

NCA 2004 Public Address Pedagogy
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Below is a brief description of the course & texts, and the end-of-term assignments I have students do. (This course enrolls a mix of grads & undergrads.) I want them to learn how to practice close textual analysis of rhetorical artifacts, how to write and speak clearly & persuasively, and along the way, to appreciate the struggles & the humanity of our sisters who have gone before us. I grade on the depth of the analysis; whether or not the claims exist, are clear, and are supported by evidence; and the quality of the prose and the performative choices they make in their final presentation.

Public Address (History of Women's Movements in the U.S.)

TEXTS

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. Man Cannot Speak For Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric. Volume I. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs, comp. Man Cannot Speak For Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists. Volume II. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989.

Findlen, Barbara, ed. Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation. Seattle: Seal, 2001.

Foss, Sonja. Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice. 2nd edition. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1996.

Morgan, Robin, ed. Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement. New York: Random House/Vintage, 1970.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be an exploration of American Public Address in the 19th and 20th centuries. We will be focusing particularly on speeches and essays from the "three waves" of feminist movements in American history; our analyses of the texts will take the form of rhetorical criticism. We will begin with the Foss book that describes the nature of rhetoric, rhetorical criticism, and feminist criticism. The majority of the semester will be devoted to reading selections from each of the three historical periods. We will endeavor to listen to the voices of these women and understand the issues that surrounded and motivated them, including abolition, civil rights, and human rights. The "first wave" was largely concentrated around the battle to achieve woman's suffrage. Our readings from the Campbell texts include speeches and writings from the 1830s to 1920, and rhetorical criticism of those texts. The "second wave" is the name given to the "women's liberation movement" of the 1960s and 1970s, and our readings from the Morgan book will provide a sampling of those concerns. Our readings from the Findlen book represent the "third wave," which includes diverse approaches to feminist change in the 1990s.

Please take as a GIVEN that my (proverbial) door is always open to you for

discussion of your ongoing projects, the reading, and so on. (My actual door may be closed on a given occasion, but please don't let that stop you from coming to see me during office hours or calling or making an appointment to talk!) Checking in with me early & often usually results in less stress for you along the way, and a better end product. I encourage you to come see me & to keep me posted on your choice of topic and your progress in general.

A couple of notes about page length of the assignments: (1) I expect all papers and handouts to be typed & double-spaced, using a scholarly format (MLA is preferable, APA is acceptable). I cannot accept any handwritten work. (2) If you wind up needing slightly more space, go ahead and use another page rather than playing with margins and fonts, because (a) I was a student too, and I know those tricks, and (b) I have good eyesight & I'd like to keep it as long as possible. Thanks.

IDEA DRAFT FOR FINAL PROJECT:

In 1-2 pages, identify the historical figure or describe the theme or issue you'd like to focus on, and list the texts you anticipate analyzing. You may wish to compare several texts by the same person, several texts on the same topic (& same "wave"/time period) by different people, or several texts dealing with the same issue by different women in different time periods. Also list secondary sources that you expect to consult (for example, biographies or articles about the speaker or the theme). Undergrads should compare two or more artifacts. Grads are expected to compare three or more artifacts, and also to provide an initial list of relevant source material (the list of sources obviously takes extra pages).

FINAL PROJECTS:

Keep in mind that any rhetorical analysis is, itself, a persuasive act. You are trying to convince your audience that your analysis of these rhetorical artifacts is accurate and well-justified.

Make a clear claim about what you have found. Your research question (the question that leads to your focused claim or thesis) might be phrased as "What are the main or central rhetorical strategies this speaker/author used in creating her text? Or, What invitations does this text make to the reader? Or, How do I evaluate this rhetorical effort--do I find it effective and moral (or not)?" Foss's list of the steps for criticism (Chapter Two) will be a helpful reminder. Your thesis tells the audience what the "news" is, and the bulk of your presentation will provide systematic support for the argument that you are making. Arguing means providing reasons and evidence in support of some claim. You will probably have several subpoints, perhaps corresponding to the patterns you have found, or perhaps corresponding to subquestions suggested by your initial focus, that structure the presentation of your argument.

Remember to provide specific examples from the text to support what you are saying: that means quoting from your messages, and then leading your audience

through your understanding of what sort of response this excerpt invites or seeks, and how it seems to be inviting or seeking that particular response.

What have you learned from looking at these examples together? What do you now know about how rhetors try to appeal to an audience in situation X ("when speaking on this topic," "in this time period," "what this author/speaker tended to do") that you wouldn't have known before? What are the implications of your findings for public address, and/or for how we think of the women's movements? (I'll expect grad students to do more with the "implications" than undergrads.)

PRESENTATION OF PROJECTS:

Take 10-15 minutes to intrigue us with highlights from your analysis and with excerpts from the texts you've analyzed.

Be nice to your audience. Help them understand these artifacts. Your presentation should (briefly) remind us about the setting or context for these messages, as well as the issues that motivated this person/these people. Then try to show us the overall patterns you have found in your messages, and offer your interpretation of what these patterns imply about communication in this women's movement.

Thinking specifically about the delivery and performance aspects of your presentation, I encourage you to orally "perform" significant passages from the speech texts or essays you've focused on to give us a flavor of those artifacts.

Provide the class with a clear handout listing your main points, specific quotations, and key sources. But keep in mind that a group's reaction is always to read what you give them right away, so wait on passing out handouts until you are ready to discuss them. Otherwise, handouts will distract from your message. Don't forget to speak to the group, not to your visual aids, if any. If you need special equipment for your presentation, let me know in advance, please.

As with any oral presentation, practice several times (studies show that it's best to practice in the actual room where you'll be presenting). That way, you are comfortable speaking, familiar with what you are going to say and with how you are going to get from point to point, how the equipment works for your demonstration (if applicable), and how much time your presentation takes. You want to appear professional: well-organized, competent, and interesting. Speak loudly and clearly (speak more slowly than you think you need to), and let your enthusiasm for your project show. One of the best ways to reduce anxiety, by the way, is to get caught up in what you are saying. Remember that everyone is in the same boat, and that we are a friendly and supportive group.

Good luck, have fun (hopefully), and contact me with any questions at all!