AH 2220F – Effective Communication in the Arts and Humanities

Instructor: Michael Fox
Meetings: Th 9:30-12:30 NCB (North Campus Building) 114
Office: Lawson 3270F
Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30; Th 12:30-1:30; by appointment
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Prerequisite: 75% or higher in AH 1020E

Official Description:

This course examines the critical forms and strategies of writing and speaking in the Arts and Humanities by studying the principles and practices of rhetoric, argumentation, stylistic clarity, editing/rewriting, with an eye to students’ professional as well as academic development.

Longer Description:

If communication can be said to have laws, then the first law, without which we cannot communicate, is that effective communication must have a purpose. Crafting effective communication requires a knowledge of audience and the simultaneous awareness of what detracts from that purpose (what might be called minimizing “interference”) and what reinforces that purpose (what some might call “effective redundancy”). Communication in the arts and humanities is not significantly different from communication in any other discipline: good communication skills are vital for things like research and leadership. Further, however, the tools of an effective communicator are in fact prior to expression. We need to be able to think logically in order to communicate effectively. This course will, therefore, address logic and rhetoric together, demonstrating how modern attitudes toward professional communication are indebted to tradition and break from it, how understanding Aristotle helps corporate communication, and how being able to recognize rhetorical figures is vital to being an effective public speaker. In the larger picture, the skills of communication are vital to civic engagement and civic literacy: to paraphrase the Canadian political scientist Henry Milner, that means the knowledge and ability capacity of citizens to make sense of [and change] their [political] world.

Students can expect to participate in class discussion and debate, to make oral presentations, to study grammar, rhetoric, and logic, to learn how to make helpful comments on the oral and written work of their peers, to study elements of style which are useful in every kind of communication, and to work collaboratively on different kinds of projects, including textual analysis.

SASAH Student Learning Objectives:

To self-motivate and inspire others to follow through with challenging and experiential situations, to be resilient in learning and unlearning knowledge expectations, and thus to find common ground for intellectual, cultural, and social growth and change.

To interpret and explain complex material and information in creative and persuasive forms of oral and written communication for academic and public audiences. To assess and apply historical and
contemporary theories which inform research and practice in the arts and humanities, in related disciplines across the academy, and in fields beyond the academy.

To consider and appreciate the viewpoints of others in collaborative work settings and learning environments while maintaining and sharing one's own reasoned perspectives.

To acknowledge and identify personal values in relation to historical, cultural, and social contexts. To articulate a vision of civic responsibilities and to understand the importance of engaging with local, national, and global communities in support of the greater good.

To develop, design, and implement, both independently and collaboratively, creative modes of expression through rigorous critical thought and responsible engagement practices.

Course-Specific Learning Objectives:

1) To develop awareness of all aspects of communication, focusing specifically on language
2) To gain a broad understanding of the history of thinking about communication, focusing specifically on rhetoric
3) To develop further the ability to communicate, mainly orally and in writing
4) To find, interpret, manipulate, and subvert “communication” everywhere

Required Texts:


[Other short readings and web-based material will be provided via Sakai]

Course Requirements:

The course is divided into four modules, each with a graded component, and a fifth module specifically on style will form part of most classes:

1) The history of rhetoric: report (500 words of text; 10%) and presentation (10 minutes or so; 10%) on a major thinker in the history of rhetoric
2) Rhetorical tropes and figures: report (200 words of text on a trope or figure with example[s]; 5%); speech (speech, performed [roughly 10 minutes] and handed in as text for my reference; 25%)
3) Essay (25%)
4) “Uncreative writing” project (10%)
5) *Style* (15%): 9 “lessons”; 50 minutes apiece

Some of the work will be completed in groups. In Module 1, the 500-word report and presentation will be done in groups of two (12 presentations). In Module 2, each student will compose a 200-word entry on a trope or figure, with examples, and groups of two students will compose, perform, and hand in a speech (one per group) which demonstrates your grasp of the rhetoric we've been studying. In Module 3, each student will submit an essay which demonstrates a grasp of the concepts discussed in the course to date and which engages with the 150th anniversary of the
founding of Canada (more on this later). In Module 4, individual students will complete an “uncreative writing” project, building on the concepts introduced in Goldsmith. As appropriate (and available), some class time will be available for students to work with their groups. In Module 5, “lessons” from the Williams and Nadel text will be taught by students (in groups of three or so) to the rest of the class (one per class, throughout the term). The outcomes of Modules 1 and 2 (minus the speeches) will be compiled and made available to the class as a kind of “handbook” of rhetoric.

Please note:

1) The best (and only) way to contact me outside of class and office hours is via email. Except in extraordinary circumstances, you can expect a response within 24 hours. Please do not email me using Sakai’s mail function.

2) Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author (and this includes websites), they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. All suspected instances of plagiarism are reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. See the “Information for Students” sheet on the Department of English and Writing Studies’ home page: http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/info-for-students.html

3) Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

The full policy is set out here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

4) Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Other support services:

Registrarial Services http://www.registrar.uwo.ca
Student Support Services https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login
Services provided by the USC http://westernusc.ca/services/
Student Development Centre http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/

5) Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day late, unless prior arrangements have been made.
Schedule of Classes (subject to adjustment)

September 7: Introduction
September 14: Background: thinking about language and the rhetorical tradition; Style Lesson 2
September 21: Presentations: key figures in the history of rhetoric; Style Lesson 3; 500-word "entries" due September 28 (electronically)
September 28: Last presentations; tropes and figures; Style Lesson 4
October 5: A selection of short speeches (finding examples); Style Lesson 5
October 12: Fall Reading Week (no class)
October 19: A selection of short speeches; Style Lesson 6
October 26: Speeches
November 2: Speeches; trope/figure entry due November 9 (electronically)
November 9: Trivium 21c; Style Lesson 7
November 16: Trivium 21c; Style Lesson 8; essay due November 16
November 23: Uncreative Writing; Style Lesson 9
November 30: Uncreative Writing; Style Lesson 10; final "uncreative" projects due December 7
December 7: Conclusion