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 on 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, and 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.

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 society and analyzes it through context as well as displays/utilizes multiple perspectives AND possesses 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 1,000-1,200 words.

Short Essay 3: analyze an article from Signs of Life in the USA, a section of the novel Survivor, 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 1,000-1,200 words.

Research Project
30% of Final Portfolio grade
This is a formal, argumentative, college-level research paper that is at least 3,000 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 Project & Presentation
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.

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.................................................................10%
Portfolio (refer to portfolio requirements for itemized assignment values)...........90%

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

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences or tardiness will not be tolerated. “An instructor may elect to drop a student for the following reasons: 1) excessive absences, normally defined as more than the number of times the class meets per week; 2) failure to take examinations; 3) failure to complete class assignments. …The primary responsibility for class attendance and maintaining an accurate registration record rests with the student. …Students are expected to attend all sessions of a class in which they are enrolled. Anticipated absences should be reported to instructors in advance in order to complete assigned work by due dates.”

--- Palomar College Catalog, Section 5 – Academic Regulations and Standards

*Distilled: Come to class and don’t be late!*

**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.

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/](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

01/23/08 –
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

Week 2

01/30/08 –
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 3

02/06/08 –
Writing Due:
Response to Survivor (pp. 289-250)
Response to The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (Preface, pp. 1-11)

Reading Due:
Survivor (pp. 289-250)
The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (Preface, pp. 1-11)

Week 4

02/13/08 –
Writing Due:
Final Draft of Short Essay 1
Topic and proposal for Short Essay 2
Response to Survivor (pp. 249-205)
Response to The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (pp. 12-25)

Reading Due:
Survivor (pp. 249-205)
The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (pp. 12-25)
Week 5

02/20/08 –

**Writing Due:**
Rough Draft of Short Essay 2
Response to *Howl* (pp. 7-28)
Response to *Survivor* (pp. 204-158)
Come to class with prepared notes on the supplemental reading

**Reading Due:**
*Howl* (pp. 7-28)
*Survivor* (pp. 204-158)
The *Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking* (pp. 26-34)

Week 6

02/27/08 –

**Writing Due:**
Topic and proposal for Short Essay 3
Response to *Survivor* (pp. 157-101)
Response to *Gasoline* (any three poems of your choice!!)
Response to *Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 65-75)

**Reading Due:**
*Survivor* (pp. 157-101)
*Gasoline* (any three poems of your choice!!)
*Signs of Life in the USA* (pp. 65-75)

Week 7

03/05/08 –

**Writing Due:**
Final Draft of Short Essay 2
Response to *Survivor* (pp. 100-49)
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 *Survivor* (pp. 100-49)
*Signs of Life in the USA*: Choose one essay that interests you in Chapter 1: Consuming Passions: The Culture of American Consumption
Week 8

03/12/08 –

Writing Due:
Response to Survivor (pp. 48-1)
Response to Signs of Life in the USA (pp. 209-221)
Response to The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking

Reading Due:
Survivor (pp. 48-1)
Signs of Life in the USA (pp. 209-221)
The Pocket Guide to Critical Thinking (pp. 35-40, 52-58)

Week 9

03/19/08 –

Writing Due:
Final Draft of Short Essay 3
Topic and brief outline for the Research Essay (at least the thesis)
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:
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)

Week 10

03/26/08  SPRING BREAK

Week 11

04/02/08 –

Writing Due:
Response to Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 5: American Paradox – Culture and Contradiction in the U.S.A. (381-395)
Response to Kennedy, Randall. “Blind Spot.” Signs of Life in the U.S.A. (446-448)
Proposal for Research Paper (500 words)
Working bibliography for Research Paper

Reading Due:
Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 5: American Paradox – Culture and Contradiction in the U.S.A. (381-395)
Kennedy, Randall. “Blind Spot.” Signs of Life in the U.S.A. (446-448)
Week 12

04/09/08 –

Writing Due:
Rough Draft of Research Paper
Response to Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 4: The Hollywood Sign – The Culture of American Film (299-307)

Reading Due:
Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 4: The Hollywood Sign – The Culture of American Film (299-307)

Week 13

04/16/08 –

Writing Due:
Final Draft of Research Paper
Response to Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 6: We’ve Come Long Way, Maybe - Gender Codes in American Culture (451-457)

Reading Due:
Signs of Life in the USA: Chapter 6: We’ve Come Long Way, Maybe - Gender Codes in American Culture (451-457)

Week 14

04/23/08 –

Writing Due:
Proposal for Final Creative Project
Response to Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Chapter 7: Constructing Race – Readings in Multicultural Semiotics (541-548)

Reading Due:
Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Chapter 7: Constructing Race – Readings in Multicultural Semiotics (541-548)
Week 15

04/30/08 – Creative Writing Segment

Week 16

05/07/08 – Final Creative Project Presentations

Week 17

05/14/08 – Final Creative Project Presentations

Week 18 (attendance is mandatory; no exceptions)

05/21/08 – Due at the beginning of class (no exceptions): Final Portfolio