Introduction to Contemporary Rhetoric and Composition Studies

Course Syllabus

Jennifer Sano-Franchini
Website: http://www.msu.edu/~sanojenn
Office: 274 Bessey Hall
Email: sanojenn@msu.edu
Office hours: T 1:30-3:30 pm & by appointment

Course Description

This course is intended to be a preliminary introduction to the field that will address both notions of rhetoric and composition as a disciplinary structure and discipline as a rhetorical construct (Mailloux). In other words, academic conventions, being rhetorical constructions, are not intuitive, and literacy in disciplinary conventions is necessary for pushing the field in new directions (Berkenkotter, et al.; Hyland; Powell, “Blood”; Villanueva). Thus, there are four main goals of this course:

1) to acquaint you with the discipline of rhetoric and composition studies by introducing you to a few historical accounts of the field and by providing an introductory overview of some contemporary themes and debates within the field;
2) to help you begin thinking about what it means to do work in rhetoric and composition as an academic discipline as well as how you might situate yourself in the field; and
3) to facilitate your professional development.

In other words, the goal of this course is to facilitate what I will call literacy in professional “field speak,” in order to provide you with a sense of the interpretive frame through which work in rhetoric and composition studies is done, as well as for equipping you with the tools necessary for pushing at the boundaries of the field. Through this course, you will gain a sense of the diverse topics and approaches available to pursue in rhetoric and composition, which may provide you with direction toward more focused studies. In the process, you will find yourself becoming more and more a member of an intellectual community with a keen understanding of what this intellectual community looks like.

Textbooks


*Additional readings will be posted on our course website.

Major Assignments

This course will encourage you to use multiple modes of discourse, including in-class discussion surrounding readings and relevant issues, written responses to readings, in-class presentations and discussion facilitation on a week’s set of readings, production of professional documents, website
development, and course projects, which may take a variety of forms. To be more specific, assignments for this course will include:

- weekly written responses to the course readings,
- one discussion presentation on a specific week’s readings,
- one methodology presentation,
- a curriculum vitae,
- a professional website,
- two journal readaround reports,
- field mapping,
- and course projects, including project proposals.

**Weekly Response**
The weekly response assignment is based, along with personal experience, on the basic premise of Janet Emig’s seminal essay, “Writing as a Mode of Learning,” where she quotes Lev Vygotsky, who says, “writing makes a unique demand in that the writer must engage in...‘deliberate structuring of the web of meaning’” (125). In this way and through this assignment, you will be able to give focused attention to the comprehension and structuring of the week’s readings, enabling a fuller understanding of the texts and themes as well as richer in-class discussion. This assignment could also create a space for you to document day-to-day interactions and observations that pertain to issues raised in the course that you may wish to return to in the future. You might also be asked to consider in your responses how an argument is being made in any given reading.

**Methodologies Presentation**
You will, in small groups, select an object of inquiry on which you would like to focus. For each object of inquiry, I will compile a set of readings on which students will give a 20-minute in-class presentation.

**Field Map**
This low-stakes assignment is designed to encourage you to think about the field spatially, and to visually situate yourself in the field.

**Readaround Reports**
To become better acquainted with the conventions, characteristics, and prevailing themes of a couple of the field’s major journals, you will read around in the last five years of the following journals: *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*, with the option to focus on another journal in lieu of *College English*. Through these readaround reports, you may also encounter readings relevant to your course projects due at the end of the semester.

**Course Project**
You should design a project that is pertinent to the course topic, yet useful to you, wherever you are in the program. For instance, you might create an annotated bibliography of works with an accompanying position paper pertaining to some specific strand of thought, methodology, or area of study that you found interesting; a conference presentation-length paper; or a traditional or collage essay pertaining to some topic you found compelling.

**Professionalization Documents**
While thinking about your disciplinary positioning and professional development rhetorically, you will design and revise two professional documents: your curriculum vitae, and your professional website.
Attendance & Participation

Attendance at all class sessions is expected. Participation includes coming to class everyday, on time, and prepared, having completed the required readings and assignments, and ready for thoughtful and active engagement with each other. All students are expected to participate in an active, open, and respectful manner, in small and large groups.

All cellphones should be put on silent (not vibrate) or switched off during class.

Grading

Weekly Response........................................................................................................................................... 20%
Professionalization Documents (including CV & professional website).............................................. 20%
Methodologies Presentation........................................................................................................................ 15%
Field Map........................................................................................................................................................... 5%
Readaround Reports...................................................................................................................................... 10%
Course Project (including proposal & presentation)............................................................................... 30%

Grading Scale:  
91-100%: **4.0**  
86-90%: **3.5**  
80-85%: **3.0**  
75-79%: **2.5**  
70-74%: **2.0**  
65-69%: **1.5**  
60-64%: **1.0**  
0-59%: **0.0**

Academic Integrity Statement

If an instructor alleges a student has committed an act of academic misconduct, the instructor is responsible for taking appropriate action. Depending on the instructor's judgment of a specific instance, the instructor may give the student a penalty grade. A penalty grade may be a reduced score or grade for the assignment or a reduced grade for the course. [For a definition of "penalty grade", see Academic Freedom Report (AFR) 11 and Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) 8.1.17.]

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a disabilities specialist, call 353-9642 (voice), 355-1293 (TTY), or visit http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/.

Campus Resources

MSU Writing Center: http://writing.msu.edu
MSU Libraries: http://www.lib.msu.edu
MSU English Language Center: http://www.elc.msu.edu
MSU Learning Resources Center: http://lrc.msu.edu
MSU Counseling Center: http://www.counseling.msu.edu
Other resources available to you at MSU: http://www.msu.edu/students/
## Schedule
*This schedule is intended for planning purposes only and is subject to change.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section I: Situating Ourselves</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These readings are designed to encourage you to think rhetorically about disciplinarity, the field as a rhetorical and discursive construct, the rhetorical work of official narratives, and what it means to do work in an academic institution. Within the first couple of weeks, we will discuss the question, “What is rhetoric?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| King, T. *The Truth About Stories*  
Powell, M. “Blood and scholarship: One Mixed-Blood’s Story”  
Villanueva, V. “On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism”  
Chow, R. “Against the Lures of Diaspora: Minority Discourse, Chinese Women, and Intellectual Hegemony”  
Hyland, K. “Disciplinary Cultures, Texts and Interactions” from *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing* | Weekly Response 1 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section II: Histories of the Field</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This section is intended to provide background in a few canonical accounts of the field’s history.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Bender & Wellbery. “Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Return of Rhetoric”  
Nystrand, M., Greene, S. & Wiemelt, J. “Where Did Composition Studies Come From? An Intellectual History”  
Miller, T. “Where Did College English Studies Come From?” | Weekly Response 2 |
| **Week 3** |  |
| **Week 4** |  |
| Crowley S. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* | Weekly Response 4 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section III: (Multi)literacies and Technology</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This section is designed to help you become acquainted with a few of contemporary debates in the field including those pertaining to (multi)literacies and Students’ Right to Their Own Language, technology and its link to culture, and the role of digital media as it pertains to literacy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Brandt & Clinton. “Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as Social Practice”  
Kanae, L. *Sista Tongue.*  
Smitherman, G. “Retrospective on Students’ Right”  
Villanueva, V. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* | Weekly Response 5 CV |
| Week 6 | Bolter, J. “Introduction: Writing in the Late Age of Print”  
Stiegler, B. Introduction to *Technics and Time I: The Fault of Epimetheus*  
Wesch, M. “The Machine is Us/ing Us (Final Version)” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlGopyXT_g&playnext=1&videos=rPt4hCPK8ZE> | Weekly Response 6 |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
Grabill & Hicks, “Multiliteracies Meet Methods: The Case for Digital Writing in English Education”  
Selber, S. Selections from *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age* | Weekly Response 7  
Professional Website |
| **Section IV: Methodologies** | Here, you will continue to read a variety of contemporary issues and debates in the field, this time pertaining to methodology, including discussions about multidisciplinary approaches, positivist and empirical epistemologies, cognitive methods, and rhetorical hermeneutics. | |
| Week 8 | Cassirer, E. Selections from *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*.  
Latour, B. “Drawing things together” | Weekly Response 8 |
| Week 9 | Object of Inquiry Packet of Readings: Histories & Rhetorics; Society, Cultures, & Groups; School, Curriculum, & Pedagogy; Individuals, Learning, & Development; Texts, Artifacts, & Objects | Methodologies  
Presentation |
Berkenkotter, C. “The Legacy of Positivism in Empirical Composition Research”  
| Week 11 | Flower & Hayes. “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing”  
Cooper & Holzman. “Talking About Protocols”  
Responses in CCC Counterstatement  
Dobrin, D. “Protocols Once More”  
Lauer, J. “Heuristics and Composition”  
Berthoff, A. “The Problem of Problem Solving.”  
Responses in CCC Counterstatement  
Kinney, J. “Classifying Heuristics”  
Vitanza, V. “A Tagmemic Heuristic for the Whole Composition.” | Weekly Response 10 |
| Week 12 | Mailloux, S. *Disciplinary Identities: Rhetorical Paths of English, Speech, and Composition.*  
Optional: Leff, “Rhetorical Disciplines and Rhetorical Disciplinarity: A Response to Mailloux” | Weekly Response 11  
Course Project Proposals |
| Week 13 | Sánchez, R. *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies* | Weekly Response 12, |

**Section V: Continuing the Conversation**  
The final section of the course is dedicated to “Continuing the Conversation,” where you will begin situating yourself in the field, and consider ways of continuing some thread(s) of conversation within the discipline.  

| Week 14 | Last five years of *College Composition and Communication* | Readaround Report I  
Field Maps |
| Week 15 | Last five years of *College English* or other journal in the field | Readaround Report II  
Presentations on  
Course Projects |
| Week 16 | Finals Week | Presentations on  
Course Projects,  
Course Projects Due |