

CA 410: Advanced Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Religion
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Course Description

Perhaps it is easier to start with what this course is not. This course is not about any particular religion, especially your religion or the professor's. This course is not about comparative religion, although we will look at different views of religion. Rather, this course is about the idea of religion as an overarching concept. In this course we will examine the rhetorical aspects of religion. As rhetoric is the means by which we construct our shared symbolic world, it is an essential element of religious experience.

This course has two primary goals. At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Apply rhetorical theory to religious discourse.
- Construct and evaluate theoretically informed religious discourse.

These goals will be assessed in several ways. Students will write response papers that ask them to consider religious topics such as faith and morality as well as rhetorical ones such as ethos and pathos in religious expression. However, the core assessment will be the public performance of a sermon. This sermon will also be written with justifications for their rhetorical choices. Graduate students will be assessed through a final research paper and comprehensive exam question.

I expect that each student will come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the day. According to the University of South Alabama's Academic Policies and Procedures, "Each hour of lecture usually requires two hours of outside preparation. Thus, a student carrying sixteen semester hours should be prepared to spend at least 48 hours in class and study per week."

Required Texts

Bataille, Georges. *Theory of Religion*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1989.

Hogan, Lucy Lind, and Robert Reid. *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.

All other readings will be available through the library's online course reserves.

Suggested Text

Bataille, Georges. *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*. Translated by Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986.

This text is suggested for those who want more background on Bataille's theories. I would also recommend investing in a style guide, such as APA, MLA, or Chicago, if you have not already done so. An important part of scholarly writing is accurately and consistently citing your sources.

Class Climate

The questions that we will grapple with have no easy answers. There will be points where you may disagree with someone else. This is appropriate and, to some degree, desirable. However, respect for others in the class is an essential component of this class. Arguments should be made in a spirit of inquiry rather than as personal attacks. For more on University of South Alabama's policy regarding Academic Disruption, see *The Lowdown*.

Attendance Policy

This is a senior level course, so I assume that by now you recognize the value of regular class attendance. This course relies heavily on in-class discussion. Excessive absences will negatively impact your participation grade in this course. If you are not present, you are not able to participate and it is impossible to make up the discussion. You get two absences free—no questions asked. However, after these absences, each absence will decrease your final grade by 10 points (half a letter grade), so use them wisely. In addition, there may be in-class activities, such as the peer editing sessions, that are impossible to make up. If you are absent, please do not email me asking, "What did I miss?" You missed 150 minutes of discussion and perhaps an assignment. Make friends with your classmates and get the notes from them and/or come to my office hours.

Academic Honesty

From the Student Academic Conduct Policies: "Any dishonesty related to academic work or records constitutes academic misconduct including, but not limited to, activities such as giving or receiving unauthorized aid in tests and examinations, improperly obtaining a copy of an examination, plagiarism, misrepresentation of information, or altering transcripts or university records. . . . Penalties may range from the loss of credit for a particular assignment to dismissal from the University" (*The Lowdown*, p. 249). In short, don't do it. I don't like to bust students for plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty but I will. It isn't fair to others and it isn't fair to yourself.

Here is the policy set forth by the Department of Communication:

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the Student Academic Conduct Policy. By registering at the university, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Conduct Policy, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and

responsibilities as defined by the code. Please see *The Lowdown* for the complete **Student Academic Conduct Policy**.

Each instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the chair of the department. The student involved will receive written notification describing the alleged violation and the recommended penalty, along with a copy of the policy. The written notification will inform the student that if it is determined that previous incident(s) of Academic Misconduct have occurred, an additional or higher level charge may be brought.

The student involved has ten (10) Class days from receipt of the written notification to submit a written response to the instructor and request a conference with the department chair and the instructor.

Assignments

Proposal: Provide a 1-2 page discussion of the topic of your sermon. Briefly explain how you plan to approach the topic. The sermon can be on any topic of your choice, but it should fit well into a sermonic style. That is not to say that it has to be a religious topic, although that makes it easier. One could just as easily give a sermon on atheism as Christianity because issues of truth, faith, morality, and justice transcend specific religious beliefs. **This paper is due on January 24.** Although this may seem early, the earlier you decide on a sermon topic, the more time you have to work with that idea through the response papers. If you have trouble deciding, talk to me during office hours.

Response Papers: Throughout the semester, I will assign 1-2 page papers that will allow you to think through the issues that we will discuss in class. The due dates are listed in the schedule.

Final Sermon (Performance): This is it. Time to stand and deliver. You will deliver a sermon of approximately 10 minutes. This may sound like a lot, but it is actually about 5 double spaced pages of text. You will be assessed on both content and delivery. **This will take place on May 1.**

Final Sermon (Text): Because I want this to be more than an impromptu extemporaneous speech, you will turn in a copy of the sermon with an explanation of your choices for the sermon. I want the sermon to be theoretically sound. This is your chance to explain why you made the choices you did in the sermon and why you think such choices would be effective. Contrary to most of my classes, I wish to receive the text of your final sermon by email. This will allow you to use the comment function in Word to explain your choices. Back up your choices well; this will be the basis of my assessment for this portion. **This paper is due on May 1.**

Participation: Participation is more than simply showing up. In order for you to succeed in this class it is imperative that you come prepared, having read the assignments for the day and ready to discuss them.

Late work policy: Late assignments will receive half credit at the most and will only be accepted by the next scheduled class. No assignments will be accepted one week past the original due date. If you know that you will be absent when an assignment is due, have a classmate bring

it to class or bring it to my office before the class period on which it is due. I will not accept reflection papers by email.

There will be no final exam in this course; the final sermon will serve that purpose.

Grading Scale

There are a total of 100 points available in this course:

Proposal: 10
Response Paper 1: Faith: 5
Response Paper 2: Morality: 5
Response Paper 3: Language: 5
Response Paper 4: Ethos: 5
Response Paper 5: Pathos: 5
Sermon (Performance): 15
Sermon (Text): 20
Participation: 30

A=90-100; B=80-89.99; C=70-79.99; D=60-69.99; F=below 60

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. The Office of Special Student Services will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations.

If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please notify the instructor/professor and provide certification from Special Student Services. (OSSS is located at the corner of Jaguar Drive and Old Shell Road, 5828 Old Shell Road, phone – 460-7212).

Keep in mind that OSSS prohibits me from making any retroactive accommodations, so if you will need special accommodations please talk to me as soon as possible. Moreover, I can make no accommodations unless you are registered with OSSS.

Statement on Diversity

The Department of Communication is committed to preparing students to work in a diverse society. As such, our classes will include lectures and activities which promote an awareness of and sensitivity towards differences of race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, sexual orientation, religion, age and disabilities. Such an environment will contribute to the growth and development of each member of the class, as it will encourage students to embrace diversity as a positive aspect of learning and scholarship.

Reading Schedule

1/17 Introduction to Rhetoric

Burke, Kenneth. "Definition of Man." In *Language as Symbolic Action*, 3-24. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966.

1/24 Rhetorical Theory, Continued

Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (1970): 111-19.

Fisher, Walter R. "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." *Communication Monographs* 51, no. 1 (1984): 1-22.

McGee, Michael Calvin. "The 'Ideograph': A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 1-16.

Proposal Due

1/31 The Power of the Voice

Lunceford, Brett. "The Science of Orality: Implications for Rhetorical Theory." *Review of Communication* 7, no. 1 (2007): 83-102.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 1982. (pp. 36-57).

2/7 What is Religion?

Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, pp. 9-61.

Context Paper 1 due: Faith

2/14 What is Religion?

Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 65-111

2/21 **Mardi Gras, No Class**

2/28 Preach On! Part I

Hogan and Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation*, pp. 7-67

Context Paper 2 due: Morality

3/6 Preach On! Part II

Hogan and Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation*, pp. 69-111.

3/13 **Spring Break, No Class**

3/21 Preach On! Part III

Hogan and Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation*, pp. 113-160.

Context Paper 3: Language

3/27 Sermons- Old School

Danforth, Samuel. "A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness." In *American Rhetorical Discourse*, edited by Ronald F. Reid, 38-52. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995.

Edwards, Jonathan. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In *American Rhetorical Discourse*, edited by Ronald F. Reid, 64-77. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995.

Context Paper 4: Ethos

4/3 The Language of Religion

Gunn, Joshua. "H. P. Blavatsky and the Magic of Esoteric Language." *Journal of Communication & Religion* 25, no. 2 (2002): 193-227.

Hastings, Adi. "From Ritual to Grammar: Sacrifice, Homology, Metalanguage." *Language & Communication* 23, no. 3-4 (2003): 275-85.

4/10 Video Night

We will watch several videos dealing with religious practice and sermons.

Context Paper 5: Pathos

4/17 The Power of Ritual

Jacobs, Janet L. "The Effects of Ritual Healing on Female Victims of Abuse: A Study of Empowerment and Transformation." *Sociology of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1989): 265-79.

Liénard, Pierre, and E. Thomas Lawson. "Evoked Culture, Ritualization and Religious Rituals." *Religion* 38, no. 2 (2008): 157-71.

Whitney Kelting, M. "Candanbālā's Hair: Fasting, Beauty, and the Materialization of Jain Wives." *Religion* 39, no. 1 (2009): 1-10.

4/24 Alternative Views

Holloway, Richard. "Godless Morality." *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 10 (2005): 137-39.

Russell, Bertrand. "Why I Am Not a Christian." In *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, 3-23. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.

5/1 **Sermon Presentations**
Papers Due

Regarding Changes in Course Requirements

Since all classes do not progress at the same rate, the instructor may wish to modify the above requirements or their timing as circumstances dictate. For example, the instructor may wish to change the number and frequency of exams, or the number and sequence of assignments. However, the students must be given adequate notification. Moreover, there may be non-typical classes for which these requirements are not strictly applicable in each instance and may need modification. If such modification is needed, it must be in writing and conform to the spirit of this policy statement.