Rhetorical Theory and Criticism

Course Goals and Objectives
Rhetoric is the study of effective communication. Rhetorical theory is the study of the basic ideas that rhetoricians use to think about and improve communication—ideas like audience, intention, strategy, ethos, pathos, and logos. Rhetorical criticism is the study of other people’s communication efforts (oral, written, and visual) to determine how they were put together, whether they were successful, and what effects they had.

Our objectives include learning what the basic rhetorical ideas are, gaining experience using them to evaluate communication in a variety of forms (book, story, magazine article, movie, website, etc.), and successfully putting those ideas into our own writing, speaking, and designing. We also will learn the differences between five kinds of criticism, how to do them, and how to decide when it is best to use one kind as opposed to another.

Core Questions
• Why is it so important to think about who the audience is when communicating?
• What can we learn by doing rhetorical criticism?
• What is a symbol? What does it mean to say something is 'symbolic'?
• What is a genre? Why is useful to know what genre something is?
• What is a 'narrative type'?
• What is a metaphor and how do we know one when we see one?

Disabilities
Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with certain medical or psychological disabilities. You must notify the course instructor at the beginning of the semester if you wish to request such accommodation.

And the Assignments are:

1) Four 2 – 3 page critical analyses each applying one of the kinds of criticism we discuss in class. You can skip one of these and do the longer paper on it, instead. Longer paper due first day of finals week, May 5.)
• Rhetorical (due Tues. Jan 28)
• Neo-Aristotelian (due Tues. Feb 11)
• Genre (due Tues. March 11)
• Narrative (due Tues. April 2)
• Metaphoric (due Tues April 25)

2) A 10 page critical analysis that applies the fifth kind of criticism, the kind you did not write a 2–3 page analysis on….in other words, start thinking about which kind of criticism you want to write a longer paper on. (due Mon May 5 in my mailbox 3d floor Walker)

3) An in class presentation of the results of one your analyses. Pick a day and a kind of criticism:
• Neo-Aristotelian (Tues. Feb 11)
• Genre (Thurs Feb 27)
• Narrative (Tues March 25)
• Metaphoric (Tues April 23)

4) 1 page responses to the shorter readings (from The Best American Nonrequired Reading). Due the day we discuss the reading.

How I would like class sessions to be to structured:

I ask each of you to carefully attend (rhetorically) to the class dynamic. Encourage each other to talk. Listen when others speak. Speak up yourself. Defer when someone who has not had the chance to speak chooses to speak. Ask each other questions. Take each other seriously. Take yourselves seriously. And do all of that in a relaxed way. I don’t ask much. Nothing more than I ask of my cats.

Books/Readings

Foss, Sonja. Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice.
Krakauer, John. Into the Wild.

Some Definitions of Rhetoric

"The faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."
---Aristotle

"A study of misunderstanding and its remedies."
---I. A. Richards
"The use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents...through identification."
---Kenneth Burke

"The study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented to us for assent."
---Chaim Perelman

"The study of effective communication."
---Arthur Quinn

**Syllabus**

(1) January 14

Introductions. Why study rhetoric, or how rhetoric can make you into the person you want to be?
**Assignment:** Read “Local Hipster...” and “Marilyn Manson...” in The Best American Nonrequired Reading. (Note the irony: this is required...) **Write** 1 page describing the structure of one or the other.

(1) January 16

Discuss readings, their structure and purpose. Discuss humor.
**Assignment:** Read pages 1 – 22 in Rhetorical Criticism and “Higher Education” in The Best American Nonrequired Reading. (Note the irony: this is required...) **Write** 1 page response to “Higher Education” -- explain in detail how we are supposed to feel by the end and how you know this.

(2) January 21

Discuss reading and rhetorical criticism. Emotion. In pairs: apply the “steps” (from Rhet. Crit.) to the reading.
**Begin** to choose something to write your first paper on.
**Assignment:** finish choosing something to write your first paper. Come to class with an explanation of why you chose what you did and why you think it is a neat thing to study.

(2) January 23

Share ideas for things to study. Help each other think about how to analyze it. Use the steps in Rhetorical Criticism.
**Assignment:** write first analysis (3 pages, due Jan 28)
(3) January 28

First analysis due. Exchange and comment.
Start watching movie “Bulfinch”
Assignment: read “Speed Demons” in Best American Nonrequ… Write 1 page explaining the main strategy that the piece uses to have an effect on you.

(3) January 30

Finish watching movie “Bulfinch” – discuss.
Assignment: read pages 23 – 33 (“Neo-Aristotelian Criticism”) and pages 51 – 58 (“The Power of Saddam Hussein’s War Rhetoric”) in Rhetorical Criticism. Write 1 page response to “The Power…” --explain what you learn or are supposed to learn from the analysis.

(4) February 4

In groups of three, exchange your 1 page explanations and compare. Note differences. Report back. Hand out speeches.
Discuss readings.
Assignment: using Neo-Aristotelian criticism, analyze one of the speeches handed out (due Feb 11).

(4) February 6

Workshop day: bring in drafts of your analysis of a speech.

(5) February 11

Oral Presentations on Neo-Aristotlean paper. Genre paper due.
Discuss Genre. Ads exercise.
Assignment: choose and object and begin describing its genre – follow steps in Rhet. Crit.

(5) February 13: No Class: Winter Carnival

(6) February 18
Half a’ Horror film. Discuss.
Assignment: keep working on Genre paper (draft due Feb 25)

(6) February 20

Visit Erin Smith.
Assignment: keep working on Genre paper (draft due Feb 25)

(7) February 25

Workshop on Genre papers.

(7) February 27

Oral Presentations on Genre paper.

March 4 and 6: Spring Break

(8) March 11

Discuss narrative

(8) March 13

Discuss reading
Assignment: read Into the Wild. Write 3 page narrative analysis (follow steps in book), due Tues March 25. (Oral presentations on March 25 also).

(9) March 18 : No Class -- Work on Into the Wild

(9) March 20 : No Class -- Work on Into the Wild

(10) March 25

Assignment: read “My Fake Job” in Best American Nonreq… Write 1 page describing the effect the author wants to have on you and how narrative works in this piece.

(10) March 27

Continue discussing Into the Wild.
Discuss “My Fake Job.”
Assignment: read “Stop that Girl” in Best American Nonreq… Write 1 page describing the effect the author wants to have on you and how narrative works in this piece.
(11) April 2
Discuss reading.
On listening. Narrative and argument. (Emma?)

(11) April 4
Chasing down an antelope.
**Assignment:** read pgs 357 – 368 and 388 – 392 on metaphor in Rhet. Crit. Find examples of metaphor to bring in.

(12) April 9
Discuss reading. Metaphors and/or symbols. Discuss your metaphors. Discuss objects to study.
**Assignment:** read "Pamphleteer" in Best American Nonreq… Decide what you will study, metaphorically. (Paper due: April 25).

(12) April 11
Discuss reading.
Part of a movie.

(13) April 16
Finish movie.

(13) April 18
Discuss movie.

(14) April 23
Oral presentations on metaphor.

(14) April 25
Metaphor paper due.
Workshop on long papers.

Assessment.

Finals Week: May 5 – 9
Long papers due Mon. May 5 in my mailbox (3d floor Walker)

**Basic Concepts or the Starting Points of Rhetorical Methodology**

**The Structure of the Rhetorical Process**
- Invention, Judgment, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery

**The Structure of the Rhetorical Product (or the Potential Parts of a Speech)**
- Exordium, Narration, Partition (Common Ground), Confirmation (Argument), Refutation, and Conclusion (Peroration)

**A Structure of the Rhetorical Occasion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Actual response</td>
<td>As Represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>Anticipated response</td>
<td>As is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>ethos pathos logos</td>
<td>Relevant characteristics, beliefs,</td>
<td>Exigencies/ Constraints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Structure of the Rhetorical Situation (Bitzer)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Exigency</th>
<th>Constraint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Classical Rhetorical Occasions**
- Deliberative (political), Forensic (judicial, legal), Epideictic (funerals, festivals)