Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies

Course Goals and Objectives

This course considers key theoretical, pedagogical, and historical issues and events that have linked rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies and is designed to introduce you to these fields of study. One of the objectives of this course is methodological: we will examine different research agendas and talk about scholarly training and choosing appropriate research methods. Another objective is historical: we will look at the twisted disciplinary histories that both link and isolate areas such as rhetoric, speech, communication, composition, literature, and literacy studies. This course also should help you become accustomed to graduate seminars and the expectations of graduate studies, and, as one of the core courses, it should provide a meeting place for Ms and PhD levels of study.

Core Questions

- Is language use a separable skill, independent of content and context of use?
- How much conscious control do we have over language use?
- Is rhetoric/literacy/language neutral, civilizing, or evil?
- Can language use be taught, or is it a natural talent?
- Who defines good language use? To what extent are the features of good language use defined ideologically and time bound?
- Why is language use important? What's it good for?
- What are the appropriate methods for studying language use?
- Do acts of communication have an inherent or necessary structure? Do acts of communication have any inherent or necessary boundaries?
- Are modes of communication (oral, written, visual) basically the same or basically different?
And the Assignments are:

1) One 5 page paper that you will read to the class as a work in progress in order to get feedback, after which you will sketch a plan for revision and turn both in. The paper will be based on the class readings for a particular day of your choosing and applied to one of the core questions. You should make an argument. Presentations will be on weeks 6 – 12.

2) A 15 page paper that may extend the paper you read in class, by using more of the readings (at least two books or a book and several articles), or may pick up a different issue, if you wish. You can talk to me about possible issues.

How I would like class sessions to be structured:

I want us both to look closely at the readings and think critically about them. I want us to talk about the larger issues that criss-cross rhetoric, literacy, and composition studies, but I want us to do so as we learn the benefits of careful, close reading of the texts that shape these fields. So on the weeks you are not responsible for giving a paper, choose a reading for the day and write 1 – 2 pages that connects the main argument or some significant step in the argument to one of the core questions (see above).

I also 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

(By the way, I will not have a bunch of articles to copy, which I hope will offset the cost of the books (somewhat).)

(Also: buy all the books asap because the bookstore may pull and send back everything not sold after the fourth week.)

Popular Literacies. John Trimbur, ed.
Cintron, Ralph. Angle's Town.
Cornbleet, Sandra and Ronald Carter. The Language of Speaking and Writing.
Plato. Phaedrus.
Street, Bryan. Literacy in Theory and Practice.

(handout on Harris, Joseph. A Teaching Subject)
Syllabus

August 26
Discuss Plato's Phaedrus: dialogue, speaking/speeches, and writing (multimodality)

September 2
Discuss Bryan Street's distinction between the autonomous and the ideological models of literacy, teachability and possibilities for social and personal progress.

September 9
Discuss Bryan Street's approach to literacy studies and education. New London Group, multiliteracies, and Revision.

September 16
Discuss RSQ articles (in filing cabinet), the history of the relations between rhetoric, speech, communication, and composition. Discuss Leff and Farrell in CRT on the scope of rhetoric.

September 23
Discuss Combleet and Carter's approach to teaching speech and composition together. Also discuss Fish on the Phaedrus and close reading.

September 30
Discuss Joe Harris's history of composition as a discipline. I will give you each a chapter. Pair up and exchange so you have read two chapters. As we discuss the chapters those who have read the one we discuss fill the others in on main argument and points.

October 7
Discuss Bitzer and Vatz (in CRT) on the rhetorical situation. Discuss Black and Wander on the creation of ethos and the positioning of the audience.

October 14
Discuss Poulakas, Hariman, Fisher (in CRT) on the scope of rhetorical studies as a way of thinking about 'popular literacies' (and looking forward to Trimbur's edited collection).

October 21
Something of Marilyn Cooper's on composition studies. Also, Phelps on composition.

October 28
Discuss Trimbur (tba)

November 4
Discuss Trimbur (tba)
November 11
Discuss McGee, McKerrow, Charland (in CRT) on the relations between rhetoric, ideology, and power as background to reading Cintron.

November 18
Discuss Sutton, Campbell, Blair (in CRT) as examples of stretching the scope of rhetoric as background to reading Cintron.

November 25
No class Thanksgiving

December 2
Discuss Cintron.

December 9
Discuss Cintron.

MTU’s Policy on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. MTU’s Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and the policy covers copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchasing academic papers. If you ever have any questions about this issue, or about how to cite someone else’s work properly, please talk with me or consult a coach in the Writing Center.

MTU’s Policies on ADA and Harassment

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at MTU, please contact Dr. Gloria Melton in the Dean’s Office (phone: 7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may talk with me, your advisor, a department chair, or the Affirmative Action Officer (phone: 7-3310).

Caveat
I reserve the right to change this syllabus based on the needs of the class.