Comm 171

Intro American Civic Rhetoric:

Civic Rhetoric in Trump’s America

Fall 2017

**Instructor:** Prof. James Jasinski

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**Overview of Course:**

This course serves two functions or has two purposes. First, the course is designed to satisfy the Humanistic Approaches core requirement. What does that mean? A few things. Humanistic Approaches courses study how people (or “humans,” hence Humanistic) engage questions of identity and value through forms of “intellectual and cultural experience” and “products of human reflection and creativity” (I’m quoting/paraphrasing the learning objectives and course guidelines faculty developed for this core category). Questions of identity and value? In this course we’ll focus on American *civic* identity (as well as how that identity interfaces with race, gender, etc.) as well as American *civic* values. But we need to acknowledge at the outset that we won’t emphasize the singular, but rather the plural. There isn’t a singular American identity or value but a plurality of identities and values which, through the nation’s history, have often conflicted with each other. And as the course sub-title suggests, we’ll by focusing on identity and value conflicts (along with a few others) in our present, unprecedented, and uncertain moment.

What do the guidelines mean by forms of “intellectual and cultural experience” and “products of reflection and creativity”? Many things can fall under this terminology. Our focus will be on the way people use “civic rhetoric” (communication practices concerning “civic” affairs) to share experiences, promote reflection (or perhaps in some cases to stifle reflection), and create community and identity.

The Humanistic Approaches guidelines stipulate that courses in this category will introduce appropriate “methodologies” to help “explicate and evaluate” cultural products and practices. You’ll be introduced to various “methods” in many of your Puget Sound courses. Reading, something you all know how to do, is a “method” (just as counting is a method). And just as counting leads to more advanced forms of mathematical analysis, there are more advanced, more nuanced forms of reading. This course will ask you to focus on a range of analytic concepts (conspiracy narratives, political emotions, genres, etc.) to achieve more nuanced readings of instances of civic rhetoric. By reading texts (and texts will range from tweets to speeches) more carefully, you’ll enhance your ability to “explicate” them: understand how they work/how they influence readers and listeners. And grasping how texts work/how they influence people will help you think about how you might criticize or evaluate them.

Comm 171 also satisfies a requirement in the Communication Studies major (the introduction to the major requirement). Rhetoric is not only a cultural product and practice (a text). Since Aristotle and other ancient Greeks began writing about rhetoric around 300BC, people (especially in but not limited to “the West”) have theorized about it, have studied and taught for over two millennia. In the contemporary United States, rhetoric is an object of interdisciplinary interest (which means that scholars in different academic disciplines, such as Communication, English, and Philosophy, study and teach it). At Puget Sound, rhetoric is a key topic in the Communication Studies major, and this course will introduce you to some basic principles in rhetorical theory in order to prepare you for more advanced work in the Comm Studies major or minor (should you wish to pursue such work).

**Course Objectives:**

As noted above, the broad objectives of the course are to satisfy the Humanistic Approaches core guidelines and introduce students to the academic study of rhetoric. More specifically, upon completing the course, students should be able to:

1. identify and explain how a range of concepts (from authoritarianism to paranoia) can help us understand our current civic and political world;

2. explain the historical ancestry of contemporary civic rhetoric and political practices;

3. explain how technology helps shape contemporary civic rhetoric and political practices; and

4. identify and explicate basic concepts in academic rhetorical studies (such as genre, emotion, narrative, etc.) that inform civic rhetoric in our present day.

**Required Reading**

All of the course’s *daily reading assignments* are available through the course’s moodle web site. Moodle readings will typically be in either a Word document or PDF format. I’ll provide you a list of specific course readings on the first day.

*All readings should be completed for the class period noted on the reading schedule*. If you are ever confused about what reading assignment should be completed for a specific class period, it is your responsibility to request clarifica­tion.

**Since we will be discussing readings in class, *you need to bring a copy of each day’s reading with you to class* (in paper or electronic form).**

**A word of caution about accessing readings electronically.** If you choose to access readings electronically, make sure that the only thing open on your electronic device is the course reading (or readings) or possibly other relevant course materials. While I may occasionally encourage you to Google a person or event we are discussing in class, you **should not** use class time to check email, browse the internet, etc. If I discover that students are using their electronic devices to access things other than class materials, I will ban all electronic devices from class. If I resort to this option, you will still be required to bring a copy of each day’s reading with you to class. Finally, students who repeatedly neglect to bring required readings with them to class will be dismissed from those specific class periods for which they have not brought materials.

**Course requirements/grading**:

There will be twelve (12) graded short assignments (see assignment handouts for details); each short assignment will be worth ten (10) points. There will also be twelve (12) in class reading quizzes; reading quizzes will be graded 1 through 0 (a score of 1 if quiz question answered very well, a score of .5 if quiz indicates student read the assignment but failed to answer quiz question, and 0 if quiz indicates student didn’t read material very carefully). Including the reading quizzes, there are thirteen (13) opportunities to earn ten points (10) in the course.

Your grade will be determined by your top ten (10) scores out of the thirteen possible scores. Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

100 to 93 A 81 to 80 B- 71 to 70 C-

92 to 90 A- 79 to 77 C+ 69 to 67 D+

89 to 87 B+ 76 to 72 C 66 to 63 D

86 to 82 B

Students who have answered questions correctly and/or made frequent and productive comments during class discussions *may* have there final course grade increased by one third; students with excessive absences (over five) *may* have there course grade reduced by one third.

There are no assignment or quiz make ups. Assignments will not be accepted late nor will extensions be granted. Please don’t ask.

Students with proper authorization from the Office of Accessibility and Accommodations may receive extra time to complete in class quizzes.

**Course Policies**

1. Students must comply with University policies regarding academic honesty. It is your responsibility to review the *Logger* on-line so that you avoid violating University academic honesty policies, especially those relating to academic integrity and plagiarism.

You must pay special attention to maintaining academic integrity when working on course assignments. The fact that you and your classmates are responding to the same writing prompt for the analytic assignments *does not* transform that assignment into a group project in which you would share resources with each other. The same is true for the Book Review project. *All course assignments and projects are individual. Do not share your research (your work) with your classmates.*

2. *Turn off* your cell phones before class.

3. Students may not record (audio and/or visual) class sessions. The only exception is for students authorized via the Office of Accessibility and Accommodations.

4. Please review university emergency preparedness and response procedures posted at www.pugetsound.edu/emergency/ <<http://www.pugetsound.edu/emergency/>> .  There is a link on the university home page.  Familiarize yourself with hall exit doors and the designated gathering area for your class and laboratory buildings.    
   
If building evacuation becomes necessary (e.g. earthquake), meet your instructor at the designated gathering area so she/he can account for your presence.  Then wait for further instructions.  Do not return to the building or classroom until advised by a university emergency response representative.  
   
If confronted by an act of violence, be prepared to make quick decisions to protect your safety.  Flee the area by running away from the source of danger if you can safely do so.  If this is not possible, shelter in place by securing classroom or lab doors and windows, closing blinds, and turning off room lights.  Lie on the floor out of sight and away from windows and doors.  Place cell phones or pagers on vibrate so that you can receive messages quietly.  Wait for further instructions.

5. If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Peggy Perno, Director of the Office of Accessibility and Accommodations, 105 Howarth, 253.879.3395. She will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

6. Upon approval from the Dean of Students’ Office, students who experience a death in the family, including parent, grandparent, sibling, or persons living in the same household, are allowed three consecutive weekdays of excused absences, as negotiated with the Dean of Students. For more information, please see the Academic Handbook.

**Tentative class schedule** (given the course’s focus on our present moment, revisions are possible; I’ll give you a clear heads up if we’re going to deviate):

Date Topic

Mon 8/28 Introduction to course.

Wed 8/30 Explaining Trump I: Our Postmodern Moment. **Read:** material on moodle (see course reading list for details).

Fri 9/1 Explaining Trump II: Economy vs. Culture. **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #1 due**

Mon 9/4 Labor Day. No class.

Wed 9/6 Explaining Trump III: The Decline in Trust. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 9/8 What is Populism I. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 9/11 What is Populism II. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 9/13 Trump’s Populism.

**Assign #2 due**

Fri 9/15 Trump and Demagoguery I. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 9/18 Trump and Demagoguery II. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 9/20 Emotional Appeals and Civic Rhetoric. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 9/22 Trump’s Demagoguery.

**Assign #3 due**

Mon 9/25 Authoritarianism in the 21st Century. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 9/27 Paranoia and Conspiracy in American Civic Rhetoric. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 9/29 Analyzing Conspiracy Rhetoric. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 10/2 Contemporary Conspiracy I: Alex Jones. **Read:** material on moodle (and watch video via link)

Wed 10/4 Contemporary Conspiracy II.

**Assign #4 due**

Fri 10/6 The “Myth” of Voter Fraud. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 10/9 Voting Rights in the Age of Trump

**Assign #5 due**

Wed 10/11 From Birtherism to the White House: Trump and Race. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 10/13 Race Policies/Politics in the Age of Trump. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 10/16 Fall Break. No Class.

Wed 10/18 **Book review/assign #6 due**

Fri 10/20 Charlottesville. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 10/23 Gender in Trump’s America. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 10/25 Inaugurating Trump’s Presidency. **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #7 due**

Fri 10/27 Trump and the Mainstream Media. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 10/30 Anti-intellectualism in America. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 11/1 Anti-intellectualism and the Rise of Trump. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 11/3 Expertise in the Age of Trump. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 11/6 The Trump Presidency in “Political Time.” **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #8 due**

Wed 11/8 Fake News. **Read:** material on moodle (and watch video via link)

Fri 11/10 Internet Trolling and Civic Culture. **Read:** material on moodle

Mon 11/13 Trump as Troll. **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #9 due**

Wed 11/15 No class.

Fri 11/17 No class.

Mon 11/20 Trump as Diplomat. **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #10 due**

Wed 11/22 Thanksgiving Break. No class.

Fri 11/24 Thanksgiving Break. No class.

Mon 11/27 Trump and the Twitter Presidency. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 11/29 Civic Rhetoric in the “Post-truth” Era. **Read:** material on moodle

Fri 12/1 Civic Rhetoric and Social Media/Digital Culture. **Read:** material on moodle

**Assign #11 due**

Mon 12/4 Civic Rhetoric and the Restoration of Trust. **Read:** material on moodle

Wed 12/6 **Assign #12 due**