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: 126 Coates Hall  
Office hours: TTh 9:00-10:00am, or by appointment  
Office phone: 225.578.6683

“The text as such never appears as a dead thing; beginning with any text ... we always arrive, in the final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being.”

Mikhail Bakhtin

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,” “public address,” and “effectiveness” over inquiries into other archives and alternative critical objectives 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 art of criticism. 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-plus years of the discipline we used to call “speech.”

In this seminar, we will engage in a survey of rhetorical criticism as a method of humanistic inquiry. The vast majority of the work we read and discuss will come from the discipline of communication studies, but we will also benefit from the work of colleagues in English, media studies, cultural studies, performance studies, and other cognate fields. Each week, we will discuss a specific orientation toward criticism by discussing readings, disciplinary histories, and relevant rhetorical artifacts.

The best rhetorical critics are those who 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.

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

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1 I’m very grateful to my colleagues Daniel Brouwer, Dana Cloud, Josh Gunn, Ashley Mack, and William Saas for sharing their syllabi and ideas with me.
of literature in the field and major writing assignments. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand, appreciate, and employ different approaches to rhetorical criticism
- 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.
- One book is highly recommended, but not required:


ASSIGNMENTS

**Final Essay** This 7,000-10,000 word original piece of rhetorical criticism represents the culmination of the semester. You must identify a discrete focal object 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 theoretical 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 theoretical orientation, you should be able to offer some concrete indications of where you are headed in this regard.

**Peer Critique** Each student is responsible for offering thorough written feedback of a classmate’s advanced draft essay. This 2-4 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.

**Mini Crits** On each day of the semester when we discuss a distinct approach to rhetorical criticism, you are responsible for delivering a brief critique of a rhetorical artifact. This may be a speech,

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2 Please submit all written work via email. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be in my inbox before class starts on the due date.
televised commercial, scene from a television show or movie, print or television news story, or any other kind of focal object that addresses an audience. Your goal is not to present on something that is similar to one of the focal objects discussed in one of the assigned readings, or even discuss the ways in which your artifact reflects the social issues raised by one of the articles. Rather, you should be attending to the suasive functions of your artifact in the same general way as the authors from that week’s readings. For example, if a week’s readings demonstrate approaches to analyzing visual rhetoric, then your mini crit should briefly analyze a visual text that reflects, complicates, and/or expands upon those approaches. Typical presentations should last 2-5 minutes.

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Actual Points</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Crits</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Critique</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Proposal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Draft</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td><strong>Total</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 the expectations of a graduate course

208-220 = A+

203-207 = A
**Good work** relative to expectations
196-202 = A-
190-197 = B+

**Average work** relative to expectations
181-189 = B

**Unsatisfactory work** relative to expectations
174-180 = B-
168-177 = C+
159-167 = C
152-158 = C-
146-153 = D+
137-145 = D
130-136 = D-
129 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. Email, rather than my office phone, is generally your best bet for reaching me. 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. 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 and be mindful of the fact that differently positioned bodies experience speech in disparate ways.

**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.

**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 semester, 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, I will immediately report it to the Dean of Students. 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 August 28, 2018. After this point, you will be issued a withdrawal grade. If you fail to withdraw by 4:30pm on November 2, 2018, 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 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 a LSU 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.

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3 You may, however, choose to co-author your final essay with a classmate.
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.

I am also happy to discuss grades on individual assignments throughout the semester.

Cell Phones, Laptops, etc. Use common courtesy with electronic devices. Cell phones should remain silenced for the duration of class. Please feel free to use your laptop to take notes and otherwise organize course material. In general, 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

With the exception of the first three weeks of the semester, each seminar will feature a “focal reading” and several “supplemental readings.” The focal reading will be our primary topic of discussion. We will focus on the nuts and bolts of the reading, taking a deep dive into the ways in which the author(s) executed their criticism. Several questions will drive our discussion of the focal reading, including (but by no means limited to):

1) What is the essay's focal object?
2) How does the author(s) justify the analysis of the focal object?
3) What is the essay's critical orientation, and how does the author(s) develop and apply it?
4) What is the essay's thesis?
5) In what ways does the essay address broader disciplinary questions regarding rhetorical criticism and theory, as well as matters of intellectual and/or social importance?
6) Why did the essay warrant publication in a refereed journal or edited volume?

The supplemental readings are a combination of pieces that inform(ed) the focal reading and/or engage in modes of critique similar to that in the focal reading. We will ask similar questions of the supplemental readings as of the focal reading.

I expect that you will have completed both the assigned focal and supplementary readings by the time we meet to discuss them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings (*denotes focal reading)</th>
<th>Due/Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/23 &amp; 8/30</td>
<td>What Critics Do</td>
<td>Wilchelns; Wrage; Black; Jasinski; Flores; McKerrow; Chávez; “Beyond Inclusion;” Ono &amp; Sloop; Leff &amp; Sachs; McGee, “Fragmentation;” Charland; Hall; Calafell; Goltz; Hart; Darsey</td>
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<td>9/6</td>
<td>Critical Orientations</td>
<td>Leff &amp; Utley; Watson; Johnson Thornton, “MLK;” Biesecker; Owen; Ehrenhaus</td>
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<td>9/13</td>
<td>Critique of Public Culture</td>
<td>Houdek;* Morrissey; McKinnon; Meier &amp; Medjesky; Vats; Johnson</td>
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<td>9/20</td>
<td>Close Reading</td>
<td>Chirindo;* Johnson &amp; Stone; Campbell; Lee; Rood; Murphy; Morris</td>
<td>Topic Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>Analyzing Narrative, Genre, and Other Forms</td>
<td>Hill;* Watts; Gunn; Milbourne &amp; Hallenbeck; Barnett; Fisher; Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/4</td>
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<td>NO CLASS: Fall Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>Ideographs and Other Sites of Struggle</td>
<td>Gutierrez-Perez &amp; Andrade;* McGee, “People;” Johnson Thornton, “Mapping;” Delgado; Cloud; Hayden; Jakes</td>
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<td>10/18</td>
<td>Rhetoric and Media</td>
<td>Corrigan &amp; Edgar;* Olson; Davis Gatchet &amp; Davis Gatchet; Kang; Lundberg; Mack; Washington</td>
<td>Advanced Draft</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/25</td>
<td>Rhetoric <em>In Situ</em> (Pt. 1)</td>
<td>Cram, “Archival;”* Harris; Ott, Aoki, &amp; Dickinson; Poirot; Topinka; Blair &amp; Michel</td>
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<td>11/1</td>
<td>Rhetoric <em>In Situ</em> (Pt. 2)</td>
<td>Pezzullo,* McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, &amp; Howard; Conquergood; Na’puti; de Onís; McHendry</td>
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<td>11/8</td>
<td>NO CLASS - NCA</td>
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<td>11/22</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<td>12/6</td>
<td>Final Essay Presentations @ Chateaux Mack-McCann</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>Final Essay</td>
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**Readings**


Brouwer, Matheson; Chávez, “Spatializing;” Earle; Bennett


