English 309A: Rhetoric—Principles and Practices

Fall, 1999
Tuesday and Thursday 8:30-10:00; HH 139

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Hours: Wednesdays & Thursdays 3:00-4:30

Course epitome
“A study of rhetorical theories from the Classical Period (Pre-Socratic to Augustine) with an emphasis on how these theories reflect changing attitudes towards language, reality, and the self.”

—Catalogue

We will be investigating belief, persuasion, truth, knowledge, reason, and virtue, through the theorizing, hyping, and complaining of the ancients.

We will be tracing the early history of rhetoric, from before its invention as a discipline in quasi-democratic Greek antiquity to its absorption into authoritarian Christian ideology with the early Middle Ages.

We will be focussing on the ideas of a few major characters,—like the Really Big Dog, Aristotle, the Great Satan, Plato, and the Slippery Fish, Gorgias.

We will be exploring how we just can't escape figuration, so we might as well make friends.

We will traffic in symbols, and they will traffic in us.

Texts
Robert Wardy, *The birth of rhetoric*
M.L. Clarke, *Rhetoric at Rome*
Arthur Quinn, *Figures of speech*

Style guide
Aaron, McArthur, *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*

Requirements
Midterm 20% (2 Nov)
Final 30% (up to the Registrar)
Project Academic Essay OR
Change-the-world project 30% (6 Dec)
Being Rhetorical 20% (all the live-long day)

Slogan
*As it is the duty of the master to teach, so it is the duty of the pupil to show himself teachable. The two obligations are mutually indispensable.*

—Quintilian

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1 All royalties derived from the sale of this book will be donated to the Department of English scholarship fund.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HISTORY DAY</td>
<td>CONCEPT DAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Sept</td>
<td>Hello; how are you?</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Sept</td>
<td>Hello; who are you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Sept</td>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Sept</td>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Sept</td>
<td>Gorgias</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Oct</td>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Oct</td>
<td>Plato</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Oct</td>
<td>Dialectic</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Oct</td>
<td>Isocrates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Oct</td>
<td>Pathos</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Oct</td>
<td>Aristotle</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Oct</td>
<td>Enthymemes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Oct</td>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>(Chapter 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nov</td>
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<td>4 Nov</td>
<td>Ad Herennium</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Nov</td>
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<td>11 Nov</td>
<td>Cicero</td>
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<td>16 Nov</td>
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<td>23 Nov</td>
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<td>25 Nov</td>
<td>Quintilian</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dec</td>
<td>Augustine</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Dec</td>
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MIDTERM

TERM PROJECT DUE
Requirements—Exams & Being Rhetorical

Midterm
You will have to know both "facts" and "ideas". The exam will test mostly the former, with multiple-choice, true-false, short-answer questions. It will cover material up to and including the 28 October class.

Final
More of the same, but with some essay questions thrown in to chart the "ideas" quotient of the course. The 'facts' portion will focus on the Roman period (material after the midterm); the 'ideas' portion will cover the entire course.

Being rhetorical
Come to class prepared, contribute to discussions, participate in the building and the development of the course. In particular, you should think reflectively about all the readings: for the theoretical readings, you might want to link them to contemporary or ongoing issues; for the figures, you might want to collect a few of your own.

Chief opportunities:
- Most classes will feature a figuration session, corresponding to the linguistic permutations in the readings from Quinn.
- The history days will have room for questions and discussion.
- The concept days will be largely discussion classes.

Ways to get a good grade: ask relevant questions, make salient observations, look for and point out connections in the material, complain about the unbelievable pressure of having to be rhetorical on demand, ...

Ways to get a mediocre grade: sit in your seat; avoid eye contact with the professor.

Ways to get a poor grade: stay away from class, make long irrelevant commentaries, treat your fellow students with extravagant disrespect, ...

By the way, I am almost impervious to arguments that third-year university students, in a rhetoric programme, destined for careers involving the professional use of language, should not 'be required to talk in class'.

Notes
Do the readings before the assigned class.

If you have any questions, please make sure you ask them.

Familiarize yourself with Policy #71, particularly with regard to plagiarism and other forms of cheating.

Term Project
You can do either an academic essay OR a change-the-world project; see below for details.

Harris, English 309A, Fall 99
Requirements—Term Project

Academic Essay

Start thinking about your essay immediately. I’m not kidding. It will not have to be very long (1,500 - 2,000 words), but it will have to be very good. This is a third-year English course; the quality of writing and thinking should reflect that level of study.

If you think academic essays are soul-less forms with no connection to the world outside university, then don’t do one (see change-the-world project). But my own view is rather different. I see them as a mode of thinking, and thinking is good.

You can do a critical analysis, or a conceptual paper.

Critical
Start with a concept (logos, reason, opinion, contingency, virtue, figuration, metaphor, ...) and watch it develop through the course (and help it develop through the course; see "Being rhetorical" above).

- Do some outside reading on it (a.k.a. library research).
- Collect original data illustrating it (a.k.a. empirical research, a.k.a. a text).
- Write a paper which shows (1) awareness of how that concept is rhetorical, especially in the terms of the ancients; and (2) original thought on how that notion operates in any given universe of discourse.
- Prototypical topics are "The Ethos of Jean Chretien's Hep-B Speeches--Ciceronian or Aristotelian?", "Kairos in Rink-Board Advertising", and "Perspective in Go".

Conceptual
Alternately, you might do a more purely historical or theoretical paper,--say, comparing Isocrates and Augustine on the notions of values in discourse, or discussing the role of deliberative orations during the Roman empire. Again, you need to go to the library. Again, you need to demonstrate (1) awareness of the rhetorical dimensions of the concept under discussion, and (2) original thought on its function in the context you examine. But your focus should be on rhetorical theory or general practices, not on a specific body of practical discourse.

Evaluation
My evaluation will depend on the cogency, conceptual sophistication, and rhetorical appropriateness of the paper. I know these are somewhat vague terms, and that identifying manifestations of them is subjective. But all that means is it isn’t easy serve up tidy definitions in a course prospectus. It doesn’t mean they are unknowable. As someone who has been going to school for most of your life, who is at least halfway through your degree, and who is looking at a career using language, you should, in fact, be getting to know them pretty well by now.

The Little, Brown Compact Handbook is a good resource for invention, arrangement, and style. I am always willing to talk about your ideas; class discussion is also a good place to test out the effectiveness of your views and expression of them.
Requirements—Term Project

Change the World Project

Start thinking about your project immediately. I’m not kidding. Rhetoric is, at its heart, the use of symbols to make things different. The world is a big place—even the facets of it visible in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada—and symbols are very powerful little beasts. So there are lots of opportunities. But twelve weeks is not very much time.

**Topic** How you try to change the world, what route you choose, and how far you go towards your goal are all up to you. But I advise you (1) to choose a manageable topic, one that can produce some results in the time allowed (if you want to reconcile the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims, 12 weeks may not be enough); and (2) to choose a project that engages and challenges your rhetorical mettle for a reasonable part of the term (asking someone to put out their cigarette is a rhetorical act which changes the world, but not a very ambitious one).

Successful topics in the past have included: getting a vegetarian entree on the daily residence menu; recouping a damage deposit from a wheedling landlord; attempting to prevent the United Way from raising money on campus; lobbying for a traffic light; attempting to change course requirements for the RPW programme.

**Evaluation** My evaluation will depend on the success and scope of the project, particularly as it is manifest in a project report, to which all the criteria and expectations of the academic essay apply: cogency, conceptual sophistication, and rhetorical appropriateness, at a level reflective of third-year English studies.

You can structure it any way you like, but it should have at least five sections:

- The problem (what you want to change).
- The method (how you tried to change it).
- The narration (what you did, what ‘they’ did, what you did then, what else ‘they’ did ...).
- The analysis (how effective your rhetoric was, how effective ‘their’ rhetoric was, why).
- All relevant documentation (copies of letters, copies of posters, addresses of websites, transcripts of speeches, and so on) in one or more appendixes.

The method, narration, and (especially) analysis sections should demonstrate a thorough awareness of rhetorical principles, particularly those principles discussed by the ancients.

Length depends on the documentation required by your project, but the submission should include 4-10 pages of description and analysis (between 1,500 and 3,000 words).