

“Syllabus: Critical Writing and Research” by Ben Kuebrich
Michael Burns, Timothy R. Dougherty, Ben Kuebrich, & Yanira Rodríguez
“Soundwriting and Resistance: Toward a Pedagogy for Liberation”

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

–Martin Luther King Jr.

If you don't do politics, politics does you.

–French Proverb

REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. There is no required textbook for this course¹
2. Reliable access to reading, saving, printing and annotating PDFs/links
3. A notebook and writing utensil

COURSE GOALS AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course is designed to fulfill three outcomes:

1. Think with writing: use composing processes and tools as a means to discover ideas, engage deeply with questions, reconsider concepts and beliefs, explore problems, and promote local and global change, including but not limited to engaging those questions, problems, and concepts currently of relevance to the academy.
2. Think about writing: Develop metacognitive awareness about writing and rhetoric.
3. Compose writing: Demonstrate genre awareness and rhetorical agility through both producing and problematizing academic and public, dominant and non-dominant, genres, in both written and multimodal forms.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class facilitates your continued growth as a writer, researcher, and critical thinker. By writing, we will not limit ourselves to the five-paragraph essay nor the academic text. This class offers an expansive view of writing. Effective writing in the 21st century includes emails, essays, reports, editorials, text messaging, tweets, podcasts, and video. We will analyze and write in several genres throughout the course.

While this class will not deal solely with academic writing, you will do the work of the intellectual in every assignment and class: rethinking commonplace assumptions, accounting for your own perspective, and staying curious and open-minded. These actions are foundational to learning to think critically and analytically.

This class will be broadly focused around political rhetoric, starting with the ongoing presidential primaries. We will also expand the notion of “political” beyond electoral politics. The term

¹ An idea for the money you save: invest in a printer so you no longer need to wait in line at the library.

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

“political” will deal with the functioning of both formal and informal decision-makers and the creation and administration of policy. Politics is also the disruption, refusal, and challenge to the function of those who have formal and informal decision-making power in a society.

As we expand the notion of political rhetoric, we come to see how graffiti on a subway is politics. War is obviously politics. Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” is politics. Any style of dress is politics. So-called neutrality, or being “just” normal, is especially politics. As Dr. King makes clear above, silence and inaction is complicity with the world as it is. As Paulo Freire writes, “Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

COURSE OUTLINE & MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction (Week 1)

Defining Political Rhetoric and Research

We start by defining the terms of the class, getting to know one another, and stretching our minds and souls for the work ahead.

Readings:

“The Geography of Sorrow: Francis Weller On Navigating Our Losses” *Sun Magazine*

“The Untold Story of Guns” *On The Media*

Unit One (Weeks 2-7)

Adding Depth to the Debate: The Research Essay

We start analyzing rhetoric in the ongoing presidential primary season. Taking several important issues and themes as examples, we will start to learn the role of research in adding depth and substance to debates that are often superficial. In the process, we reveal the work of political rhetoric to inform, misinform, persuade, attack, and inspire. Work in this unit includes a mini-presentation, an essay proposal, an annotated bibliography, peer review with a rough draft, and a final research essay.

Readings:

Chapter One of Farhad Manjoo's *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society*.

Jonathan Haidt “The Moral Mind” *TED*

Intro and Chapter One of Ian Haney Lopez’s *Dogwhistle Politics*

George Wallace “Segregation Now”

Matt Taibbi “How America Made Donald Trump Unstoppable” *Rolling Stone*

Unit Two (Weeks 8-10)

Raising Your Voice: The Editorial

You continue your work with various political issues and themes by advocating for action, critiquing, adding depth, or offering another perspective into the public sphere of political debate. Here you add not your opinion but your informed perspective to educate and/or agitate. Work for this unit

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

includes watching and analyzing a documentary from a list of choices, a topic proposal, rough draft and peer review, and final editorial.

Readings:

Editorial Board “The Trump Campaign Gives License to Violence” *New York Times*

Ta-Nehisi Coates “The Good, Racist People” *New York Times*

Deborah Tannen “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Disliking Hillary Clinton” *Time*

Andrew Rosenthal “How To Write An Editorial” *New York Times*

Andrew Rosenthal “Beyoncé’s Halftime Show Inspires Ridiculous Criticism” *New York Times*

“Language Matters” *Stall Seat Journal*

Unit Three (Weeks 11-13)

Making Noise: The Podcast

The idea of “making noise” in this unit refers to political disruption/interruption through music. We will analyze the ways that artists interrupt and disrupt political debate, policy, powerful interests, and the enforcement of laws through their music. You will collaborate in groups of 2-3 to create a podcast that describes, analyzes, and demonstrates this disruption. You will have guidance but also creative license in how you use the song to comment on contemporary issues.

Readings:

“Rough Theses on To Pimp A Butterfly” *Red Wedge*

“The Political Folk Song of the Year” *NPR*

Alynda Segarra “Fall in Love With Justice”

Unit Four (Week 14)

Researching, Writing, and Rhetoric: The Manifesto

Throughout the course you will be taking notes and informally reflecting on your writing, your research, and your use of rhetorical concepts. During week 14, you will produce a manifesto—a genre open to your own creative organization and style—to reflect on the work you produced in the course.

CLASS WORK

Participation

Plan to attend each class and to participate meaningfully. This means being prepared, talking regularly with substance, and asking questions. I regularly note who is participating meaningfully in my classes and who is not. By the end of the class, I will be able to see who is in my A range for participation, who is in my B range, and who is in my C range.

In active, energetic classes most of my students get As. In classes with a lot of silence and low energy, most of my students will get Cs in this category. Even when we are tired, we can always dig deep to make our own energy and let it feed and reverberate with the class. Help create the type of energized and participatory class we all love.

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

Short Writing Assignments

About once a week, you will come to class and turn in a short writing assignment, or do a short writing assignment during class. These assignments serve two functions. First, the more you write the better you become at it. Second, writing about a reading helps you to engage deeper with it, remember key points, and to keep you prepared and ready for class. I assess these writing assignments with two marks: a plus for satisfactory work (full credit) or a minus for unsatisfactory work (half credit).

Mini Presentation

During the first unit of the class, groups of 4-5 will present on a text. This just requires a little extra energy in order to add more knowledge to the class discussion.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Adding Depth to the Debate: The Research Essay²	25%
Raising Your Voice: The Editorial³	15%
Making Noise: The Podcast⁴	15%
Researching, Writing, and Rhetoric: The Manifesto	10%
Participation	15%
Short Writing Assignments	15%
Mini Presentation	5%

Grading in this course is as follows:

A: excellent work that abundantly meets assignment expectations

B: good work that meets expectations

C: satisfactory work that generally satisfies the assignment but with common and significant problems

D: unsatisfactory work that exhibits very significant problems

F: failing work that does not meet university-level requirements

Grades are determined by following the University's 100-point scale:

A 93-100, **A-** 90-92, **B+** 87-89, **B** 83-86, **B-** 80-82, **C+** 77-79, **C** 73-76, **C-** 70-72, **D+** 67-69,

D 63-66, **D-** 60-62, **F** 0-59.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Assignments

Graded assignments are due at 11:59 pm on the day I ask for them. Email ahead of time for extensions, which I will grant depending on circumstance and with appropriate penalties.

² Includes your research question, annotated bibliography, topic proposal, rough draft, and final draft.

³ Includes your topic proposal, rough draft, and final draft.

⁴ Includes your song analysis, rough edit, and final edit.

Critical Writing and Research *Political Rhetoric*

Attendance

I keep attendance records daily and expect you to show up in class, on time, and prepared for class. Regular attendance will give you the best chance at succeeding in the class, so I make these rules to help keep you motivated to attend:

- 1) You may miss two classes without penalty. These are for when you are sick, have a family emergency, or really need a day to renew your spirit and energy. You don't have to write me about these two days, especially not to ask if you "missed anything important." You can assume that in every class we will be doing something important and you should rely on D2L to keep you on track and continue doing coursework. Missing class is not an excuse for getting behind and I am not allowed the time to individually catch each student up – it will have to be your responsibility.
- 2) If you miss more than two classes, your grade will be affected in the following ways:
 - 3 absences -1% final grade
 - 4 absences -2% final grade
 - 5 absences -4% final grade
 - 6 absences -6% final grade
 - 7 absences -8% final grade
 - 8 absences = inability to pass course
- 3) Being late and/or leaving early twice is equal to one absence.

Email Policy

It is expected that faculty, staff, and students activate and maintain regular access to University provided e-mail accounts. Official university communications, including those from your instructor, will be sent through your university e-mail account. You are responsible for accessing that mail to be sure to obtain official University communications. Failure to access will not exempt individuals from the responsibilities associated with this course.

What's more, many of the activities and assignments in this course will include or require the use of email and D2L. With the increased volume of emails and electronic submissions, I must ask that you abide by the following policies to ensure clear communication. Beyond facilitating communication, this will also teach you about some of the rhetorical demands of this ubiquitous genre of electronic communication. You must remember that emails are public discourse with audiences, contexts, and genre-specific challenges.

Americans With Disabilities Act

If you have a disability that requires accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please present your letter of accommodations and meet with me as soon as possible so that I can support your success in an informed manner. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively. If you would like to know more about West Chester University's Services for Students with Disabilities(OSSD), please contact the OSSD which is located at 223 Lawrence Center. The OSSD hours of Operation are Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Their phone number is 610-436-2564, their fax number is 610-436-2600, their email address is ossd@wcupa.edu, and their website is at www.wcupa.edu/ussss/ossd.

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

Office Hours

Office hours facilitate individual and small group instruction and are available as a place to ask questions and check in about your work in the class. In addition to the times listed at the top of the syllabus, you may also set up an appointment by email. I will have you schedule times to meet with small groups in office hours often.

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center, located in 214 Lawrence Center, is a resource for writers at all levels and all stages of the writing process. Visit their site to view their hours, and make an appointment online: www.wcupa.edu/writingcenter.

Additional Resources

For questions regarding Academic Dishonesty, the No Grade Policy, Sexual Harassment, or the Student Code of Conduct, students are encouraged to refer to their major department's handbook, the Undergraduate/Graduate Course Catalogue, the Ram's Eye View, or the University Web Site. Please understand that improper conduct in any of these areas will not be tolerated and may result in immediate ejection from the class.

Safe Environments

WCU Faculty, Staff, and Students are committed to creating a community free from interpersonal violence, including sexual assault, partner violence, and stalking, in which all members feel safe and respected. Furthermore, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments prohibits sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, and sexual coercion at all public and private schools which receive Federal funds.

I believe each student deserves a safe environment to pursue an education and I understand the devastating impact forms of power-based personal violence (i.e. sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking) may have. I am dedicated to contributing to a safe campus and I believe that each of us has a personal responsibility to reject violence or intimidation of any kind.

If you or someone you know has experienced stalking, partner violence or sexual assault, please know, you are not alone. You can find confidential resources at the following:

- **Sexual Misconduct Advocate:** Housed in the Office of Wellness Promotion, the Advocate is a confidential resource for those who have experienced sexual violence, harassment, intimate partner violence and stalking. *Sherry Mendez: 610-436-0732 | smendez@wcupa.edu Commonwealth Hall Room 12. Hours: Mon-Fri 8a.m.-3:30p.m.*
- **Counseling Center:** The Counseling Center offers free confidential individual and group counseling and support. *610-436-2301 | Commonwealth Hall—Lower Level to schedule an appointment. Hours: Monday through Friday 8:a.m.-4:30 p.m.*
- **Student Health Services:** The Health Centers offers non-emergency medical care for injuries and follow-up appointments. *(610) 436-2509 | Commonwealth Hall—Lower Level. Hours: Monday-Friday, 8a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday 10a.m.-6p.m.*

Critical Writing and Research

Political Rhetoric

- **Women's Center:** The Women's Center is a confidential resource offering assistance to survivors, friends, and family members of a recent or past assault. [\(610\) 436-2122](tel:6104362122) | *Lawrence Room 220. Hours: 8:00-4:00pm*
- **Crime and Victim's Center of Chester County:** 24-hour hotline for sexual assault and rape in Chester County: 610-692-RAPE (7273).

Please know that all faculty on campus are mandatory reporters. If you disclose an experience of sexual misconduct to me outside of a classroom discussion or an assignment, please be aware that I must report it.

Filing a sexual misconduct report does not mean you will have to get involved with the investigation or go to court. Survivors under the influence of drugs or alcohol WILL NOT face disciplinary charges from WCU. Learn more at: www.wcupa.edu/admin/social.equity/sexualmisconduct/sexualMisconductReport.asp.

APSCUF

I am a member of APSCUF, the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties. We uphold the highest standards of teaching, scholarly inquiry, and service. We are an organization that is committed to promoting excellence in all that we do to ensure that our students receive the best education. Ask me for more information on what APSCUF does for students, and see www.apscuf.org or www.facebook.com/APSCUF.