

English 380:
Rhetoric and Public Interest
CRN: 16663, 3 credits
Spring 2024
Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 9:30 – 10:20 a.m.
WALC 3148

Instructor:

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Office hours: 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. (Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays), or by appointment.

Course Description

When I last taught this course, we were relatively fresh off the January 6th riot/insurrection/protest at the US Capital. Some people thought the polarized, toxic culture of politics might have broken after the event, that the fever might have broken. It hasn't. The US has grown at the more entrenched and common ground seems all the more out of reach. During this semester, the nation will begin a year-long election process that promises the same division and recrimination. This course introduces students to theories and methods of analyzing collective social action rhetoric, invites students to apply that critical thinking to historical and current activism, and challenges students to develop research into movements to which they have a personal connection.

Today's activism in the U.S. has its roots in a nation founded on protest from colonial freedom and anti-slavery activism to movements focused on civil rights and identity politics. This activism reflects the understanding, use, and power of rhetoric to affect national identity formation, its ideals, and mythology, and these forms of social movement rhetoric pursue change for the place and meaning of people of color, women, the working poor, and other minority identity formations. After being introduced to a menu of methods for the analysis of the rhetoric of social movements and applying them to specific common texts, students will develop their own substantive research into activism around social, cultural, or political change, ideally a project that taps activism with unique appeal. Using activist language that's come before and honoring how social justice has been advanced through writing and speaking in the past, we'll take a look at contemporary struggles around AI, the environment, reproductive rights, voting rights, affirmative action, religious freedom, and marriage equality.

Texts

All available at open-source materials via Brightspace connections

Learning Objectives

- Link contemporary assumptions about public citizenship to historical movements around social justice.
- Introduce collective action as tangible, accessible, and negotiable.
- Foster critical awareness of the shifting nature of identity and place in the U.S.
- Place contemporary political debates over citizenship and civic agency and participation in a wide historical context.
- Highlight historical shifts in the ways by which people come to identify with social movements, their agenda and rhetoric, and the degree to which particular formations have become hegemonic.

- Connect writing process and analysis to audience and rhetorical purpose.
- Create a collaborative peer-to-peer environment for revising in virtual and “real-time” contexts.
- Continue growing students' facility with written and oral communication.

Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of key social movement rhetoric linked to race, sex, class, and nationality.
- Capacity to place oneself in dialog with historical movements for social justice.
- Awareness of analytic methods for movement rhetoric, and opportunity to combine or riff strategies to foster innovative technique and insight.
- Research social movement, study its rhetoric and apply insight to a local context.
- Write essays focusing on functional, political, and ideographic elements.
- Develop an expertise in a social movement's rhetoric.
- Produce a portfolio reflecting intellectual growth around the social movement rhetoric context, argumentation, prose, and composition self-awareness.

Assignments

Weekly reading/responding/writing will culminate in essays designed to challenge students to apply functional and critical/interpretive methods of analysis to primary/original social movement and activist texts. Students will upload essay drafts, workshop each other's writing, and then produce meta-texts to guide revision based on peer responses. Students will also produce a portfolio representing a range of criticisms or interpretive techniques. A semester-long project will require students to survey and catalog a movement or activist rhetoric and to produce a “text” that fosters education or awareness of the movement or activism amongst your wider peer group.

Overview:

- **In-Class Participation, Online Posting & Responding** (30% of course grade, posted in 10% chunks)
 - *Reading & Class Responses*
 - We'll have some meaty academic theories of social movement rhetoric, or we'll look at some actual primary texts (or do both). To prime our class discussions, I'd like for you to respond on your BrightSpace journals, by 9:00 a.m., the morning of class, at least once a week.
 - Alternatively, tell me about the world around you and the rhetoric of public issues you're encountering. If you're not politically inclined, write to me about pop- or subcultural debates you're encountering (e.g., what do you make of *Barbie* or the most recent episodes of *RuPaul* or *Below Deck*? What are they trying to make us believe? What's the frame? Any points of challenge?)
 - You might also debrief about class. Riff on something you heard but that you didn't feel comfortable sharing in class. Spout off about something class got you thinking about.
 - **Minimum: Post weekly.** For a better grade, post with substance and foster conversation, whether in discussion threads or private journals with me.
 - *Participation*
 - Rather than have me talk *at* you, I'd prefer to facilitate a healthy discussion among us about the readings and how you under them and can integrate them into your own experiences as well as the primary texts we'll be analyzing. That said, I understand talking in class, to others or me, can be intimidating. If you're one of those people, strike up a dialogue with me online through our journal on BrightSpace.
 - Application Presentations: Following each of our theoretical modules, you'll present your own application of that theory to an activist group or issue of your choosing. Remember, we've got a mixed class of peers who might not share your belief and for whom you're trying to show how they use rhetoric according to

the theory we've just studied. Alternatively, you can pick some example of activism that you've encountered in the world and show you understand the theory in relation to it. Be prepared to lead class discussion around your application for about 10 minutes.

- Grading:
 - Grades in the "B" range for this element of the course represent substantive posting, dialog, or application.
 - Grades in the "A" range represent "outstanding" peer response and meta-texts. They push peers and self in productive and insightful ways in a consistent basis.
 - Grades at or below the "C" range represent inconsistent postings (missing any weekly postings) or posting that represent facile and minimalist commenting.
 - Monthly grades will be affected by whether you miss class for legitimate reasons (University recognized absences or religious observances).
- **Mid-Term Portfolio** (30% of final grade)
 - **Revise any journal response** into a fully fleshed-out essay directed to an authentic audience of your own choosing. The point is to persuade this potential/actual audience of the insight(s) you're developing in the journal post. Your argument needs to be presented in a manner that would resonate with that audience while also signaling your understanding of the content as well as your persuasive control. This paper isn't meant to be the typical 5-paragraph theme, but instead to be a vehicle for you to share insight that's meaningful and excites you (about doing, about sharing your learning). For consistency, please format your papers according to MLA guidelines. Cite any outside sources or references that contribute to your understanding or analysis of texts (i.e., wikipedia or google). I highly encourage you to also workshop your revisions with a consultant at the Purdue OWL (remember, you can do this work in-person, through email or "live" chat), but go into the experience being active (what do you want help with, what would you like to learn) as opposed to being a passive blob ("Yo, look at this and fix it for me").
 - Write a cover-memo addressed to me, reflecting on your writing process and on what guided your choice of essays. Your memo may also consider:
 - How did it go?
 - What problems did you encounter?
 - What do you feel good about?
 - What do you wish you could now change?
 - What did you learn about your own writing that you could share with other students?
 - Due: March 4, in BrightSpace under Assignment link.
 - Grading:
 - Grades in the "B" range for this element of the course represent strong products that represent substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. The meta-text is also insightful.
 - Grades in the "A" range represent "outstanding" revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose.
 - Grades at or below the "C" range represent inconsistent revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. The meta-text is missing or inadequate.
- **Final Portfolio** (40% of final grade) (Due by the end of our final exam period, TBA)
 - Part 1: Develop and revise any two journal postings from the semester into fully-fleshed out documents that you might imagine sharing/publishing with an authentic audience. Also include a meta-text as outlined in the midterm project.
 - Part 2: Social Movement/Activism Project
 - Pick any social or cultural issue in which you have a personal investment. You

will need to propose and commit to the issue early on in the semester, writing an initial introduction to the issue/movement and explaining your motives for studying it.

- Assess how you might bridge the gulf on your issue, reflect on how discussion went in class if we ended up choosing your topic to discuss.
- 5-10 minute presentation during last week of classes.
- Grading:
 - Grades in the “B” range for this element of the course represent strong essays that represent substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. The meta-text is also insightful. The project will represent audience-awareness, a sound understanding of the movement and its agenda, and have a reasonable action plan to educate.
 - Grades in the “A” range represent essays that have outstanding revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose. The meta-text is thorough, with key insights and examples. The project will represent sophisticated audience-awareness as well as comprehensive understanding of the connections between activism or movement being studied and the semester’s lessons from theories and histories.
 - Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. The meta-text is missing or inadequate. Projects will reflect weak or incomplete understanding of movements, applications of our theories, and/or an inadequate/implausible action plan.

Grading

- Grades in the “B” range for the course represent “strong” performance, including substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. Reading quizzes indicate mostly careful reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are also insightful for a writer’s process and self-awareness. Presentations are strong, but slight important elements of the topic.
- Grades in the “A” range represent “outstanding” performance, including deep revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose. Reading quizzes suggest outstanding reading and understanding of assigned texts. Any meta-texts are sophisticated studies of a writer’s process and self-awareness. Presentations are very effective and leave few if any gaps in the assigned topic.
- Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent performance, including uneven revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. Quizzes are spotty or inconsistent evidence of reading and understanding of texts. The meta-text is missing or inadequate. Presentations verge on ineffective, incomplete, and leave the audience wondering about significant elements of the assigned topic.

Policies

Attendance & Deadlines

- Attendance is critical. Missing sessions undermines our sense of community that just can’t be duplicated. Adhering to deadlines is also crucial. However, life intrudes from time to time, and I understand that reality. You are each experienced, so I assume you’ll know to contact one another and explain/make allowances for missed discussions.

- Please be aware that postings need to be done no later than the deadlines outlined above or in the schedule, so also factor access to technology into your schedule. Assume, as I always do, that when you most need technology, it will fail you. In other words, have a back-up plan to your internet access.
- If you cannot participate or meet a deadline because of a religious observation, please let me know, and we'll negotiate equitable due dates.
- Late portfolios will be penalized one-third grade for each day past the due date. Late postings will also diminish your grades for the discussion component.

Snow days/Bad weather

- If Purdue calls a snow day (rarely happens), we'll follow its guidance. If I can't get to campus, we'll flip to a zoom classroom and meet online. If you can't get campus, life happens, it's okay.

Disability and Special Circumstances

- If you have a learning disability, you are under no obligation to inform me, but knowing that information can help me make your learning experience better. If you suspect you may have undiagnosed issues and want help, I can provide appropriate, confidential contact information.

Academic Integrity

- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. However, you'll be doing quite a bit of writing in class and individual enough in nature that such cheating will be difficult—I'll get very familiar with your voice and natural means of expression. Also, be aware that your prose needs to be in your voice—if someone else edits your work, in certain cases your writing no longer is "yours." Passing it off as yours is still plagiarism. In most cases, plagiarism is unintentional or happens because of anxiety. Rather than get yourself in trouble, talk to me, and we can work through the problems.
- ChatGPT, or artificial intelligence with large language models, has created quite a bit of angst on campus, for your peers, for your professors, and maybe even for you. The technology has quite a bit of promise to help writers who get in a bind, so we'll talk about how to, when to, and whether to use the technology in your own learning process. I don't love that it flattens all voice and audiences, but that's my bias as a rhetoric/writing professor. I want you to learn to understand literacy, reading and writing, as a broad activity that represents innumerable genres and communities of practice, not just in English, not even considering the broader humanities, social sciences, arts, and STEM disciplines. This instructor cares about you as a writer and budding English major; I plan to be actively engaged in learning and studying with you, so I hope to help foster your personal relationship with knowledge and your representation of it. If you want to check out or use LLMs, let's do it as a class and see what it gets right, wrong, and how it goes afoul of teaching and learning in college.
 - **A bit of a warning:** Talk to your other professors about how they feel about the technology in their classes. Some faculty, some departments have very different relationships to the issue of LLMs than we will have in this course.
- Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace table of contents, under University Policies.

Essay style and conventions

- All class assignments and projects must be word-processed unless otherwise noted. Handwritten or informally produced documents will not be accepted. Please number your pages and follow MLA or Chicago citation and format guidelines as detailed on the Purdue OWL. If MLA or CMOS are styles that you'll never use in your professional life, talk to me and we'll figure out another that will help you down the road.

Conduct

- Students are expected to adhere to the university's code of conduct. While I will encourage wide diversity in opinions and talk, everyone must be allowed to have a voice. On the flipside, being a passive, withdrawn presence in our community is not appropriate. Though some courses on campus don't enable students to have much agency, this course will prize everyone's engagement and talk (whether face-to-face or online). Students should not expect me to just transmit what I want or impart knowledge; I'm here to get you to express and hone your thinking, writing, and speaking. Please don't assume everyone agrees with you or has your life experiences. We will frequently discuss how people opposed to particular ideas come to them, assuming some of "those people" likely are in class and just don't embody what they're thinking. Students who don't actively participate may pass, but they will likely get a low grade. If you're a quiet and shy person, use our activities on BrightSpace as an outlet.
- Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his, her, or their potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies.
- Mental Health/Wellness: A link to CAPS is on the Brightspace listing of resources of Student Services and Resources section. Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.

Schedule

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1	January 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before class, try out NameCoach. Need help? See BrightSpace. • Introductions, review syllabus, assignments • Register with Purdue OWL, if you haven't • Post to journal on BrightSpace: Thoughts on syllabus, questions you didn't feel comfortable sharing in the room. 	January 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Rhetoric? • What is truth? • What are sources of information? • Primary versus secondary information? • Applying it all to the "interwebs" 	January 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit "Rhetoric" • What's an argument? Fact vs. Value? • Post to journal: How do you feel about the concepts we've talked about this week? Anything leaving you wondering?
2	January 15 (No classes for MLK, JR, day)	January 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit what's an argument. • Policy vs. Fact vs. Value • Idea of the Warrant 	January 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's activism or social movement? • Post to journal: What do you make of most every fact, value, or policy being arguable? Or better, a representation of rhetoric? What warrants do you see in everyday argument?
3	January 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional analysis of activist rhetoric • Artificial Intelligence & Writing 	January 24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional analysis in detail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Changing views of society vs history 	January 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Prescribing action vs mobilizing for action • Deepening AI and campus policy • Post to journal: Many students struggle to see/hear how activists are trying to change our views of society and history. Do a riff on where you see that distinction happening in everyday society.

4	January 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping the movement alive 	January 31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepening AI and campus policy 	February 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post to journal: Option 1) Write about where you see activists trying to keep their movement alive after losing or winning? Why wouldn't they just stop and be done?
5	February 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 1: Walk the class through as many functions as possible with an activist group/politicism you see as interesting. Semester-long project proposal due 	February 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 1 continues. 	February 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 1 wrap up.
6	February 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of Style Environmental activism (LEAP Project) 	February 14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocating for reform or revolutionary change 	February 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting conventional codes or rejecting them Post to journal: What do you make of activism <i>style</i>? What are you drawn to? What are the people around you influenced by? Share some specific examples.
7	February 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 2 	February 21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 2 	February 23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications Presentations 2
8	February 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of ideology in activist rhetoric Ideology vs. hegemony What's an ideological "dog whistle"? 	February 28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of ideology in activist rhetoric Genealogy of an ideological code 	March 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class, Harry at ECWCA (regional writing center conference)
9	March 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 3 Midterm portfolio due 	March 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 3 	March 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class Semester-long Project Update Due

10	March 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class, Spring Break 	March 13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class, Spring Break 	March 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No class, Spring Break
11	March 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application Presentations 3, wrap up. Access to education debates 	March 20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA 	March 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA
12	March 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voting rights activism 	March 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA 	March 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA
13	April 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious freedom vs anti-discrimination activism 	April 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA 	April 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA
14	April 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presidential election activism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assuming Supreme Court takes up election issues 	April 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA 	April 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary activist texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading TBA
15	April 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences with Harry in 230B KRCH 	April 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences 230B KRCH 	April 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences 230B KRCH
16	April 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activism Presentations 	April 24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activism Presentations 	April 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activism Presentations
17	Finals week (Final portfolio due, date TBD)		