

English 507 (Section 501)
Rhetoric and Postmodernity
Spring 2007

Surely you must have realized, if only by the way I conduct them, that these sessions are not analogous to so-called scientific meetings. It is in this sense that I ask you to take careful note of the following, that in these open sessions, you aren't by any means on display, despite the fact that we have outside guests, sympathizers and others. You mustn't try to say elegant things, aimed at putting you in the limelight and increasing the esteem in which you are already held. You are here to be receptive to things you haven't as yet seen, and which are in principle unexpected. So, why not make the most of this opportunity by raising questions at the deepest level you can, even if that comes out in a way that is a bit hesitant, vague, even baroque.

--Jacques Lacan, *Seminars (III "The Symbolic Universe")*

W: 6:00-8:30
HUMB 264

Dr. Moira Amado Miller
University of South Alabama
Office: HUMB 272
Office Phone: 460-7936
Main English Office (message) – 460-6146
Email: amadomiller@usouthal.edu
Mailbox: HUMB 240 (English office)

Office Hours: T/R 11:00 – 2:00. I set aside these office hours for you – please feel free to drop by. Alternately, you may wish to make an appointment at another mutually convenient time. It's probably always best to let me know you'd like to see me in order to avoid unforeseen scheduling conflicts.

Texts: Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, eds. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962.
Faigley, Lester. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 1992.
Gilyard, Keith. *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1999.
Goodman, Russell B., ed. *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 10. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
Newmeyer, Frederick J. *The Politics of Linguistics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1993.

NOTE: Students will also occasionally be responsible for journal articles and/or book chapters. Supplemental readings will be provided as handouts or made available through electronic reserve.

Course Goals: This course is intended to investigate the various sites of rhetorical study and the ways, means, and justifications for the deployment of rhetorical tools since the historical, theoretic, and methodological rupture we can think of as "the rhetorical turn." Students will examine rhetorical theory and methodology as a way to examine texts at sites of both production and reception. This course is designed to introduce students to the field of "rhetoric and composition" as an academic discipline, and to investigate what it means to apply rhetorical theory to ethical and scholarly problems that are defined by

questions of legitimacy, power, identity, and the nature of knowledge itself. Students will investigate the ideas of “language games,” narrative, and discourse through various approaches which highlight the intertextuality and contingency of knowledge. *Disciplinary approaches*, for instance, would include rhetoric and philosophy, rhetoric and anthropology, rhetoric and communication studies, literature and rhetoric. *Methodological approaches* include rhetoric and composition, the rhetoric of science, comparative rhetorics and sociolinguistics. *Intention-based or civic approaches* are cultural critique, argument theory, ethics, feminism, postcolonial theory, and discourse theory.

Course Description:

EH507, Rhetoric and Postmodernity, is a focused and purposeful exploration of the field of rhetoric study as it has been defined by postmodern theory and within the cultural milieu Lyotard understands as a “condition” characterized by a persistent opposition to universals, meta-narratives (the progress of history, the preeminence of science, the possibility of absolute freedom), and generalities. The condition of postmodernity, which Frederic Jameson envisions as “late capitalism,” functions by reference to power and identity and concerns itself with changes to systems and institutions. This course should serve specifically to offer graduate students entrée into contemporary rhetorical study, to the study, that is, as both Wittgenstein and Lyotard would say, of “language games” as an integral part of the research agendas and professional identities that constitute departments of English. This newly proposed course is designed to provide the time and space for such exploration.

The course will offer a focused examination of the work of rhetoric and rhetoricians in departments of English in the contemporary University. Our examination of postmodern rhetoric study will focus especially on the ways it intersects with postmodern theories of identity: feminist theory, postcolonial theory, sociolinguistics, discourse studies, queer theory, gender studies, deconstruction, and comparative studies. As is the case with all studies of rhetoric, the course content will also demonstrate the importance of critical textual study across the disciplines.

Organization of the Course: The course will be run as a seminar, with significant readings due for discussion at each class meeting. Our central work will be discussion of assigned readings. The skeleton schedule at the end of this syllabus should guide your reading. The main texts may be supplemented by additional readings that I either hand out in class or post to a Web site, though supplemental material will be kept to a minimum. In addition, you will be expected 1) write weekly reading responses, 2) participate fully in in-class written work and classroom projects, 3) submit an annotated bibliography *and* a seminar paper for formal evaluation, 4) deliver a short presentation about your bibliographic work, and 5) submit a final portfolio.

Major Assignments & Grading Criteria: The *Reading Responses* are cumulative and support and extend the work of the classroom itself. The *Annotated Bibliography* should cover a major theoretical contribution or a key program or scholar. Students will provide this bibliographic information and a set of discussion questions (with copies for the class) in a short *Presentation*. Students must turn in a written proposal for the annotated bibliography. Seminar papers will be due on the last day of class; topics for seminar papers should also be reviewed in discussion with me. Retain all your written work, take notes, and make other necessary preparation toward the submission of a *Portfolio* during finals week. Note that the portfolio will include a short synthesis essay as an introduction to the portfolio.

Insofar as each of these assignments should be a natural outcome of your thinking about our readings and classroom work, they should not be visualized as separate and discrete assignments. The sequence has been designed in the hope that you will take the opportunity to link tasks, to build ideas, and to create something bigger than the sum of its parts by the end of the class.

Grades will be computed using the following values:

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- Reading Responses: 20%
- Annotated Bibliography and Discussion: 20%
- Seminar Paper: 30%
- Portfolio: 20%

If at any time during the semester you are concerned with the letter grade you are receiving in this course, please consult with me and I'll provide you an advisory grade based on your performance to date.

I practice a combination of “contract” and “holistic” grading, along with a certain amount of traditional percentage grading. The “contract” part of the evaluation is your compliance with this syllabus. That is, you must attend class, read the material, contribute to class discussion, and turn in all assignments in order to pass the class. The reading responses, presentation, and the portfolio will be graded holistically. The annotated bibliography and seminar paper will be given A-F letter-grades.

If at any time during the semester you are concerned with the letter grade you are receiving in this course, please consult with me and I'll provide you an advisory grade based on your performance to date.

Manuscript Presentation: Scholars in English studies prepare their work in accordance with the *MLA Style Guide*, so that's the style we'll be adhering to in this course.

All work submitted to me for evaluation must be handed in a file folder or two-pocket folder. When turning in a larger essay-type assignment your folder should include drafts, notes, copies of research sources, and other relevant source materials.

Participation: In a Nutshell—*You must come to class and you must participate in class discussion. If you don't, you can't pass the course.*

It is absolutely essential that you come to each class meeting prepared. Your enthusiasm for contributing to class discussions should be surpassed only by demonstrations of actual familiarity with the assigned readings.

It's no coincidence, nor personal preference on the part of the instructor/evaluator that folks who participate during class time tend to get better grades.

Attendance: Note that the University's general attendance policy does not recognize any absences as “excused” except for those that are a result of the student being removed from class for attending a university-authorized off-campus function. These “excusable” functions must be cleared by the sponsoring faculty member through the Office of Academic Affairs.

My attendance policy is as follows: You are granted one absences without it counting against your grade. You do not owe me *any explanation* whatsoever an absence; it's not my job to determine whether your life circumstances constitute “good reasons” or not. Beyond the one absence (and those covered by permission from the Office of Academic Affairs), your grade will suffer.

If for any reason you miss more than two weeks of class meetings, your grade will be reduced by ½ a letter grade; three absences will reduce your grade a full letter. Four or more weeks of absences may constitute failure of the course. We meet exactly 15 times during the course of the semester; one simply cannot pass a discussion-based seminar having missed more than ¼ of the semester. Even students who excel in all other areas are subject to this policy.

Please don't expect me or anyone else to fill you in on a missed class during class time or over email.

Please advise me in writing during the first two weeks of the course if you will be missing class in deference to religious obligations.

Conferences: I encourage you to make appointment/s for at least one individual conference at or before mid-term. Mandatory individual conferences will be scheduled during final's week.

Academic Misconduct / Plagiarism: Issues of Academic Misconduct will be handled according to the University's policy as described by the Student Academic Conduct Policy. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, submitting someone else's work as your own, failing to give appropriate credit to all sources used in your work, submitting a paper of your own for credit in more than one course without the prior consent of both instructors, or in any way distributing drafts of a class member's work without the permission of the author. I want to read only your work.

Listserv/Web forum: Each student will join the *Writing Program Administrators* Listserv for the duration of this course. The WPA-L is an electronic forum for professionals and students involved in writing program administration at universities and colleges worldwide. We will join this forum as listening guests in order to understand more fully the history and theory of rhetoric as it has evolved in the modern university, and to get a peek at the challenges, research agendas, and program descriptions and initiatives of academics in Rhetoric and Composition today. Please go to the WPA-L page on *The Council of Writing Program Administrators* Web site and follow the directions there to join the WPA-L. This URL will get you there: <http://wpacouncil.org/wpa-l>

Our class may have its own online discussion list or Web forum. Should we communicate in an electronic forum, it would serve as a way of continuing our class discussions, and it could also be used to post messages of class-wide interest. Because such a space would serve as an extension of the classroom, rules of respectful interaction would apply there as they do in the physical classroom.

Students with Disabilities: If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to self identify. You can ascertain the steps involved in documenting a disability by contacting the Office of Special Student Services and by providing the required documentation to that office. Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. I'm glad to help you in any way I can with that process. You should also call the OSSS if you have general questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The phone numbers for the OSSS are 460-7212/7213. If you have a condition which may affect your ability to exit safely from the premises in an emergency or which may cause an emergency during class, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with me and/or the OSSS.

And, Finally: You are responsible for abiding by the terms set forth in this Policy Statement and any subsequent additions and amendments. Consider it a contract. It is, therefore, to your distinct advantage to fully comprehend this and other documents. To this end, if anything about course policies, procedures, and/or scheduling seems fuzzy, or disturbing, or confusing, please ask me to clarify.

Week 13

4 April

Faigley

Week 14

11 April

Goodman

SEMINAR PAPERS DUE

Week 15

18 April

Goodman

Week 16

25 April

Goodman

PORTFOLIOS DUE

27 April: Last Day of Classes

30 April – 3 May (Monday – Thursday)

Final Exams Week:

SCHEDULE FINAL CONFERENCE FOR THIS WEEK

5 May (Saturday)

Commencement

7 May

Final Grade Web Entry due by 10:00a