

English 309C

Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

The question is not "Who am I?" but "Who are we?"

—Wayne Booth

An "ideology" is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it.

—Kenneth Burke

I am a critic because I feel that rhetoric should move a society forward rather than backward, that it should open and not close the public sphere, that it should make people generous and not craven. I am a critic, ultimately, because I am a citizen.

—Roderick Hart

Tuesdays, Thursdays, 10:00-11:30, RCH 204

Course conductor: Randy Harris, x35362, raha@uwaterloo.ca,
Office hours (HH247): Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1:00-2:00

Objectives

The objectives of 309C are the ongoing objectives of liberal arts education generally, and rhetorical education specifically: the enhancement of critical thinking in both the **private sphere** (exercising judgement) and the **public sphere** (engaging society and culture). If we both work hard at it, you should gain considerable **knowledge** about the analytic instruments and theoretical perspectives of rhetoric developed in the contemporary period. If we work even harder, you should gain a fuller **understanding** of contemporary life, and your place in it, through the application of those instruments and the trying on of those perspectives. If we work in the right way, your writing and your reasoning should improve as well.

Course epitome

Quoth the calendar:

"An examination of contemporary rhetorical theory and its relationships to criticism, interdisciplinary studies and computer applications."

But what's the point of contemporary rhetorical theory in the first place? —Where there are organisms, there is mutual influence; where there are humans, there are symbols; where there are influence and symbols, there is rhetoric. Aristotle would tell you that, and tell you that where there is rhetoric there damn well better be judgement, too. But it takes the twentieth century to realize the full diversity of symbolic modes, to invent the elaborate symbolic distribution networks, and to develop the theoretical instruments, necessary to see the truly inescapable, mind-bending, person-forming, culture-saturating nature of rhetoric.

Texts

Required

Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Robert Trapp, editors. 2002. *Readings in Contemporary Rhetoric*. Long Grove, ILL: Waveland Press.

Various web-accessible articles, listed on the schedule.

Style guide (the English department's official guide for academic writing)

Jane E. Aaron and Murray McArthur. 2006. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. Third Canadian edition. Aaron and McArthur. Toronto: Addison Wesley Longman.

Requirements

	worth	due
Midterm exam	25%	18 June
Final exam	25%	tba
Essay	35%	proposal due: 9 June essay due: 21 July
Being rhetorical	15%	all the livelong day

Exams

Midterm

You will have to know both "facts" and "ideas" for this course. The midterm will test mostly the former, with multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer questions. It will cover material up to and including the 16 June class. These facts will come mostly from the readings. You need to read carefully, take clear, thorough notes, ask any questions that surface, talk to each other; most of all, think about and apply what you read. If you *use* the information, it will stick.

Final

More of the same, but with some essay questions thrown in to chart the "ideas" quotient of 309C. It will cover the entire course, but the fact-based questions will have more emphasis on the post-midterm readings.

Being rhetorical

Come to class, contribute to discussions, participate in the development of the course. You need to be engaged in the topics and themes of 309C every time you're in class (and you need to be in class).

Ways to get a good grade: ask **relevant** questions, make **salient** observations, look for and point out **connections** in the material, use the rhetorical concepts we encounter to complain about the unbelievable pressure of having to be rhetorical on demand, ...

Ways to get a mediocre grade: sit in your seat; avoid eye contact with the professor.

Ways to get a poor grade: stay away from class (of course, but also), make long irrelevant commentaries, treat your fellow students with notable disrespect while they are commenting to class, read your e-mail, text your friends and enemies, review the calls on your cell phone, have a sandwich and a thermos of soup, ...

Essay

Your essay grade is the **largest and most important component of your mark**. Start thinking about your essay right away. I'm not kidding. It will not have to be very long (2,750 - 3,250 words), but it will have to be very good. This is a third-year RPW course in the department of English Language and Literature; you should be writing and thinking about rhetorical issues at an advanced level, and you should know how to research and write an academic essay.

There are two options. You can do a critical analysis or a theoretical analysis. But these are differences in focus, not in material. A critical analysis must bring theoretical concepts to bear on an artifact (or artifacts). A theoretical analysis must bring artifacts into the argument, as a way of testing the theoretical concepts. In either case—this is a research essay, remember—you will have to **go beyond the course readings**, lectures, and discussions.

A critical analysis rhetorically examines a semiotic artifact in the light of some theory or theorist from the period we are studying. A typical artifact for analysis would be an oration, a political or cultural or scientific argument, a novel or play, perhaps an argumentative exchange. But a scene from a movie is perfectly acceptable, too, or a website or a DVD interface, or a podcast, or the poster over your room-mate's bed, even a gum wrapper would work. Remember though, critical analyses need to be **theoretically informed**, so you will have to draw on the concepts and positions explored in the course.

A theoretical analysis takes a concept or a particular theorist's framework and examines it for the critical payoff it provides (or fails to provide)—what it tells us about people and their symbolic inducements, or *fails* to tell us about people and their symbolic inducements. The first step is to become an authority on some concept (identification, presence, simulacra, ...) or theorist (Richards, Booth, hooks, ...). As an authority, you will then see with particular clarity how successful the concept or theorist is, where the failures might be, whether there is a need to augment, constrain, reshape, or even discard the concept or framework. Whatever your argument is, you should draw on other theorists to support or explore your position. Your essay cannot not just be an explanation of the concept or the framework. It must be an **analysis**. The chief way to analyze theoretical claims is to test them against the domain they seek to explain. For rhetoric, that means against instances of symbolic inducement.

What matters for your **understanding**, and consequently for your grade, is how you develop your analysis: what your examination yields in terms of explaining central aspects of the artifact or the concept or the framework, and how you demonstrate that yield (significantly including the research you marshal and deploy, and the cogency of your argument).

A **proposal** is required, whichever form your paper takes. You will need to write up a one-page essay plan and discuss it with me before you write the essay. The proposal should identify the **thesis** you will be arguing (for instance, that the ideological position in Brian De Palma's *Redaction* is effective, or not, because of how it captures, or fails to capture, the relation between identification and persuasion; or that Bitzer's notion of the rhetorical situation is obsolete because exigence is not applicable to digital social networks; or that Weaver's idealism is a much needed corrective the information ennui of the Blackberry Age). You will need to do preliminary **research** on your thesis: what are the important primary and secondary texts, and why are they important? (That is: on redaction and identification, or the rhetorical situation and social networks, or Weaver and smartphones.)

My evaluation of the essay (including the proposal) will depend on the soundness, analytical sophistication, research depth, and rhetorical appropriateness of your work, along the following metrics:

Proposal

Articulation of your thesis	3%	
Research outline	4%	
Style and grammar (sentence and paragraph structure, diction, spelling, punctuation, agreement, ...)	3%	10%

Essay

Articulation and framing of your thesis	10%	
Research	20%	
Use of evidence (research and analysis)	20%	90%
Quality of argument	20%	
Style and grammar (as above)	20%	

I require **digital submission**, in RTF or PDF, by midnight on the due date; this makes the logistics much simpler, and also permits easier screening for originality/plagiarism (the University of Waterloo utilizes Turnitin.com).

Notes

Do the readings before the assigned class.

If you have any questions, please make sure you ask them.

You need to have at least 2B standing to take English 309C

Schedule		
Date	Topics	Readings
5 May	Meet n greet	
7 May	Rhetoric	Booth (“Rhetorical Stance”)
12 May		Richards (“Philosophy”), Bitzer (“Situation”)
14 May		
19 May	Values	Weaver (“Phaedrus”), Booth (“Censorship”)
21 May		
26 May	Judgement	Perelman (“New”) Habermas (“Philosophico-”)
28 May		
2 June	Motives	Burke (“Dramatism”), Burke (“Prologue”)
4 June		
9 June	Proposal due Science	Campbell (“Invisible”)
11 June		
16 June	Language	hooks (“Language”), Richards (“Basic”)
18 June	Midterm	
23 June	Cognition	Grassi (“Metaphor”), Burke (“Psychology”)
25 June		
30 June	Oppression	hooks (“Resistance”), Weaver (“Life”)
2 July		
7 July	Real Life	Baudrillard (“America”), Weaver (“Responsible”)
9 July		
14 July	Power	Foucault (“Sexuality”), hooks (“Reflections”)
16 July		
21 July	Essay due Rhetoric	Booth (“Rhetorical Stance”)
23 July		
28 July	Course review, exam preparation	

Academic Integrity

Members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

The late policy is simple: **don't be**. If personal concerns, including health issues, prevent you from meeting a deadline, contact me ahead of time to make arrangements; if unforeseen circumstances prevent you from meeting a deadline, contact me when you are able and we can work something out. Please note that bad planning, conflict with assignments in other courses, and video-game addictions (to list a few attested reasons offered by students in the past) are not interpretable as personal concerns.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity [check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/] to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate Associate Dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) (other than a petition) or Policy 71 (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals) www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Digital screening: The University of Waterloo utilizes Turnitin.com.