The Rhetoric of Pop Culture America

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The objective or scope of English 202: Critical Thinking & Composition, as stated in the Palomar College Course Outline, is to examine “language and its implication through rhetorical and semiotic analysis based on systematic consideration of language in context” and develop an “awareness of principles of classical argument in light of the traditions of rational thought.”

In this class, we will be examining popular culture and the texts that are produced within it to unveil rhetoric that comments on or portrays issues such as consumerism, socio-political propaganda, gender issues, transgression, social deviance, and other issues of social or political sensitivity and concern.

You are expected to reflect critically on your processes of writing and reading, and to interrogate the ways in which texts (re)produce particular social constructions and power relations, such as those that center around gender, race, nationality, class, disability, and sexuality.

You will learn to question, explore, explain, analyze, develop, and critique ideas effectively; undertake writing projects that have depth and complexity; and make appropriate decisions about argument, structure, and rhetorical conventions.

It will be important for you to discard your prudishness, if any, as soon as you walk through the door of this classroom because you will be reading/exposed to content of a mature nature.

TEXTS

Required:

ASSIGNMENTS

Responses
You will have multiple responses due throughout the semester. These responses (at least 300 words) are meant to be fairly informal write-ups on our class texts (on syllabus) that are typed, stapled, and double-spaced. Use these responses to explore your ideas and probe concepts.
**DUE:** Assigned periodically throughout the semester. Individual responses to be assigned in class and due at the beginning of the next class.

Short Essays
50% of Final Portfolio grade (approx 17% each essay)
Short Essay 1 & 2: the topic is open to your choice, however, they must each be different. But please note that these essays must meet the following requirements: 1) it addresses a potent and volatile problem in our current culture and attempts to pose an answer OR it addresses a controversial and socially significant issue in our current realm of being and analyzes it through context as well as displays/utilizes multiple perspectives AND possess a valid thesis; 2) addresses a concrete specific topic; 3) must fully engage with the issue at hand; 4) must have at least five sources; 5) must incorporate critical thinking methodology and insights from class texts; 6) must have a works cited page. Each essay must be 1000-1200 words.

Short Essay 3: analyze an article from *Signs of Life in the USA*, a section of the novel *Fight Club*, or a poem in *Gasoline* or *Howl* and investigate the topic or issue further. This essay must incorporate the following: 1) engages fully with text; 2) investigates the text through contextual evidence as well as other critical thinking methodology that we explore in class; 3) must utilize five secondary sources; 4) must have a works cited page. This essay must be 1000-1200 words.

Research Project
30% of Final Portfolio grade
This is a formal, argumentative, college-level research paper that is at least 3000 words in length. As far as a topic is concerned, I find that it is more hindering to write a specific prompt for you. Thusly, this is an open topic research paper, however, the content must be within the confines of popular culture and the texts or problems thereof. When writing this research project, it will be important to narrow your topic down to a concise statement or problem. Note that this is an argument-driven problem-solving research project. This research essay must address a valid issue within popular culture that is worth arguing. Please see me when you have a topic for this research project. All topics must be cleared through me (face to face or email). This research essay must have at least seven sources and a works cited page.

Final Creative Project
Project & Presentation: Creating Rhetoric - A Creative Project
20% of Final Portfolio grade
**Objective:** to produce your own pop culture text, explain the significance of it, and critically engage with the topic of your choice through analysis of such items as context (such as but not limited to social and political variables), multiple perspectives, and other critical thinking methodology.

Think and reflect on the content that we have covered in this class. Contemplate the texts that we have covered. From music to fiction to poetry to essays, we have been exposed to rhetoric that communicated to the reader/audience a certain social or political message. Now, it is your time to create. You must create your own piece of pop culture rhetoric. This creative project must address a significant and precise topic.
To explain this further, the project has been split into three modules:

Module 1: Create a well-developed screenplay (minimum 5 pages), short story (minimum 3 pages), poem (minimum 20 lines), or an other media project (other media projects can include DV and AVI productions, musical score[s] or mix[es], website, performance piece, sculpture, found-art, painting, illustration, installation, a collection of photography [minimum 5 proofs], or other approved media [please let me know if you're thinking about doing something not listed above]).

Module 2: The Explanation: To satisfy the writing requirement for this class, this second module of the creative project must be fulfilled. After you have produced your pop-culture piece of rhetoric, you must compose a 1000-1200 words (or more) essay based on the following criteria: (1) explain and critically engage with the topic that you have chosen (2) explain and discuss any rhetorical devices that have been used (3) in detail, explain what it is about your creation that is important to you? (4) and lastly, but most importantly, how is your project different or similar to a text that you have explored in class (i.e., theme, tone, character, symbolism, and so on).

Module 3: Finally, for the third module of this project, you must share a draft of your creation with the entire class (we'll discuss presentation days for each individual when time allows). This presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes.

If your piece happens to be longer than 15 minutes, please try to abbreviate the presentation (be creative) for time conservation purposes. If you have chosen an other media project, please bring it in, share/perform/read to the class, and provide an abstract of your explanation for the class that explains the significance or meaning of your creation. Prepare to make this a presentation to the class.

DUE: These are due when you make your presentation to the class, which will be during the last week of class.

THE PORTFOLIO

The portfolio of written work you are required to turn in on the last meeting of the semester must be in a three ring binder or pocket folder and include the following bulleted items. Any portfolio not in this format or a portfolio that falls short of content will not be accepted (i.e., missing assignments, etcetera):

- Table of Contents
- Preface (300-500 words, see note below)
- Three Short Essays (all drafts, including revisions)
- Research Paper (all drafts, including revisions)
- Module 1 and Module 2 (see descriptions) of the Final Creative Project (if your project is something that cannot be turned in, such as a sculpture or something of this sort, please take a photo of it and write a brief abstract (no more than 200 words) of it and include it in your portfolio along with everything pertaining to the Final Creative Project.

Note about the Preface to your final portfolio: In 300-500 words discuss how the work in your portfolio reflects your overall development as a writer and thinker, and specifically how your
engagement with the idea of cultural critique and critical thinking has or has not impacted your writing and thinking as well as your ideas about the social functions of writing.

Support this discussion with specific commentary on some or all of the texts in your portfolio—evaluate their strengths and weaknesses—and discuss your revisions in detail. You may provide a rationale for why you have arranged the work in the order that you have. Your preface should read as a cohesive whole. Note: the preface is not an evaluation of the course or of me. (due at the end of the semester; should include all writing assignments [original & revisions])

**GRADES**

Ancillary assignments & participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Itemized Assignment Values</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary assignments &amp; participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio (refer to portfolio requirements for itemized assignment values)</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: If you do not participate, fully, in class, this will count against you in the form of lack of attendance.

**ASSIGNMENT DETAILS**

All written assignments (except in class writings) must be typed and double-spaced. You are also required to run a spell check and adhere to MLA format for citing sources (see *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Fifth Edition [1999]). Revisions will not be accepted without prior drafts. Late work without reasonable explanation and notice is unacceptable and will result in a lower grade for the assignment. One revision for each paper/essay is allowed and cannot, and will not, be accepted after one week of original return date (the higher score will be recorded). For example, if your paper is returned to you, by me, on Monday, the latest your revision can be turned in is on the following Monday. No exceptions.

**GROUP WORKSHOPS**

Periodically, we will be breaking up into groups of four or five students (possibly less, possibly more, depending on class size) in order to exchange papers to workshop. In order to successfully do this, each of you must bring at least six copies of your rough draft to class.

By doing this, you will have the opportunity to have your papers reviewed by your peers. It is important that when you workshop a paper and write a response, you carefully choose your words in a constructive manner, address the positive and negative aspects of the texts, and critically engage with each text.

On the day you exchange your papers back and hand your workshop response back to your peer, please print two copies and give one to me.

**THE WRITING CENTER**

The Writing Center is located in Room S-1 of the San Marcos campus and offers one-on-one consultation and tutoring at all stages of the writing process: brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing. While the Writing Center will assist with the rules of grammar and punctuation, it is not an editing service; rather, it seeks to work with you in developing and improving your problem-solving strategies and analytic abilities. The Writing Center is staffed by trained peer tutors familiar with the varied writing demands of the college’s writing requirement.
The Writing Center also includes a resource room with books and other materials on writing. The services offered by the Writing Center are free of charge. Visit their website at http://www.palomar.edu/english/writing_center/.

For this class, it is recommended that you consult with tutors in The Writing Center at least twice during the semester, but you may consult with tutors more frequently if you wish.
**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**

10/23/05 –
*First day of class. All those who are afraid of extremely hard work can run away. Scared.*
Introductions
Overview of course syllabus
Examine *Critical Thinking*
Overview of Signs of Life (*Introduction*, pp. 1-29)
Group Exercise: *Reading the Signs* (pp 29)
Brainstorm and outline topic/thesis for Short Essay 1

10/25/05 –
**Writing Due:**
Rough Draft of Short Essay 1
*Hint: You may want to read the selection below before you start on your Short Essay 1 because this selection is a good starting point and can fire your thoughts.*

**Reading Due:**
Signs of Life in the USA: *Writing About Popular Culture, Citing Sources* (pp. 31-62)

**Week 2**

10/30/05 –
**Writing Due:**
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. xi-29)
Response to *Clear Thinking for Composition* (pp. 1-16)

**Reading Due:**
*Fight Club* (pp. xi-29)
*Clear Thinking for Composition* (pp. 1-16)

11/01/05 –
**Writing Due:**
Final Draft of Short Essay 1
Topic and proposal for Short Essay 2
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 30-64)
Response to *The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 12-25)

**Reading Due:**
*Fight Club* (pp. 30-64)
*The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 12-25)
Week 3

11/06/05 – **Writing Due:**
Rough Draft of Short Essay 2
Response to *Howl* (pp. 7-28)
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 65-85)
Come to class with prepared notes on the supplemental reading

**Reading Due:**
*Howl* (pp. 7-28)
*Fight Club* (pp. 65-85)

**Supplemental Reading:**
The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (pp. 26-34)

11/08/05 – **Writing Due:**
Topic and proposal for Short Essay 3
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 86-102)
Response to *Gasoline* (any three poems of your choice!!)
Response to *Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 65-75)

**Reading Due:**
*Fight Club* (pp. 86-102)
*Gasoline* (any three poems of your choice!!)
*Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 65-75)

Week 4

11/13/05 – **Writing Due:**
Final Draft of Short Essay 2
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 103-142)
Response to *Signs of Life in the USA* (choose one essay within Chapter 1: Consuming Passions: The Culture of American Consumption)

**Reading Due:**
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 103-142)
*Signs of Life in the USA*: Choose one essay that interests you in Chapter 1: Consuming Passions: The Culture of American Consumption

**Supplemental Reading:**
Clear Thinking for Composition (pp. 27-39, 81-102)

11/15/05 – **Writing Due:**
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 143-166)
Response to *Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 209-221)
Response to *The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking*

**Reading Due:**
*Fight Club* (pp. 143-166)
*Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 209-221)
The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (pp. 35-40, 52-58)
Week 5

11/20/05 – **Writing Due:**
Final Draft of Short Essay 3
Topic and brief outline for the Research Essay (at least the thesis)
Response to *Fight Club* (pp. 167-end)
Response to *Signs of Life in the USA*: Choose one essay that interests you within *Chapter 3: Video Dreams: Television, Music, and Cultural Forms*  

**Reading Due:**
*Fight Club* (pp. 167-end)
*Signs of Life in the USA*: Choose an essay that interests you within *Chapter 3: Video Dreams: Television, Music, and Cultural Forms*  

**Supplemental Reading:**
The *Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 69-76, 86-96)

11/22/05 – **Writing Due:**
Response to *The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 126-128)
Proposal for Research Paper (500 words)
Working bibliography for Research Paper  

**Reading Due:**
The *Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 126-128)

Week 6

11/27/05 – **Writing Due:**
Draft of Research Paper  

**In Class:**
Workshop all Research Papers (you must bring in at least six copies of your paper)

**Reading Due:**
TBD

11/29/05 – **Writing Due:**
Final Draft of Research Paper

**Reading Due:**
TBD
Week 7

12/04/05 – Writing Due:
Proposal for Final Creative Project

Reading Due:
TBD

12/06/05 – TBD

Week 8

12/11/05 – Due at the end of class if you are presenting. No exceptions. Final Creative Project

12/13/05 – Due at the end of class if you are presenting. No exceptions. Final Creative Project

12/13/05 – Due at the beginning of class. No exceptions. Final Portfolio