Course description

Our world is replete with persuasive texts. Political speeches, popular narratives, email messages, advertisements, TV shows, even casual interactions with friends and family. The list is endless. The persuasive appeals are sometimes overt and aggressive. But more often they are subtle, so subtle that we may not even be aware that we’ve been persuaded by them. It is for this reason that we need a set of flexible tools for understanding how texts persuade. Rhetoric provides a set of such tools.

In this course, we’ll explore the sources and expressions of rhetorical power. How are texts persuasive even when they seem to be innocent, factual, and not rhetorical at all? What rhetorical strategies are at work in the texts that impact us daily? How can we be more critical consumers of the rhetorics around us? How can we more effectively reach and persuade the audiences who consume our own written texts? To answer these questions, we’ll explore a number of methods of text analysis and rhetorical criticism: Traditional/classic, Burkeian, fantasy-theme, narrative, the new rhetoric, ideological, feminist, postmodern, and visual rhetoric. The thinking process will also be covered in detail: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Finally, we will also have a number of opportunities (in class and in writing assignments) to practice doing rhetorical criticism with a wide variety of different texts, from famous speeches to websites to advertisements.

How to think about this course

In some ways, the content of the course will be easy to master, at least at an abstract level. In other ways, however, the course is intellectually challenging because 1) it will expose you to a new and sometimes strange vocabulary for analyzing texts, and 2) it requires you to apply this vocabulary to new rhetorical messages and situations. A degree of creative and critical thinking is needed to do well in this course.

To facilitate the kind of thinking that this course requires, we are going to spend a significant portion of class time working through and applying some of the more difficult course concepts and readings—both in small groups and as a whole class. Because you will be asked to apply the course content to new rhetorical messages and situations, we will also spend time in class on the process of applying the tools of rhetoric. Classroom discussion will be a crucial part of our time spent together. The success of the course depends upon your willingness to engage other members of the class about course concepts.

Please be prepared to accept a little uncertainty when you enter the classroom. This is not a course that will always offer you a set of facts that can simply be memorized. Sometimes, you will just have to be satisfied with partial or conflicting knowledge. In other words, we may at times have to be satisfied with someone’s interpretation of an event or text rather than with what really happened.
(From a rhetorical perspective, we can never know what really happened in any objective way, because what really happened is always mediated by someone’s perspective.) So please don’t become frustrated if we spend an entire class period talking about the different ways in which an artifact (i.e. a text, event, speech) can be interpreted. In the interest of promoting 1) classroom discussion and 2) a definition of rhetoric that privileges interpretation over truth, I may be hesitant at times to privilege my own interpretation over yours, especially if your interpretation is grounded in compelling evidence.

Finally, because we will spend so much time analyzing artifacts and reading essays written by scholars and students who have spent a lot of time analyzing artifacts, you must be prepared to look more closely and carefully at artifacts than you have ever done before. You will have a more positive experience in this course if you do not simply assume prior to reading an assigned article that an author has “over-analyzed” or “read too much into this.” Rather than dismiss reading assignments because they seem to “go too far,” you should be open to considering the potential benefits of a careful, rigorous rhetorical analysis.

**Required texts**

Purchase the books from the campus bookstore.


2. Coursepack for English 4365.001: Rhetorical Criticism. Spring 2006. (The coursepack was sent to the copier during the first week of classes, so it won’t be ready immediately. But it will be ready before it’s needed, and I’ll let you know when you can pick it up from the bookstore.)

**Course website**

The course website contains course notes, the course schedule, and other info: [http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/3362/spring06/](http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/3362/spring06/). If changes need to be made to the course schedule, you will find an updated copy on the course website.

**Grading**

Your final course grade will be calculated according to the table below, using the standard curve of 90-100% = A; 80-89.9% = B; 70-79.9% = C; 60-69.9% = D; 0-59.9% = F. Under no circumstances will grades be rounded up or down.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Criticism #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Criticism #2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Rhetorical Criticism #3</td>
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<td>Rhetorical Criticism #4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roundtable session</td>
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<td>Facilitate the discussion</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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Assignments

Readings
You must prepare the assigned readings before class on the days for which they are assigned. (See the Course Schedule for a list of due dates.)

Tip: To do well in this course, you will need to keep up with the readings. You will need to come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignments. The reading assignments will be your instructor’s primary means of presenting course content to you. If you have questions about a reading assignment, or if you would like to talk about reading or studying strategies, please make an appointment to see me outside of class. Needless to say, you will jeopardize your chances of doing well in this course if you fall behind with the readings. You will quickly discover that much of what we do in class will depend upon your understanding of and willingness to discuss the reading assignments.

Daily Quizzes
We will start most class days with a reading quiz. The quizzes are designed to encourage you to keep up with the readings, because so much of what we do in class will depend upon your familiarity with the assigned readings. The quizzes will test your basic comprehension of the reading material, and will not ask you to analyze, interpret, or evaluate the readings.

Four Rhetorical Criticism Papers
You will write four rhetorical criticism papers in this course. Each paper will be about 1250 words (5 pages typed double spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman, descriptive title, page numbers, and stapled). You won’t be penalized for going over 1250 words, but you may be penalized for not meeting the minimum length requirement. Each rhetorical criticism paper should analyze a different artifact.

- **Rhetorical criticism #1**: Analyze the artifact assigned by the instructor (see course notes for info on the artifact); no formal tool (“search model”) of rhetoric required; include description & analysis sections only (see the chapters 1-5 in the textbook for info on describing and analyzing without using a “search model”); analyze the context and draw on outside research as needed.
- **Rhetorical criticism #2**: Analyze one of the artifacts suggested by the instructor (see the course notes) or choose an artifact on your own (get it approved by the instructor in advance); analyze the context and draw on outside research as needed; use one of the following tools of rhetoric: ancient rhetoric, Burkeian (pentadic or cluster), or fantasy-theme criticism.
- **Rhetorical criticism #3**: Analyze one of the artifacts suggested by the instructor (see the course notes) or choose an artifact on your own (get it approved by the instructor in advance); analyze the context and draw on outside research as needed; use one of the following tools of rhetoric: narrative, the new rhetoric, or ideological.
- **Rhetorical criticism #4**: Analyze one of the artifacts suggested by the instructor (see the course notes) or choose an artifact on your own (get it approved by the instructor in advance); analyze the context and draw on outside research as needed; use one of the tools of rhetoric that you have not used in one of your three other rhetorical criticism papers.

Roundtable Session
Lead the class in a roundtable-style discussion of one method of rhetorical criticism and one artifact chosen specifically for this discussion. This is a group assignment. Directions, group assignments, and a roundtable schedule will be provided in class and made available on the course website. The goal of each roundtable is to give the other members of the class an opportunity to apply a particular tool of rhetoric to an artifact. As roundtable leaders, your group will bring to class an artifact (or small set of closely related
artifacts) that we have not discussed before. The roundtable leaders will also prepare an exercise for the class to complete in small groups. The exercise should encourage the class to apply the method under discussion that day or week to the artifact selected especially for this occasion. The roundtable leaders should bring hard copies of the exercise for everyone in class. The leaders will start the session by giving the class a short summary of the method under discussion (3-5 minutes). Then, the leaders will review the directions for completing the exercise, divide the class into groups of three, and direct each group to work on the exercise. The roundtable leaders will monitor and manage each group’s discussions (10 minutes). Following small group discussion, the leaders will host a short, whole class de-briefing session in which groups report to the leader and to the class as a whole their responses to the exercise (another 10 minutes). Finally, the leaders will sum-up the roundtable by highlighting/summarizing the groups’ responses and how they relate to the critical method in question (2-5 minutes).

Upon completion of your group’s roundtable session, your group will submit a short report. Full details will be discussed in class and posted to the course website.

Facilitate the discussion
Over the course of the semester, you will undoubtedly be looking for and collecting interesting artifacts to analyze in your rhetorical criticism papers. To facilitate class discussion, you will be asked to share two different artifacts on two separate occasions. A sign-up sheet and in-class demonstration will be provided. Here’s the process: 1) At least one week before the date on which you are scheduled to share an artifact, read/skim the readings for that day, 2) Choose an artifact that fits the readings for that day—i.e. an artifact that the class might profitably use to apply the tool discussed in the readings, 3) Bring to class on the day you are assigned a) your artifact and b) 3-5 discussion questions (on disk, so we can share them on the projection screen), 4) Come prepared to share your questions.

Your discussion questions should be open-ended and designed to facilitate discussion about the artifact in the context of the tool of rhetoric we are discussing that day.

Tip: You may be able to plan ahead so that the artifacts you share with the class for this assignment are the same ones you choose to analyze for one or more of the rhetorical criticism assignments.

Expected learning outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Describe the major tools of rhetorical criticism and the thinking process involved in doing rhetorical criticism
2. Select appropriate artifacts to analyze using one or more tools of rhetoric
3. Select tools of rhetoric by matching them to appropriate artifacts
4. Describe and appreciate some of the ways that rhetoric shapes society
5. Write effective, college-level rhetorical analyses

Methods for assessing the expected learning outcomes
The expected learning outcomes of the course will be assessed through:

Reading quizzes covering the thinking process involved in doing criticism as well as the major tools of rhetoric; structured and unstructured whole class and small group discussions of the readings and rhetorical artifacts; numerous opportunities to practice doing rhetorical criticism; group presentations; individual presentations in which students facilitate discussion by sharing rhetorical artifacts; four major paper assignments.
Course policies

- Be prepared for class by doing the assigned reading and writing in advance.
- Submit all required assignments to be eligible for a passing grade.
- Be on time for class.
- Expect to attend every class meeting. The success of the course depends upon your regular attendance. If you are absent more than three (3) times, your final course grade will be reduced 3% for each absence after three. Six or more absences will warrant a failing grade in the course. I do not excuse absences.
- Talk with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss your special needs or ADA accommodations, if any.
- Expect to participate actively in class discussions.
- Respect the views of others.
- Do not plagiarize. Your work must be your own. If you borrow words or ideas from another writer, you need to make it explicit (through proper citation practices) that the words/ideas in question are not your own. If you use someone else’s paper as your own (e.g. a paper found on the Internet), you are in violation of the University’s policy on academic integrity (p. 49 of the University Catalog). Please keep in mind that the penalty for plagiarism can be severe. See me immediately if you have questions about the University’s policy on plagiarism.
- Submit your work on time. Assignments should be submitted in hard copy (unless otherwise noted) at the beginning of class. Late work is penalized 10% per day. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted.
- Feel free to discuss course questions and concerns with me during office hours, by appointment, or via email (sean.zdenek@ttu.edu). I will do my best to respond to your email queries within 24 hours, except during weekends and holidays.