

Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse

Chair: Lydia McDermott

Matthew Bost (on Sabbatical, 2019-2020)

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Rooted in the classical art of persuasion, the study of rhetoric encompasses the use and analysis of symbols to share ideas, construct social reality, and make decisions about matters of common concern. Students of rhetoric engage in the critical study and composition of various messages, as well as exploring the dynamics of symbolic action through studying speeches, written and audiovisual texts, and embodied performance.

Through the study and practice of rhetoric, students learn to critique historical and contemporary public discourse, considering the stylistic and persuasive devices that make particular pieces of rhetoric effective. Additionally, students develop skills in written and oral composition, learning to craft messages that account for specific audiences in specific rhetorical situations. Finally, students reflect on the larger dynamics of rhetoric, considering the relationship between discourse and reality, the cultural and ethical power dynamics of communication, and the ways that any public discourse reflects its historical and social contexts.

In addition to serving students in our major and minor, the **Rhetoric, Writing, and Public Discourse Department** (RWPD) teaches written and oral communication as skills necessary for the broader Whitman community. RWPD courses seek to help students across disciplines develop the writing and speaking skills they will use for their coursework and for all types of written and oral communication during and after their time at Whitman. Courses in RWPD help students develop skills for many genres of composition, from research papers, poster presentations and senior theses to artist statements, op-eds and protest speeches.

Distribution: Courses completed in RWPD apply to the humanities distribution area with the following exceptions:

Fine arts: 110

Cultural pluralism or humanities: 250 and 270

Social sciences or humanities: 342

As part of its commitment to teaching written and oral communication across the curriculum, the department of Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse offers RWPD 170, Language and Writing. Many students are required to take RWPD 170, and more information about the Writing Proficiency requirement can be found in the General Studies Section of the catalog. In addition to the requirement, all incoming students are encouraged to take the course in their first year. Spring sections are open to all first year students. This will be particularly helpful for students in the 3-2 program and students planning on going to medical school, as many of these programs require students to have taken a composition course.

Total credits required to complete the Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse major: A student who enters Whitman without any prior college-level coursework in RWPD will complete 36 credits to fulfill the requirements for this major, including RWPD 230, 330, 387 and 487.

The Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse Major: A student who enters Whitman without any prior college-level coursework in RWPD will complete 36 credits to fulfill the requirements for this major, including RWPD 230, 330, 387 and 487. Major credits may include up to 8 credits of 200 level or higher courses outside the department relevant to the student's rhetorical studies that are pre-approved by the student's major adviser. Students are welcome to concentrate their studies in areas such as political rhetoric, social justice rhetoric, presidential rhetoric, rhetorical theory, or any area in which they have scholarly interest.

- I. All majors will complete RWPD 230 by the end of fall junior year.
- II. Junior Seminars: All majors will complete RWPD 330 and RWPD 387 by the end of their junior year.

- III. **Senior Seminar:** All majors will complete RWPD 487 in the fall semester of their senior year. All majors will write and orally present a senior capstone paper of around 6,500 words as part of RWPD 487, unless they are seeking honors in major (see point IV below). The oral presentation will consist of an approximately 10-minute public presentation followed by Q&A.
- IV. **Honors in Major:** Majors seeking to graduate with Honors in Major must have a cumulative GPA of 3.3 and major GPA of 3.5. Honors in major will be extended to students who receive an A- or higher on their senior thesis, and pass their defense with distinction. In addition to the regular major requirements, those seeking honors must complete the following:
- a. The student must propose an honors thesis topic prior to fall semester break of their senior year. Additionally, the student should select a primary thesis advisor and two additional readers for their proposed thesis project. Proposals of around 1,500 words in length will be reviewed by the student's chosen thesis advisor.
 - b. *In lieu of a senior capstone paper*, the student will revise and expand their initial thesis proposal into an approximately 4,000-word prospectus that includes a description of the student's chosen critical artifact(s), a review of relevant literature and the scholarly conversations the student proposes engaging, a proposed argument for the final thesis project, and a proposed committee. Thesis prospectuses will be graded by the instructor for RWPD 487 and approved by the student's thesis advisor.
 - c. If their proposal is approved, and after finishing RWPD 487, the student will take RWPD 498 as an independent supervised research project during spring of senior year, with their chosen thesis advisor serving as the course instructor. During RWPD 498, the student will write and revise a senior thesis of at least 10,000 words.
 - d. The student will orally defend their thesis at the end of spring senior year. The defense will consist of a 10-15-minute public presentation followed by a short Q&A and a discussion with the student's committee members.
- V. Department policy does not allow a P-D-F grade option for courses within the major.

The Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse minor: A minimum of 20 credits including 230 and at least four credits of 300- level or higher coursework. Up to four credits of 200 level coursework or higher outside of the department, fitting to the student's rhetorical studies and approved by the student's minor adviser, may count toward the minor. Department policy does not allow a P-D-F grade option for courses within the minor.

100-103 Special Topics in Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse **1-4 credits**

Courses in special topics areas within RWPD. Any current offerings follow.

110 Public Speaking

Fall, Spring

Staff

4 credits

Words matter. If we want to change the world, it is more important now than ever to develop our ability to communicate clearly, effectively, and artfully. In this course, students will learn the fundamentals of public speaking. They will learn how to speak about things that matter to them, and — with practice — to make things matter to others. Students will refine their ability to speak in a variety of settings, situations, and genres to diverse audiences. Through classroom activities, practice speeches, and formal performances, they will learn how to engage the attention, attitudes, and actions of others regarding issues of personal, communal, and civic importance.

121 Fundamentals of Argumentation

Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

This course is an introduction to the theory and practice of argumentation. Argumentation as an area of study explores the ways that evidence-based claims are used to mediate disagreement and controversy in personal,

technical, and political contexts, and make decisions when the best course of action is contested or unclear. The course engages four primary topics: we will explore the core theoretical concepts of argument, and think about how different types of argument work and what makes them effective when directed toward particular audiences. We will discuss the ways that different communities of argument (from legal and scientific fields, to local and national debates over political issues, to arguments in mass media forums and online) judge the worth of different claims, and mediate disagreements, and we will think about how those communities interact and what happens when they come into conflict. We will dissect examples of argument in different communities in-depth, and think about how particular arguments are shaped by historical context and specific circumstances. Finally, we will interrogate the limits of argument as a paradigm, inquiring into its foundational assumptions, the ethical issues it raises, and potential alternatives that have been forwarded (ranging from dialogue to invitational rhetoric and consensus-building). In addition to analyzing arguments, students will put course material in practice through written and oral argumentation and debate. Assignments will include papers and presentations addressing different theories of argument, case studies diagramming the evolution of major historical or contemporary public arguments, advocacy and op-ed writing, and in-class dialogues and debates.

170 Language and Writing

Fall, Spring **Fall: McDermott, Rother, K. Schlegel, R. Schlegel, Stoberock, Terry; Spring: Rother, Stoberock** **4 credits**

A course designed to introduce students to analytical writing through extensive writing practice and revision. The course provides strategies for invention, development, and editing. Emphasis is placed on analysis and synthesis, with additional attention to language use at the sentence level, including grammar, diction, and syntax. Open to first-year and sophomore students; open to juniors and seniors by consent of instructor.

200-203 Special Topics in Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse **1-4 credits**

Courses in special topics areas within RWPD. Any current offerings follow.

210 Writing for Diverse Purposes

Spring **Terry** **4 credits**

This course offers writers the opportunity to focus on expository writing for varying audiences and for diverse purposes. The course will engage students in the study of genre characteristics and conventions, prosodic style, and adaptation of writing for differing audiences.

230 Introduction to Rhetoric and Public Culture

Fall, Spring **Fall: Patia; Spring: Staff** **4 credits**

An introduction to the Rhetoric Department, this course examines the role of communication in our contemporary society. We address three core areas: political and legal rhetoric, rhetorics of social justice, and contemporary rhetorical theory. Students evaluate public discourse such as political speeches (from across world regions), print and digital media (e.g., news, documentaries, web campaigns), and institutional advocacy (e.g., propaganda, legal arguments, and policy deliberations). Course requirements include class discussion, an oral presentation, and two short writing assignments. Throughout, students develop two key proficiencies: how to better interpret the diverse communication that surrounds them, and how to become effective and reflective advocates for change in the world.

250 Rhetoric, Gender and Sexuality

Fall **Patia** **4 credits**

This class examines the ways that rhetorical practices and theories rooted in gender and sexuality can and do create, reinforce, adjust and sometimes overcome sex and gender based bias in society. The nature of this bias is addressed as a rhetorical construct that continues to serve as a basis for social, political, and economic conditions of existence for many. In the class, we will critique communication in the media, daily discourse, the law, politics, and in personal experiences. The goal of this examination is to increase awareness of difference and bias in communication based on gender and sexuality, to challenge theoretical assumptions about what constitutes inequity, to analyze the

rhetorical practices that constitute gender and sexuality, and to offer new perspectives from which to view gender-based rhetorical practices. May be elected as Gender Studies 250.

255 The Rhetoric of Social Protest
Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

This class explores the rhetorical grounds of social interaction with an emphasis on the role of communication in social change. The course introduces students to the primary theoretical tools that rhetorical studies uses to examine social protest and change. Theories are illustrated through examination of a set of case studies (e.g., civil rights campaigns, environmental politics, grass-roots social movements, and digitally networked global communities). By studying the phenomenon of social protest and change, we examine how collective identification is created and how groups are motivated to act in concert, particularly in contexts where communication alone may be insufficient to alleviate injustice.

260 Rhetoric and Sensation in Civic Life
Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

For much of rhetoric's history, scholars have focused on the ways that tropes and textual devices, from metaphor to narrative, influence human communication and civic engagement. This course explores a variety of recent scholarly work that expands rhetoric to account for visual, auditory, tactile and other sensory aspects of rhetoric. We will explore the ways that sensory factors (for example, hearing a speech at a political rally versus reading it on paper) influence the meaning and effects of public discourse. We will also explore a series of basic critical tools for reading images, music and audio, considering communication rooted in touch and exploring the persuasive features of particular spaces (e.g. malls, courtrooms, protest rallies), as well as discuss a variety of other rhetorical artifacts that shape our lived experience of the world. Finally, we will explore the broader implications of rhetoric's effects across the senses for how we think about symbolic action and civic engagement. Assignments will include a mid-length research paper, a discussion assignment, and short responses in a variety of written, visual, and audible forms. May be taken for credit toward the Film and Media Studies major.

270 Rhetoric, Incarceration, and Civic Engagement
Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

This course will focus on the links between civic engagement, rhetoric, citizenship, and incarcerated populations. Specifically, hosting almost all of its credit hours within the Washington State Penitentiary, the course will begin with an overview of how incarcerated populations come to be understood as citizens within society, drawing from the work of Michelle Alexander. Additionally, students will generate a topic of local, state, or national importance each semester and will research and prepare a public forum on the topic with students from the Washington State Penitentiary. Assignments include short reflection papers, visits to the Penitentiary for research and presentation workshops with incarcerated students, and a public presentation. Course may be taken twice for credit. *Note:* Almost all course meetings will occur at the Washington State Penitentiary. Students must follow all rules and guidelines of the Penitentiary on these visits. All students in the course must submit to, and pass, a criminal background check in order to participate in the course. All semester, this course's meeting time will be 5:00-8:15pm. May be repeated for a maximum of eight credits. *Prerequisite:* consent of instructor.

300-303 Special Topics in Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse
1-4 credits

Courses in special topics areas within RWPDP. Any current offerings follow.

310 The Theory and Practice of Tutoring Writing
Spring **McDermott**

2 credits

This course is designed to prepare you to be an effective and confident writing tutor. It will introduce you to major theories on peer-tutoring, debates concerning the teaching of writing, and practical techniques for dealing with difficult situations in the process of tutoring. You will leave the course having conducted genre-specific research, having developed your own tutoring philosophy, and with a portfolio of strategies for tutoring from yourself and

your peers. One of our goals is to create a community of knowledgeable and supportive writing center tutors who can then work as a team within the writing center. Not open to first semester students.

320 Advanced Writing Studies

Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

An advanced course in writing studies for students interested both in advancing understanding of their own writing processes and styles as well as in learning broader theories of composition and rhetoric across the curriculum. Students will study and practice rhetorical devices and genre analysis in order to facilitate flexibility in writing for different academic communities. Not open to first-year students.

321 Changing the Subject: Judith Butler and Philosophy

Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

This course will examine the writings of contemporary philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler in response to seminal texts from the European philosophical tradition. These texts will include selections from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the "Second Essay" from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" as well as Foucault's reply to that essay, and Levinas' "Peace and Proximity." The seminar will focus on, first, the close reading of the primary source philosophical texts, placing those texts into dialogue with Butler's critical interpretation of them. Thematically, it will engage such themes as the constitution of the subject, critique, and the relationship to the Other; methodologically, it will explore Butler's deconstructive and rhetorical style of reading, using it as an exemplar for the theoretical appropriation of traditional philosophical texts. Bi-weekly seminar presentation papers will be required, as well a final presentation and researched paper. The seminar is writing intensive, and emphasizes structured peer feedback. May be elected as Philosophy 321. *Prerequisite:* Philosophy 201, Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse 230, or consent of instructor.

330 Rhetorical Theory and the Human Condition

Spring

Staff

4 credits

The very question, "What is rhetoric?" prompts consternation and confusion, dialogue and dissent. From its inception in ancient Greece, the study of rhetoric has gone hand in hand with important debates over truth versus belief, the role of persuasion in social change, the relationship between identity, power and civic engagement, and the possibility of democracy. These debates have only become more pressing in the present moment, as our lives and communities are shaped by a ubiquitous array of communicative acts and sources, from cable news to the internet. Beginning with rhetoric's classical origins, this course will explore the primary debates and conceptual tools that have shaped it as a field, focusing on how authors grappled with rhetoric's power, the links between rhetoric and civic identity, and the role of rhetoric in social change. Throughout the semester, we will assess how rhetoric has been studied in different historical contexts to construct a picture of rhetoric's role in molding the human condition. Course to include a final research project and several short response papers, as well as class discussion and participation. *Recommended prerequisite:* Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse 230.

342 Rhetoric and Capitalism: Exploitation, Precarity and Social Change

Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

From conversations about campaign finance and net neutrality to ethical debates over the labor practices used to produce contemporary communication technologies, capitalism shapes contemporary civic engagement in a variety of important ways. In this course, we will explore some of the key histories and theoretical terms necessary to understand the links between capitalism and public discourse. We will focus on two key trends: capitalism's tendency to translate local human relationships and symbolic actions into abstract, interchangeable processes of exchange (for example through social media, creditor relationships, or monetary exchange), and the ways that capitalism makes some bodies or lives precarious while insulating other bodies or lives from risk and potential harm. Topics covered will include the *Citizens United v. FEC* Supreme Court decision, the increasing global shift to an economy based on communication and information, the relationship between conventional waged labor and other forms of labor (e.g. housework, sex work, black market economies), and the utility of various lenses, from Marxist

and anarchist perspectives to feminist, ecological, critical race, and queer perspectives for rhetorically engaging with capitalism's effects. We will also discuss some of the ways that activists have responded to these trends, from traditional labor organizing to the construction of communities removed from capitalism, to digital and social media activism. Assignments will include a mid-length research paper, a series of short reflections, and a discussion assignment.

353 The Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Struggle

Spring

Patia

4 credits

This course examines the rhetoric of the Black freedom struggle in the US, beginning with African Americans' efforts to survive and resist slavery and culminating in contemporary struggles for social, political, and economic justice. We will explore the birth of 20th century struggles for civil rights in the radical left of the 1930s, and chart the continuation of these struggles through the lunch counter sit-ins, marches and bus boycotts of the mid-1950s, struggles for voting rights and political representation in the 1960s, and community organizing and advocacy for Black power in the late 1960s and early 70s, as well as examining the ways that all of these movements inform present-day struggles for social change. Assignments will include short analytical essays centered on primary texts, and a final rhetorical criticism paper on a topic of the student's choice. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major.

360 The Rhetoric of Social Protest: Exploring the Arab Spring

Not offered 2019-20

4 credits

This course uses a number of moments of social protest throughout the Middle East to introduce students to theories and the practice of mass persuasion, propaganda, public advocacy, and social activism. Theories are illustrated through examination of a set of case studies (e.g., Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and more). By studying the rhetoric(s) of social protest in the context of the Middle East moment now commonly referred to as the "Arab Spring," this course examines how collective identification is created, and how groups are motivated to act in concert, particularly in contexts where protest is geared to alleviate injustice in a global context. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major.

365 Rhetoric and Violence

Fall

Patia

4 credits

Rhetoric and violence are frequently separated and irresistibly connected parts of contemporary civic life. We bemoan the breakdown of discussion into violent division, and worry over rhetorical incitements to violent action, even as we draw lines between "free speech" and physically violent acts. This course examines key theoretical and historical connections between rhetoric and violence, attempting to make sense of the rhetorical impacts of physical force, the relationship between speech and violent action, and the ways that histories of violence shape subjectivity, interpersonal relationships, and political community. We will begin by studying rhetorical theorists who have posed general questions about the relationship between rhetoric and violence, the definition and scope of the term "violence", and the material power of discourse. We will then engage these theoretical debates through extended discussions of scholarly, activist and journalistic literature around several points of intersection between rhetoric and violence including rhetoric around gun violence and mass shootings, feminist discussions of gendered violence and masculinity, histories of racial violence, "fighting words" and injurious or hurtful speech, and contemporary military and political violence. We will also discuss antiviolence rhetoric that attempts to publicize, counter, or mitigate the effects of systemic violence against marginalized communities. Throughout, the course will link important political discussions with larger theoretical debates, giving us the tools to think violence in connection with rhetoric, and consider the ethics of nonviolence. Assignments will include several short response papers, seminar based discussion, and an oral presentation.

380 Rhetorical Bodies

Spring

McDermott

4 credits

This course examines the rhetorical construction of bodies as well as the ways in which bodies are often used rhetorically. In order to carry out this examination, we will apply a variety of critical rhetorical lenses to written and

visual texts. We will be particularly concerned with the intersections of social factors such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability and the ways in which these intersections are written on our bodies. We will read texts by classical and contemporary theorists and authors, such as Hippocrates, Quintilian, Judith Butler, Kenneth Burke, Patricia Hill Collins, Debra Hawhee, and Robert McCruer. This course will be writing intensive. May be taken for credit toward the Race and Ethnic Studies major. May be elected as English 377.

387 Rhetorical Criticism

Spring

Patia

4 credits

This course teaches students the core methods used to critically analyze texts from a rhetorical perspective. Using a variety of rhetorical artifacts including speeches and court opinions film, public monuments and memorials, and political protest rhetoric, students will consider how individual rhetorical acts are shaped by authorship and composition, audience, and social and historical context. We will think about these factors in conversation with concrete methods for analysis ranging from close textual criticism to ideology critique to affect and public memory analysis. Finally, the course will instruct students in researching and writing an extended piece of rhetorical criticism. *Recommended prerequisite:* Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse 230.

401, 402 Independent Study

Fall, Spring

Staff

1-4 credits

Individually directed studies in rhetoric culminating in a presentation, paper, or other creation as arranged between the student and professor. *Prerequisite:* consent of instructor.

403-406 Special Topics in Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse

1-4 credits

Courses in special topics areas within rhetorical studies. Any current offerings follow.

487 Advanced Rhetorical Criticism and Theory

Fall

Bost

4 credits

Advancing student understanding of rhetorical theory, particularly in examining contemporary and post-modern theories of rhetoric and their application to student theses, this course focuses on an advanced analysis of rhetoric. Students will deepen their knowledge of rhetorical criticism and theory by interrogating texts using a variety of critical methods and lenses. Students also give presentations utilizing these advanced perspectives. The goal of the course is to prepare students to perform effective rhetorical criticism, to integrate theory effectively in analyzing rhetoric, and to apply various rhetorical theories to students' senior thesis projects leading to the writing of cogent and well organized theses. *Prerequisites:* Rhetoric, Writing and Public Discourse 230 and 387; open to other students by consent of instructor.

491 Thesis

Spring

McDermott

4 credits

Research and writing of the senior thesis. Open only to and required of senior majors.

498 Honors Thesis

Spring

McDermott

4 credits

Research and writing of the senior honors thesis. Open only to and required of senior majors. *Prerequisite:* Admission to honors candidacy. Students wishing to be considered for honors must apply to the department during the fall semester of their senior year.