English 104 Rhetoric in Popular Culture

4:00-5:20 MW
HH 1108

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Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:30, or Monday by appointment
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Ext:

Course Description

In this course, we explore rhetoric in popular culture by studying a variety of cultural artifacts, ranging from advertisements and graffiti to literature, music, and art. Ultimately, this course is about power and agency. The study of rhetoric and the study of culture meet around questions of persuasion: How do designers or authors of texts use signs to persuade? How do audiences or readers consume those signs, and what do they do with them? Why do some texts become part of popular culture while others remain marginal? Is popular culture dominated by corporate or government interests? What do the texts that comprise our popular culture reveal about our shared values and assumptions?

To better understand these questions, we start the course with an overview of rhetorical and cultural theory. We then move into a discussion of rhetoric in corporate advertising, asking how this advertising attempts to sell desires and values along with products. We will then analyze a variety of countercultural artifacts from the 1960s to see how rhetoric might be used to elicit cultural change.

By the end of the course you will be sensitized to the rhetoric in the texts that flash across your computer and television screens, come through your ear buds, appear in your email inbox or on your Facebook wall, surround you at the grocery store, greet you along the side of the highway... You will have a greater awareness of and appreciation for how these texts attempt to shape your beliefs and guide your actions.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, you will be
- familiar with key issues, theories, and research methods in cultural studies and rhetorical theory
- cognizant of the rhetorical nature of texts
- adept at analyzing the rhetorical strategies of texts by drawing upon the critical methods and theories within the rhetorical and cultural studies
- familiar with academic style

Reading Materials
- English 104, Courseware
Assignments

Critical responses (3 @ 5%) 15%
In-class essay 25%
Proposal 5%
Final paper 25%
Exam 30%

Critical responses (3)
These will be done in-class at unspecified points throughout the term. They will be 1-2 page responses to a prompt about the reading or lecture material. They will be graded for familiarity with the material and engagement with the issues.

*Missed responses will receive a grade of 0.

In-Class Essay
This essay will take the entirety of one class to complete. You will have a choice of 3 questions on which to write an argumentative essay with a thesis and distinct points of support. The essay questions will be generated from the course readings and lectures up to that point in the course. These questions will not be distributed ahead of time. Grammar and spelling will not be matters of serious consideration unless they hinder the essay's readability. I am interested in seeing critical thought and real engagement with the issues at hand.

*Extensions will not be granted for this assignment without proper documentation (i.e., doctor’s note).

Proposal
This is a 5-page essay proposal (12 point font, Times New Roman or Calibri, 1" margins) in which you will make a case for your chosen cultural artifacts, describing what they are and explaining not only why they are worthy of individual analysis but also why they should be analyzed together as a group. You will also state your research question, the answer to which will become your thesis statement, and explain the significance of this question (to address the "so what?" issue). You will also outline the theory you will be using to analyze your artifacts, providing a rationale for why this theory is useful, reliable, and applicable in this case. A full bibliography in APA or MLA style is required.

*Submit the proposal at the beginning of class on Wednesday, October 7. If you are unable to submit your proposal during class, email me the essay as an attachment by 4pm on the due date. Files that are encrypted or will not open will be subject to the late penalty.

*Late penalty is 5% per day, including weekends.

Research Paper
This is an 8-10 page argumentative research essay (12 point font, Times New Roman or Calibri, 1" margins) in which you will compare the rhetorical strategies at work in two to three cultural artifacts (posters, songs, advertisements, paintings, poems, speeches). Be sure to consider their social contexts, mediums, and intended audience(s) in this comparison. The goal here is not necessarily to determine which is more effective, but to analyze how the artifacts use signs to create meaning. The essay must have a clear thesis statement and logical organizational structure and it must draw on a minimum of 10 academic sources. A full bibliography in APA or MLA style is required.
*Submit the essay at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 18. If you are unable to submit your essay during class, email me the essay as an attachment by 4pm on the due date. Files that are encrypted or will not open will be subject to the late penalty.

*The late penalty is 5% per day, including weekends.

*Research papers with no proposal will not be accepted.

Research Paper Resubmission Option
Resubmit your revised research paper for a chance to improve your grade. This resubmission must include a cover letter explaining not only the changes made to the paper but also the rationale for these changes and a reiteration of the paper's topic and purpose (addressing the "so what?" issue). A copy of your original paper with my comments must also be included in this resubmission. Late resubmissions will not be accepted.

*Submit the resubmission by Wednesday, December 2nd (no extensions will be granted). If you are unable to submit your essay during class, email me the essay as an attachment AND place a copy of the revised essay along with the original paper with my comments in my department mailbox by 4pm on the due date. Files that are encrypted or will not open will be subject to the late penalty.

Exam
This is a 2.5-hour exam to be held in the exam period covering all of the course material, including lectures and readings. The exam will have 3 parts: a) Sight Passages, in which you must identify the text and author of the citation and discuss the significance of the passage, b) Critical Response, in which you respond a statement using a minimum of 3 of the course readings to substantiate your opinion, and c) Rhetorical Analysis, in which you will analyze the rhetorical strategies used in 3 cultural artifacts. Each part will offer choice.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction
- Brummett Chapter 1

Week 2 – Critical Methods
- Brummett Chapters 3 & 4
- Storey (Courseware)

Week 3 – Key Issues
- Cormack (Courseware)
- Adorno & Horkheimer (Courseware)

Week 4 – Rhetoric in Advertising
- Williams (Courseware)
- Fowels (Courseware)
- Kilbourne (Courseware)
- * Wednesday, PROPOSAL DUE
Week 5 – Rhetoric in Advertising
*Monday no class (Thanksgiving)*
- Online readings: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice
- Terry O’Reilly, The Age of Persuasion "Season 3, Episode 4: Rethink the Shark"
- Terry O’Reilly, The Age of Persuasion "Season #3 Great Canadian Campaigns"
- Terry O’Reilly, The Age of Persuasion "In Defense of Advertising"
  http://www.cbc.ca/ageofpersuasion/2008/04/in_defence_of_advertising_1.html

Week 6 – Review
*Wednesday, IN-CLASS ESSAY*
- Online reading: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_essay.html
  http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing_Center/Handouts/EssayExams.pdf;

Week 7 – Rhetoric and Counterculture
- Goffman & Joy, Chapter 12 (Courseware)
- Leland, Chapter 6 (Courseware)
  → Online resources:
    - CounterCulture Wiki
      http://counterculture.wikia.com/wiki/CounterCulture_Wiki
    - Wikipedia article “Counterculture of the 1960s”

Week 8 – Rhetoric and Counterculture: Music
- Henry (Courseware)
- Henry (Courseware)
- Rowe (Courseware)
- Manson (Courseware)

Week 9 – Rhetoric and Counterculture: Graffiti
- Samir S. Patel, “Writing on the Wall,” Archaeology, 60.4 (2007)

Week 10 – Rhetoric and Counterculture
*Wednesday, ESSAY DUE*
- Leland, Chapter 15 (Courseware)
- Frank, Chapter 7 (Courseware)
- Heath & Potter, "Introduction" (Courseware)
- Adbusters' ad (Courseware)

Week 11 – Rhetoric and Counterculture
- Goffman & Joy, Chapter 15 (Courseware)
- Heath & Potter, "The Birth..." and "Freud Goes..." (Courseware)

Week 12 – Review
*Wednesday, RESUBMISSION OPTION*
Regulations

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of 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.]

**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, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://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.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm](http://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, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm).

**Note for students with disabilities:** The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term."