COMS 641: Rhetoric, Culture and Social Critique

Raymie McKerrow

»» Course Goals
This course will consider various rhetorical discourses as instrumental in constituting social relations; in particular, we will focus attention on a critique of whiteness, and on African American rhetoric. In addition, for students who have not had an exposure to critical methods of inquiry, there will be an opportunity to examine various approaches.

»» Course Texts

3. At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies, Ed. Thomas Rosteck
4. Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, 3rd Ed., Sonja Foss (optional)
5. Course Readings: identified below as **-- check Library Reserve via web.

»» Course Expectations/Assignments

1. Attendance/Participation:
The starting assumption is that you have arrived prepared to contribute in substantive, critically constructive ways to a dialogue. Be prepared to advance ideas that may extend or amplify the reading, or interrogate specific issues within the reading. Frankly, you get as much out of a graduate experience as you are willing to put into it—you do yourself and your classmates an injustice arriving only half-prepared to contribute.

2. Facilitation:
On the Monday prior to each class (by 4pm), submit via email at least two of any combination of the following: substantive questions, concisely stated "positions" that extend or argue with some part of the reading, observations that link ideas together across readings. I will collate these and use them as a "discussion starter" for each evening's consideration of the materials assigned.

3. Criticism Focus:
We will spend approx. 45 minutes of three class sessions focusing attention on various critical approaches – the entire class will be expected to be present, but those who have already taken a graduate level rhetorical criticism course may forego reading – though it will be a useful reminder of issues previously considered.

4. Presentations:
We will create 4 small groups (3-4 members, depending on eventual class size). Your task will be to identify a specific discourse which your group will
examine and provide an oral report on. One focus will be on ethnic oriented discourses: Latina/o, Native American, Asian and African. Another focus may be more visual in nature: Memorializing Discourse. The report should incorporate, as appropriate, visual images – sights - sounds – as creatively constructed to get points across.

5. Papers:
   You will select one of the following options by Week 2 of the Quarter—with the expectation that you will complete the required work by the respective due date. As should go without saying in a graduate seminar, plagiarism (copying other's words w/o attribution) will be grounds for course failure.
   1) Option 1: Two 12-15 page papers (w/notes, references added) examining critical issues in the course; one is due at Week 5 (by Thursday of that week if an extension is needed); the second is due Finals week (by Thursday of that week if an extension is needed). Late papers will be discounted a full grade unless prior approval is given—and that must be related to external circumstances fully beyond your control. The theme for these papers may be critical reflection on a substantive portion of the reading to date, or a "mini-criticism" that seeks to extend, alter or otherwise contribute to the understanding of a specific issue or event.

   2) Option 2: One 25-30 page paper (w/notes, references added) that focuses on a specific issue or event, and makes a substantive contribution to the literature. Late papers will be discounted unless prior approval is given—and that must be related to external circumstances fully beyond your control. Due Finals Week (by Thursday of that Week if an extension is needed beyond Tuesday).

Grades
The following categories will comprise your final grade: Facilitation/participation in class discussion: 20%; Group Presentation: 30%; Paper (Option 1: 25 /25%) (Option 2: 50%).

Tentative Course Outline:

1. March 30  Getting started
2. April 6  Orientation: Contextualizing Rhetoric and Culture
   Readings:  **Goldzwig, Multiculturalism, Rhetoric and the 21st Century**
   **Martin & Nakayama, Thinking Dialectically about Culture and Communication**
   **Shome & Hegde, Culture, Communication, and the Challenge of Globalization**
   Rosteck Text: Ch. 8, 9, 10, 13
3. April 13  Various Perspectives
   Readings:  Rosteck Text: Intro, Ch. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12.
   Focus on Criticism: Foss, Ch. 4, 5, 6
4. April 20  Critiquing Whiteness
5. April 27  Continuing the Critique
Readings: Nakayama & Martin Text: 9-14; **Hasian & Nakayama: The Fiction of Racialized Identities
Focus on Criticism: Foss, 7, 8, 9
Option 1: paper # 1 due
6. **May 4** African American Discourse
   Readings: Rosteck Text, Ch. 4; Jackson/Richardson Text: Intro, 1-4; 6-8
7. **May 11** African American Discourse II
   Readings: Jackson/Richardson Text: 9-18
   Focus on Criticism: Foss, 10, 11, 12
8. **May 18** Oral Presentations
   Group: 1 (6:15-7:45) Native Am*
          2 (8:00-9:30) Latina/o*
9. **May 25** Oral Presentations
   Group: 3 (6:15-7:45) Asian or African*
          4 (8:00-9:30) Memorializing Discourses*
   *These are offered as suggestive—and to indicate the nature of the substantive topic or theme should alternatives be considered.
10. **June 1** Abstracts
    Final Paper: Summary of argument/critical approach/resources
11. **June 8**
    Option 1: Paper # 2 Due; Option 2: Final Paper Due; 5pm