Course description & purpose

This course is designed as a general introduction to methods of rhetorical criticism. We’ll start the course by considering the nature of rhetorical criticism, the scope of rhetoric, and some classical sources. The majority of the course will be organized by method. We’ll start our tour with a discussion of traditional (classical) criticism and the revival of interest in rhetoric at the start of the 20th century. Other modern methods and tools of rhetorical criticism will follow—situational, dramatic form criticism, genre, content analysis, framing analysis, narrative criticism, fantasy-theme criticism, mythic perspective, feminist criticism, ideographic, critical rhetoric, and metaphor criticism. Issues and questions of interest to rhetorical theorists and practitioners will also be covered—e.g. the relationship between language and reality; the rhetorical situation; authorship and the second persona; intertextuality; how text and talk interact, visual rhetoric; and constitutive rhetoric.

This course is organized as a graduate seminar. Discussion will be our primary in-class activity, and thus the success of the course will be our collective responsibility. You are expected to read and prepare for class diligently, participate actively and thoughtfully in class discussions, and assume the role of discussion leader when appropriate. You can expect me to come to class prepared, ready to engage the readings and the issues raised in them. We will supplement our in-class sessions with lively asynchronous discussions on WebCT.

By the end of the course, you should be able to select, apply, combine, and evaluate a variety of methods of rhetorical criticism in the context of your own research projects. As such, the course aims to foster critical thinking about the relationships among rhetoric, texts, and society.

Required texts

Purchase the books from an online bookseller (e.g. amazon.com) or from the campus bookstore.

In addition to the required books, there are a small number of **required supplemental readings**. These readings will be available on course e-reserve at the TTU library. To retrieve them, go to: [http://www.library.ttu.edu/ul/](http://www.library.ttu.edu/ul/) and click “Course/E-Reserve” on the left hand navigation bar. Then search by instructor’s last name (i.e. Zdenek). Print out these supplemental readings, read them carefully, and bring them to class on the days assigned.

**Course website & WebCT info**

- The course website contains class notes, the course schedule, and other info: [http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5375/spring06/](http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5375/spring06/). If changes need to be made to the course schedule, you will find an updated copy on the course website.
- A WebCT site has been created for this course: [http://www.webct.ttu.edu](http://www.webct.ttu.edu). We will be using the discussion board feature on WebCT to discuss the readings. Login using your e-raider username and password. If you don’t see the course listed after you log in, let me know and I’ll add you to the WebCT roster for the course.

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical artifact</td>
<td>See below</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roundtable session</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lit review</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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**Assignments**

**Reading responses**

*Selecting a rhetorical artifact.* You will select one rhetorical artifact to study, share, and write about for the duration of the semester. Because you will be analyzing the same artifact multiple times over the course of the semester, and writing about the same artifact in each of your reading responses, you will need to choose your artifact carefully. *(To repeat: you will analyze the same artifact in every reading response.)* We will talk in class about what counts as a rhetorical artifact. Here are some loose guidelines:

- The artifact should be chosen with an eye to the methods of rhetorical criticism we will be discussing this semester. Prior to selecting your artifact, you should skim Kuypers’s overview of each method. The ideal artifact should potentially speak to these various methods. In other words, the artifact should be complex and rich enough to allow you to interpret it in a number of ways and to apply it to a number of different methods of criticism.
- The artifact you choose can be a single unit (e.g. a transcribed speech) or a set of closely related artifacts (e.g. a small set of scenes from the same movie, a collection of electronic discussion posts, a set of closely related websites, etc.)
- The artifact should be easily consumable by other members of the class. It should be scanned/digitized if it’s not originally available in a computerized format. Because we will be discussing your artifact in class, you will want to choose an artifact that can be shared with others.
easily. This does not mean that the artifact needs to be short (if it’s discursive) or brief (if it’s non-discursive, like a movie clip), but it does mean that you should choose an artifact that will be understood relatively easily by others. Don’t choose a book or a movie (too long, potentially too obscure), but think about how your artifact can encourages class discussion. You want to choose an artifact or set of artifacts that other members of the class can comment on insightfully.

- The artifact should reflect your own research interests and possibly feed into your final seminar paper.
- The artifact should be approved in advance by the instructor (optional but highly recommended). If you’re having difficulty finding or choosing an artifact, please arrange to talk with me immediately.

Choosing the right artifact is important. During the first two weeks of class, please feel free to speak with me (e.g. over email or in my office) to get my feedback on the artifact you are thinking about using.

**Writing.** Respond to the reading assignments in tightly focused posts to the WebCT discussion board. Each response should be in the range of 600-750 words, and **must be posted to WebCT before class.** See the course schedule for due dates and topics. Each of your posts should have a descriptive title in the subject line (as opposed to “Response 1”). The content of your posts should do all of the following (in this order):

1. Address a question, concern, or problem of interest to you,
2. Synthesize the readings into themes or topics that will enable you to explore this question or issue (at least 1/2 of your response),
3. Apply the readings to your rhetorical artifact (at least 1/3 of your response)
4. Discuss briefly how your response relates to at least one other WebCT post for that week. **You have the option of responding to a classmate’s post in your reading response or as a separate WebCT post.**

You will want to demonstrate in your reading responses that you have read all the assigned readings. But more importantly you will want to show in your writing that you have read critically and carefully, that you have given thought to the questions and issues raised in the readings, and that you have considered how the readings speak to each other and to your artifact. Approximately 1/2 of each of your responses should be devoted to a synthesis of the readings. Approximately 1/3 of each of your responses should be devoted to an application of the readings to your chosen artifact. Post your response to the WebCT discussion board. Ideally, the WebCT board will resemble a lively discussion about the issues raised in the readings and in class.

**Roundtable session**
Lead the class in a roundtable-style discussion of one method of rhetorical criticism and one artifact chosen specifically for this discussion. The goal of the roundtable is to give the class an opportunity to discuss as a group how we might apply a particular method to an artifact. As leader, you will bring an artifact (or small set of closely related artifacts) that we have not discussed before and that no member of the class (yourself included) has selected as his/her reading response artifact. As leader, you will also prepare an exercise for the class to complete in small groups. The exercise should encourage groups to apply the method under discussion that day or week to the artifact selected especially for this occasion. The leader should bring hard copies of the exercise for everyone in class. The leader will start the session by giving us a short summary of the method under discussion (3-5 minutes). Then, the leader 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 leader will monitor and manage each group’s discussions (10 minutes). Following small group discussion, the leader 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 leader will sum-up the roundtable by highlighting/summarizing the groups’ responses and how they relate to the affordances of the critical method in question (2-5 minutes).

**Lit review**
The lit review assignment is designed to encourage you to explore one tool of rhetorical criticism in more detail. For example, say you’re interested in using narrative criticism in your final seminar paper. For your lit review, then, you might choose to focus on narrative criticism or some aspect of narrative criticism. The sources for your lit review should be drawn exclusively from peer-reviewed, academic journals. The lit review should synthesize and critically assess the sources from the perspective of a question of interest. Additional requirements: 2000-2250 words, 8-10 peer-reviewed articles are discussed in the lit review, at least half of the articles discussed in the review are no older than five years, appropriate citation style is used consistently throughout (MLA or APA).

**Seminar paper**
The seminar paper is the most important assignment in this course. Do not wait to begin on this assignment. See me early and often to discuss possible seminar paper ideas. It’s not too early to begin thinking about and planning this assignment. A poorly executed or rushed seminar paper will adversely affect your final course grade. Requirements: Plan and execute a seminar paper that explores a question of interest within the context of the course. The final product should be of superior quality, suitable for presentation at a regional or national conference. Your paper should blend theory and application. It should also be based on outside research (i.e. a lit review). MA students’ papers should be in the range of 3500 words in length; doctoral students’ papers should be in the range of 5000 words in length. Your seminar paper should serve as the culmination of your work over the semester. You will present your seminar paper to the class at the end of the semester. While not graded, the presentation is required and you should endeavor to give a superior presentation to the class (15 minutes in length).

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

1. Describe the major tools of rhetorical criticism
2. Apply the tools of rhetorical criticism to a range of rhetorical artifacts
3. Select and combine tools of rhetorical criticism that fit the context and the artifact(s)
4. Evaluate the tools of rhetorical criticism (their strengths and weaknesses)
5. Write effective, professional, graduate-level rhetorical analyses

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

Weekly written responses to classic and up-to-date readings in rhetorical criticism; seminar-style discussions of the readings; WebCT-based discussions of the readings; numerous opportunities for students to practice doing rhetorical criticism (in class and in writing) with a range of artifacts; a “roundtable” assignment in which students become experts in one tool of rhetorical criticism and teach it to the class using a combination of lecture, small-group exercise, and application of theory to an artifact; a literature review assignment that encourages students to explore an area/tool of rhetorical criticism in more detail; a major seminar paper assignment at the end of the semester that allows students to showcase their work.
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.