COM 711 – Rhetorical-Critical Research Methods –

“Must we all be ‘rhetorical critics’?”

-Barnet Baskerville, 1977, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*

**Course description**

This course examines the use of rhetoric as a critical lens and methodological approach to artifacts. The class takes seriously Kenneth Burke’s claim that “all living things are critics,” in thinking that the capacity for knowledge, symbols, and reasoning affords the ability to make claims about the world around us. In addition to delving into theories of rhetorical criticism as a method (who gets to say what about what and to whom with what purpose?), we will also learn tools to examine the symbolicity of speeches, films, spaces, stories, culture, politics, etc. The class will primarily perform two functions: to understand and critique exemplars of criticism and to give us the tools to perform criticism ourselves. In the dynamic space between subjective and objective, between author and audience, and between beauty and form lies – the rhetorical critic.

**Course objectives**

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to satisfy the following learning objectives, in alignment with COM Learning Outcomes and University Learning Objectives of intellectual breadth and lifelong learning, inquiry and critical thinking, communication, and citizenship and ethics:

- **define** rhetorical criticism and **identify** important theorists through history that have shaped our understanding and performance of it
- **critically analyze** historical and contemporary exemplars of rhetorical criticism
- **conduct** original research with a clear thesis, logical structure, and expert use of course materials and outside resources that reaches a conclusion about an artifact
- **evaluate** the strengths and weaknesses of rhetorical methods
Course assignments

More details on all course assignments are available in the relevant “Rubric” files uploaded to Canvas.

Article Anatomy Write-up ........................................................................................................................................50 points

Students will choose an article that rhetorically critiques of Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech from week 3 and fill out the “article anatomy” worksheet about that article. This worksheet will help us learn the organization, format, and content of criticism as we begin to write it ourselves.

Artifact Paper .........................................................................................................................................................75 points

Students will write a 5-6 page descriptive paper on their rhetorical artifact that explains various rhetorical aspects of the artifact, its language use, physical appearance, style, tone, characters, plot, etc. as relevant to their artifact, which are opportunities for interpretation and rhetorical importance. Students will also examine the historical context, author, and effects of the artifact: what is surrounding, influencing, leading to, and following from the artifact? This paper should also justify the selection of the artifact and what is included in the artifact (i.e., its scope).

Rhetorical Methods Paper ........................................................................................................................................75 points

Students will select their method for the final paper and perform a literature review of readings about their chosen method and their artifact. This 5-6 page paper will analyze relevant readings from the course, collect and analyze other examples of the methods, and discuss their benefits and limitations of the method in examining the artifact. This paper will begin a preliminary analysis of the artifact for use in the final paper.

Peer Review Workshop ...........................................................................................................................................50 points

Students will submit a full draft of their final paper for use in the peer review workshops the last week of class. Students will be graded on the quality of their draft and their preparation and participation in the peer workshop process with their partner.

Final Criticism Paper ............................................................................................................................................... 150 points

Students will integrate the artifact and methods papers into a seamless 20-page paper analyzing the artifact. The paper should make a clear thesis and argument about the importance of the artifact and analyze it using the selected method at the level of a competitive conference submission.
Discussion Posts and Participation................................................................. 100 points

During the “methods” weeks (7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13), students will write discussion posts applying that week’s method to an artifact of their choice.

Students are expected to attend every class. Missing class will affect a student’s ability to succeed in the course. I expect students to not only be present, but also actively listening, asking questions, responding to peers, and making comments. This is a graduate level course that requires active and critical engagement in the content, so students are expected to participate every class session.

Students are expected to come to class with notes from the readings including:

- The thesis statement/s of each reading
- A quotation from each reading that is particularly interesting, thought-provoking, helpful, etc.
- A question that you have about the reading to understand the reading better

Grading scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82-80</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>62-60</td>
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Assignment criteria

All assignments are due by 11:59pm on the due date unless otherwise noted. All assignments should be submitted electronically to Canvas. Without a pre-arranged exception, no late assignments will be accepted. All assignments have detailed rubrics—contact your professor with questions and clarifications. Students should follow a consistent citation style of their choice when citing materials.

Course expectations

In taking this class, we all commit to communicating clearly and promptly, making the most of our class time, and putting in effort outside of the classroom. I welcome visits to my office hours to clarify rubrics, expand on course concepts, brainstorm paper topics, or other course-related questions/issues. Please include the following in email subject lines, so I can address questions promptly: student’s last name and course number and the topic of the email (example: LastName711_Topic). Give your professor 24 hours to respond to emails. If you do not receive a response after 24 hours, please email a reminder.
Course materials

All readings listed below should be completed prior to that day’s class. It is required that students purchase/otherwise locate the follow text. All other course readings will be posted to Canvas. Please read course readings in the order they are listed in the syllabus to aid our course discussions.


Students wanting a crash course in rhetorical criticism may also consider purchasing Sonja Foss’s Rhetorical Criticism textbook, which is often assigned at the undergraduate level. ISBN: 1-57766-318-7

University policies

For a full list of UNLV policies updated by term please click here. Specific policies are also noted below.

Academic Misconduct—Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility, and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling at UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution. An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the Student Academic Misconduct Policy (approved December 9, 2005) located at: https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct.

Copyright—The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you, nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional information can be found at: http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright.

Disability Resource Center (DRC)—The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, http://drc.unlv.edu/, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.
Final Examinations—The University requires that final exams given at the end of a course occur at the time and on the day specified in the final exam schedule. See the schedule at: http://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars.

Incomplete Grades—The grade of I—Incomplete—can be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session but for reason(s) beyond the student’s control, and acceptable to the instructor, cannot complete the last part of the course, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. The incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester for undergraduate courses. Graduate students receiving “I” grades in 500-, 600-, or 700-level courses have up to one calendar year to complete the work, at the discretion of the instructor. If course requirements are not completed within the time indicated, a grade of F will be recorded and the GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete do not register for the course but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the I grade.

Library Resources—Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. Subject librarians for various classes can be found here: https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject. UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students’ access to information. Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and for successful post-college life. Access library resources and ask questions at https://www.library.unlv.edu/.

Rebelmail—By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students’ Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students’ e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu. Emailing within WebCampus is acceptable.

Religious Holidays Policy—Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor within the first 14 calendar days of the course for fall and spring courses (excepting modular courses), or within the first 7 calendar days of the course for summer and modular courses, of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit: http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531.

Transparency in Learning and Teaching—The University encourages application of the transparency method of constructing assignments for student success. Please see these two links for further information: https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning   https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency

Tutoring and Coaching—The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring, academic success coaching and other academic assistance for all UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, visit http://www.unlv.edu/asc or call 702-895-3177. The ASC building is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Academic success coaching is located on the second floor of SSC A (ASC Coaching Spot). Drop-in tutoring is located on the second floor of the Lied Library and College of Engineering TBE second floor.
**UNLV Writing Center**—One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702-895-3908. The student's Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: [http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/](http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/).

It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and follow university policies at all times. Students are responsible for making up missed assignments if adding late. Refer to your professor or the link below if you have any questions or need clarification on a policy: [http://www.unlv.edu/policies](http://www.unlv.edu/policies)
# Sample Course Schedule

Your Professor reserves the right to change readings, due dates, and assignments as necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Important Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1 (Weeks 1-6): What is Rhetorical Criticism?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1 – Martin Luther King Day (no class 1/20)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2 – Course Introduction and Overview</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Read through the course syllabus and contact your professor with questions. What do you know about rhetoric and what do you need clarification on?</td>
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This week introduces the foundational concepts of rhetorical criticism, key vocabulary, and overarching thoughts about rhetoric as a method and criticism as a part of the communication discipline.

1/27: [Canvas] “Key vocabulary” document
[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 30] Zarefsky, Knowledge claims in rhetorical criticism

| Week 3 – Polysemous Texts | | |

This week provides examples of 3 different criticisms of the same text to show both the polysemy of texts and the variety of ways criticism is performed.

2/3: [Canvas] Barack Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech, March 18, 2008: Text [Link], Video [Link].
### Week 4 – Scope and Artifact

This week addresses the artifacts/texts of rhetorical criticism as objects to be analyzed and the scope of criticism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
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| 2/10 | [Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 15] McGee, Text, context, and the fragmentation of contemporary culture, 227-238  
[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 42] Ceccarelli, Polysemy: Multiple meanings in rhetorical criticism, 660-678  
| 2/24 | [Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 46] Lake, Enacting red power, 731-745  
[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 5] Klumpp & Hollihan, Rhetorical criticism as moral action, 94-105  

**Assignment:** Article Anatomy due in class on 2/10.

### Week 5 – President’s Day (no class 2/17)

### Week 6 – Critic and Purpose

This week focuses on the critic performing criticism, the “bias” present in all evaluation, and to what purpose we perform rhetorical criticism.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
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| 2/24 | [Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 46] Lake, Enacting red power, 731-745  
[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 5] Klumpp & Hollihan, Rhetorical criticism as moral action, 94-105  

**Assignment:** Artifact approval due by class on 2/24.

### Unit 2 (Weeks 7-13): Methods of Rhetorical Criticism

### Week 7 – Close Reading and the Origins of Rhetorical Criticism

This week examines a rhetorical method borrowing from Ancient Greek and Roman persuasive strategies. Neo-Aristotelianism focuses on ethos, pathos, logos, Cicero’s canons, et al.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
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</table>
[Canvas] Hill & Campbell exchange |
and analyzing speech effectiveness.  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58(4), 373.</th>
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**Week 8 – Genre Criticism**

This week expands on genre from Neo-Aristotelianism into a full-fledged method. Genre criticism involves defining characteristics associated with patterned situations and evaluating why changes/adaptations are made to speech expectations.

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<tr>
<td>[Ott &amp; Dickinson, Ch. 43] Watts and Orbe, The spectacular consumption of ‘truth” African American culture, 679-694</td>
</tr>
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**Week 9 – Spring Break (no class 3/16)**

**Week 10 – Dramatism**

Dramatic criticism uses the works of Kenneth Burke as a springboard for understanding the dramatic, narrative elements within events. Continuing narrative’s work on frames and adding the guilt-redemption cycle, and the pentad, we examine

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3/23: [Canvas] Burke’s greatest hits; collection of readings from A grammar of motives, A rhetoric of motives, and Language as symbolic action</th>
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the ways dramas unfold and the distribution of blame and responsibility in artifacts.


### Week 11 – Ideological Criticism

This week focuses on how worldviews and ideas are apparent in language. We analyze how ideologies change over time and chart important moments/rhetorical shifts in history.


[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 28] Charland, Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the *Peuple Québécois*, 432-447

### Week 12 – Feminist Criticism

This week focuses on how gender, power, and agency influence rhetorical criticism. Taking power structures and hegemonies into consideration can influence conclusions drawn from artifacts.


[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 47] Flores, Creating discursive spaces, 746-760


**Assignment:** Rhetorical methods paper due on 4/10.

### Week 13 – Visual and Material Criticism

This week focuses on tools for analyzing and criticizing non-linguistic, visual and material texts. This week analyzes the “material turn” and provides tools for


[Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 22] Dickinson, Ott, and
| analyzing material objects, places, and spaces. | Aoki, Spaces of remembering and forgetting, 338-353  
| | [Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 50] Blair, Reflections on criticism and bodies, 798-814 |

**Unit 3 (Week 14-16): Reflections on Rhetorical Criticism**

**Week 14 – Criticizing Criticism**

This week turns our analytical toolbox towards the process of criticism itself. We address the process of understanding rhetoric, understanding who criticism serves, and how criticism contributes to/challenges power structures.

| | [Ott & Dickinson, Ch. 33] Ono & Sloop, The critique of vernacular discourse, 499-523  

**Week 15 – Closing Thoughts on Rhetorical Criticism**

This week we will read articles to prepare us to write drafts of our final paper and about the future of rhetorical criticism. We will also give brief presentations about our final papers for feedback.

| 4/27: Final paper presentations  

**Assignment:** First draft of final paper due 5/1.
This week we will wrap-up class by workshopping our final papers.

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<tr>
<th>5/4: Final paper peer review session</th>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Bring 2 hard copies of your peer review documents to class.</td>
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**Final paper due Wednesday, 5/13 by 11:59pm to Canvas and via email**