

**COMM 311**  
**Rhetoric and the Public Sphere**  
Spring, 2020  
TTH 3:30-4:50

**Instructor:** Dr. Dan Durbin

**Office Hours:** TTH 1:00-2:00, T 5:00-6:00, and by appointment.

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**Course Objectives:** This course provides an introduction to rhetoric and the public sphere, how communication is used to shape the minds and actions of individuals and the broader public. The class traces the development of rhetoric and public discourse from its origins in ancient Greece, through its codification and study in the Roman Era and the Middle Ages, to its use in contemporary times. Students will have the opportunity to study rhetorical theorists from each era and to begin practicing rhetorical inquiry.

**Specific Student Outcomes:** 1.) Become conversant in the language and theories of rhetorical studies, 2.) Demonstrate proficiency in critical thinking and critical analysis of rhetorical texts, 3.) Understand recurrent concepts of effective public discourse, 4.) Demonstrate the ability to apply these concepts to communication on a variety of media.

**Required Texts:** Herrick, James A. *The History and Theory of Rhetoric. Sixth Edition*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon 2017.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. (trans. by W. Rhys Roberts) New York: Dover Publications 2004.

COMM 311 Course Notebook. Available at the bookstore.

Recommended Text: Bizzell, Patricia and Herzberg, Bruce. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1990.

**Course Notebook:** You will be taking your main class notes in the course notebook. This notebook will be the most important text you buy this semester. It covers the spectrum of thought on communication and rhetoric in the public sphere and will be

invaluable in preparing for exams. The current edition has been modified from previous editions. So, you need to buy your own copy. For the price, it is one of the best book investments you will ever make. The material will be readily adapted to work you must do in future courses. So, buy it and keep it!

**Examinations:** There will be two midterms and a final examination in this class. The midterms will comprehensively cover different eras of rhetorical theory. The final exam will be cumulative. The midterm exams will each be worth 15% of your final grade and the final will be worth 25%.

**Writing Assignments:** There will be two writing assignments in this class. The papers will give you practice researching material and following the MLA or APA writing style. In each paper, you will examine and employ rhetorical theories of different eras from the study of rhetoric.

All writing assignments must be prepared in strict adherence to the guidelines for academic writing laid down in the MLA or APA handbook. This means that you must pay careful attention to footnoting, punctuation, appropriate pagination, proper citation form, and attribution of sources. Each failure to conform to MLA or APA guidelines will result in a lowering of your grade on each assignment.

**Turn-it-in: Note, all papers must be turned in to turnitin.com as well as to the teaching assistants. Papers not submitted to turnitin.com will receive a zero.**

**Grade Breakdown:** The grading percentage for each assignment follows:

Midterm one-----	15
Midterm two-----	15
Final-----	25
Participation-----	5
Paper one-----	15
Paper two-----	<u>25</u>
Total-----	100

**Class Attendance:** You are allowed three unexcused absences in this class after which each absence will cost you **5% of your final grade**. Note, however, that this course is heavily weighted toward lecture and, as noted, the exams comprehensively cover lecture material. Thus, excessive absences will have a disastrous impact on your ability to answer exam questions. I strongly advise you not to miss class. Being tardy and leaving class early will count as an unexcused absence.

**Late Work:** The time constraints in this course will not allow for late work. Make certain that you can be here for all exams. Under no circumstances will any exams be given at any time other than during scheduled exam periods. Do not ask to take exams early or late. You will be refused. Further, there will be no extra credit and no extra work assigned in this class for missed exams.

But, now the good news...if you have a university accepted excuse for your absence for one mid-term exam period, there will be one make-up exam at the end of the semester. This exam may replace one missed exam (remember, your absence during the missed exam must be excused). This make-up is only available for emergency situations. The make-up exam will take place during the last class period. The make-up will not be offered at any other time. Failure to appear for the make-up for any reason will result in an automatic zero for the exam.

You can hand in your papers late. However, late papers will be docked one letter grade for each class period they are late. Anytime after the start of the class period in which they are due will be considered late.

**Paper Assignments:** In each paper, you are to explain and apply the rhetorical ideas of an important figure from the era we have examined. You will need at least five sources for each paper including at least one primary source. Your class book and notes do not count as a source. Papers will be roughly 6-8 pages in length. So, your explanation should be brief and clear. Papers will be graded on fulfilling the assignment, quality of writing, clarity, and explanatory power. We will discuss this at greater length later in the semester. Each error in spelling or grammar will result in a reduction of your paper grade. Papers with an excessive number of errors in grammar, spelling or MLA/APA usage (fifteen or more) will be returned to the author for a rewrite. Failure to rewrite the paper will result in a zero for that assignment. Rewritten papers will be docked one letter grade for having been rewritten. Note: **All writing assignments in this class must be turned in to Turnitin.com.**

Should you have questions or concerns regarding the grade you got on a paper, the school identifies the appropriate procedure as follows. Take a forty-eight hour “cooling off” period as you review the comments on your paper. If you still have questions or concerns, contact the teaching assistant who graded your paper to set up an appointment to review the paper. Should a question or dispute remain after discussing the grade with the T.A. you should contact your professor who will discuss any potential next steps with you.

**Disabilities 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. 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 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**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.

**Note:** You will hand in your papers to your TAs. They will set specific times for you to hand the papers in. Don't hand them in to me! I'd lose my head if it weren't attached.

### **Class Grades**

Final class grades will be determined according to the following scale:

A	94-100
A-	91-93
B+	88-90
B	84-87
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
F	59 and below

### **USC Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

#### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

#### **Support Systems:**

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

## **Tentative Daily Schedule and Reading Assignments**

1/14 Course Introduction.

1/16 Perspectives on the study of rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 1

1/21-1/23 Early Greek Rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 2

1/28-2/4 Plato; Herrick Ch. 3

2/6-2/13 Aristotle; Herrick Ch. 4, Aristotle Book 1

2/18-2/25 Roman Rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 5, Aristotle Book 2; Conclusions on classical rhetoric, review for first midterm

2/27 **Midterm #1**

3/3 Medieval Rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 6, Aristotle Book 3

3/5 Renaissance Rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 7

3/10-3/12 Enlightenment Rhetoric; Herrick Ch. 8; **Writing Assignment #1 due March 12**

3/17-3/19 Spring Break---no classes will be held

3/24 The Contemporary Turn; review for second midterm.

3/26 **Midterm #2**

3/31-4/2 New Dimensions in Rhetoric; Rhetoric and Argumentation; Herrick Ch. 9

4/7-4/9 Burke, Weaver and Symbol Use; Herrick Ch. 10

4/14-4/16 Rhetoric and Social Criticism; Herrick Ch. 11; **Writing Assignment #2 Due April 16**

4/21 Rhetoric and Popular Culture; Barthes, "Mythologies"

4/23 Rhetoric, Postmodernism and Culture

4/28-4/30 Simulations, conclusions, wrap up, and review for final exam.

**Final Exam: May 12, 2:00-4:00**

**COMM 311**  
**Spring, 2020**  
**Writing Assignment #1**

Your writing assignments will offer you the opportunity to examine a rhetorical document of your choosing in two different ways. As we discussed at the start of the semester, any form of public discourse has rhetorical elements. Those elements work to modify the actions and beliefs of some audience. Even your favorite Netflix show, virtual reality game, or Marvel Comics movie attempts to modify your understanding of the world and your actions regarding that world. For these assignments, you need to choose a favorite “text” of yours, a public form of communication. You may choose a favorite video, movie, song, album, political speech, blog article, news commentary, poem, painting, you get the picture. If you have any questions regarding whether or not your choice is a reasonable example of public communication for this assignment, bring it to me or your class teaching assistants and we will discuss it with you.

I am particularly concerned that you choose something that is meaningful to you personally. These exercises should help you appreciate your subject in ways that, perhaps, you have never considered and should help you see ways in which the text(s) shape your perspective.

The first writing assignment focuses on classical approaches to human communication. We have discussed the use of ethos, pathos, and logos as artistic appeals in rhetoric and how situational factors (courts, ceremonies, legislatures) impact communication. Your first writing assignment offers you the opportunity to perform a classic rhetorical criticism on your chosen text. Your paper will analyze the text in its setting. Is the text epideictic, forensic, deliberative in nature (you’ll be surprised to find how many texts turn out to be fundamentally epideictic in nature)? What can you show from the text’s situation and from its message that indicates what *type* of discourse it is?

You will also analyze the text’s content, identifying the rhetorician’s use of appeals of ethos (credibility, values), pathos (sentiment), and logos (reasoning). Each time you find the rhetorician appeal to credibility, sentiment, or reason, you are to quote that section of the text, explain how it represents an appeal to logic, sentiment, or credibility, and make a judgment concerning how effective that appeal was. Of course, in some cases, words may not be used. Rhetoricians may use visual images, symbols, ritualistic actions, or any number of other means to appeal to an audience. When that happens, you need to clearly explain the visual images, actions, etc, so that your reader can understand how they illustrate appeals to logic, sentiment, or ethics.

You are also to show at least three pieces of evidence the author uses and identify what type of evidence they are. They may be maxims (famous sayings), examples (illustrations, stories, specific instances), testimony (expert or immediate), and so on. You are to back up your claims about the types of evidence being used by examining the evidence itself (show us why this particular piece of evidence is a piece of testimony or

an example). Of course, in visual or narrative forms of communication, the “evidence” used will often be examples. For instance, characters in stories exemplify values (that is, their actions are examples of specific values that the narrator seeks to praise or blame).

Your papers should also note the enthymematic nature of this communication. You should note the audience values that the text presupposes and to which it speaks. For instance, when, say, a character in a film you are analyzing works very hard and rewarded with success, what values do the filmmakers presuppose you will recognize and share with them. This will complete your analysis of the appeals. As Aristotle noted, appeals rely on values, beliefs, or perspectives held by the audience. What does the text assume about the audience’s beliefs and actions, what does it leave as an unstated assumption, in building its case?

You should conclude your paper by reviewing your assessment of each appeal and each piece of evidence and offering a final assessment of the text as a whole. You should make the case that it was either effective or ineffective based on your assessment of its use of evidence and ethos, pathos, and/or logos.

Remember, depending on the audience, it is not necessary to use each type of appeal to make a case. And, in some cases, certain appeals might be less useful or even distracting. For instance, if you examine a speech in which a scientist argues for a specific scientific theorem before an audience of scientists and the speaker solely uses emotional appeals, you have to question how effective s/he might have been. On the other hand, a romantic comedy that primarily used syllogistic reasoning to make its audience laugh and cry would seem a bit ridiculous.

If this assignment seems a bit mechanical, it is. It is also, in most respects, pretty simple. The step-by-step process allows us to see certain aspects of rhetorical appeals. However, during the last hundred years, as media exploded onto the scene, various approaches grounded in the classical approach offered more contemporary and often more nuanced ways of analyzing mediated discourse.

In your second paper, you will use a contemporary critical approach to exam the same rhetorical work you used for your first paper. Be certain you pick something you really like for your papers. It will make this a lot more fun and help you see the contrast between the rather mechanical historical approach and the contemporary interest in diverse forms of directed communication.

You are to follow MLA or APA guidelines throughout this paper. Each failure to employ MLA or APA guidelines will cost you a point off your paper grade. You should have a minimum of 5 cited sources and a minimum of 6-7 pages of text in your completed paper. The bulk of your cited references should be about the situation surrounding the text (movie reviews, articles or books on the popularity of the song/album, the power of the poem or artwork, and so on). You will also need, of course, to cite Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and any other classical works on which you draw. Papers will also be graded on quality

of writing, quality of analysis, and demonstrated understanding of concepts. Papers will lose one point for each error in spelling or grammar.

C papers will, with minimal difficulties in grammar or spelling, review the text in its setting and draw on elements of classical rhetoric to discuss the text. B papers will be well-written with few if any errors in spelling or grammar and will draw extensively on key components of classical rhetoric (appeals, types of evidence, and so on) to explain the rhetorical appeals created in the text. A papers will be exceptionally well-written with no notable errors in spelling or grammar. A papers will thoroughly employ rhetorical concepts from Aristotle and other classical writers to examine the text in its social and historical context and show the ways in which the text created compelling appeals.

**COMM 311**  
**Spring, 2020**  
**Writing Assignment #2**

For your first paper, you used some classical concepts to examine a piece of rhetoric. In your final paper, you are to take a more contemporary approach to the same rhetorical text. Beyond demonstrating your proficiency at rhetorical analysis, this paper should hopefully show you that different critical approaches may offer diverse and illuminating explanations of rhetorical texts.

For this assignment, you are to analyze the text you examined for your first paper using Kenneth Burke's concepts of the pentad and the guilt-purification cycle.

As we have discussed in class, contemporary theorists see rhetoric as the means by which we purvey values and motivate audiences and individuals to action. If this is so, any text that enters the public sphere promotes some set of values and presses listeners to some sort of action. Burke saw the pentad as the structure of appeals to human motivation and the guilt-purification cycle as a perpetual rhetorical form (or drama), one that appears over and over again as the rhetorical scheme of effective public discourse.

As you may recall, Burke grounded his rhetorical theory in dramatism, the notion that we construct all our motivating rhetorical appeals in the form of social dramas. The pentad was the form of drama, the guilt-purification cycle was the narrative structure of the drama. So, you are to explain your subject's effectiveness through the pentad and the guilt-purification cycle. This means you are to analyze the text finding the order the author sees as polluted, the pollution the author identifies in the order, the guilty party the author would have us symbolically kill, and the means of expiation (the symbolic killing) the author proposes. You should then identify the transcendent order the author envisions as arising out of this sacrifice.

As you examine the drama that unfolds, you will need to identify the various elements of the staged narrative. That is, you will need to identify the act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. As you find the "guilty party," you are to identify that party relative to the "act"

within the pentad. If the guilty party is a person or persons, they would represent an agent-act ratio (the kidnappers in the relatively recent film “Taken” are so odious and their goals so heinous, they fully deserve the horrific ends they meet and Liam Neeson’s various actions, no matter how outrageous, are all justified). If the “guilty party” is a setting (Gotham City is such a cesspool it needs to be cleansed, not by the hero it wants, but by the hero it needs---the Batman), it would represent a scene-act ratio (This becomes important in a movie like “The Dark Knight” because it “justifies” many of Batman’s outrageously invasive actions. If the guilty party is the city, then monitoring all the cell phones in the city to capture the Joker is not a shocking and illegal invasion of personal privacy; it’s a legitimate act of heroism, saving the populace from the city’s urban terror. The action is not directed at the citizens of Gotham but at the polluted scene, the city as a whole.).

This assignment is meant to be both challenging and engaging. Burke’s ideas are typically complex and often difficult. However, the guilt-purification cycle, as we have discussed it, should not pose a challenge in application. As always, you can make these assignments easy for yourself by choosing as your rhetorical text something you truly enjoy (a favorite movie, a favorite music album).

If you choose a subject you are deeply interested in, this analysis should be illuminating and a whale of a lot of fun. If you pick something you have no interest in, this analysis may cause you greater pain than being forced to watch pre-2019 Adam Sandler films in an un-air-conditioned discount theater in Texas 24 hours a day for life. So, choose a topic near to your heart and read/listen to/watch it closely . . . several times.

You are to follow MLA or APA guidelines throughout this paper. Each failure to employ MLA or APA guidelines will cost you a point off your paper grade. You should have a minimum of 6 cited sources and a minimum of 7-8 pages of text in your completed paper. At least 4 of your cited sources should be about your subject, indicating its popularity, social impact, or rhetorical effectiveness. Papers will also be graded on quality of writing, quality of analysis, and demonstrated understanding of concepts. Papers will lose one point for each error in spelling or grammar. Good luck and, if you have any questions, please contact me or your lab instructor.

C papers will have limited difficulties in spelling and grammar and will draw on the pentad and the guilt-purification cycle to discuss the appeals of the text. B papers will be well-written with few if any difficulties in spelling or grammar and will extend the argument in the first writing assignment to examine the specific appeals within the structure of the pentad and each step of the guilt-purification cycle as it is used within the rhetorical text. A papers will be exceptionally well-written with no obvious errors in spelling or grammar and will comprehensively examine the dramatistic construction of the rhetorical text, explaining how each element is used by the rhetorician(s) to motivate audiences to see the world in a given way and to act in accordance with that perspective.

