English 104: Rhetoric in Popular Culture

Instructor: Christine Horton
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Lecture: 2:30-3:50 TTh, AL 105
Office hours: 4:00-5:00 TTh, Office PAS 2217

Course Description

This course explores how popular culture can persuade, influence, and convince in daily life. Using a variety of rhetorical methods, we will analyse a range of artefacts in this class, including (but not limited to) advertising, literature, film, television, music, technology, radio, art, and fashion. The goals of this course are both theoretical and practical: we aim to understand the rhetorical method, and then to practice the art in order to identify and explore the various forms of popular culture that surround us. Students will not only study the messages of popular culture in this class but also participate directly in their production through a class blog, drawing attention to the ways in which these discourses are used to create and maintain individual and collective identities. Far from being merely entertainment, popular culture, especially mass media, is a dominant form of communication in today’s society; this course seeks to develop the critical lens of the student in order to understand the role of persuasive structures in our daily lives.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course students will have been introduced to, and successful students will be able to demonstrate, some of the following abilities:

- To articulate coherent definitions of rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, and popular culture
- To engage in the processes of close reading of an artefact for the purposes of discussion and critical debate
- To analyse how a particular artefact operates rhetorically through its ideas, arguments, structure, style, and context
- To develop and structure a rhetorical analysis of an artefact using a reasoned argument and integrated research and source material to articulate and support positions

Course Materials


Evaluation
Blog Participation – 10%
For each method, students are responsible for one blog post, one discussion question, and one response to another student’s post, discussion question, or response. The discussion question and blog post must be posted by the start of the second lecture (as noted on the syllabus), and the response must be posted by the end of the week (Sunday night). The discussion question must address the rhetorical method directly, for example, “How does the ideological method account for resistance?” The blog post must engage directly with a popular culture artefact, and it must contain the following features: a link to the video/webspace/blog/comic (where possible), must be 100 words, must be original (cannot use the same artefact twice), and must comment on a specific aspect of the type of rhetorical method, for example, the use of setting as a function of the narrative method in Matt and Kim’s video “Lesson’s Learned.” The response must be critical (rather than descriptive), and engage directly with the artefact or method of criticism, and can be posted in response to either a post or a discussion question, and perhaps even to answer a discussion question! Grades are earned based on the quality of posts, responses, and questions. Attendance and active participation in class will aid in this quality. Artefacts posted on the blog may be, and are encouraged to be, the focus of further analysis in assignments. Students must email the instructor with their blog username before the blog is posted.

Rhetorical Analysis #1 – 15% - Four Pages ---- Rhetorical Analysis #2 – 25% - Six Pages
Choose any one popular culture artefact and one method of criticism most appropriate for analysis. Students may not use the same method or type of artefact (film, song) twice. Write a four page and six page rhetorical analysis of the artefact which demonstrates an understanding of the rhetorical method and uses the terminology of the method of criticism. The assignment must be original, have a thesis based argument, be structured using essay/paragraph structure, and use at least three acceptable academic resources. The assignment must be four pages in length, be typed in 12 point Times New Roman, be double spaced, have 1 inch margins, and adhere to MLA citation style in every way. Students are encouraged to submit essays with original and well organized arguments which should engage in a close reading of the artefact within the framework of the thesis of the essay. Students will post their analysis on the blog within 24 hours of submitting it in class and, where possible, also post a link/picture for their work.

Late Penalties
Rhetorical Analyses must be submitted in class. Late papers may be submitted in the English Department Drop Box, HH2016E (beside HH228). Late papers will be penalized at the rate of 2% per day. No extensions or exceptions. A doctor’s note or a note from the registrar is required to avoid a late penalty. Email submissions of assignments will not be accepted.

Research Materials/Methods
Acceptable academic research materials include peer reviewed journals, academic texts, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), and scholarly encyclopaedia, such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online (EBO). Websites and Wikipedia are not acceptable academic sources. For the purposes of this class, OED and EBO are acceptable resources for all research. Sources other than OED and EBO must be approved by the instructor to be accepted as a reference.

**Schedule**

**Week One**
September 14 - Introduction
September 16 - Introduction to Rhetorical Theory
Reading: Foss - Chapter 1

**Week Two**
September 21 - Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis
Reading: Foss - Chapter 2
September 23 - Introduction to Popular Culture Theory
Reading: Storey - Introduction

**Week Three**

September 28 - Neo-Aristotelian Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 3
September 30 - Cluster Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 4

**Week Four**
October 5 - Cluster Criticism – Blog Post #1 due
October 7 - Narrative Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 9

**Week Five**
October 12 - Narrative Criticism – Blog Post #2 due
October 14 - Metaphor Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 8

**Week Six**
October 19 - Metaphor Criticism – Blog Post #3 due
October 21 - Midterm Exam

**Week Seven**
October 26 - Generic Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 6
October 28 - Generic Criticism – Blog Post #4 due

**Week Eight**
November 2 - Ideological Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 7
November 4 - Ideological Criticism – **Blog Post #5 due**

Week 9
November 9 - Fantasy-theme Criticism **Rhetorical Analysis #1 due**
Sign-up for Mandatory appointments in Week 10
Reading: Foss - Chapter 5
November 11 - Fantasy-theme Criticism – **Blog Post #6 due**

Week 10
November 16/18 - No Class - mandatory appointment with instructor, PAS 2217

Week 11
November 23 - Pentadic Criticism
Reading: Foss - Chapter 10
November 25 - Pentadic Criticism - **Rhetorical Analysis #2 due, Blog Post #2 due**

Week 12
November 30 - Review
December 2 - **Final In-Class Exam**

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, 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 professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. 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)

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)

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm)

Academic Integrity website (Arts): [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)

Academic Integrity Office (UW): [http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/)

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:
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.