English 104: Rhetoric in Popular Culture

Instructor: Michael Hancock
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Lecture: 2:30-3:50 WF, RCH 103
Office hours: 4:00-5:00 WF, Office PAS 2212

Course Description
This course explores how popular culture can persuade, influence, and convince in ordinary life. Using a variety of rhetorical methods, we will analyse a range of artefacts in this class, including (but not limited to) advertising, comic books, film, television, music videos, technology, video games, architecture, and fashion. The goals of this course are both theoretical and practical: we aim to understand the rhetorical method, and then to apply those methods in order to identify and explore the various forms of popular culture that surround us. Students in the course will be expected to demonstrate their ability to apply rhetorical methods to pop culture artefacts in responses, essays, and class discussion. Popular culture is more than mindless entertainment. Whether it appears as a tool for mass media, personal recreation, or the expression of identity, popular culture is the dominant form of communication in today’s society. This course seeks to develop the rhetorical skills of the student in order to critically assess the role of persuasive structures in our daily lives.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will have been introduced to and be expected to successfully demonstrate some of the following skills:

- To define and explain basic concepts involving rhetoric, rhetorical analysis, and popular culture
- To apply these definitions and engage in the close reading of a popular culture artefact for the purposes of critical discussion, and debate
- To analyze the rhetorical functioning of a particular artefact in terms of its ideas, structure, arguments, style, and context
- To articulate a rhetorical analysis of a particular artefact in terms of the rhetorical methods discussed in class, integrating research to justify and support an argument

Course Materials

http://books.google.ca/books?id=Npt3Q5lxrccC&source=gbs_navlinks_s
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**
January 5 – Introduction
January 7 – Introduction to Rhetorical Theory
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 1.

**Week Two**
January 12 – Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis.
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 2.
January 14 – Introduction to Popular Culture Theory
**Reading:** Storey—Introduction.

**Week Three**
January 19 – Neo-Aristotelian Criticism
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 3.
January 21 – Cluster Criticism
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 4.

**Week Four**
January 26 – Cluster Criticism
January 28 – Generic Criticism
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 6.

**Week Five**
February 2 – Generic Criticism
February 4 – Narrative Criticism
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 9.

**Week Six**
February 9 – Narrative Criticism. **Submission date for first essay.**
**Reading:** Foss—Chapter 7.

**Week Seven**
February 16 – Metaphor Criticism. **Midterm exam.**

**READING WEEK**

**Week Eight**
March 2 – Fantasy-Theme Criticism.