due date. If you are taking a personal day or observing a religious holy day, you can still turn an assignment in on time by turning it in EARLY to Turnitin on BlackBoard or by making arrangements with the professor in advance.

There are very few circumstances in which makeup assignments are applicable to this class. Since you will have most major assignments well in advance, you will always have the opportunity to turn in work early. Again, plan accordingly to account for interviews, travel (University Authorized, religious, and personal), and illnesses. If you miss an in-class assignment (e.g., quiz) due to a University Authorized Absence or religious observation, you can write a make-up essay to take the place of that in-class assignment. If you miss an in-class assignment because you are taking a personal day for any other reason, the assignment cannot be made up.

Crisis Contingency

In the event of the university closing for weather-related reasons or illness outbreak (e.g., swine flu), please visit the course website on Blackboard. I will provide instructions on how to turn in assignments and how the class will proceed utilizing BlackBoard’s announcements function.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that all students have read and understand the Center for Student Rights & Responsibilities expectations regarding Academic Dishonesty and Integrity. If you have misplaced your copy of their code, please surf the net to http://wwwunt.edu/csrr/development/dishonesty.html. It is of utmost importance that you understand what is meant by cheating, facilitating academic dishonesty, fabrication, plagiarism, etc. It is also important for you to understand your rights should I or any other instructor accuses you of academic dishonesty. Every graded assignment, unless otherwise indicated, requires you to do original, independent, and creative work. In addition to copying someone else’s words or ideas, reusing your own work (from other courses) is considered academic dishonesty—you might be permitted to extend research from other classes, but you must clear this with your professors before proceeding with such research. Frequently, you will be asked to summarize and synthesize various course readings and additional research; if you are using more than 3 words of that text, they need to go in quotation marks and include the corresponding page number(s). Even if you are not quoting text directly, you need to indicate when you are using another scholar’s thoughts/ideas/concepts/paradigms/etc by putting their name in parentheses after their idea. Violation of these expectations will result in swift and severe consequences (typically, failure for both the assignment and the course).

Disability Concerns

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens. In accordance with the ADA and Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA), I will gladly provide reasonable accommodation to students who need it. Students who wish to self-identify and request assistance under this policy should register in room 318A of the University Union by the second week of class.
SETE Evaluations

The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester from APRIL 23 - MAY 11, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Meetings

I am willing to meet with you ahead of time and talk about your assignments. I am more than willing to read drafts and outlines ahead of time to offer suggestions for improvement. I will be maintaining a 24/7 policy with regard to talking about grades – Once I have returned an assignment with a grade, please wait at least 24 hours to talk with me about the grade (this will allow you time to reflect on the feedback and constructively determine questions for our meeting). Any meeting regarding grades on particular assignments must be scheduled within 7 days of the return of that assignment – it is never good to wait too long to discuss a potential problem. I will not discuss grades over e-mail or telephone, and I will not discuss your grades in reference to anyone else in the class. You are not graded against others in the class and everyone is evaluated based on their individual contributions. Indeed, students who have found success in this class in the past have realized the importance of keeping an open dialogue with me.

E-Mail & BlackBoard

Students are expected to check their preferred e-mail quite frequently in order to stay current with course communications. If you have a question outside of class and can’t make it to my office hours, please contact me via e-mail (either my UNT or Gmail account -- do not e-mail me through the BlackBoard site). In addition, this course will employ the BlackBoard system—plan to check this often for course reminders, announcements, updates, assignments, and readings.

Cell Phones/Text Messaging

We all use them and love them. Use them and love them before class and after class. Please don’t make me answer your phone!

Academic Research

(or, why you should avoid becoming a Google Monkey)

It is expected that you are capable of performing (and willing to perform) collegiate level academic research. Often, this will require a trip to the brick and mortar building called a “library” – this may seem arduous, but all of your research needs are not always available on your home computer. The only time you should be using Wikipedia or Google is to help you brainstorm—googling a topic or doing a Wikipedia search should never constitute an end result of your research. Wikipedia and Google should never show up on your bibliography. In your presentations, phrases such as “according to Wikipedia.com…” and “as explained on Google.com…” should never escape from your mouth.

Bottom line: Run away from Wikipedia and Google.

The UNT Library website has the option “Communication & Mass Media Complete” – this search engine should be your friend. While it does not catalogue all journals in the field of Communication, it does search a good number of them and offer many of them in pdf format. Select “Find Journal Articles” under Electronic Resources. On the left side of the page, select “C” at the top of the page (it’s the third letter from the left in the alphabet). There you will find the link to “Communication & Mass Media Complete.” You might also try “ComIndex,” “ComAbstracts,” or “Communication Abstracts.”

Regardless of which database you select, you need to find either a pdf of the source (this is the equivalent of the article photocopy) or the physical journal at the library. You will be told often that “internet sources” are not acceptable research. Finding journal articles that are catalogued online is not the equivalent of an “internet source.” When I say “no internet sources,” I mean something that only exists online and is not peer-reviewed. There are some exceptions to this “no internet source” rule; please consult with me if you think you have encountered an exception.
Grading/Quality of Work

All grades will be in the form of a letter grade (A-F) and weighted according to the demands of the specific assignments. In the end, your final grade will be accounted in the following manner:

A: **Exemplary**: work or performance that goes well beyond the basic expectations of the assignment to the point of providing a model of excellence to others.

B: **Commendable**: work or performance that not only meets all requirements but exceeds them, demonstrating depth, originality, and other marks of quality that give the work distinction.

C: **Satisfactory**: work or performance that fully meets all requirements competently and shows the ability to function as a college student.

D: **Marginal**: work or performance that either (1) fails to meet all requirements though what is done is considered competent, or (2) meets all requirements but not at a basic level of competence or (3) both of the above but not poor enough to be considered failing.

F: **Failing**: work or performance that falls significantly short of requirements or basic competence or both. And, of course, work not done.

**Incompletes**

In accordance with university policy, a student can only receive a course grade of “I” if the student 1) has completed at least 75% of the coursework, 2) is passing the course, and 3) has a justifiable and documented reason beyond the control of the student for not completing the work on schedule (e.g., serious illness, military service).
Disclaimer

This syllabus should not be considered a binding contract on the part of the professor, who reserves the right to change any aspect of the course without prior notice.

Schedule of Readings

It is expected that you will read the text(s) BEFORE coming to class for the day, that you will take notes on you readings, and that you will bring the readings with you to class so we can discuss them fully. Please use your printing privileges and bring all readings with you with notes to enable quick consultations. We may alter some of the readings as the semester progresses depending on the needs of the class.

BB = Blackboard
Borchers = Rhetorical Theory: An Introduction

M. 1/16  Martin Luther King, Jr. Day -- No Class

W. 1/18  Introduction to Course  Why are you here? Let's get to know each other …

M. 1/23  What is Rhetorical Theory?
  • Borchers, Chapter 1
  • Harry G. Frankfurt, Selections from On Bullshit (BB)

The Classical Foundations

W. 1/25  Introducing the Classics
  • Borchers, Chapter 2
  • Robert Pirsig, Selection from Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (BB)

M. 1/30  Plato vs. the Sophists
  • Sophists, “Dissoi Logoi or Dialexeis” (BB)
  • Plato, “Gorgias” (BB)

W. 2/1  Isocrates & Aristotle
  • Isocrates, “Against the Sophists” (BB)
  • Isocrates, “Antidosis” (BB)
  • Aristotle, “From Rhetorikè” (BB)

Rhetoric Makes This World

M. 2/6  Laying the Groundwork
  • Borchers, Chapter 5

W. 2/8  The Fragility of Truth
  • Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense” (BB)

M. 2/13  Metaphors We Live By
  • George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, selection from Metaphors We Live By
W. 2/15  Dramatism & Scapegoating  
• Borchers, Chapter 6  
• Kenneth Burke, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle” (BB)  
***This is a longer day of reading -- give yourself extra time***

M. 2/21  Constituting Audiences  
• Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois” (BB)

W. 2/22  EXAM #1

The Critical Turn

M. 2/27  Discussion of Final Projects

W. 2/29  Introduction to Critical Theories  
• Borchers, Chapter 7  
• James Jasinski, “Ideology” (BB)

M. 3/5  Ideographs  
• James Jasinski, “Ideograph” (BB)  
• Sara Hayden, “Revitalizing the Debate Between <Life> and <Choice>: The 2004 March for Women’s Lives” (BB)

W. 3/7  Persona(e)  
• James Jasinski, “Persona” (BB)  
• Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory” (BB)

M. 3/12  Critiquing Gender  
• Borchers, Chapter 8

W. 3/14  Critiquing Race & Theories of Whiteness  
• Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric” (BB)  
PROPOSALS DUE BY MIDNIGHT on TURNITIN on BLACKBOARD

SPRING BREAK

What Can (a) Rhetoric Be?

M. 3/26  Publics & Counterpublics  
• James Jasinski, “Public Sphere” (BB)  
• Phaedra Pezzullo, “Resisting ‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month’: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances” (BB)

W. 3/28  Iconic Photographs  
• Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, “Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph” (BB)

M. 4/2  Rhetorical Bodies  
• Christine Harold and Kevin DeLuca: “Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till” (BB)
W. 4/4  Intersectional Rhetoric
  • Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “Trashing the System: Social Movement, Intersectional Rhetoric, and the Collective Agency in the Young Lords Organization’s Garbage Offensive” (BB)

M. 4/9  The Potential of Queer Counterpublics

W. 4/11  EXAM #2

M. 4/16  Presentations

W. 4/18  Presentations

M. 4/23  Presentations

W. 4/25  No Class -- Go to the Gender Fair for Extra Credit in the 1 O'Clock Lounge (10:00 - 3:00)

M. 4/30  Presentations

Tuesday 5/1 COMM 1010 COMMunity Fair in the 1 O'Clock Lounge (10:00-2:00) -- Extra Credit Opportunity

W. 5/2  Presentations

Final Projects due by Wednesday, May 9th at 5:00 p.m.