CMST 7962: Seminar in Rhetorical Criticism

Professor Bryan McCann, PhD
Location: Coates 153
Time: Th 3:00-5:50pm
E-mail: bryann@lsu.edu
Office: 227 Coates Hall
Office hours: TTh 12pm-1pm, or by appointment
Office phone: 225.578.6813

“Criticism should begin with 'look at that beautiful thing.'”

Robert Eaglestone

“Here is where a critic might count. Putting the pieces together, trying to understand what is novel and adventurous, what is enervated and complacent ... Looking back into the corners, we might discover whose America we are living in at any moment, and where it came from.”

Greil Marcus

Course Catalogue Description

Types of speech criticism, criteria, and measures of effectiveness of public address

Additional Description

The above course description reflects rhetorical scholarship’s tumultuous history, privileging as it does “speech criticism” and “public address” over inquiries into other archives that may illuminate important truths about the nature of human symbol use. As you will see throughout this semester, such history and politics are deeply important to the science/art of criticism. Indeed, engaging rhetorical criticism as a practice is best done in the context of various disciplinary histories. What we study, how we study it, and what we hope to gain in the process are inextricably tethered to the priorities of individuals who have published in our journals and attended our conferences for at least the first 100 years of the discipline we used to call “speech.”

In this seminar, we will approach various methods of rhetorical criticism as orientations toward texts. Rather than characterizing these approaches as cookie-cutter one might apply to a text, we will instead regard them as ways of reading that are often at their best when employed alongside others. A central assumption of rhetorical scholarship is that we can acquire rich understandings about public life through the study of rhetoric as an instrumental and constitutive force. The best rhetorical methods are those that allow critics to illuminate what a text or set of discourses may reveal about strategies, interests, and power dynamics at play in public culture; as well as how rhetoric itself functions as a social force.

1 I’m very grateful to my colleagues Daniel Brouwer, Dana Cloud, Josh Gunn, and Ashley Mack for sharing their syllabi and ideas with me.
Course Objectives

Students will develop a stronger appreciation for and critical understanding of rhetorical criticism as (primarily) a method in communication studies. This will be accomplished by engaging key pieces of literature in the field and major writing assignments. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand, appreciate, and employ different methods of rhetorical criticism
- Distinguish instrumental from constitutive approaches to understanding rhetoric
- Acquire a firm rootedness in “classic” approaches to criticism, as well as newer developments in the field(s)
- Understand key debates associated with the practice of rhetorical criticism
- Produce high quality rhetorical scholarship suitable for publication

Required Texts/Materials

- All required readings/materials will be posted online.
- Two books are highly recommended but not required:
  


ASSIGNMENTS

Final Essay This 7,000-10,000 word essay represents the culmination of the semester. You must identify a discrete text or set of texts to analyze, and outline a clear framework for doing so. Strong criticism is convincing, not obvious, provocative, driven by curiosity, and suggestive of broader insights into the nature of rhetoric. A successful essay will be suitable for conference submission with zero or minimal revision and, ultimately, journal submission.

Advanced Draft This 6-12 page essay represents your last major opportunity to solicit instructor and peer feedback for your project. Please cite a minimum of 15 sources, 90 percent of which should be scholarly in nature. Unlike the topic proposal, you should have a fairly clearly developed methodological orientation.

Topic Proposal This 2-3 page essay should briefly describe the text you intend to analyze and make a case for its relevance. While I do not expect you to have a fully developed methodological orientation, you should be able to offer some concrete indications of where you are headed in this regard.

Please submit all written work via email. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be in my inbox before class starts on the due date.
Peer Critique Each student is responsible for offering thorough written feedback of a classmate’s advanced draft essay. This 3-4 page essay must reflect a thoughtful reading of your peer’s work, including commentary on conceptualization and execution. While there is no source citation requirement, the best critiques are supported by outside scholarship and recommend readings for the author.

Critical Responses On at least two occasions during the semester, you will be responsible for writing and orally delivering a brief (3-5 page) essay employing one of the critical orientations covered that week. These responses must be typed and composed like a professional academic essay (i.e. not an outline). Essays should clearly outline the method, apply it to a discrete text or set of texts, and advance thoughtful insights regarding the utility and/or limitations of the method, as well as the implications of your analysis for how we might understand your text(s) and similar discourses. Students will present their responses during the second half of class on the designated day. Think of this as a slightly more casual version of a conference presentation.

I will distribute a sign-up sheet on the first day of class to determine who will present on which readings. In most cases, there will be two presentations per reading.

Some pointers:

- It is not your job to “teach” the readings in your essay. That’s my job. Rather, use this essay as an opportunity to explore your own areas of interest as they relate to the material.

- Please, please, pretty please, base your responses on issues and concepts about which you care deeply. Boring responses do a disservice to you and the rest of the seminar.

- Responses that clearly reflect a lack of preparation and/or effort will receive zero credit. All others will be graded seriously, but will also be approached in the spirit of dialogically interrogating difficult material. Still, this is half your grade, so please do your best.

- Responses should be read aloud and should last no more than ten minutes.

- End your response with two or three good questions that can sustain class discussion for the remainder of that day’s seminar (responses are to be delivered during the second half of class).

It is your responsibility to email a copy of your response to the entire class at least an hour before we meet.

Participation I recognize and respect a variety of learning styles and, therefore, do not have a particularly dogmatic approach to participation. The ideal seminar, in my view, entails robust discussion. We learn best when we play off of each other’s ideas, challenge each other, and, in some cases, simply think out loud in order to work out a difficult concept. That said, participation also includes work and communication outside the classroom. It is my hope that the expectation of strong participation goes without saying in a graduate seminar setting.
AVAILABLE POINTS
(TENTATIVE)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Actual Points</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Response #1</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Response #2</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Critique</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Proposal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Draft</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>220</strong></td>
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REGARDLESS OF YOUR POINT TOTAL, YOU CANNOT PASS THIS CLASS IF YOU FAIL TO TURN IN ANY OF THE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS.

Grading Key

*Excellent achievement* relative to requirements
198-220 = A

*Good work* relative to requirements
176-197 = B

*Unsatisfactory work* relative to the expectations of a graduate course
154-177 = C
132-153 = D
131 and below = F

COURSE POLICIES

Office Hours and Availability: If, for whatever reason, my posted office hours do not work for you, please do not hesitate to contact me and arrange an alternative meeting time. After one year of working at LSU, I still have no clue how to operate my office voicemail. Therefore, email is your best bet. Please allow up to 24 hours for a response to emails. I do not generally respond to emails on weekends.
The Communication Environment The study of rhetoric engages a wide range of philosophical, political, and ethical questions that cut to the very core of what it means to be a citizen, even a human. I am committed to ensuring that our classroom is a hospitable environment where we can respectfully discuss and debate a wide range of relevant issues. Everyone should feel comfortable to speak their minds, but must do so in a way that enables others to do the same. As one of my mentors is fond of saying, “You may curse ideas and authors, but never each other.” You should also prepare to be held accountable for anything you say in class.

Participation and Attendance This graduate class is discussion-oriented and practice-centered. Preparation for class and faithful attendance is directly correlated with success. If you miss more than two classes without an adequate excuse, you will receive a failing grade.

Readings I expect you to arrive to class each week having completed all required readings and prepared to engage in thoughtful and mature discussion.

If you are aware of readings, television clips, etc. that reflect the day’s discussion, you should feel free to share them with the class (provided they are appropriate) via Moodle or during the designated class session.

Late Work Unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand, I am not inclined to accept late work.

Incompletes Incompletes are reserved for extraordinary circumstances such as personal emergencies that can be documented. An incomplete is granted when, in my judgment, a student can successfully complete the work of the course without attending regular class sessions. Incompletes, which are not converted to a letter grade within one year, will automatically revert to an F (failing grade).

Academic Integrity I trust students in this class to do their own work. Students are responsible for adhering to the college’s standards for academic conduct. Even revising another student’s work, collaborating to share research with other students, or adapting your own work from another class is academic misconduct. Failure to acknowledge sources in written assignments or oral presentations constitutes plagiarism. If you are ever confused about how these policies apply to your own work, please play it safe and consult me.

If you do engage in academic dishonesty, you will automatically fail the course and will be subject to disciplinary action from the college and/or university. For more information on this important issue, please look online at https://grok.lsu.edu/Article.aspx?articleId=17072

Drops/Withdrawals If you wish to drop this class, you must do so by 4:30pm on September 1. After this point, you will be issued a withdrawal grade. If you fail to withdraw by 4:30pm on November 6, you will receive and “F” for the semester.

Religious Observances It is LSU’s policy to respect the faith and religious obligations of students, faculty and staff. Students with exams or classes that conflict with their religious observances

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3 You may, however, choose to co-author your final essay with a classmate.
should notify me well in advance (at least 2 weeks) so that we can work out a mutually agreeable alternative.

**Special Needs** Louisiana State University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. The syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to speak with Disability Services and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. This publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Disability Services, 115 Johnston Hall, 225.578.5919.

**E-mail** All students must obtain and regularly check an email account. Expect periodic updates from me about what’s happening in class via Moodle as well.

I will not, under any circumstances, communicate grade information via email or over the phone.

**Moodle** Please check Moodle for updates to the class schedule, assignment guidelines, grade information, etc.

**Commitment to Conversation** I believe in the right and responsibility of students to take an active interest in their education. If there is anything inside or outside this class that you care to discuss with me, please do not hesitate to do so.

I understand that “life happens” and will work with you to make REASONABLE accommodations for issues that may be negatively impacting your performance in this class. The sooner you consult me on such matters, the better.

While I am happy to discuss grades on individual assignments throughout the semester (provided you do so no sooner than 24 hours after but within two weeks of receiving the grade), I do not respond well to having responsibility for your entire academic future thrust upon me. In other words, how your performance in this class will impact your GPA, ability to graduate, job prospects, etc. are not sufficient grounds for discussing a grade on an assignment. More generally, I will not entertain discussions about final grades once the semester is over. If you wish to challenge your final grade, you must do so through the proper university channels. Please visit this link for further information:
http://catalog.lsu.edu/content.php?catoid=1&navoid=27&hl=%22appeals%22&returnto=search#Grade_Appeals

**Cell Phones, Laptops, etc.** I am a technology junky and appreciate the important role smart phones, laptops, and the like play in our information society. That said, I also know they can function as a huge distraction in the classroom. If you have a cell phone, smart or otherwise, keep it in your pocket and on silent (vibrate is not silent). Failure to do so will result in my confiscating your phone for the duration of the class period. Please feel free to use your laptop to take notes and otherwise organize course material; however, if I notice you chatting on Facebook, visiting non-class related websites, etc., you must discontinue your use of the computer for the rest of the semester. In other words, technology is fine as long as it doesn’t call attention to itself.
Contractual Agreement Your acceptance of these conditions, as well as the policies outlined in this document, is implied by your continuance in the class. To maintain the integrity of everyone’s grade, and ultimately, degree, all course policies are non-negotiable.

Everything in this document, including the daily schedule, is subject to revision or modification due to unforeseen circumstances.

### PROJECTED SEMESTER SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Due/Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/27</td>
<td>Historical/Conceptual Foundations</td>
<td>Wichelns; Wrage; Stewart; Black; Hart &amp; Daughton</td>
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<td>9/3</td>
<td>Problems of Method; or, What Constitutes Good Rhetorical Scholarship?</td>
<td>Hart; Darsey; Jasinski; Goltz; CS forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>The Text</td>
<td>Gaonkar; Leff; Leff &amp; Mohrman; Medhurst; McGee (I); Bitzer; Campbell &amp; Burkholder</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/17</td>
<td>Ideological Turns</td>
<td>Wander; Campbell (I); Eagleton; Jameson; Charland; Greene; Grey</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>Critical/Cultural Studies</td>
<td>During; Grossberg; Blair &amp; Michel; McKerrow; Ono &amp; Sloop; Condit</td>
<td>Topic Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>Tropes and Form</td>
<td>Fisher; Miller; Burke; Ott &amp; Aoki; Ivie; Gunn (I); Lewis; Bormann</td>
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<td>10/8</td>
<td>Ideographs and Other Contested Sites; or Ideology, Part II</td>
<td>McGee (II); Cloud (I); McCann; Johnson; Delgado; Pezzullo; Enck-Wanzer (I)</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>10/15</td>
<td>Visual Rhetoric</td>
<td>Olson, Finnegan, &amp; Hope; Hariman &amp; Lucaites; Finnegan; Harold &amp; DeLuca; Cloud (II); Blair, Jeppeson, &amp; Pucci</td>
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<td>10/22</td>
<td>Rhetoric with Feelin’</td>
<td>Biesecker; Lundberg; Rushing &amp; Frentz; Rice; Gunn &amp; Hall; Cloud &amp; Feyh</td>
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<td>10/29</td>
<td>NO CLASS – FALL BREAK</td>
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<td>11/5</td>
<td>Feminist &amp; Queer Rhetoric</td>
<td>Campbell (II); Morris III; Sloop; McKinnon; Dow; Dubrwny &amp; Ramadurai; Bennett; Brouwer</td>
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<td>11/12</td>
<td>Rhetoric &amp; Identity Politics</td>
<td>Chávez; Shome; Enck-Wanzer (II); Moon &amp; Flores; Lindemann &amp; Cherney; Kelly</td>
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<td>11/19</td>
<td>NO CLASS - NCA</td>
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<td>11/26</td>
<td>NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</td>
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<td>12/3</td>
<td>Final Essay Presentations (Location TBD)</td>
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Readings


