Senior Seminar: 
Rhetoric and Culture

COMM 4300, Section 1
Fall, 2013

T/Th 11-12:15
Hellem 211

Professor Peter Simonson
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Hellem 95, 303-492-0718

Office Hours: T: 10-10:55/Th 4:30-5:30 and by appt.

Course Description

*Rhetoric and Culture* is a senior seminar designed to help you analyze ways that our worlds are created, reproduced, and altered through communication. More specifically, we will draw upon rhetoric as a conceptual framework for understanding how cultural meanings and practices are enacted on an everyday basis. The first third of the semester will be devoted to equipping you with theoretical resources for analyzing relationships between rhetoric and culture—the first understood as communicative address, the second as the symbolic meanings and material practices that constitute a collective way of life. We will examine perspectives informed by evolutionary biology, dramatism, critical cultural studies, anthropology, and affect theory. After developing that theoretical base, we will turn to empirical studies from a variety of national contexts that explore social media and a range of other cultural phenomena, including diaries, public images of President Obama, medicine and public health, and the 9/11 attacks. We will conclude the semester by exploring the affective *feel* of everyday life and ways that it shapes the rhetorical construction of culture. Learning in this course is cumulative, meaning you need to read and develop basic mastery of all the materials. Emphasis is placed on cultivating students’ abilities to use theoretical insights to reflect intelligently upon their own lives and the worlds beyond them.

Required Books and Other Readings


D2L Access at [https://learn.colorado.edu](https://learn.colorado.edu) for PDF versions of articles.
Expectations and Evaluations

Senior seminars are unique courses. Small, intensive capstones, they operate at the highest intellectual levels of the undergraduate curriculum. For those considering graduate school, a senior seminar is an excellent indicator of your interest and aptitude for advanced scholarly work. For those pursuing the whole range of other paths, the senior seminar is a chance to do the best thinking and academic work of your undergraduate careers. Some of the readings are hard. There will be things you don’t immediately understand. That’s part of the process. Bring your questions, discussion topics, curiosity, and overall engagement. Aim to do your very best in terms of preparation, participation, and intellectual production.

To those ends, these are the basic expectations for the class:

- **Come prepared every class period.** You may take one “Pass” over the course of the semester. Use it well. I will expect you to prepare and participate fully every other time.
- **Reading is not optional. You have to do it—carefully—to learn.** We will work closely with the texts. Always bring them to class with you.
- **Discussion—speaking and listening—is central to what we do.** Do it conscientiously and respectfully and we’ll learn a lot together. I will call on people.
- **Learning is cumulative.** Early readings provide tools for interpreting later readings. The course as a whole provides a way of looking at the world. We will cycle through ideas and assignments multiple times. The final exam is cumulative. Stay on top of the material every week.
- **Do not use your electronic devices for anything except looking at the PDF of your reading and taking notes.** This is one of my ‘things.’ Usually I prohibit laptops in the classroom as a way for us to be together, let ideas emerge, and stay focused. Class time is a time for really learning and really being together. I’m experimenting this time by lifting my outright ban. If you’re glued to your device and not with us, I’ll call you out on it. Don’t make me be an angry study hall monitor.

Assignments, Exams, Evaluation

5%   Initial Reading Response:  A 2-3 page paper that responds to prompts I give you about the first readings. Calls for you to engage closely with a difficult text and allows me to give you feedback on the quality of your reading and care with interpreting it. Due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, September 3.

20%  Theory Exam:  Exam on key concepts of the Theory section of the course. Cumulative and challenging. In class, Tuesday, October 8.

20%  Rhetorical Culture Paper:  4-6 page paper that examines one of the empirical studies from the Rhetorical Culture section of the course using concepts drawn from the Theory section. Due into D2L by 11:59 pm on Sunday, November 3.
20% Digital Rhetorical Culture Paper: 5-7 page paper that engages a topic from the Digital Media section of the course, drawing upon ideas from the previous sections. Due into D2L by 11:59 pm on Sunday, November 24.

15% Final Exam: In-class cumulative exam. Short answer and essay format. Tuesday, December 17, 4:30-7:00 p.m.

20% Participation: Coming to class, on time. Showing obvious signs of careful reading. Bringing your readings. Listening and responding to others (not just pushing your own agenda). Displaying respect. Not disappearing into your digital device. Taking notes. Overall helping the class to learn.

I also want to work with a system I have used with success in the past—a kind of two-tiered discussion process. I’ll divide the class into four groups. Each class period, one of the four groups will be designated “primary respondents.” For the first 20 or so minutes, discussion will be limited to the primary respondents and me. This means that primary respondents need to be exceptionally well prepared, since I’ll be asking you very specific questions about what the text says and what it seems to mean. You’ll help us to make sure that we are on the right track the entire class, after I open it up to everyone for the last 40-50 minutes. If you are not a primary respondent, you are still expected to read and participate in the discussion. Your Participation Grade for the class will be determined by your work as both a primary and a secondary respondent.

**Course Schedule**

Identified readings should be completed before that class period

**Theories of Rhetoric and Culture**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>Overview &amp; Introductions</th>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evolutionary Biology I: George Kennedy, “A Hoot in the Dark”</td>
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<td>Sept</td>
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<td>Evolutionary Biology II: Jeanne Fahnestock, “The Rhetorical Arts of Cooperation.” Initial Reading Response due at the start of class</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Dramatism I: Kenneth Burke, “Definition of Man”</td>
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<td>Sept</td>
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<td>Dramatism II: Kenneth Burke, “Terministic Screens”</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Critical Cultural Studies I: Raymond Williams, selections from Keywords (“Culture,” “Ideology”) and Marxism and Literature (“Hegemony”)</td>
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<td>Sept</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Critical Cultural Studies II: Williams, Marxism and Literature, 115-135</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>Rhetorical Anthropology I: Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler, selections from Culture &amp; Rhetoric (pp. 1-3, 21-30); Michael Carrithers, Preface and Introduction to Culture, Rhetoric, and the Vicissitudes of Life (Hereafter: CRV), pp. vii-17</td>
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Sept 24  Rhetorical Anthropology II/Internal Rhetorics & Rhetorical Selves: Jean Nienkamp, *Internal Rhetorics*, ix-5, 125-136; & Nienkamp in CRV, ch. 1

Oct 1  Affect Theory: Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism”
3  In-Class Discussion and Review

Oct 8  **Theory Exam**
10  Take the day off and recover

**Studies of Rhetoric across Cultures**

Oct 15  Christopher Brown, “Barack Obama as the Great Man”
17  CRV, chs. 2 and 9. **Paper topics distributed. Due into D2L by 11:59 pm on Sunday, November 3.**

Oct 22  CRV, chs. 3 and 4.
24  CRV, chs. 5 and 6

Oct 29  CRV, chs. 7 and 8.

**Digital Rhetorical Cultures**

Oct 31  Richard Lanham, “Stuff and Fluff”

Nov 5  Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (AT), ix-20, 151-170
7  Turkle, AT, 171-240

Nov 12  Turke, AT, 241-305. **Second paper topics distributed. Due 11:59 p.m. Sunday, Nov 24.**
14  Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook* (TF), Preface, chs. 4, 6, 13 (pp. ix-xx, 40-52, 65-77, 99-110)

21  No Class. Work on your papers.

**Rhetoric, Affect, and Everyday Life**

Dec 2  Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (OA), 1-40
Dec  9  Stewart, OA, 82-129
11  Review of the Semester
Dec  16  Final Exam, 4:30-7:00 p.m.

**UCB Student Information**

(1) If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and [http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices](http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices) If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at [http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html)

(2) Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, if you let me know in advance of a religious obligation, I can accommodate you. See full details at [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html). A comprehensive calendar of the religious holidays most commonly observed by CU-Boulder students is at [http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/)

(3) The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at [http://www.colorado.edu/odh](http://www.colorado.edu/odh)

(4) All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html) and at [http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/](http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/)

(5) Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning
environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code