COMM 541-001: Rhetoric & Civic Life/ENGL 545-002: Contemp Issues and Inst Contexts in Rhetoric & Comp
Boise State University
Department of Communication & Media

Instructor: erin d mcclellan
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Office: Communication Building, C-104
Office Hrs: M: 3:00-4:00 pm W: 12:00-1:00 pm

Course Website: http://www.commstudy.com/541.html
F: By appointment

Course Description: This course examines the intersections of rhetorical theory and practice with civic life. Addresses issues of civic engagement, public sphere(s), rhetorical performance, citizenship, and the construction of (im)possibility.

Course Objectives: (1) Understand a variety of contemporary rhetorical theories in relation to contemporary issues in social and political life; (2) Analyze living rhetoric through the lens of contemporary rhetorical theory; (3) Facilitate discussion of weekly rhetorical concepts and theories as presented in course readings; (4) Adopt a rhetorical perspective to analyze some aspect of rhetoric “in the world” (5) Articulate the significance of a rhetorical perspective for civic life (experimentally, systemically, and/or conceptually).

Required Readings - [Either BlackBoard or available through BSU library databases]:


Moriarty, Thomas A. & Greg A. Giberson (2010). “Civic Rhetoric and the Undergraduate Major in Rhetoric and Writing,” (pp. 204-216) in What We are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors (Eds. Greg A. Giberson & Thomas Mariarty). Boulder: University Press of Colorado.


All readings are to be completed BEFORE class each week. Be sure to bring the text and all relevant readings to class on the day they are discussed.
**Attendance:** Class attendance is important and expected as a vital part of understanding material through class discussion and participation in class activities. If you know you will be missing class in advance, a discussion prior to the absence is strongly suggested. For illness, an e-mail no later than the end of class is required to be considered for any make-up work.

At the beginning of some class periods, I will pass around a sheet with your names on it. Be sure to sign next to your name to receive credit for that day. If you come in late, it is your responsibility to sign up with me after class. This sheet will be the official attendance document for the course and determine whether or not you receive participation points for that day. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes and any additional information presented on that day before you come to office hours. Your participation grade is highly correlated with your attendance – if you are not in class, you cannot participate.

**Mobile Devices:** Due to the large number of mobile devices in our daily lives, I unfortunately must now include consequences of failing to respect this class as a “disturbance free zone.” You are always expected to turn your notification sounds OFF when you are in this classroom (this does not mean it is on vibrate, making noise against your notebook in your bag when someone next to you is trying to concentrate). It also means that you may not read or send texts during class at any time. All personal mobile device use unrelated to what we are immediately doing in class is prohibited. If there is a pressing reason for your phone to be on vibrate, please be sure you can answer it as discreetly as possible outside the classroom.

When other students are presenting, this is of utmost importance (just like in the “real world,” there is a time and a place to make sure your phone is silenced!). If another student is presenting in front of the class and your device becomes a distraction in any way, you will lose your attendance for the day. If your device becomes a distraction during YOUR presentation, you will lose your attendance for the day and lose points from your presentation grade.

**Assignments:** All assignments are due during the class period listed on the syllabus. Late work is not accepted, nor are unexcused absence make-up or extra-credit assignments allowed. Make-up work can be arranged for legitimate absences (e.g., verified health condition, participation in university-sponsored activities, serious family emergencies, and religious observances). If the absence is known ahead of time, you must make arrangements before the date the assignment is due. This class will include group work, homework, and participation in activities; you are expected to participate in all of these with your highest level of integrity, preparation, and effort.

**Grades:** In this course, you will be required to participate in all reading discussions and in-class activities meant to demonstrate your understanding of the course material. You are also responsible for contributing to your assigned group facilitations of readings week to week. You will have one oral examination and a final paper that integrates the concepts, theories, understandings, and/or methods addressed in this class to connect civic life to rhetorical theory. Your final paper will focus on a specific personal, social, institutional, or political context within which civic life is engaged in uniquely rhetorical ways. You will complete a Final Paper Plan and meet with me one-on-one as part of your paper’s development. This process will be discussed in greater detail later in the semester.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Group Facilitation Participation</th>
<th>300 pts.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Exam</td>
<td>200 pts.</td>
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<td>Final Paper Plan</td>
<td>100 pts</td>
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<td>Peer Review Workshop</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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The letter grade for the course will be assigned as follows:

- A+ 720-750
- B+ 645-674
- C+ 570-599
- D+ 495-524
- A 705-719
- B 630-644
- C 555-569
- D 480-494
- A- 675-704
- B- 600-629
- C- 525-554
- D- 450-479
- F 0-449
Your work is expected to be of high quality, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the subject matter. The following offers insight into how I grade.

**A is outstanding.** Such work presents sophisticated, complex, and intellectually challenging argument. Resources are adroitly used to explore the thesis. Papers and presentations are structured and delivered in a way that successfully employs standard form. It takes intellectual risks and succeeds in them, exploring topics thoroughly and within the prescribed time or page limit. The A paper or presentation concludes by exploring the assumptions and implications of the thesis and argumentation (rather than merely summarizing previous points), drawing significant and insightful conclusions out of the analysis that has been presented.

**B is commendable.** Often similar to A work, it may offer slightly less complex or intellectually engaging argument. It is fairly successful in its use of analysis. The B paper or presentation does more than fulfill the assignment by going beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning; it takes risks and succeeds fairly well, showing originality and intellectual enthusiasm. Oftentimes, the B paper or presentation lacks the polish or sophistication of the A paper or presentation or does not have the same success in organization or argumentation.

**C is acceptable.** This work adequately fulfills the assignment in a routine way. Although it engages the topic and offers a thesis argument, it may not offer a fresh or challenging approach. It needs to delve deeper with analytical questions and approach the topic more imaginatively. The delivery and organization are acceptable but not thoughtfully or carefully constructed. The C paper or presentation often tries to prove rather than explore an argument or interpretation. The supporting materials become merely a means for substantiating a thesis instead of serving as a tool for further exploration of the issues raised in the thesis. Often, supporting materials are not convincingly used in support of the thesis. In addition, the conclusion does not move much beyond the initial thesis.

**D is deficient.** The D paper or presentation may be similar to the C paper or presentation but not as completely argued. The thesis is often bland or does not present a clear argument. Supporting materials are often poorly used or left unexplained. There are often serious organizational flaws or problems with the logic of the arguments and conclusions. In spite of these flaws, however, the D paper or presentation does address the topic and attempts to construct an argument with support.

**F is failing.** Although there can be many reasons for not receiving credit, the most common are: (a) summary without an argument or interpretation of the supporting materials, (b) absence of a thesis argument, (c) serious misreading of the text or absence of supporting materials, and (d) plagiarism of outside materials. Plagiarism, as will be discussed later, will minimally result in an F in the course, and also possible expulsion or formal academic reprimand.

I am always happy to discuss the evaluation of your work. If you believe that I have made an error in grading your paper or presentation, please bring your concerns to my attention. **I will not discuss grades during or after class or via e-mail.** To discuss a grade change I expect you to (a) bring your paper or presentation comments to your meeting with me and (b) have reviewed your feedback and prepared a coherent dissent to the comments provided. I will reevaluate the paper or presentation on the condition that I also may find errors that I did not catch in the initial grading process. Your grade, therefore, is subject to gain and/or lose points in this process. Please note that discussions not contesting grades are ALWAYS welcome and encouraged to allow for future improvement.

**Academic Misconduct:** All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Boise State University Student Code of Conduct, available on the following webpage: [http://deanofstudents.boisestate.edu/student-code-of-conduct/](http://deanofstudents.boisestate.edu/student-code-of-conduct/)

It specifically reads: “The University upholds the values of honesty, trust, fairness, civility, respect, and responsibility as the foundation for a successful academic environment. As a tool, the Student Code of Conduct will help promote growth and learning as students interact with their environment and accept responsibility for decision-making…

The term “academic dishonesty” may include cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty. All assignments submitted by a student must represent her/his own ideas, concepts, and current understanding or must cite the original source. Attempts to violate the academic integrity of an assignment do not have to be successful to be considered academic dishonesty…[please see website for a list of examples]…
The term “cheating” includes any action where an individual or group either carries out or attempts to carry out dishonest work and/or where an individual or group either assists or attempts to assist an individual or group to carry out dishonest work. If students are uncertain whether an action constitutes cheating, they have a responsibility to ask the faculty member for the course for clarification…[please see website for list of examples]…

The term “plagiarism” at its most basic level means to steal someone else’s words, composition, research, and/or ideas. Plagiarism is both cheating and theft. Given the seriousness of this offense, students have a responsibility to understand its meaning and implications for the academic community. Plagiarism can be committed in any type of assignment…[please see website for list of examples]…

Any student found to have committed, or attempted to commit, any of the following misconduct is subject to sanctions outlined in the Student Code of Conduct…[see website for specific procedures and sanctions]?

**Educational Access Statement:** Students with registered disabilities needing accommodations to fully participate in this class should contact the Educational Access Center (EAC). All accommodations must be approved through the EAC prior to being implemented. To learn more about the accommodation process, visit the EAC’s website at [https://eac.boisestate.edu/new-eac-students/](https://eac.boisestate.edu/new-eac-students/).

**Boise State University Firearm Policy:** Idaho law permits concealed carry of firearms on the Boise State University campus by some students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Other than qualified law enforcement officers, only persons who have been issued and are in possession of an Idaho enhanced concealed carry license are permitted to do so. Firearms must remain concealed at all times. If a firearm becomes visible it is a violation of university policy and the person may be removed from campus. Please notify Boise State Campus Security (call 208.426.6911) or the Boise Police Department (call 911) for any reports of firearms on campus. Use of firearms is prohibited on campus.

**Course Schedule:** The following is a tentative course schedule for the next 17 weeks. Each day, we cover a new topic through a combination of lecture and discussion. The items in bold text are readings to be completed before the class period that are assigned (see website for specific daily assignments). The readings are short and pointed, and imperative for effective class discussion and processing. Please make sure that you have all reading completed prior to the start of class. Please check the class website for the weekly detailed assignments and due dates: http://www.commstudy.com/541.html. **Be sure to visit the website before each week to find out the daily reading assignments as well as check for any announcements, notes from your professor, or changes to the general schedule below.**

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<th>Week 4</th>
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<td>Rhetoric and Civic Life</td>
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<th>Week 5</th>
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<td>Rhetoric and Democracy</td>
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<td>ORAL EXAM ASSIGNMENT Q&amp;A</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
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**Assignments:** The two major evaluations for this class will be an Oral Exam and the Final Paper:

1. **Oral Exam:** One oral exam will be given in Week 7. You will be provided with a set of questions to guide your studying and preparation of notes/materials to bring with you to the Oral Exam the week before it is proctored. This will serve as an individual accountability for what you have been learning and discussing in-class about the various theories and perspectives of rhetoric and civic life we are engaging in this course. An Oral Exam rubric will be distributed two weeks prior to the scheduled exam.

2. **Group Facilitations:** Each week, we will read and discuss two central articles focusing on the theme we are examining. The remaining articles will be split between assigned facilitation groups the week before they are
discussed. Each facilitation group will be required to lead discussion about their assigned article and participation points will be awarded each week based on quality of contribution to and facilitation of the article’s discussion. You must be present to earn facilitation points for that day. If you have an excused absence there will be an alternative assignment that you will need to complete to earn the points for that day.

3. **Final Paper:** Your Final Paper will be focused on connecting the existing communities you are involved in with rhetorical theory such that you discuss civic life in a unique way. Your paper should demonstrate your ability to utilize a theoretical lens to help explain rhetoric as consequential in some way. You will be evaluated on your ability to present a plan for your final paper (including an articulation of what (types of) sources you will be using to ground your paper) in Week 15. You are welcome to complete this meeting sooner if you would like. **You will receive a detailed assignment for the Final Paper in Week 13.**

   **Remember—** explore your interests. Challenge your understandings. Learn new things. Most importantly, have fun making new discoveries as you think about the world around you in new ways!