

ENGL 788 Topics in Rhetoric: Contemporary North American Dissent and Social Action

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Class Meetings	Monday 6:30 – 9:20PM PAS 2085
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the modern rhetorical antecedents of the discourses of dissent emerging from contemporary social justice movements, including those associated with racism, classism, homophobia, and nationalism in Canada and the United States. From the American Indian Movement to Idle No More, from Black Liberation to Black Lives Matter, from socialist labour to the New Left, from Stonewall to Queer Liberation, from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to Quebec's Values Charter Legislation, from nationalist rhetorics of the Cold War to contemporary debates on immigration, this course will provide students with grounding in contemporary theories of dissenting discourse as well as with opportunities to explore the rhetorical practice of dissent within a variety of social movements.

REQUIRED READINGS

Morris, Charles E. and Stephen Howard Browne, eds. *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*. 3rd ed. Strata Publishing Inc. 2013.

Posted on Learn

Ahmed, Sara. "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism." *Borderlands*, volume 3 Number 2, 2004.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation." P. 127 in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House.

Marcuse, Herbert. "Repressive Tolerance." In *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Beacon Press, 1965.

Additional Readings as Assigned

ABOUT THIS COURSE

Each of you will design your own program of focus, including research, topics and methods for discussion leadership, and project production (or alternatives). You should bring your program of focus plan with you to class on September 21 for discussion with the group. Following this class meeting, discussions and activities each week will be co-designed in order to support and facilitate each student pursuing their individual lines of inquiry and production and sharing that work with the group. You may determine the size, shape, extent, direction, and aim of your program. I ask only that you consider not only the exchange-value of the program you design (the grade you receive and/or the way in which you might profit from your program), but also its use-value – for you, for an audience, readership, or users of your choice, and for your colleagues enrolled in the course. I ask that you plan not only to share what you are learning from your program with your colleagues in the course, but also that you support your colleagues in exploring with you the questions around which your program and theirs is organized – that you help one another understand better the use-value of discourse in understanding and addressing complex social problems.

Key Values

What follows is a list of key values or principles that I ask you to join me in enacting throughout the course of the term. I invite you to consider these values or principles as you design your program of focus and shape what forms your knowledge production will take throughout the term (e.g. discussion leadership or facilitation, reading assignments, intellectual production or project design). This course, I hope, will give you opportunities to pursue your curiosities, to learn through experimentation, and to push the limits of traditional models of teaching and learning.

- Knowledge is socially produced. *Because this is so, epistemology (what is counted as knowledge in any given context) and the means by which knowledge is produced are shaped and constrained by power – by the forces of domination and exclusion as well as resistance and dissent. Knowledge production is, then, always a political action.*
- All of us are both knowledgeable and knowledge-makers.
- Teaching and learning are intersecting and overlapping spheres of activity: we learn by teaching as well as by being taught.
- To teach does not signify either an inability or a lack of need to learn more and better.
- Similarly, to be a learner does not signify that one knows nothing – nor does it absolve members of a community, collective, or group from participating in knowledge production and sharing or dissemination of knowledge.
- Learning is at its best when both teachers and learners are curious and open to surprise and to wonderment.

- Learning well and deeply (and teaching well and deeply) are better served by the posing of critical, complex, and even mischievous questions than by unquestioning adherence to unexamined rules and conventions.

Therefore, in a productive and sustainable learning community, collective, or group

- Responsibility for active engagement in both teaching and learning will be shared.
- The expertise and professionalism of the person occupying the role of teacher will be recognized and respected, but not mystified or reified.
- The experience, knowledge, and desire to learn of those occupying the role of student will be recognized, and respected, but not mystified or reified.
- Dialogue is fundamental to knowledge production, essential to learning, and a critical aspect of effective pedagogy. Each participant will bear responsibility for participating in and sustaining ongoing dialogue throughout the term.
- To read, think, talk, and write well together about complex issues requires that each participant, rather than seeking to suppress difference and avoid conflict, will collectively commit to addressing difference and talking through conflict with respect, compassion, and care.
- Not all ideas and perspectives are equal in quality or are “right.” Not all bad ideas or ill-conceived perspectives are utterly wrong. Contradictory claims may be simultaneously true. The intellectual labour of engaging with complexities such as these belongs to all participants in a learning community, collective, or group.

You have the opportunity to design a program of focus and ways of approaching that program for this course that best suit your learning style and learning needs as well as your interests. Please communicate with me to the best of your ability about your needs. Together, we will ensure that you are able to accomplish your goals for your program of study.

Organizing Questions for Design of Program of Focus

What follows is a list of questions you may use to help you design your program of focus, to define your contributions to the class, and to determine what form your project(s) will take.

- What drew you to this course?
- What questions have you believed this course would help you to explore or answer?
- What is your general area of interest for your program of focus?
- What question or questions do you seek to pursue through your program of focus?
- Why are those questions important to you? To who else might those questions be important?

- What goals drive your program of focus? What do you hope to achieve?
- How do these goals serve the learning needs and interests of your colleagues in the class? How do they pertain to or extend the subject of the course as it is outlined in the course description above?
- In what ways will you contribute to the learning of your colleagues through your program of focus? How will you make what you are learning available to the rest of us?
- How will you use the rest of us to brainstorm, test ideas, explore complex questions and issues, and gather feedback on your project(s)?
- What will excellence look like as you learn from your colleagues in the class? As you teach your colleagues in the class? As you research? As you frame your ideas and craft a project – a product – that may be taken up and used or learned from by others? What would sufficiency look like? Failure?
- By what criteria will you judge the degree to which you have successfully completed this course and your program of focus?

Areas of Expertise

What follows is a list of topics with which I am well equipped to provide extensive assistance. This list should not be read as a limit to your program of focus, but rather as a guide to help you discern what kind of support I can best offer to you and how we might proceed together to build your learning experience in the course.

- Critical Theory: theories of power, change, subjectivity, and agency
- Critical Pedagogy; theory and practice
- Class and Classism: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Material Conditions; Class Struggle
- History of Rhetoric of Social Movements: US Civil Rights; Black Power; Anti-War; AIM; Idle No More; Occupy; Anonymous
- Critical Race Theory and Anti-Racist Rhetoric: History of race and racism in the US and in Canada; History of anti-racism in the US and Canada; Anti-racist rhetoric in US and Canada; racist violence as well as the role (rhetoric and performance) of violence in resistance to racism.
- History of Rhetoric of Nationalism, Colonialism, Xenophobia, and Immigration “Reform” in the US and Canada – particularly English-Only movements and struggles around language and national identity
- Community Activism: Organizational leadership training, labour organizing, strategic and tactical movement design; Community activist rhetorics
- The Demise of Social Movements: History and rhetoric of repression, suppression, appropriation and assimilation; history and rhetoric of conflict from within social justice movements
- History of Rhetoric of Anti-Semitism: (20th and 21st centuries)
- Rhetoric of Islamophobia in the US and Canada (21st century)
- Racialization and Re-racialization of Minorities in the US and Canada
- Neoliberalism and the Rhetorics of “diversity,” “tolerance,” and “multiculturalism”

- Social Media and Social Justice Activism: Twitter; Facebook; 4chan; etc.
- The Theatre of Dissent: Performativity and Persuasion

Areas of Guidance

What follows is a list of topics in which I am not an expert, but am knowledgeable and able to provide support and assistance. Again, this list should not be read as a limit to your program of focus, but rather as a guide to help you discern what kind of support I can best offer to you and how we might proceed together to build your learning experience in the course.

- Feminist Theory and Activism: history and rhetoric
- Queer Theory and Activism: history and rhetoric
- Intersectionality and Social Activism
- Environmentalism and Environmental Racism

Maximize your Learning

In order to provide you with the best individualized instruction and to tailor my assistance to your program of focus, I request that you meet with me individually on a regular basis throughout the term.

I understand that you may live some distance from campus and that your availability, therefore, may be limited. I also recognize that you may work on or off campus in addition to taking graduate courses and that you may have families or family obligations that complicate your schedules.

Please review your calendar and schedule a regular bi-weekly appointment with me. I will do what I can to make myself available during times that work for you rather than setting appointment times and asking you to adapt. In return, I expect that you will recognize and be respectful of the limits on my time and of the ways in which my schedule may fluctuate with the demands of my research program, my service obligations, and my family's needs.

Summary

What follows is a to-do list for you to use as you prepare for the term and design your program of focus:

- Schedule bi-weekly appointments with Frankie for the duration of the term
- Read carefully through the material provided in Frankie's general course outline
- Write your plan for your program of focus. This is not a graded assignment, but a text designed to be used by you to organize your study and intellectual production for the term. You should suggest and together we will determine the means by which your work for the term will be evaluated, by what criteria, and by whom. You may choose to use the following steps to guide you as you draft your plan:

- Choose a topic of focus and identify the question or questions that will drive your research as well as your leadership of class learning for the term
- Define the projects you will engage with or produce through your program of focus
- Define the means by which you will a) engage your colleagues in a critical dialogue about the questions driving your program of focus and its project(s) and b) disseminate what you are learning to your colleagues in the class
- Define the criteria by which you will measure the success of your program of focus this term
- Draft your program of focus for sharing at the second meeting of our class

COURSE CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	ACTIVITIES
SEPTEMBER 14	FIRST CLASS MEETING	Introductions; The Wicked Problem of Dissent; Preparation for the Term Ahead
SEPTEMBER 21	Read Syllabus and Teaching Philosophy Statement carefully; Prepare Program of Focus plan; Read Althusser	Review of your Term Outline; View and Discuss The Manufacture of Consent; If time, begin discussion of Althusser
SEPTEMBER 28	Read Marcuse, Lorde, Ahmed	TBA
OCTOBER 5	Read Morris and Browne Section I	TBA
OCTOBER 12	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	
OCTOBER 19		TBA
OCTOBER 26		TBA
NOVEMBER 2		TBA
NOVEMBER 9		TBA
NOVEMBER 13	NOTE: THIS IS A MEETING ADDED BY THE ADMINISTRATION TO FILL IN A DAY MISSING FROM THE TERM	TBA
NOVEMBER 16		TBA
NOVEMBER 23		TBA
NOVEMBER 30	LAST CLASS MEETING	TBA
DECEMBER 4		FINAL PROJECT DUE

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Frankie Condon

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For many years, I have been both moved and inspired by a question posed to Mary Rose O'Reilly by one of her professors, Ihab Hassan: "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" (*The Peaceable Classroom* 9) Removed from the social and educational context in which the question was originally posed, however - a widespread, collective recognition of the brutality and senselessness of war during the Vietnam era - the pairing of the teaching of English with peacemaking is more likely to provoke confusion than insight among readers of a statement of teaching philosophy such as this one. To understand whether or how there might be any sort of intersection between the study of English - of rhetoric and writing in particular - and the transformation of human relations requires something more than allowing the query to stand, functionally, as a rhetorical question.

In his book, *The Geometry of Violence*, criminologist Harold Pepinsky, argues that violence plays out along a spectrum of human relations ranging from the least affiliative and most violent to the most affiliative and least violent. Societies and cultures with expansive definitions of affiliation and higher valuations of affinity, care, contingency and mutuality are less likely to be riven by either systemic violence (e.g. political or social violence) or by widespread patterns of individual violence. The study of rhetoric and writing, it seems to me, constitutes one means by which we may examine, engage, and extend the critical, analytical, interpretive, performative and communicative means by which we have historically made and continue to make our relations: preserving and reproducing conditions produced by existing or inherited relations or, alternatively, creatively resisting and shifting or transforming those relations.

That the process of insertion into existing social relations and, by extension, into particular perspectival horizons begins at birth and continues throughout our lives is true. It does not necessarily follow, however, that we possess no agency within those relations; we can, in fact, shift, alter or even transform those relations. How we do this work, by what means, within what limits, for what purposes, and to what effect are questions with which I am most concerned both as a scholar and as a teacher.

There are, Linda Alcoff notes, two aspects to what we might understand as social identity: "our socially perceived self within the systems of perception and

classification and the networks of community in which we live;" and our *lived subjectivity* or who we understand and experiences ourselves as being (*Visible Identities* 93). Rather than representing these two aspects of social identity in binary terms (exterior and interior or embodied and felt, for example), Alcoff asks us to consider the ways and degrees to which disparate experiences of being a self and of being called to perform *as if* one is a particular sort of self fail to map neatly onto one another. She asks readers to notice and make sense of the discontinuities among and between the range of experiences that constitute our being in and of the world. While we cannot possess objective understanding of our lives as we live them, as Gadamer points out, our situatedness in place, time, and experience do enable ways of knowing. We are capable of what Gadamer terms *effective historical consciousness*: capable, in other words, of "reflective awareness of the horizon of our situation." We are capable of recognizing that horizon as fluid and dynamic rather than static and given, and capable of recognizing that this horizon is not the only determinant of our understanding and our ability to make meaning. (Alcoff 95)

My aim in the classroom is to invite students to notice, wonder at, and engage critically the power not only of language, itself, but of particular rhetorical modes and strategies for communicating (and performing) the known and the production of new knowledge. I challenge students to question and critique representations of social relations as natural and given and to recognize the ways and degrees to which these relations are, in fact, the products of human labour. I want students to recognize the ways in which they are always, already knowledge producers and rhetorical agents in the construction of meaning. I want also to support and sustain students as they recognize the degree to which as they exercise rhetorical agency they are in fact participating in the reproduction or potentially at least the struggle to transform social relations. I want to support and sustain students, providing them with appropriate conceptual and practical scaffolding as they acquire broader and deeper fluencies in the range of analytical, interpretive, performative and communicative modes of engagement or acts that constitute the means by which individual and collective perspectival horizons are recognized and shifted for themselves and others. I hope to teach my students also to recognize the degree to which these modes of engagement are constituted by complex, ongoing processes of affiliation and disaffiliation or the making and unmaking, creating, inhabiting, and destroying or transforming of human relations. In other words, the study of rhetoric is also necessarily the study of how human relations are forged in and through language: shaped, enabled, and constrained through our representations of ourselves, of others, and of that which constitutes knowledge within particular contexts or communities. The study of rhetoric should engage all of us in the study not only of what is said and how, but also toward what ends and for whose benefit. We make and claim our relations as we compose across a wide variety of contexts

asserting the legitimacy of our presence as rhetors and knowledge producers within communities to which we do or hope to belong. We may pass on the ideological as well as the intellectual legacies of our forebears, but we may also transform those legacies as we compose. I hope students leave my courses with an expanded sense of their intellectual and rhetorical antecedents as well as with a much greater sense of their own contingency, their interdependence and the mutuality of their needs and interests across disparate visible and invisible identities and social and lived subjectivities. Furthermore, I hope that students leave my courses with a greatly enlarged sense of their capability and responsibility as scholars, rhetoricians and writers, as citizens of the world, to those who will come after us.

I recognize the political and hence contested nature of the work I aim to do as a teacher. I believe that the purpose of critical theory is not only to explain the world, but also to change it. By extension, I believe that the purpose of writing as an activity central to higher education curricula is not merely to prove that one has learned, but to contribute meaningfully to the conditions in which learning is possible: to participate in the collective creation and sustenance of learningful relations as well as in the making of meaning and the production of new and usable knowledge.

Often, I believe, critical pedagogy is misunderstood and misrepresented as being inherently coercive and critical teachers as being engaged in the political inculcation of their students. These misconstruals are, I believe, an effect of an inadequate understanding of the range of conceptions of change and change-agency that inform the theory and practice of critical pedagogy. While I am not dismissive of the power of the *agon* in the cultivation of rhetorical agency or of oppositional pedagogy (a praxis distinct from the tradition of critical pedagogy) per se, these are not modes or approaches that play a significant role in my own teaching. I tend to see both oppositional pedagogy and the *agon* as being tactically useful on occasion, but more generally ineffective (and often dishonest) in argument, persuasion, as well as in teaching and learning. Neither am I terribly interested in the pedagogical potential of traditional practices of negotiation, which I believe preserve the status quo by, in effect, purchasing or manufacturing consent. Instead, as a teacher I labour to both enact and teach an array of interconnected intellectual and rhetorical processes that, taken together, constitute both a rhetorical appeal and a rhetorical means by which shifts in perspectival horizon and, consequently, in the character and quality of human relations might be initiated.

In brief, these processes might be categorized into four types: those associated with *decentering*; those associated with *nuancing*; those associated with *kairotic engagement*; and those associated with *readiness*. *Decentering* is the ongoing process of listening (recognizing and acknowledging) to the meaning-making practices of others while, simultaneously recognizing and honouring difference by

dis-placing one's self (social and lived subjectivities) from the center of meaning. I understand the process of *decentering* as a continuous revisioning of the quality of one's presence with/for and attentiveness to the other. *Nuancing* is the ongoing process of transmemoration and witness: of situating one's own story of being and becoming - of social and lived subjectivity - in relationship to the histories, epistemologies, and rhetorical traditions of others without privileging one's own story or using that story to overwrite, subvert, or appropriate the stories others might tell. *Kairotic engagement* is the ongoing process of recognizing, articulating, revising, and re-articulating the rhetorical exigence that attends analysis, interpretation, critique, creative intervention, and the making of meaning or new knowledge; that is, of continual engagement with the ways and degrees to which problems, contradictions, or questions are amenable to address (or redress) through discourse. *Readiness* is the ongoing process of cultivating and sustaining a mindscape capable of wonderment: capable of being surprised by and interested in the world, in why the world is as it is and how it came to be so, and in the marvellous variety of ways in which the world might be created, inhabited, and represented by others. Here I understand "interest" in the double sense of being both intrigued by others - by what others say and know and do - and being needful of affiliation and of the recognition and care co-created through affiliative relationships with others. Finally, however, none of these processes taken singly or together nor the variety of in-class discussions and activities and writing assignments that I might engage in any given course seem sufficient to me to justify a claim that mine is a critical praxis absent an ongoing, reflective consciousness of the constancy of failure to the endeavours of teaching and learning and a shared commitment to learn from failure. That is, *humility* is central to any meaningful practice of critical pedagogy and integral to *humility* is the recognition that failure is inevitable. I strive for willingness to learn from failure and, when appropriate and ethical, to make pedagogical failures visible to students such that they might engage reflectively and learningfully with them as well.

Frequently, critics of critical pedagogy assert that the greatest risks associated with this approach to teaching are that students will feel pressured to adopt the politics of their teachers in order to succeed in the course or, alternatively, be so alienated by the fact of their political differences with their teacher that learning becomes impossible. My own experience suggests a different kind of risk or challenge altogether. To engage - to really engage - critically in the study of writing as a communicative act requires that we study the epistemological and rhetorical means by which knowledge is produced and disseminated. To engage - to really engage - critically in the study of writing as a communicative act requires that we study public rhetorics that, by design, shape how we think, perform our selves, and act in relation to others. But to engage - to really engage - at all in any of these

studies requires both interest and a sense of need for learning. The greatest challenge I face in the classroom is the extent to which students tend to confuse exchange-value and use-value or, more frequently, to believe that the only thing to be gained from any given writing assignment or any writing course is the exchange-value represented by a grade. My challenge is not that students adopt my politics in service of achieving a good grade; they just don't nor do I require or expect them to. My challenge is that some of my students have learned too well the lesson that school is boring; that the subjects about which one might write as well as the activity of writing are boring; that being curious is boring; that the only knowledge worth acquiring in school are the usable skills that might be associated with workplace competencies and that learning those is boring. Too many of my students have been schooled for years by the ringing of bells that not only tell them it's time to move from one classroom to another, but also to shut off the past moment from the current one--that there are no integral or fruitful intersections, continuities, or intriguing discontinuities between the subjects that they study (Gatto 1-5). The interferences of an audit culture in public education seem to have had the prevailing effect of teaching students that the value of learning and the quality of one's education is measured by the number and range of information bytes emptied of nuance and complexity one might acquire that can be easily and quickly performed and judged.

And so perhaps it is most accurate to say that my greatest challenge as a teacher is to create and sustain conditions in which joy is possible in the classrooms I share with students and to help students recognize the necessity of joy to learning well and deeply. I am speaking less here of fun - though, of course, I think having fun is good - than of the affective dimensions of learning at the conjoinment of interest and pleasure, seriousness and absurdity. These are the intellectual and creative intersections where learners discover in themselves and one another the strange and unfamiliar and find it good; where laughter fractures totalities; where the possibility exists for both gentle and exuberant celebrations of the miracle of our collective presence on this earth, at this place - together at the interstices of learning and knowing, being and becoming, of self and other (Ehrenreich 261). The value of joy to learning is not the degree to which momentary pleasure releases us from labour, from pressure, anxiety, or loss. I do not think of joy as a safety valve, for example (Ehrenreich 257). Rather, I think the value of joy derives from the ways in which the experience of joy releases us from bondage to the expected and the familiar - from rigid adherence to rules and compulsive adherence to social constraints. To experience joy in learning is to experience, even momentarily and provisionally, a release into creative intellectualism - into the as-if, the what-if, and the whys of matters that viewed without joy seem either exceptionally mundane or so permanent, so fixed as to be beyond question. In some sense, I suppose I am

suggesting that learning - really learning - constitutes an act of misbehaviour in relation to the familiar and the known and that, similarly, writing well demands a certain mischievousness - the willingness to play the trickster as well as an openness to being tricked and making sense of that. I am interested and, I'll admit, invested as a teacher, a co-learner, and as a writer in the ebullient joy that erupts among students as they learn to collude in the making of mischief as well as in the gentler joy that emerges in moments of recognition and acknowledgement of mutuality, contingency, interdependence, for it is in such moments that I am most convinced that not only are we all learning, but that our lives as learners and as writers are and will be changed for the better by having learned together.

Works Cited

Alcoff, Linda Martin. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.

Gatto, John and Thomas Moore. *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*. New Society Publishers, 2nd edition, 2002.

O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *The Peacable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1993.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity: Take the time now to familiarize yourself with the summary of Policy #71. In order to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, consult “How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors”. Consult Academic Integrity at UW for more information. Visit this link to learn about the University of Waterloo’s expectations and policies regarding Academic Integrity.

Accommodations: The University of Waterloo has a long-standing commitment to support the participation and access to university programs, services, and facilities by persons with disabilities. Students who have a permanent disability as well as those with a temporary disability get AccessAbility Services. To register for services, you must provide documentation from a qualified professional to verify your disability. Please contact them at 519-888-4567 ext. 35082 or drop into Needles Hall 1132 to book an appointment to meet with an advisor to discuss their services and supports.

Grievances: In case that a decision affecting some aspect of a student’s university life has been unfair or unreasonable, they may have grounds for initiating a grievance according to Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: Familiarize yourself with “academic integrity” to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for your actions. Consult Policy 71 for all categories of offences and types of penalties.

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>