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 are in terms of 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:

Writing assignments: one exploratory piece of writing, two rhetorical analyses, and a persuasive research assignment. I will have handouts detailing what I am expecting from each paper.

It is possible that after reading your first paper, I will ask some of you to make weekly visits to the writing center in order to help you with your writing skills. Please do not take this personally. I have visited the writing center for many years to get help with my own writing, and I know the benefit of such visits.

To fulfill the oral requirement, each of you will work with another student and will take turns leading our class discussion. This should be considered informal, and you are welcome to use any means you’d like to present the material. You can bring in movie clips, and use audio or other visual aids. In other words, for the entire class period, you’re the boss! I only require that you cover the material that needs to be covered. You will also do a final presentation on your persuasive research paper.
Attendance is also considered an assignment. 3% of your grade will be deducted for each absence after you have taken advantage of your 2 free unexcused absences, unless you have a university-documented absence. Make the choices that you need to make knowing the above. Please know that as an instructor, I do not take student absences personally. If you miss more than 2 classes and your grade is adversely affected, please do not take it personally. It’s simply a class policy.

Do I need to buy books or other materials for this class?
Yes! We are going to be using Reading Culture 6th Edition (2004) by George and Trimbur.

You are also required to purchase The Non-Designer's Design Book by Robin Williams.

It is likely that there will be other reading assignments that you will be required to download off 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 – 80% of final grade
Oral assignments – 10% of final grade
Class participation (includes participation in class discussions) – 5% of final grade
Portfolios – 5% of final grade

Grading Scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<td>A/B</td>
<td>89-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-88</td>
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<td>B/C</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>D</td>
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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

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. I will place all assignments on the Webct calendar page, as well as all handouts for the class periods. If you miss class, it will
be your responsibility to find out what you need to read or bring for the following class. This way there are no excuses for not knowing what is required if you do 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, and I will deduct 5% off your final assignment grade for each day the assignment is late. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. 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).