Topics in Writing: Consumer Culture
WRTG 3020
Fall 2005

Instructor: Lonni Pearce, PhD
Section: 040
Time: Tues/Thurs, 9:30 – 10:45
Location: LIBR M300D

Office: Envd 1B74
Office Hours: T/Th 11-12:30 (or by appt)
Office Phone: 303-735-5654
e-mail: lonni.pearce@colorado.edu
(most reliable method of contact)

Required Texts/Materials
- Reading assignments on e-reserve in the library or on the Internet
- Loose-leaf notebook paper for in-class writing
- Copies of your work when needed for class discussion
- Grammar handbook and college dictionary of your choice (optional)

Course Description

"The things you own, end up owning you." Tyler Durden, from Fight Club

We're told that we live in a "consumer culture," but what is meant by this phrase and how did this culture of consumption emerge? What role does rhetoric (a term that we'll define during the semester) play in shaping both our collective culture and our identities as individual "consumers"? Finally, how do current political, social, and economic trends reveal the politics of money? During the semester, we will work together to examine these questions through reading and responding to various written, audio and visual texts.

Although the subject matter of the course is consumer culture, the primary work of the course is writing—writing in response to texts, class discussion, and your own observations and research. You will write three major essays during the semester: historical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and cultural critique. We will address how to approach each of these essays, as well as general concerns with academic writing, as part of our class discussion.

Academic writing generally serves two purposes: writing to teach and writing to learn. That is, in your essays I will expect you to demonstrate what you know by:
- making clear arguments
- supporting your arguments with concrete examples and illustrations
- organizing your ideas into a cohesive structure
- effectively using the tools of writing—style and tone, grammar, spelling, and punctuation—to present your ideas

But I will also expect you to use the writing in this course to explore new ideas by:
- considering the opinions of people who think differently than you do (this includes both the authors of assigned texts and other people in the class)
- examining and questioning your current assumptions.

I have two goals for the course:
- rather than finding definitive answers for our questions about consumer culture, that we engage in the subject matter and find that it is complicated, contradictory, and ripe for further exploration and action
- that we better understand and practice reading and writing in order to recognize the power, limitations, and consequences of language.
Attendance
You may be dropped from the course if you miss more than three classes. This may seem harsh, but the reasoning is simple—if you are absent more than three times, you have missed a significant amount of the course material and it will be difficult for you to achieve the goals of this course. Of course, there are always exceptions. If you have a valid reason for being absent for more than three class periods, contact me and we can discuss the situation.

If you are absent, contact a classmate for the information and assignments you missed.

Conferences
During the course of the semester, I will schedule conferences (either individually or in groups) to discuss your writing. Conferences are regarded as a class period. If you don’t show up for your scheduled time, it will be counted as an absence. If you are unable to attend and you know beforehand, please contact me to reschedule.

Writing Center
If you want additional help with your writing, the Writing Center is a great place to go to talk about ideas, improve your thesis or essay organization, or just generally work on your writing skills.
- Location: Norlin E-156
- Hours: Mon – Thurs, 9 am – 8 pm; Fri, 9 am - noon; Sun, 4 pm – 7 pm
- Website: http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html (schedule an appointment online)

Grading
To complete this course successfully, you must attend class and scheduled conferences, complete assignments on time, and participate in class activities and discussions. For major essay assignments, you must turn in all drafts before I will grade the final version of your essay. If you have a question about your grade, please ask me about it. An important thing to remember is that even if you feel you have done poorly on an assignment, turn it in anyway! If you turn the assignment in, you will at least receive some points that count toward your final grade. Otherwise, you will not receive any points for the assignment.

Note: A word to the wise—keep copies of all of your assignments! Although I don’t often lose things, it can happen. If you have a copy, we’ll both be happier in the rare event that I misplace your paper.

The grades for the course will be determined according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-class essay</th>
<th>required, ungraded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1: Historical Analysis</td>
<td>200 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2: Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>150 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique presentation</td>
<td>50 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 3: Cultural Critique</td>
<td>200 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Comment (presentation = 25 pts, essay = 75 pts)</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation (discussion, attendance, workshop participation)</td>
<td>50 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal writing/portfolio assignments (in-class and other assigned writing)</td>
<td>150 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1000 points</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = 900-1000 points; B = 800-899 points; C = 700-799; D = 600-699

Essay Format
Informal in-class writing and homework assignments: These assignments can be typed or hand-written—the one requirement is that they are legible. These assignments will not be graded on grammar, spelling, or punctuation. (But here’s a hint: I will be less distracted and better able to focus on your insightful comments and ideas when I’m not distracted by major grammatical and spelling errors.)

Essays 1, 2, & 3: All versions of your essays that are turned in should be typed and double-spaced.

Late Assignments
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L. Pearce
Late assignments are, well, late. Unless you have spoken with me beforehand to arrange for an extension, I will subtract 10 points from the grade for each day the assignment is late. I will not grant extensions just for any old reason, but if you absolutely cannot meet the deadline because of something unavoidable, contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss the situation. Computer problems are not an acceptable excuse for a late paper—with the variety of resources on campus, you should have ample opportunity to complete your assignments on time.

**Plagiarism**

Only you can prevent plagiarism! Seriously, this is an important issue. Please read carefully the Honor Code (available at: www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/) to familiarize yourself with the University’s policy on using other people’s work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated; the paper will receive an automatic F and your case will be reported, consistent with the procedures of the Student Honor Code. If you have any questions on whether you are in danger of plagiarizing, ask me.

**Disabilities**

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

**Daily Schedule**

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Any major change in deadlines will be distributed in writing or on our class listserv.

**WEEK 1**

**Tues, Aug 23:**
- Intro to the course and goals

**Thurs, Aug 25:**
- **DUE:** read the syllabus, email me with your responses to the About You questions, read Snare, Charles E. “Implications of Considering Students as Consumers.” *College Teaching*, v. 45 n. 4 (1997): 122. (available at: http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/pwr/themes/dancing.htm, scroll down to find the link to the article); bring a copy of the article to class

- Discuss syllabus and course policies
- In-class writing on and discussion of Snare reading

**WEEK 2**

**Tues, Aug 30:**
- **DUE:** read T.J. Lears, “From Salvation to Self-Realization” (on e-reserve); write response journal #1: two-column format (text, response) and come prepared with definitions of three key terms; bring the article to class

- Discuss roots of consumer culture
- Discuss Lears reading and journals
- Discuss Historical Analysis and Culture Comment assignments

**Thurs, Sept 1:**
- Academic writing and research discussion/review
- Groovy grammar #1

**WEEK 3**

**Tues, Sept 6:**
- **DUE:** read Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, pgs 1-41 (on e-reserve); response journal #2: two-column (text, response) and bring three discussion questions; bring article to class and response journals 1 and 2
• discuss Ewen reading

**Thurs, Sept 8:**

**DUE:** paragraph proposal for historical analysis essay (paragraph description of topic, list of primary and secondary questions, 6-10 keywords for searching)

• Library seminar

**WEEK 4**

**Tues, Sept 13:**

**DUE:** Bring all sources/notes you have for your Historical Analysis essay

• Informal presentation of topic
• Groovy grammar #2

**Thurs, Sept 15:**

**DUE:** Bring all sources/notes

• Discuss additional primary source texts
• Discuss annotated bibliography
• Sign up for conferences
• CULTURE COMMENT#1

**WEEK 5**

**Tues, Sept 20:**

**DUE:** version 1 of Historical Analysis essay due for peer review (bring 4 copies of your essay)

• Peer review workshop

**Thurs, Sept 22:**

**DUE:** draft of historical analysis essay to me (include peer review sheets, drafts)

• CULTURE COMMENT#2

**WEEK 6**

**Tues, Sept 27:**

• Conferences (bring 3 questions to discuss)

**Thurs, Sept 29:**

• Conferences (bring 3 questions to discuss)

**WEEK 7**

**Tues, Oct 4:**

**DUE:** email sentence revisions to me by Monday midnight; bring your draft of your historical analysis essay to class

• discuss revision strategies
• Groovy grammar #3

**Thurs, Oct 6:**

**DUE:** portfolio for Historical Analysis essay
CULTURE COMMENT #3

WEEK 8
Tues, Oct 11:
DUE: read “Rhetorical Criticism” and “Defining Rhetorical Situations” on ereserve; based on the readings, write a paragraph that summarizes the definition of rhetoric; also, pick four other key terms from the readings and write one or two-sentence definitions for each term; bring a copy of the readings to class

- discuss rhetoric
- discuss rhetorical analysis essay
- groovy grammar #4
- CULTURE COMMENT#4

Thurs, Oct 13:
NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

WEEK 9
Tues, Oct 18:
DUE: go to the website for one of the following organizations and write a one-page rhetorical analysis of the site. Discuss your interpretation of the social context, purposes, audiences, and appeals/strategies/choices of the site:
- Center for the New American dream
- Coop America
- I buy different
also, read “Can We Build a New American Dream?” on ereserve and write a definition of “socially responsible” consumption based on the article; read “Conservation is immoral” and write a summary of the author’s arguments against conservation; please bring both articles to class.

- Define politicized consumption
- discuss website analysis
- CULTURE COMMENT#5

Thurs, Oct 20:
DUE: Read the articles on corporate social responsibility by Friedman and Reder on ereserve. After reading the texts, write a one to two-page response in which you summarize both articles and respond to the authors’ arguments. How would you characterize the difference between Friedman’s and Reder’s views of what a society should be? What might be some of the social effects/consequences of each of these points of view?

- discuss readings
- Discuss rhetorical analysis essay
- Groovy grammar #5

WEEK 10
Tues, Oct 25:
DUE: your mission: go to the grocery store and find an item that somehow “advertises” social responsibility as part of the product image; bring the item to class and be prepared to “show and tell” (NOTE: You cannot use Ben and Jerry’s ice cream or Stonyfield yogurt since we have already discussed these in class)

- “show and tell”
Thurs, Oct 27:

DUE: Drafts of your rhetorical analysis essay for peer review (bring four copies to class)

- Peer review
- Sign up for conferences

**WEEK 11**

Tues, Nov 1:

DUE: email revised sentences to me by midnight Monday; revised draft of rhetorical analysis due me (include peer reviews)

- CULTURE COMMENT #7

Thurs, Nov 3:

- Conferences (bring your essay and specific questions you’d like to discuss)

**WEEK 12**

Tues, Nov 8:

- Conferences (bring your essay and specific questions you’d like to discuss)

Thurs, Nov 10:

DUE: portfolio for rhetorical analysis essay

- intro to unit 3
- discuss/define critique
- groovy grammar #6
- culture comment #8

**WEEK 13**

Tues, Nov 15:

DUE: read J. Schor’s article (on ereserve); write two-column response journal and bring 3 discussion questions to class; also, bring a copy of the article to class

- Discuss reading
- optional conference sign up
- Groovy grammar #7

Thurs, Nov 17:

DUE: TBA reading (on ereserve); bring a copy of the article to class

- Discuss reading
- Presentation discussion / presentation sign up
- CULTURE COMMENT #9

**WEEK 14**

Tues, Nov 22:

- Optional conferences

Thurs, Nov 24:

NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING
WEEK 15
Tues, Nov 29:
DUE: draft of your cultural critique essay (bring 4 copies for peer review)
- Peer review
- Presentations 1-3

Thurs, Dec 1:
- Presentations 4-10

WEEK 16
Tues, Dec 6:
- Presentations 11-18

Thurs, Dec 8:
DUE: portfolio for critique essay
- course review

Have a great winter break!

A Little Bit About You...

Occasionally I need to contact you outside of class, so please fill out the following information and email your responses to me before the second class meeting. Your answers to these questions will also help me gauge where we are starting as a group—thanks!

Name:
Phone:
Email:

Tell me a little about your previous experiences in writing—is it only a school thing, or do you do any writing on your own?

What are your favorite/least favorite things about writing?

What do you expect out of this class?

What is your major and what types of writing might be involved in your intended profession?