

English 581

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English 581: History of Rhetoric

When most people hear the word “rhetoric,” they usually know it only as pejorative term, as in “That’s just empty rhetoric!” Others with a little more experience might think that “rhetoric” is just a series of dry old rules about formulating speeches. Actually, the history of rhetoric is a history of conflict and differing points of view. When the ancient Greeks realized that in the assembly and the law courts a citizen could move others to action, change opinions, and defend his (unfortunately not “or her”) own interests merely through the power of language, it led to many important questions. Could such persuasive eloquence be taught? If so, how? Was it ethical to teach an art that could be used to deceive? Who could or should learn this art? As we shall see as we progress through this course, these questions, although they have been answered in many different ways through the centuries, persist to this day. We will explore the conflicts between sophists and philosophers, between Plato and Aristotle, between ancient and modern points of view, and between male-dominated and feminist views of rhetoric, all with an eye toward practical application in the classroom. As potential writing teachers, you are on the verge of inheriting both the insights and the conflicts of this rich tradition.

Required Texts:

Bizzell, Patricia. and Bruce Herzberg, Eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Conley, Thomas. M. *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Connors, Robert J., Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford, eds. *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1984.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Jarratt, Susan C. *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1991.

Recommended Texts:

Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George Kennedy. New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1991.

(This translation is more readable than that in the Bizzell and Herzberg, and the notes and other apparatus are very useful.)

Murphy, James, et al. *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*. 3rd ed. Mahwah: Hermagoras Press, 2003.

(This is sort of a sophisticated “Cliff’s Notes” of Classical Rhetoric. It will clarify and solidify your knowledge, and will come in very handy when you are studying for the comprehensive exam.)

The Bizzell and Hertzberg collection, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, is expensive (about \$86) but is really the only book of its kind available for use. In addition to our history of rhetoric course, it will be used in the modern rhetoric course, and for the comprehensive exams, so it will serve multiple purposes in the program. All of our primary texts will come from this book. *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, by Thomas Conley, is a very readable and intelligent overview of the rhetorical history, with very well-chosen examples that serve to characterize authors and increase an understanding of their significance. *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* provides bridges and connections between classical rhetoric and composition theory. It has been out quite a while now, but the fact that it is still in print demonstrates its value. Susan Jarratt’s *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, argues that Plato and Aristotle instigated a highly successful smear campaign against the sophists, and that we should reconsider them for our own time. From *Dissemination* we will read the long essay “Plato’s Pharmakon,” which provides both a deconstructive reading of the *Phaedrus*, and a good introduction to Derrida’s method of analysis, connecting classical rhetoric and postmodern theory.

The Course Plan:

We will spend the first three weeks reading Greek rhetoric, followed by a week and a half of contrary perspectives found in Jarratt and in Derrida. Then we will take up Roman and Medieval rhetoric. Our exploration of later materials will be necessarily shallow and quick, but we will also touch upon Renaissance and Eighteenth century authors.

This course will be “web-enabled” in that it will have a Blackboard site attached to it. All handouts, discussion questions, and other course materials will be distributed through the Blackboard site, so it will be important to check it a couple of times a week. Each student is also required to use the discussion boards to post a weekly response to the readings and is encouraged to engage in online discussion of other students’ responses.

Requirements:

| Assignments | Percentage of Grade |
|-------------|---------------------|
|-------------|---------------------|

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| --In-class presentation of an article from <i>Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse</i> or another source. (last three weeks) | 20% |
| --Online participation in discussion boards and group projects. | 15% |
| --Classroom participation and quizzes. | 15% |
| --Take home final on major themes from the reading. (This is good preparation for the comprehensive exam.) | 25% |
| --Final paper | 25% |

Reading and discussion question for each work will be posted to the Blackboard site. In general, it is best to download these before starting to read the work, so that the questions can serve as a focusing device or reading guide. Make notes on the answers to the questions, and bring them to class. If you have questions or comments, post them to the discussion board.

Whatever rhetorician we are studying, the following questions are things to look for:

1. How does this writer define rhetoric?
2. Is rhetoric good, bad, or neutral?
3. Who is the rhetor? What is his or her role in society?
4. Is rhetoric teachable? If so, how?
5. What is the role of talent in producing a good orator?
6. What does the rhetor need to know?
7. What is truth? How is it known? What is knowable and what is not?
8. What is the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy?
9. What is the role of language or style?

The Presentations:

The articles in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* generally raise issues regarding both classical rhetoric and modern teaching practices. Your job is to

- Define the main issue on which the author focuses.
- Provide your classmates with some background on the issue. Why is it important?
- Summarize the main points.
- Evaluate the quality and usefulness of the article.
- Discuss how the issues raised in the article relate to classroom teaching.

The Paper:

The paper should be 15-20 pages, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point type. Sources should be documented in either MLA or APA style. **Whatever topic you choose, your paper should not be a mere summary of the ideas of a given rhetorician or a collection of critical quotations about rhetoric or certain rhetoricians.** There are three possible types of papers:

1. Rhetoric as Pedagogy: An exploration of an application of a practice, a perspective, or a theory from classical rhetoric in the context of classroom teaching today. This could be an analysis and review of a textbook that is based on or utilizes classical techniques such as *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* Edward P.J. Corbett, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* Sharon Crowley, or *Everything's an Argument* by Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz. If you are currently teaching composition, another approach would be to design a lesson or assignment based on a classical theory or practice and do a case study of the results.
2. Rhetoric as Analytical Tool: Using classical rhetoric as a theoretical perspective or analytical framework, write an analysis of a text of some kind. This could be from a political campaign, an advertising campaign, an editorial, an article, a literary work, or other piece of contemporary discourse. Choose the perspective of a particular author, such as Aristotle, Plato or Cicero, to perform the analysis.
3. Rhetoric as Discourse Theory: Choose a problem or issue of theoretical or scholarly interest and explore it in the works of several different rhetoricians or in the earlier and later work of a single figure.

The Final:

The take home final will consist of two or three broad, wide-ranging questions about the nature of classical rhetoric, similar to questions that might appear on the comprehensive M. A. exam. You will choose one of them.

Schedule of Assignments and Readings:

| Dates | Topics, Assignments, and Activities |
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| Wk1 | |
| Mon. 9/25 | Introduction to the course; Rhetoric Timeline; Excerpts from <i>The Clouds</i> by Aristophanes. Who were the sophists and what were they doing? |
| Wed. 9/27 | Gorgias, “Ecomium of Helen” (42-46); Isocrates, (67-79) |
| Wk2 | |
| Mon.10/2 | “Dissoi Logoi” (47-55); Plato, “Gorgias” (80-109); Conley, Chapter 1 |
| Wed.10/4 | Continue Plato, “Gorgias” (109-138); Begin discussing “Phaedrus” (138-47) |
| Wk3 | |
| Mon.10/9 | Continue “Phaedrus” (148-68) |

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| Wed.10/11 | Aristotle's <i>Rhetoric</i> Intro and Book I (169-213); "Three Ways to Persuade" "Rhetorical Analysis Checklist" |
| Wk4 | |
| Mon.10/16 | Aristotle's <i>Rhetoric</i> Book II (213-24); D'Angelo, "The Evolution of the Analytic <i>Topoi</i> ," in <i>Essays on Classical Rhetoric</i> (50-68). |
| Wed.10/18 | Aspasia (56-66); Jarratt, <i>Rereading the Sophists</i> Chapters 1 and 2, (1-61) |
| Wk5 | |
| Mon.10/23 | Jarratt, Chapters 3 and 4 |
| Wed.10/25 | No class. I will be at English Council in San Diego. However, you should be thinking about your paper topic. |
| Wk6 | |
| Mon.10/30 | Derrida "Plato's Pharmacy" (<i>Dissemination</i> 65-171) |
| Wed.11/1 | Lauer, "Issues in Rhetorical Invention" in <i>Essays on Classical Rhetoric</i> (127-139); Handout: "Stasis Theory: Finding Common Ground and Asking Pertinent Questions." |
| Wk7 | |
| Mon.11/6 | <i>Rhetorica ad Herenium</i> (241-282); Conley, Chapter 2 |
| Wed.11/8 | Cicero, "From <i>De Oratore</i> ." Quintilian (359-400) |
| Wk8 | |
| Mon.11/13 | Quintilian (400-428); Conley Chapter 3. |
| Wed.11/15 | Augustine (481-435); Conley Chapter 4. |
| Wk9 | |
| Mon.11/20 | Ramus; Conley Chapter 5. |
| Wed.11/22 | Campbell |
| Wk10 | |
| Mon.11/27 | Blair, Whately |
| Wed.11/29 | Final wrap-up discussion |
| Final | |