Communication Through Narrative

The main purpose of this class, besides striving to better understand ourselves, our fellow humans, and the world we live in, is to walk away with increased communication skills. We will be practicing and producing texts using 3 modes of communication: oral, written and visual, and will be evaluating these texts via rhetorical analysis and criticism. We will learn how audience and purpose shape effective communication, which will lead us to seek out multiple points of view in our own work in order to learn how our positions fit within the wider contexts of global cultural diversity. We will also consider the ethical issues present in the ways in which we choose to communicate, be it oral, written or visual.

We are going to become skilled in these three modes of communication through our exploration of narrative, that is, the stories we tell in which we interpret aspects of the world we live in and our place in that world. According to Richard Kearney in On Stories, “Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living” (3). He goes on to state that when someone asks us who we are, we tell our stories. We “recount [our] present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. [We] interpret where [we] have come from and where [we] are going to. And so doing [we] give a sense of [ourselves] as a narrative identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime” (4). By investigating the topic of narrative, it is my hope that we will, indeed, come to a better understanding of ourselves, our fellow human beings, and the manner in which we exist together in this very big (or is it very small?) world.

What kinds of assignments will be required for this class?

Assignments for this class include the following: 2 rhetorical analyses, a personal response paper, one formal piece of persuasive writing (7-10 pages) including a required draft and bibliography, a formal informative multi-model presentation that indicates your expertise in using visual and verbal communication strategies, a piece of writing that explores the differences between your informative and persuasive work, and, finally, a portfolio of all your work in the class along with a reflective cover letter.

Although this might seem like a lot of work, every assignment will build on top of the previous one and will serve to be the basis for both your persuasive piece of writing and your informative presentation. Given in this manner, I am hopeful that all the assignments will seamlessly work together to make your persuasive and informative projects strong without a lot of needless sweat and tears. If you are consistent in your work throughout the semester, the final weeks of class won’t feel like the final weeks of class!

You will be getting a finalized assignment sheet on a weekly or biweekly basis. In this way we can be more flexible with our schedule, allowing more or less time for each assignment based on class discussions and student need.
Do I need to buy books or other materials for this class?


You will need to purchase a 3-ring binder to hold all your assignment sheets, your written assignments and your reading material. If you keep up with this throughout the semester, putting your portfolio together at the end of the semester will be a breeze.

It is likely that there will be other reading assignments that you will be required to download, either off my web page or WebCT. You will need to bring these articles with you to class.

Reading assignments will be assigned at least one class period prior to when they will be discussed. You must complete the reading assignments prior to attending class as this will lead to more interesting discussions.

How are you going to grade us?

The following is a breakdown of how I will be evaluating your performance in this class:

Writing assignments (including the persuasive paper, rough draft, and bibliography) — 50%
Oral assignments (including the informative presentation) — 30%
Class participation (which includes attendance and attitude) — 20%

Grading Scale

93-100 A 89-92 A/B 83-88 B 79-82 B/C
73-78 C 69-72 C/D 63-68 D 62-0 F

How are you structuring this class?

This class is similar to that of a graduate seminar class, that is, I expect you to participate in the class discussions and conversations. It is probable that you will hear, read, and view material that you don't agree with, or are personally uncomfortable with. I encourage the expression of differing points of view in these situations, and expect that each member of the class will be made to feel comfortable in offering their own particular observations. Part of being a good communicator is learning how to negotiate in the face of differing beliefs and different ways of being in the world. Don't take apposing viewpoints personally. What matters is how well you learn to communicate your feelings and beliefs in a rhetorically sound and persuasive manner.
Course Policies

Attendance and active participation are expected and required. After the first two absences, 3% of your final grade will be deducted for each subsequent absence.

Because readings may be assigned the day before class, it is essential that if you do miss class you have a way to find out what the assignment is. There will be a class list serve generated that will allow you to communicate with each other via email for this purpose. Do not count on me outside of class time or office hours to be available to give you the reading assignment if you miss class.

Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class, your grade will be adversely affected.

All assignments are due on assigned days. 10% of your work grade will be deducted for each day late. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. I know that life can be difficult at times, but work schedule changes, transportation, or family issues, unless documented, are not considered a valid reason for missing assignment deadlines or class meetings. If you find yourself in a difficult scheduling or life-jam, I encourage you to come talk to me. Please.

If you have a cell phone or pager, either turn them off or set them to vibrate.

Plagiarism

In our western culture, plagiarism is considered cheating and is a serious academic offense. It is defined as “knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and it covers copying sections, major ideas, or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by other students. If you are in doubt, quote. If you are quoting someone directly then you need to list the information within quotation marks and cite a page number. If you are paraphrasing, then you need to cite the person and a page number. If you have any questions, please talk to me or consult the Writing Center.

Is there really still a problem with harassment?

Yes, there really is. 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 call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).
My office hours are Thursday 9:00 - 12:00 by appointment.

Thanks Sue.

Brian P

I assume by last week I don't have syllabi on office hours for you.

---

SyllabusSpring2007.doc

Content-Type: application/applefile
Content-Encoding: base64