Composing Civic Life–Rhetoric and Public Discourse
Writing 3020, Fall 2008

Dr.

Classes, Rooms, Times:
Section 075, HUMN 370, TR 11:00-12:15
Section 086, EDUC 143, TR 2:00–3:15

Office & Contact Information
1338 Grandview, first door on left
303-735-5246
Hours: TR 3:30–4:30
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Mail: Program for Writing & Rhetoric, ENVD (basement)

Writing Center 303-735-6906, wrtghelp@colorado.edu

Required Texts
A college-level dictionary such as the OED online (CU URL - http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl).
PDF and .DOC files that I will ask you to download, read, and bring to class.

Course Description and Objectives

This reading- and writing-intensive course is focused on the study of rhetoric and public life in the contemporary US. Historically, rhetoric as a field of study has concerned itself with articulating the ideals of public life in democracy. Today, more Americans are placing their ideas on the web, and expertise increasingly is eschewed in favor of egalitarian and participatory sensibilities. All US publics post-9.11 experience greater state surveillance and secrecy, and for many Americans, it is easier to find opinion and information, yet harder to know what to believe.

We will consider what the consequences are when distinctions are blurred between experts and amateurs, information and opinion, and truth and fiction, and ask: What are the prerequisites for civic literacy? How is civic literacy related to political engagement? How can US publics know what to believe? How can we help to create the kind of world in which we want to live? Granted,

[humans] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte 5

Knowing something about the circumstances we have inherited, and the power of language to shape our thoughts and actions are integral to civic literacy. This is a point Gerald Graff makes:

Ever since George Orwell...it has been a commonplace of social criticism that whoever controls language controls the way we think and act.

Foreword, English in America ix

Our objectives in this course are to expand our civic literacy and capacities for close reading, critical thinking, rhetorical analysis, argumentation, and public writing. These capacities are not discrete but are integral to each other. We read public and academic discourse to consider the influence of language, public opinion, and political
engagement and to ask what civic literacy entails. Our focus will be on the impact of Web 2.0 on knowledge, information, and society.

This class involves the sustained practice of a kind of everyday and intellectual civility too often missing from public discourse today. You will be working with people who do not necessarily understand or agree with you and who sometimes may be as impatient with you as you may be with them. The ability to hear what someone else is saying is key to public life and perhaps the most useful thing that we can learn to do. Listen to your classmates.

Course Policies

Technology Protocol Issues

Rhetorical awareness includes knowing when to use what mode of communication, in what register, and in what circumstance (rhetorical situation). To make course protocols explicit, turn off all your digital tools and toys—bionic extensions—including Blackberries, iPhones, iPods et al, and all other bells and whistles before class starts. Do not make phone calls, text message, pass notes, or engage in other back channel activity and communication that distract you and others from class activities. When you open your laptop in class, it should be to complete a class task.

Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and participation are necessary for your success in class and for the success of the class as a whole.

- Building rhetorical knowledge is accretive; when you miss class you miss an opportunity to build your knowledge.
- Participation begins with coming to class on time with readings and assignments done and in your possession.

The above behavior is bedrock for participation and the foundation for your other performances, including:

- Contributions to in-class discussion and exercises;
- Peer reviews and workshops;
- Completion of homework assignments.

Absences: You do not gain points through full attendance, but may drop your course grade by a full letter by arriving late, not attending class, being unprepared, leaving early, or disrupting the work of others. You can take two unexcused absences (in other words, a full week of class) without your absence affecting your grade.

- Your course grade can drop one full grade for every unexcused absence after the first two unexcused absences.

Excused absences include documented illness, death in your immediate family, religious holidays, and institutional excuses. These must be documented to me in a letter or e-mail or via phone. For religious observations, check university policies and plan ahead. It is your responsibility to alert me to your plans. In the case of an emergency, contact me as soon as you reasonably can after the event.

Reading, Homework, Papers, Workshops, and Peer Reviews

Readings: This is a reading-intensive course that introduces theoretical frameworks and various concepts about rhetoric, discourse, democracy, and the public sphere—course assignments ask you to critically analyze, synthesize, and communicate positions on different topics with a sophisticated use of sources, support, language, and audience. Good writers of all different types—even stand up comedians—are voracious readers and observers. This course presumes that you will read closely, analytically, and widely to build your arguments and to write thoughtful and well-supported essays.

- Bring books and a hard copy of all our readings to class on all the days that we are discussing them;
• Bring Reading Response Papers that summarize key points and raising questions on the days you have selected to submit them. More on this under Brief Assignment Descriptions.

**Homework:** Homework is assigned to prepare you for the activities of the day. Bring homework on the day it is due. Homework is not accepted late—it is only accepted on the day that it is due.

**Papers:** You will write three drafts of your paper assignments. Type and double-space all written assignments. Late papers will lose a full grade for each calendar day they are late.

- Place identifying information (your name, course number and section, assignment) on the top of the first page. Save a tree or a plastic plant—no covers, please.

Workshops are an integral part of the writing process. You will submit work, read each other’s work, offer peer review, write at least three drafts of your papers, and offer a short written reflection at the end of the final draft.

**Peer Reviews:** You will type and submit at least two peer review letters for each workshop. Peer reviews are an integral part of demonstrating your rhetorical knowledge and analysis. They are a core part of your participation and demonstrate your close, critical reading and rhetorical knowledge.

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### Course Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Assignment</th>
<th>Grading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Civic Literacy Paper</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Web 2.0 Position Paper</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Reader Response Papers</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Research Proposal</td>
<td>(05%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Web 2.0 Research Paper</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Presentations</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Reflection Paper</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Participation*</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Portfolio</td>
<td>100%</td>
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*Participation is addressed above as part of course policies so I do not include another description of it below.

### Brief Assignment Descriptions

**Civic Literacy Paper** - This assignment asks to focus on a public place and the literacy practices that take place in it in order to demonstrate your powers of observation and to try your hand at a form of literary nonfiction. The purpose of this assignment is twofold: a) to introduce you to the class as an active observer and analyst of a public place and the literate practices that take place there, and b) to extend your capacities of observation, description, and rhetorical analysis. This paper should be about two and one half-to-three pages long (10%).

**Web 2.0 Position Paper** - The assignment asks you to synthesize different sources and perspectives on a controversy over the mediated information environment and Web 2.0 introduced by class materials, readings, and discussions in order to build well-supported arguments in support of your own position. The purpose of the assignment is to build your capacities of argument, synthesis and use of support. This paper will be about three-to-five pages long (15%).
Reader Response Papers -- The assignment asks you to offer succinct summaries of the reading and then to respond to what you thought was of particular value. The purpose of reader responses is to develop your capacities of rhetorical analysis, close reading, and critical thinking. You can examine questions of audience, purpose, context, methods; identify the central issues or problem; compare similarities and differences between perspectives; distinguish fact from opinion; and ask questions about what is puzzling, insightful, or true-to-life (or your experience), or thought-provoking. Each response paper should be between two-to-three double-spaced pages long. There are a number of days on which you can submit—choose three days to submit papers (3 papers worth 5% each = 15%).

Research Proposal– The research proposal indicates the research option that you will choose, the topic on which you will focus, your methods of research and a preliminary annotated bibliography (5%).

Web 2.0 Research Paper - This paper requires you to conduct archival (library, Internet) and in some cases, interview and observation-based research in order to build researched arguments in support of your position. There are several options from which to choose and I will consider alternative projects and formats as well. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate sophisticated rhetorical strategies for the synthesis and communication of your research (20%).

Presentation – The presentation asks you to organize an oral (and visual) presentation based on your final research paper. The purpose is to communicate your most interesting research findings and argument in a way that would best appeal to audience of your designation (10%).

Reflection Paper - This paper asks you to consider the practices, theoretical frameworks and strategies of the course to consider their more and less usefulness. Describe how you think you have applied theoretical frameworks and strategies to your communication of knowledge in the course and what is still challenging for you (10%).

Portfolio – The portfolio organized and presents all of your formal and informal assignments (including homework and copies of your peer review letters) in a binder that you hand in on the last day of class. The purpose of compiling a portfolio is to gather and organize all of your work in a way that makes it easy for both you and me to reflect on your work and progress in the course.

Proposed Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

Week 1
T 8/26 Course overview and introductions
Discuss Civic Literacy Paper
R 8/28 Understanding Rhetoric and Argument
Supplemental Reading: RWCL Ch. 11, “Some Key Terms in Logic and Argumentation” pp. 260-268

Week 2
T 9/2 Rhetorical analysis - bring political cartoons
Mini Workshop - Civic Literacy Papers
Discuss Peer Review and Workshop Process
Due: First draft of your Civic Literacy Papers
Reading Due: *RWCL*, Ch. 3, “Definitions and Criteria of Critical Thinking” pp. 64-71; Ch. 5, “Viewpoint, Bias, and Fairness” pp. 125-132 & Ch. 9, “Semantics” pp. 222-233

R 9/4
Writing Center Introduction - Everyday Reasoning & Bias
Due: Two copies of your second draft of your Civic Literacy Papers
Reading Due: *RWCL*, Ch. 6, “Questioning Culturally Conditioned” pp. 149-163 & Ch. 7, “Overgeneralization” pp. 183-189

Week 3

**Civic Literacy and Public Space**

T 9/9
Workshop Civic Literacy Paper: Discuss drafts and letters
Due: 2 Peer Review letters (2 copies of each = 4)

R 9/11
Read in-class: Civic Literacy Papers
Due: Civic Literacy Papers

Week 4

**Political Rhetoric and Public Opinion**

T 9/16
Political Rhetoric
Reading Due: *RWCL*, Ch. 15, “Thinking Critically About Political Rhetoric”
Supplemental Reading: Ch. 12, “Logical and Rhetorical Fallacies”

R 9/18
Public Opinion
Discuss Web 2.0 Paper
Reading Due: Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, “The World Outside and Pictures in Our Head”
Supplemental Reading: “Glossary of Rhetorical and Critical Thinking Terms”
Due: (1) Reading Response Papers

Week 5

**Culture, Meaning, & Democracy**

T 9/23
Contested Terms
Reading Due: Williams, *Keywords*, Introduction, Culture, Democracy, Ideology, Individual & Liberal & Hall, “Representation, Meaning, and Language”
Due: (2) Reading Response Papers

R 9/25
Web 2.0 Proponents
Reading Due: Lessing, *Free Culture*, “Us, Now” & “Them, Soon”
Supplemental Reading: “The Trolls Amongst Us”
Due: (3) Reading Response Papers

Week 6

**Web 2.0: Information, Amateurs, and Expertise**

T 9/30
Web 2.0 Questioners
Reading Due: *Cult of the Amateur*, Preface, Ch. 1 & 2
Supplemental Reading: “Griping Online? Comcast Hears and Talks Back”
Due: (4) Reading Response Papers

R 10/2
Reading Due: *Cult*, Ch. 3 & 4
Supplemental Reading: “World War III Wikipedia”
Due: (5) Reading Response Papers

Week 7

**Web 2.0 Continued**

T 10/7
Reading Due: *Cult*, Ch. 5 & 6
Due: (6) Reading Response Papers

R 10/9
Synthesis and discussion: The Possibilities and Predicaments of Web 2.0
Discuss Web 2.0 Research Proposal, Paper, & Presentation
Reading Due: *Culture*, Ch. 7
Supplemental Reading: “Facebook Critique: With Friends Like These”
Due: (7) Reading Response Papers

Week 8
More on Mediated Forums, Information, & ‘Misinformation’

T 10/14
Integrating Sources & Documentation
Reading Due: *RWCL*, Ch. 16, “Thinking Critically About Mass Media” pp. 391-407 & Ch. 22, “Documentation”

R 10/16
Preliminary workshop on Web 2.0 Position Paper
Due: One copy of first draft of Web 2.0 Position Paper
Reading Due: *RWCL*, Ch. 17, “Special Interests, Conflicts of Interest, Special Pleading” pp. 425-28, pp. 435-441

Week 9
Special Interests

T 10/21
Film: *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* or FCC protests
Due: Two copies of second draft of Web 2.0 Position Paper

R 10/23
Workshop on Web 2.0 Position Paper
Due: Two Peer Review Letters (two copies each)

Week 10
Building Research Arguments & Conferences

T 10/28
Conference Sign-up & Troubleshooting Research Proposals
Due: Web 2.0 Position Paper

R 10/30
Conferences
Due: Research Proposals

Week 11
Conferences

T 11/4
Conferences
Due: Research Proposals

R 11/6
Conferences
Due: Research Proposals

Week 12
Media and Special Interests

T 11/11
Library research orientation
Due: Final Research Proposals

R 11/13
Film, *Free Speech for Sale*

Week 13
Focusing on the Research Papers

T 11/18
Preliminary workshop on first draft of Research Paper
Due: One copy of the first draft of your research papers
R 11/20 Due: Two copies of the second draft of your research papers

Week 14 Fall Break & Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 15 Writing and Speaking from Your Public(s) to Other Public(s)

T 12/2 Workshop Research Paper
Due: Two Peer Review Letters (two copies each)

R 12/4 Presentations

Week 16

T 12/9 Presentations

R 12/11 Presentations
Due: Portfolio (including Final Research Paper & Reflection Paper)

Finals Week Free at last - Happy Holidays

Note #1: The CU Administration Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. If you think you need disability accommodations, contact 303-492-8671, Willard 322 and www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, the Boulder Provost’s Disability Task Force recommends that you give me and your other professors a letter from Disability Services at the start of the semester or as soon thereafter as possible that describes these needs so that we can address them.

Note #2: from the CU Administration: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Though class rosters are provided to instructors with the student’s legal name, I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records and speech. See policies at:

http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html
http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

Note #3 from the Honor Council: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarizing, aiding academic dishonesty, fabricating, lying, bribing, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273).
Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at:

http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html
http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorscode/