ENGLISH 481A
Fall 1989

M. A. Gerhardstein

Research Issues in Language, Communication, Rhetoric, and Writing

(Not open to students who have taken ENGL 292)

The intent of ENGL 481A is to introduce you to the scholarly and research journals in the areas of language, writing, rhetoric, and communication; to expose you to recent research issues, questions, and controversies in these fields; as well as to important scholars in the fields; and to enhance your own research capacities. If your interests lie in that direction, projects undertaken in this seminar can easily suggest, or lead to, Honours Essay topics.

The course will consist of a combination of independent research and directed study, conducted through seminars and individual consultations. Moving toward increasing specialization, the three parts, or phases, of the course will each involve research leading to a seminar presentation and to a written report.

Students who have participated in the seminar in earlier terms have produced some quite interesting and substantial work. If you are interested in reviewing what they did, I will provide copies of their reports and papers.

Because total enrollment in this term is going to be a bit too big to handle in one group, I intend to split the group as evenly as possible. One half of the group will then meet at the officially scheduled time and in the officially scheduled room; the other half will meet at a time and place to be established. To allow me to make this division, I will need accurate timetables from each of you by Thursday of this week (September 14 or 15). On Monday of next week (September 19), I will post notices on my office door of the group divisions and times and places. Please check.

A week-by-week schedule of course activities is provided later in this syllabus.
Phase 1 — Concentration on Journals:

This part of the course is intended to give you a foundation and some breadth on which to build the rest of the course. The foundation and breadth will come from your own research, as well as from your exposure to the seminars and reports of your colleagues in the course.

Attached to the end of this syllabus is a listing of relevant journals in the fields of language, writing, rhetoric, and communication. (A number of the more technical and difficult journals in linguistics have been omitted from this listing; but, if you would like to work with one of them, let me know.) Do a quick scan of several of these journals and then choose three of the journals for closer examination. To give you breadth of exposure, the three chosen journals should be very different (in subject matter, audience, approach, etc.) from one another.

At some point during the second week of the term, either (preferably) during your scheduled class time for the course or during my posted office hours, see me to identify and briefly discuss your three choices of journals.

Then analyze at least four recent issue of each of the three chosen journals, preferably from different years. Take note of the kinds of articles published, the kinds of topics covered, the apparent audiences, the apparent criteria of merit, etc. Consider the contrasts and the similarities among and between your chosen three journals.

During the third week of the term, your course group will meet as a whole for initial comparison of findings. In the fourth week, you will present your own findings on the journals informally and briefly (10-15 minutes) to your whole group. Afterward, you will prepare a well-focused written report (8-10 pages) for submission. Submit two copies for availability to your colleagues in the course.

Phase 2 — Concentration on Topics:

From the ideas which you noted during your journal investigations in the first part of the course (or in the presentations and reports of other students), you will choose one topic of particular interest to you, tracing its discussion in a variety of journals and books, and defining both its development over time as well as the contributions to its development made by different writers. Again, you will present your findings briefly and informally to the group and will prepare a written report (8-10 pages) summarizing these findings. This report should be accompanied by a substantial bibliography. Again, the report should be submitted in duplicate.
Phase 3: Concentration on Writers:

From the writers you encountered earlier in the course, you will choose one whose work seems of particular interest or significance to you. The writer whom you choose should be an established scholar with a substantial body of published work. Investigate this writer's contribution to his or her field of research through examination and analysis of several (say 3-12) of his or her articles, or two or three of his or her books, or some combination of articles and books. Late in the term, you will make a brief and informal preliminary presentation of your findings to the seminar group. Your full analysis of your writer's work is then to be presented in a term paper of 15-20 pages, to be due about two weeks after lectures end. Again, please submit the work in duplicate.

The following emphases will be given in the calculation of the course grade: Project 1 -- 25%; Project 2 -- 32%; Project 3 -- 43%.

Because of the importance to your success and happiness in the course of adequately orienting yourself with regard to the library's guides to its resources, the second group meeting of the course (in Week 3) will include a brief tour of a few of the more important landmarks. For purposes of this orientation exercise, please be prepared to state, from your journal review to date, a couple of topics and/or a couple of authors that you think you might later like to look up.

Schedule of Course Activities:

Project 1 --
Week 1 (week of Sept 1) -- Group meeting and Individual Consultations
Week 2 (week of Sept 18) -- Individual Consultations
Week 3 (week of Sept 25) -- Group Discussion (and Library Visit)
Week 4 (week of Oct 2) -- Seminars

Project 2 --
Week 5 (week of Oct 9) -- Group Discussion
Week 6 (week of Oct 16) -- Individual Consultations
Week 7 (week of Oct 23) -- On Own
Week 8 (week of Oct 30) -- Seminars

Project 3 --
Week 9 (week of Nov 3) -- Group Discussion
Week 10 (week of Nov 13) -- Individual Consultations
Week 11 (week of Nov 20) -- On Own
Week 12 (week of Nov 27) -- Presentations

Project 1 written report should be submitted by Oct. 16.
Project 2 written report should be submitted by Nov. 13.
Project 3 term paper is due by Dec. 13.
Journals for Examination:

Per PE2801.A6 American Speech
Per P67.C35 Canadian Journal of Communication
Per PE1001.C6 College Composition and Communication
Per PE1.C6 College English
Per P1001.C6 Communication Research
Per MF5718.J6 Journal of Business Communication
Per P90.J6 Journal of Communication
Per PN4700.J7 Journalism Quarterly
Per T11.J66 Journal of Technical Writing and Communication
Per P1.L33 Language in Society
Per 81.P571 Philosophy and Rhetoric
Per PN4071.Q2 Quarterly Journal of Speech
Per PN171.4.R44 Rhetoric Review
Per PN 171.4.R46 Rhetoric Society Quarterly
Per PN183.R45 Rhetorica
Per T11.T41X Technical Communication