

**COMM 517: Rhetorical Theory and Culture**  
Spring, 2016

*Preliminary Course Description and Objectives:*

This course examines foundational 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century theories regarding the symbolic bases of human culture. Several key questions will guide our inquiry: what is the capacity for human symbol use, and how did it come about? what role do symbols play in the construction of selves? in association with others? in the creation of cultures? what are the cultural forms of symbolic expression and how are they to be understood? and what are the politics of such understanding?

In seeking answers to these questions, we will engage the spectrum from idealist to pragmatist to structuralist to critical to postmodernist approaches. This course is not a survey of anthropology and ethnography; rather, it is an in-depth examination of certain fundamental ways to thematize “culture” as a component of the processes by which humans create and respond to symbols. This course is designed to complement other offerings in rhetoric and across the curriculum, in both the theorists it covers and the perspective from which these theorists are discussed.

*Tentative Core Readings:*

**Required:**

George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934)

Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (1944)

—, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* (1942; formerly *The Logic of the Humanities*)

Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942; 3rd ed. 1957)

—, *Feeling and Form* (1953)

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1963)

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974)

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988)

Christian Meyer and Felix Girke, eds., *The Rhetorical Emergence of Culture* (2011)

**Recommended:**

Rapport, Nigel, and Joanna Overing. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Barnard, Alan, and Jonathan Spencer, eds. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

We will not be reading all of each of these works (and there will be other readings as well). You will need to decide whether to purchase them or make other arrangements.

*Format:*

Seminar style, which places a premium on prior preparation and class discussion.

*Assignments:*

- 1) Read thoroughly in advance. Come to each class session with a handful of key terms and 2-3 key questions raised for you by the readings.
- 2) Leadership of class discussion and reports, as assigned.

*Tentative Daily Syllabus:*

Under construction.