

English 581 “History of Rhetoric”--John R. Edlund

Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the art of finding the available means of persuasion.” Plato, on the other hand, has Socrates say that Rhetoric is “an art which leads the soul by means of words,” implying that a responsible rhetor leads the soul to the truth. This conflict between persuasion to belief and a pedagogy of true knowledge continues throughout the history of rhetoric. In this course you will build a solid foundation in Classical rhetoric by reading selections from Gorgias, Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. We will apply Classical techniques to modern texts and modern classrooms, so that students will become fluent in using these techniques to analyze op-ed pieces, political speeches, campaign materials, and literary works. Some of the handouts will move easily from the seminar room to the high school classroom. In the latter part of the course we will explore how Classical rhetoric evolved to accommodate such influences as Christianity, Cartesian philosophy, and natural science, focusing on the influence such changes had on current practice in composition classrooms. Perhaps we will even discover true knowledge. Requirements will include a classroom presentation on a relevant article, a seminar paper, and a final exam.