Course Description & Goals

Participants in the course will gain broad general knowledge about the theories and methodologies that inform the study of “cultural rhetorics.” By the end of the semester, you will be able to map relationships between various theories and methodologies across inter/disciplinary boundaries and to begin to situate your own scholarly projects within one or more of the interstices of questions, methodologies, theories, and practices that comprise scholarship in cultural rhetorics.

What we'll actually do:

read, read, read a lot – in rhetoric & writing, technical communication, cultural studies, cultural history, cultural anthropology, ethnic studies, postcolonial/ decolonial studies, narrative theory, historiography, and more. The aim of these readings isn’t exhaustive coverage; it is, instead, to accumulate a theoretical and methodological constellation where our questions and discussions can help you think about how your own work will contribute to the growing body of scholarship in this field.

Our work together will focus on a complicated and sophisticated sense of story as the central methodological and theoretical tool for scholarship in cultural rhetorics, enacted through a series of practices – telling, talking about telling, watching, seeing, imagining, interpreting, etc. – that cut across the disciplinary and interdisciplinary conventions used by the scholars we’ll be reading.

We will also talk to some of these scholars who have created and/or are working in the field. Frequently, we will have Skype conversations with these folks to learn more about their work and the questions that they are wrestling with regarding cultural rhetorics. Cultural rhetorics, as you can see, is about story as practice. As such, this course is about learning to use story as practice which informs your methods and methodologies.

At the end of the course, you will self-design a cultural rhetorics project. Perhaps it is a pedagogical approach, perhaps a methodological, perhaps focused review of cultural rhetorics related to your area of study/interest. The intention is that this course helps you work towards your larger goals of incorporating a cultural rhetorics framework into your scholarship. Bonus: the 2020 cultural rhetorics conference will be held in Boise, ID during the fall semester of 2020. We *may* work on proposals for that conference as well.

So, what is cultural rhetorics? (from Katie Manthey’s Cultural Rhetorics presentation – November 2017)

Cultural rhetorics—purposefully plural to show an intersectional approach to rhetorical theory— is an approach to rhetorical theory rooted in understandings of decolonial, indigenous, queer, and feminist theories and often applied to material, ideological, and/or embodied situations. Cultural rhetorics posits that all culture is rhetorical and all rhetoric is culturally situated. Seeing culture and rhetoric as inherently connected means being able to see how systems of power—often invisible to us—function and reproduce circumstances that keep certain people in power while leaving others oppressed.
Some Questions Informing the Class:

- How does meaning-making work in specific cultures and/or communities of practice? What are the rhetorical affordances of understanding those practices? What situates those practices discursively? Historically?
- How are communities made? What rhetorical practices sustain them? How do communities constitute themselves in relation to specific geographies or in relation to imagined spatialities?
- What structures and/or forces have impacted the production of meaning in a particular culture or community of practice?
- What are the rhetorical markers of specific cultural practices? How do those markers constellate with other rhetorical practices?
- How do theoretical ideas like “contact zones,” “use,” or “borderlands” rhetoricize cultural practices?
- How is the relationship between maker, meaning, and community of practice important in a given context?
- How is a discipline like Rhetoric Studies also a community? A culture? What practices sustain it? What cultural norms are part of being disciplined into it? How do these stories and findings map onto one another and across communities of practice?

Some Themes the Class Will Touch On:

- Cultural studies and the evolution towards cultural rhetorics
- Decoloniality, decolonization, and de-linking as guiding practices
- Cultural rhetorics as a methodology for research
- Cultural rhetorics as a pedagogy for writing studies, professional/technical writing
- Cultural rhetorics sub-fields: queer rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, indigenous rhetorics, and more