

COM 496.01:  
SEMINAR IN RHETORICAL THEORY  
Rhetoric and Political Communication  
Instructor: Dr. Zompetti  
Spring 2024  
Thursday at 6:30-9:20 pm, Fell 275A

Office Hours: Mon & Tues, 2-3 pm, & by appointment  
Office phone: 438-7876

Office: Fell 414  
Email: zompetti@ilstu.edu

The focus of the seminar will be on rhetorical theory that informs and is informed by political communication. The specific areas of application will be student-driven. In short, we will investigate the intersections of political communication and rhetoric. This course will be highly theoretical, beginning with a brief introduction on rhetoric, then a brief examination of key critical theory and theorists, and then a thorough investigation of different areas of political communication theories. The course will include quite a bit of reading, class discussion, and a conference-length and quality paper.

We will focus on interrogating, criticizing and exploring the intersection of rhetoric of political communication. In this course, we will use various elements of political communication – especially key concepts and techniques – through a rhetorical process of interpretative analysis to examine how politics and the texts it produces have been historically constituted, perpetuated, and challenged. This will necessarily involve a study of rhetorical criticism which focuses on the text. When we say "rhetoric," we will be open to various interpretations, but we will use Aristotle's definition of "any available means to persuasion" as a starting point. We will define "cultural studies" broadly, focusing on the "everydayness" of culture and exploring various ways of grappling with the construction, maintenance, and resistance to meaning as it is expressed in cultural signifying practices.

Except for a couple of "lectures" in the beginning, everyone will participate by reading key primary and secondary sources on political communication and rhetorical theory. So, we need to discuss essentially two thematic things, which is how I'm structuring the course:

1. What is political communication? How can we engage in textual/rhetorical criticism to analyze different and varied political phenomena?
2. What is rhetoric and what theoretical perspectives help us to interrogate the rhetoric of political communication?

## Required Readings

### **BOOKS (required):**

1. Davis, Aeron (2019). *Political Communication: A New Introduction for Crisis Times*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. ISBN: 9-781509-529001.
2. Martin, James (2015). *Politics & Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-70671-1.
3. Keith, William M. and Lundberg, Christian O. (2008). *The Essential Guide to Rhetoric*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN: 978-0-312-47239-9

### **Other Texts:**

See below. There will also be articles for our reading pleasure. I am listing them in the tentative schedule so you can know in advance what is expected (plus I list the full citations should you need to cite them). They can be retrieved through Milner's electronic database system, the Internet, or on ReggieNet.

## Course Learning Outcomes & Objectives

1. You should be familiar with the literature concerning rhetoric and political communication and the relevant theoretical literature. You should have a working knowledge about the authors, their theories, and their arguments. You should be able to speak intelligently about the work we read and study, including understanding and using the vocabulary associated with this body of knowledge.
2. You will examine a variety of different rhetorical and critical approaches to this topic. You should be able to apply these approaches to your own investigation of the intersection of rhetoric and political communication.
3. You should remember your position as a scholar, student, citizen and activist. You should be mindful of respecting other's ideas, while being self-reflexive of your own.
4. You should be able to recognize the different types of rhetorics that exist around us. You should be sensitive to our need to interrogate them. You should, by the end of the course, have an ability to critically question such rhetorics and analyze them into a meaningful argument.
5. You should be able to produce a publishable/presentable research paper relating to rhetoric and political communication.

## Presumptions about Rhetorical Knowledge

*The course is intended for students with no background in rhetoric as well as rhetorical veterans.* For students not well-versed in rhetoric, we will begin the course with a brief introduction of rhetorical theories and methods of analysis. For the student with previous rhetorical experience, we will highlight key primary and secondary texts of various rhetorical & cultural perspectives for advanced study. If you are unfamiliar with rhetoric, I strongly encourage you to thoroughly read the Keith & Lundberg book (*The Essential Guide to Rhetoric*), as well as other sources of material. But, you should ensure that you do the extra readings **immediately** – a) the quicker you pick up the key elements of rhetoric, the faster the course issues will make sense to you, and b) you won't have the time to do extra readings once we start our weekly readings. Ideally, students should be taking graduate courses for more than just a grade – they should identify and attempt to accomplish their own “learning outcomes.”

## My Approach to Seminars

1. We all learn from each other – you from me, I from you. As such, I do not have a monopoly on truth. I will help guide and facilitate discussion. I will help you in ways that I am able. I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. And, I will speak on subjects that I have some experience. Nevertheless, we will all obtain more from this course if we remember that we can learn from each other (and not just from me).
2. I will provide (hopefully meaningful) comments on the material we discuss in class. However, a seminar is not a "lecture" course, nor is it like the typical undergraduate course. Given that we will be discussing a multiplicity of themes involving rhetoric, you will become the experts on some of these issues and will have to lead the class. I expect all of you to take an active role in your participation in this course. If you do not come to class prepared to speak (meaningfully and intelligently) about the material for that evening's class, you will be failing me, the rest of the class, and yourself. At this point in your academic careers, I shouldn't have to take attendance, or fill-in if you didn't read the material. You will not receive an A or perhaps a B in the course if you are consistently absent, late, or unprepared.
3. I am more interested in **how** you think, rather than what you think. Please don't be afraid to share your thoughts and ideas in class, and don't presume that you know how I will respond if you introduce a concept in class. It is more important that you are reflecting on the material and thinking critically about its relationship to your ideas and interests.
4. You should draw connections with what we read in class to what is occurring in the world, especially events and issues that can help shed insight into our course discussions.
5. A seminar is more than just a time for FYIs and descriptive ramblings. You must think reflectively and critically about the material. Don't accept it on face-value. If you find it useful, be able to explain why and how. If you don't find it useful, then you should have thoughtful and meaningful criticisms. In short, you need to be able to APPLY what you read, not just regurgitate it back to me and the class. You should write notes, thoughts, and questions in the margins of the readings. **Please make sure you have the readings for a particular class available as we discuss the material for that given class!!!**
6. Some of the material we will cover may seem dense, difficult, and unfamiliar. If you have some difficulty given your unfamiliarity with the topic or concepts, then you should spend additional time reading the material. Consult additional sources. Form a reading group with other members of the class. If you're still having trouble, you should ask me about possibly meeting for a one-on-one Zoom chat.
7. You should come to class always already prepared to discuss the material which is scheduled for that evening. You should also be flexible – in other words, LISTEN to what others say in the class and build your thoughts about the material on what they say. Don't be afraid to debate in class with others, provided that the debate is professional and respectful. Similarly, don't get discouraged if others disagree with your take on the readings – this is graduate school, so we need to take suggestions and criticisms and then rethink our positions.
8. Finally, you should take careful notes throughout the semester. The things we discuss in one class will build on top of things we've discussed previously. You should incorporate previous material, when appropriate, when extending your thoughts on future topics. And, your notes may prove useful when working on the final paper.

## Course Expectations

### 1. READINGS:

Complete all of the readings as they are assigned. Think about them as you read. Re-read if necessary. I strongly suggest that you complete each reading in a single sitting, rather than breaking it into segments, if possible. This will allow to reflect more accurately on the intricacies of the material.

### 2. ATTENDANCE:

Missing seminars is unacceptable behavior for a graduate student in the absence of illness, university sponsored activities, or family emergency. If you find that for some reason you need to miss class – whether I excuse it or not – please notify me in advance.

Additionally, if you miss class due to COVID-related illness, please note the University policy on absences:

<https://policy.illinoisstate.edu/students/2-1-30.shtml>

### 3. PUNCTUALITY:

Please attend Class on time. It is disrespectful to show up late. Additionally, you should be prepared (and not surprised by) to stay beyond the 9:20 end time for class. I will try to be respectful of your time, but it is not uncommon for graduate-level discussions to develop during a particular class period that is stimulating, important, and meaningful. If you must leave by 9:20 or 9:30, then you may do so without penalty. However, if our discussion is ongoing and insightful, you should consider sticking around until the discussion is over or comes to a good stopping point.

### 4. QUICK NOTE ABOUT ASSIGNMENTS:

Complete all assignments, on time. Late work will be penalized one grade per day of lateness (the next day begins as soon as class is over). I won't write comments/explanations for the grades I give to late work. **Failure to complete all assignments may result in failing the course. Failure to complete the major paper and/or the final exam may also result in a "C" or worse for this course.**

5. When you have questions about the course, assignments, etc., see me or email me. Don't talk to someone else in class and assume it is accurate. If you ask someone else, and they are wrong, then your performance may suffer.

### 6. PERMISSION REQUIRED TO RECORD:

Students must obtain written permission from the instructor if they wish either to photograph classroom lectures or discussions or to record them using audio or video devices. This restriction includes visual materials that accompany the lecture/discussion, such as lecture slides, whiteboard notes/equations, etc. Such recordings are to be used solely for the purposes of individual or group study with other students enrolled in the class. They may not be reproduced, shared in any way (including electronically or posting in any web environment) with those not in the class. Students with disabilities who need to record classroom lectures or discussions must contact Student Access and Accommodation Services to register, request and be approved for an accommodation. Students who violate this policy may be subject to both legal sanctions for violations of copyright law and disciplinary action under the University's Code of Student Conduct.

### 7. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. This includes cutting and pasting from the Internet (even if such cutting/pasting have a reference), and generally any material that is not your own unless broken off with quotation marks and cited to the proper author. You **MUST** cite material **EACH** time it is used – NOT just at the end of a paragraph. Specifically for this class, intentional borrowing material from others without proper citation or falsification/fabrication of supporting material, will automatically result in a ZERO for that assignment and may result in additional action taken by the appropriate university officials. You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct. All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else's work, is plagiarism.

Content generated by an Artificial Intelligence third-party service or site (AI-generated content) without proper attribution or authorization is another form of plagiarism. While students might use generative AI tools to support independent study practices (e.g., creation of extra practice problems, brainstorming of ideas), content created in whole or in part by AI may not be incorporated into any assigned coursework.

In this course, the use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Adobe Firefly) is not permitted during the completion of any assigned work. Use of a generative AI tool to complete assigned work in whole or in part may be referred under the Code of Student Conduct academic dishonesty provisions for further action by the Dean of Students Office. Students may use generative AI tools to support their independent study of course topics (i.e., for "help" understanding something), but should do so with the understanding that generative AI tools may not be trustworthy and should not be used for the actual production of any written work authored by the student. In certain circumstances, I may be required to refer violations to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

### 8. SPECIAL NEEDS/CONCERNS:

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu). Additionally, life at college can get complicated. If you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed or are struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit Student Counseling Services (SCS). These services are free and completely confidential. SCS is located at 320 Student Services Building, 309-438-3655.

### 9. ELECTRONIC DEVICES & DISTRACTIONS:

Out of courtesy for all participating in the learning experience, all cell phones, TVs, radios, etc. should be silenced during our Zoom classes. While you will undoubtedly be examining our readings and possibly conducting Google searches relevant to our discussions during class time, please minimize any and all distractions. This also means that you should inform your roommates ahead of time when your class meets so that they do not disturb you (and us). If I find that you are unreasonably distracted, especially if it distracts the rest of us, your participation grade will be reduced at my discretion.

## Course Assignments

### **ASSIGNMENT #1: Participation** (worth 50 points)

This will be a small class, so you will not be able to hide behind other's comments or pretend like you did not read. I expect all of you to come to class prepared to discuss all of the readings for that day. This grade is entirely subjective on my part, but it offers me the flexibility of rewarding interactive students at the end of the semester (i.e., if your grade is close to a higher grade, I can bump you up). Despite its subjectivity, the method of grading participation is roughly as follows:

- A = 68-75 points
- B = 60-68 points
- C = < 60 points

### **ASSIGNMENT #2: Presentation #1** (worth 50 points)

Present and lead the class in discussion about your chosen country (Ghana, Rwanda, Tunisia). In the presentation, you need to outline, describe, and explain the following elements: 1) current state of political & economic affairs in your chosen country, 2) the key political & economic issues that matter to politicians and voters, 3) the names and positions of the key political parties, 4) the names, positions, and brief biographies of the candidates running for president, 5) the platform/agenda of the presidential candidates (what do they stand for, what are their policy ideas, etc.), 6) the key messages from the candidates and/or the political parties (these include speeches, TikTok & YouTube videos, social media posts, etc.).

### **ASSIGNMENT #3: Presentation #2** (worth 50 points)

At the end of the semester (TBD), each student will "present" to the class their major paper projects.

### **ASSIGNMENT #4: Research Paper** (worth 150 points)

I want you to select a text and a theoretical component of rhetorical studies and develop a publishable or conference-quality paper. You should choose a subject matter that interests you. You should then examine, thoroughly, the literature that concerns this area of rhetoric. Based upon your comprehensive review of the literature, determine a specific part of your area that has not been examined, has been examined poorly, or has been examined but deserves further attention. This will set up your argument and thesis. You then should utilize your knowledge of rhetorical theory and criticism to explore a text that concerns cultural studies or develop a theoretical perspective that relates to rhetoric and cultural studies. The bulk of your paper (approximately 80%) should be spent on this criticism or theoretical development. Then, conclude your paper with relevant and reflective comments about the significance of your criticism, areas for future research, and the overall importance of the area under investigation. Here is a more detailed breakdown of what I expect:

1. Introduction. Tell me what your topic is and why it is worthy of study. Generally, a rhetorical paper begins with a discussion or declaration of a significant problem area.
2. Literature review; a survey of current thinking on your topic. Choose your literature wisely! This is vital to the creation of a quality research paper.
  - a. Select 15 (at least!) or more pieces of theory/research pertinent to your topic and briefly summarize them. You may use books, journal articles, dissertations, and if relevant, a limited amount of "popular" writing. The materials you choose should be fairly recent but may include 'classic' pieces if relevant. This research should be done early in the semester so you can interlibrary loan materials if necessary.
  - b. Tell me the main ideas/conclusions and, if relevant, the theoretic approach taken by each reading you choose.
  - c. Evaluate each reading, and tell me its strengths and weaknesses. Be very specific. Explain your conclusions rather than simply stating them; give me reasons why you believe what you do. If some of the literature is closely related, you may "group" them when you review them [e.g., you may say, "some scholars suggest that X is an important area to study (Baldwin, 1950; Hayes, 2005; Hunt, 2002; Baldwin, 1950; Zompetti, 2004)].
  - d. reach some overall conclusions about the literature you've analyzed. Look for gaps in the literature, e.g. things that should be examined but are not. Also look for weaknesses in the literature, e.g. things that are examined but, in your view, are not examined well.
3. Research questions. Rhetorical analysis and/or criticism does not use RQs. However, a quality paper demands an exhaustive treatment of the subject. Instead of questions, you should have one or two solid, declarative statements/contentions/positions in which you will explore in your paper. **Remember, your analysis should be challenging, not pedestrian.** If you or your readers can already ascertain the development of your contentions, then you need to uncover more significant claims and textual evidence. In other words, avoid a shallow, superficial glossing of the text.

4. Method of addressing your text and/or problem area:

- a. What parts of the text will you use to answer your questions? Why is your choice appropriate?
- b. What theory/method will you use to examine the text you've chosen? Why is your choice of method/theory appropriate?

5. The body of the paper. As I mentioned above, this should constitute the bulk of your paper. You should go to great lengths in analyzing your text(s). Incorporate relevant and insightful historical/contextual information as needed to help inform your analysis. Be liberal in your samples of the text you're investigating, but remember the majority of this section should be *your* analysis – not lengthy block quotes from some other scholar or the primary text under investigation. In this section, you should frequently ask the “how” and “why” questions. If your answers to those questions – based on what you've written – are inadequate, insufficient, or require more elaboration, then you know you need to engage in more analysis.

6. The conclusion. This is perhaps the most important part of the paper. Answer the “so what” question. In other words, why does your study matter? Why is it important? How does it advance knowledge in general and to the field of rhetoric in particular? What important insights should we have learned about the rhetorical implications of cultural studies by reading your paper? What areas of future research are there? Etc.

7. The references page. Don't forget this. You may use whatever style guide that you wish, so long as it is consistent. However, every quote and paraphrased item **MUST** be cited.

NB: I have no idea how long this “should” be. Write until you have achieved a complete explanation of your subject, not until a certain number of pages have been filled. Remember, however, that this should be a conference or publishable quality manuscript. Also be mindful of my writing tips. I will grade very carefully and heavily based on appropriate grammatical conventions (**please remember this!**). Finally, the paper is due around the middle of the semester (**March 16**). This is so you can spend time on your other classes at the end of the semester, so you can present your research to the rest of the class, and so you can have the opportunity to re-write your paper if you so choose. You will receive a grade out of 25 points for the first draft, and then if you choose to rewrite the paper, your second grade will be determined as:

- An excellent re-write will receive an 85% increase in the difference in score
- An above average re-write will receive a 70% increase
- A mediocre re-write will receive a 50% increase
- A below average re-write will receive a 25% increase
- An abysmal re-write will receive nothing.

## Grading

Presentation #1	50 points
Presentation #2	50 points
Paper	150 points
<u>Participation</u>	<u>50 points (25%)</u>
Total	300 points

Note: **Failure to turn in any of the course requirements may result in failure of the overall course.** For all assignments, work that meets the minimum expectations and is “average” work will earn the grade of “C.” Work that exceeds the minimum expectations and shows initiative, support and is considered “very good quality” will earn the grade of “B.” Work that exceeds “B” level work by being exceptional and outstanding in all areas (high degree of initiative, excellent support, superior quality, etc.) will earn the grade of “A.” Work that has promise but falls below the minimum expectations will earn a “D,” and work that is well below the minimum expectations, needs serious re-crafting and/or is not graduate-level material will earn the grade of “F.” The Grading Scale is an A (4) = 90-100, B (3) = 80-89, C (2) = 70-79, D (1) = 60-69, F (0) = 0-59.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

### Week 1      **Syllabus, introductions, discussion about rhetoric**

Th, 1/18      [read Keith & Lundberg]

### Week 2      **Rhetorical Theory and Methods**

Th, 1/25      Read: the Martin book; Browne (2009); Thomas & Zompetti (2020); Zompetti (2019, "Rhetorical Incivility")

### Week 3      **Rhetorical Analysis and Political Theory**

Th, 2/1      Read: the Martin & Davis books; Coe (2015); Drescher (1987); Krebs et al. (2007)

### Week 4      **Africa & Political Rhetoric**

Th, 2/8      Read: Adeoye et al. (2023); Etzo & Collender (2010); Karanja (2022); Mattes (2019); Saleh (2014); Simiyu (2014)

### Week 5      **Ghana**

Th, 2/15      Read: Amenyewu (2021); Diedong (2022); Dzisah (2020); Karam & Mutsvairo (2022)

### Week 6      **Tunisia**

Th, 2/22      Read: Cordova (2021); Ghozlen (2023); Yerkes & Ben Yahmed (2019); Zederman (2016)

### Week 7      **Rwanda**

Th, 2/29      Read: Essop (2021); Jokić (2016); Moore (2020); Mulliken et al (2022); Muswede (2021)

### Week 8      **Rhetorical Criticism**

Th, 3/7      Paper preparation; read: Ahmed (2021); Greene (1988); Greene (2004); Lajul (2020)

### Week 9 – Spring Break

### Week 10      **Ideology & Power; Rough Draft of your Paper is Due!!!**

Th, 3/21      Read: Althusser (1970); Charland (1987); Hall (1985); McGee (1980)

### Week 11      **Ideology & Power**

Th, 3/28      Read: Fawunmi & Taiwo (2021); Lears (1985); Mercer (1978); Zompetti (1997); Zompetti (2019, "Fallacy of Fake News")

### Week 12      **USA**

Th, 4/4      Read: Amaireh (2023); Kostova (2019); Roundtree (2019); Skonieczny (2021)

### Week 13      **USA**

Th, 4/11      read: Connolly (2017); Derakhshani (2021); Kayam (2018); Kulig et al. (2019)

### Week 14      **Visual Politics**

Th, 4/18      Read: Blair (2008), Foss (2008), Oparinde et al. (2019); Peterson (2001)

### Week 15      **So What? How is this stuff Useful? What can we do with it?**

Th, 4/25      read: Crick (2006); Hartnett (2010); Sowards & Renegar (2006); Wander & Jenkins (1972)

### Week 16

Th, 4/30      **Last Class; Paper discussion/presentations**

Monday, 5/8      Final paper draft due

## READINGS

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- Ahmed, Yunana (2021). Political Discourse Analysis: A Decolonial Approach. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 18(1), 139-155.
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<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>
- Amaireh, Hanan A. (2023). Biden's Rhetoric: A Corpus-Based Study of the Political Speeches of the American President Joe Biden. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(3), 728-735.
- Amenyeawu, Beatrice Eyram (2021). *Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana*. School of Professional Studies, Clark University, 79. [https://commons.clarku.edu/sps\\_masters\\_papers/79](https://commons.clarku.edu/sps_masters_papers/79)
- Ballard, Andrew, DeTamble, Ryan, Dorsey, Spencer, Heseltine, Michael, & Johnson, Marcus (2022). Incivility in Congressional Tweets. *American Politics Research*, 50(6), 769-780.
- Blair, J. Anthony (2008). The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments. In Charles A. Hill & Marguerite Helmers (Eds.), *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (pp. 41-61). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Browne, Stephen Howard (2009). Close Textual Analysis: Approaches and Applications. In Stephen Howard Browne (Ed.), *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* (pp. 63-76). Lexington.
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- Cordova, Giovanni (2021). Challenging Hegemony, Imaging Alternatives: Everyday Youth Discourses and Practices of Resistance in Contemporary Tunisia. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26(2), 337-355.
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- Diedong, Africanus L. (2022). Empowering Communities through Liberalisation of Airwaves in Ghana. In Beschara Karam & Bruce Mutsvairo (Eds.), *Decolonising Political Communication in Africa: Reframing Ontologies* (pp. 150-164). London: Routledge.
- Drescher, David (1987). A Typology of International Political Communication: Factual Statements, Propaganda, and Noise. *Political Communication*, 4(2), 83-91.
- Dzisah, Wilberforce S. (2020). *The Media-Democracy Paradox in Ghana: Rethinking Political Communication in an African Context*. Intellect Books.
- Essop, Ghazala Begum (2021). Teaching the Rwandan Genocide through Cartoon Strip. *African Journal of Rhetoric*, 13, 77-99.
- Etzo, Sebastiana & Collender, Guy (2010). The Mobile Phone 'Revolution' in Africa: Rhetoric or Reality? *African Affairs*, 109(437), 659-668.
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- Greene, Ronald Walter (2004). Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 37(3), 188-206.
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