COMM 335  
Rhetoric in Contemporary Culture  
TTh 11:00-12:20  
ANN 115  
Spring, 2015

Instructor: Dr. Dan Durbin  
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Course Objectives: This course examines the various ways communication is used to influence behavior in contemporary culture. Drawing on some classical, but, largely contemporary theories of rhetoric, students will examine the ways in which a variety of communicators seek to influence personal and mass audiences in the 21st century. We will start each segment by examining the ideas of one influential theorist. We will then apply those concepts to one or more contemporary messages. Specific Student Outcomes: 1.) Students will become conversant in contemporary theories of rhetorical persuasion, 2.) Students will learn to critically examine and respond to all forms of contemporary communication, 3.) Students will develop skills in research and assessing a variety of rhetorical messages.

Required Texts:


Course Reader.

Grade breakdown: You will be assigned two papers, each of which will be a thought piece on rhetorical texts. You will have a midterm and a final and will be responsible for in-class discussions of your papers and participation. The grade breakdown for assignments follows.

Classical Paper…………………………………………………………………….15  
Rhetorical Analysis Paper………………………………………………………25  
Midterm…………………………………………………………………………..20  
Final Exam……………………………………………………………………….25  
Paper Discussions……………………………………………………………..10  
Participation…………………………………………………………………….5
Examinations: Your exams will comprehensively cover class lecture and reading material. Your final exam will be cumulative.

Papers: You will prepare one paper that uses the classic tools of rhetorical analysis to examine a rhetorical document and a second paper that employs a theory of your choosing to examine a second rhetorical text. All papers must follow either APA or MLA guidelines for research paper writing. Failure to follow an academically recognized format will lead to an automatic failing grade on any paper assignment. Papers will also be graded on clarity, demonstrated understanding of key concepts, and critical and analytical insight.

What is a “rhetorical text?” We will discuss this throughout the semester. The easy answer is that any form of communication (verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, mass, film, radio, tv, fashion, fashion shows, fashion blogs, sports, sports programs, you get the idea . . . ) that seeks to modify the beliefs and behavior of others is a rhetorical text. Given that all communication seeks to modify the beliefs and behavior of someone, we will work from the perspective that any act of human communication is, on some level, a rhetorical act.

Technology: Note that computer laptops are not allowed during the discussion and lecture sessions of class. It is more important to participate than to take detailed notes and you will have the notes you need clearly outlined for you during class. So, handwritten notes will suffice. After each discussion and lecture session, you may want to take some time to reflect on the learning experience and type whatever notes may seem useful. However, all computers and tablets are to be turned off and stored during lectures. All cellphones and mp3 players must also be turned off and kept off throughout class. Receiving or sending communication or entertainment during class disrupts the learning environment and is rude to those around you.

Disability Services: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Students requesting accommodations for taking tests in DSP must have their information to me and DSP in sufficient time to set up accommodations at DSP.

Participation and Absence Policy: Attendance in class cannot be counted as participation. Students will receive participation grades based on the quality and quantity of their vocal participation in class throughout the semester. You will be allowed three unexcused absences during the semester. Each absence beyond three will result in an automatic 5% deduction from your final class grade. Also, remember that, when you are
absent, you cannot participate in class. So, excessive absences will also impact your participation grade. Being tardy or leaving class early will be counted as half an absence. Also, please turn off cell phones while in class. Leaving class to answer a cell phone will be counted as an absence.

**Academic Integrity:** The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University’s Academic Integrity code as detailed in the Scampus guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violations or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student’s expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

**(Tentative) Class Schedule and Due Dates**

1/13 Course Introduction


1/27-1/29 First Stirrings of Contemporary Thought; Course Reader-Wichelns, Wrage, Black.


2/10-2/12 Booth and Grassi and the Failings of the Scientific Paradigm; FFT pp. 51-78.

2/17-2/19 Perelman and the Reinvention of Rhetoric in a Scientific Age; FFT pp. 79-114.

2/24 Stephen Toulmin and the Reconstruction of Rhetoric as Argument; FFT pp. 115-152.

2/26 Midterm Exam


3/10-3/26 The Kenneth Burke Effect; Course Reader, Selections from Burke, FFT pp. 185-232.

3/17-3/19 Spring Break, no class

3/31-4/2 Habermas, Rationality, and the Public Sphere; FFT pp. 233-266.

4/7-4/9 Foucault and Rhetoric as Power; FFT pp. 343-384.
Classical approaches to rhetoric still have validity today. You will demonstrate that in your first paper. You are to find a rhetorical text, one that had some impact on some audience (a movie, a speech, a TV commercial, a book, a particular TV episode, a song, an album, you get the picture). You will examine this text drawing on classical concepts of rhetoric.

You are to structure your analysis around the appeals to values (ethos), emotion or “state of mind” (pathos), and reason (logos). How did the communicators appeal to the values of their audience? What tools did they use (narrative, syllogisms, arguments, examples, etc.)? How did they employ emotion? What tools did they use to “put their audience in a certain frame of mind?” How did they employ reason? Often, reason is subtle and works behind the scenes as a set of assumptions (in TV commercials, for instance). What rationality sustains the rhetoric you’re examining?

Classical approaches worked most effectively with language (verbal communication) and performance (nonverbal communication). Contemporary rhetoric structures language and performance into mediated messages. So, you should still be able to identify the various “proofs” being used and the way in which they are supposed to impact the audience’s belief and behavior.

Effective papers will identify the examples (illustrations, stories, specific instances), maxims, enthymemes (reasoning tools), and testimony as they are used to sustain belief and modify behavior. You should feel a bit constrained by these theories as they were not originally crafted to focus on mediated communication. Your second paper will give you an opportunity to apply contemporary concepts to a subject of your choosing.

Papers will be graded on clarity of analysis, quality of writing, demonstrated understanding of concepts and effectiveness in applying those concepts to rhetorical acts. All papers must follow MLA or APA guidelines for research paper writing. Papers will lose a point for each error in spelling, grammar and proper format. Excessive errors
We’ve now discussed a wide variety of rhetorical theories. For your final paper, you will demonstrate the value of one of these theories in assessing the rhetorical strength of a specific rhetorical act (again, a movie, a speech, a television commercial, a book, a particular television episode, a song, an album, you get the picture).

First, you must choose a rhetorical text that had some impact on a given audience. You are to explain its impact on that audience by applying an appropriate contemporary theory to the text. Your paper should be broken up into three brief sections. First, your introduction in which you identify the rhetorical text you will be assessing and explain why it is a rhetorically important or interesting text. You need to justify your claims regarding its importance or interest with evidence (if it was important because it impacted millions of people, you need to show from news accounts or previous research that it really did do so).

The second section of your paper introduces the theory you will apply and explains why it will be especially illuminating regarding this particular text. You will need to cite sources for the theory. However, DO NOT spend valuable paper time re-explaining the theory. This entire section should explain the parts of the theory that will be applied to your text and why this will be illuminating (e.g. you will apply narrative theory to your study of “The Walking Dead” because it is a character driven story and narrative theory offers an especially valuable means for assessing the impact of story characters on the narrative rationality of a story and, from that, on the values and beliefs of the audience).

The bulk of your paper (at least 4-5 pages of it) should be a brief analysis of the rhetorical text showing illuminating insights into its rhetorical power by applying the theory you have just explained (e.g. you would examine the narrative construction of characters in “The Walking Dead” and show how the actional tendencies of the characters define them as good/bad, right/wrong, beautiful/ugly---and, of course, how those definitions inculcate values into those who listen to and buy into the stories).

Papers will be graded on clarity of analysis, quality of writing, demonstrated understanding of concepts and effectiveness in applying those concepts to rhetorical acts. All papers must follow MLA or APA guidelines for research paper writing. Papers will lose a point for each error in spelling, grammar and proper format. Excessive errors (more than fifteen) will lead the papers to being returned to the student for a rewrite. Rewritten papers will lose one letter grade. You should have a bare minimum of seven sources (one from Aristotle, several demonstrating the historical or rhetorical impact of your text, potentially one from your text).
sources (at least one from your theorist, several demonstrating the historical or rhetorical impact of your text, potentially one from your text, academic sources that show how other scholars have examined your text).