

ENGL 6166: Rhetorical Theory

Spring 2026

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Class: Fretwell 223, Wednesdays 6:00 – 8:45 pm
Office hours: Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 pm (and by appt.)
Virtual office hours can be scheduled as well

Course Description and Purpose

This course surveys a variety of Western perspectives on discursive meaning making from ancient Greece to postmodernity. Texts of European rhetoric theorize the West's beliefs about the nature and importance of speech and writing, the production and substance of knowledge, the arts of communication, and the social practices as well as institutions (schools, family, religion, government, etc.) that reflect cultural ideology. To help us explore and situate how foundational and later major thinkers of Western civilization formulated and presented their ways of understanding concepts, such as good, evil, love, courage, and even varieties of European "common sense," through discourse, we will read works from Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, St. Augustine, Descartes, Mary Wollstonecraft, Derrida, and shorter readings from others. This theory-intensive course aims to privilege readings of "primary"* texts in an attempt to read with the above major figures. Critiquing the nearly all male, Eurocentric canon is greatly encouraged and an assumed goal for the course.

*Of course, we'll have to set aside the fact that most of our texts have been translated...more on that later.

Texts and Materials

- Required:
- [Plato. *Phaedrus*](#). (9780192802774)
 - [Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*](#). I prefer the George Kennedy translation: Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. 2nd ed. Trans. George A. Kennedy. Oxford, UP: 2007. (978-0195305098)
 - [St. Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine \[Rhetoric\]*](#). (9780024021502)
 - [Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method*](#). (9780872204201)
 - [Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*](#). (9780486290362)
 - Derrida, Jacques. (1981). *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass. Univ. of Chicago Press. (9780226143316)
 - [Knoblauch, Cy. \(2014\). *Discursive Ideologies: Reading Western Rhetoric*](#). Utah State University Press. (9780874219357)
 - **Selected Readings on [Canvas](#)**

Expectations

I expect students to be prepared when they come to class. **There is quite a bit of reading in this course, but it's manageable if you plan your school-work-life needs. Again, there is quite a bit of reading in this course.** Have the readings completed for the class meeting prior to coming to class and post a reflection on [Canvas](#) before our class meetings by Noon on Wednesdays. This is a graduate-level seminar that demands active, critical engagement with the texts. Although one's tastes and convictions—often mistaken as "opinions"—are appropriate for personal ways of knowing, we will emphasize identifying (as accurately as possible) the author's meaning before rushing to evaluative comments on a work. Our personal experiences will help guide us in this endeavor by offering examples from school, work, media, life, etc., which we may use to enhance our understanding of a figure's work. In other words, our experiences should help us (re)think *about* a figure's work in ways that enhance our understanding. Although we shouldn't be too eager to uncritically consume or "buy into" a figure's ideas, we also shouldn't allow our experiences (in other words, biases) to shut us off from exploring a figure's work with an open (critically aware) mind. **Inclusion of any material does not imply my endorsement of the material or figure/author in general.** I expect you to point to specific passages in our discussions. Be ready to do so every class period.

Work Requirements

Students in this course are expected to be able to compose unified, coherent documents nearly free of mechanical, logical, or structural errors. Students should also strive to write clear and concise prose. The ability to read advanced college-level texts critically is also a requirement. I will provide additional requirements on the class website. The final exam period will be used

as a presentation day for students to present their rhetoric/al projects. Time (limits) will be based on enrollment (most likely 10 minutes). Our final exam day and time is **May 6, 2026, from 6:00-8:45 pm**. Please let me know ASAP if there are any other exam conflicts with your schedules. The final exam may have to be an online synchronous meeting or video submission because the main [UNC Charlotte Exam Schedule Calendar](#) was not available when I finalized this syllabus.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Assignments	pts.	Grading Scale
Midterm Mini-Rhetorical Analysis	100	A= 90 – 100
Rhetoric/al Project	200	B= 80 – 89
Rhetoric/al Project Presentation	100	C= 70 – 79
Canvas Posts (15)	300	D= 60 – 69
Participation	300	F= Below 60
Total	1000	

Definition of A, B, C, D, and F Grades

Your final grade is a combination of the five assignment areas above. An ‘A’ means your work was excellent—not mediocre, average, or just good. A ‘B’ means your work was good—not quite excellent but definitely above average and thoughtful. A ‘C’ means your work was barely adequate enough to satisfy the assignment—showing a lack of effort or thought for the assignment guidelines. A ‘D’ or ‘F’ usually means assignments were late, missing, or incomplete—often this work does not demonstrate appropriate college-level work for a 6000-level course.

Attendance

I will take attendance every day. It is very important that you attend every class in order to keep up with the work and reading. Your grade will be lowered after missing **2** classes. Your final grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each day missed beyond **2** absences. After **5** absences you will receive a failing grade for the course. Please make an effort to come to every class on time. Don’t just skip class because you feel you have four “free” days. Save your absences for emergencies. There are no such things as excused absences. Only students participating in UNC Charlotte sponsored activities (with the proper documentation) will not be penalized for missing class. I will ask you to request a meeting with the Dean of Students if you have situations that you feel should allow you an exception to missing more than 4 classes. Cars break down, parking is limited, students get sick, and traffic is brutal, but class still happens. Your participation may also be lowered for excessive tardiness.

Please note that UNC Charlotte is under a federal mandate to comply with a financial aid rule that requires professors to identify the last date of attendance for students receiving unsatisfactory grades. Please visit the following webpage for more information: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/gradingholds/last-date-attendance>.

Late Work

An assignment is due to [Canvas](#) at the stated time. Honestly, there is no excuse for assignments being late in a 6000-level class, but I have a policy anyway: **all late work will reduce the assignment by 10% (an entire letter grade) for each class period it is late**. Late Canvas posts will not be accepted. If you will not or cannot be in class on the day an assignment is due, the assignment is still due on Canvas by the deadline, **often before class**. I will not accept assignments attached to emails. If Canvas is down, submit your work when it’s back up. Please discuss any problems you may have regarding attendance or late work before class if at all possible. Remember, you are responsible for making up all work missed. Something I’ve learned from past semesters is that if you don’t turn things in on time early in the semester, you end up not turning other things in on time (or at all). Do your best to get all your work to me on time. If you are absent, get the information from another student. Do not expect me to e-mail the class notes to you.

Participation

This is not a drill-and-skill type of course. I expect everyone to be involved in class discussions, which are extremely important for critical thinking. You must contribute to class discussions. Thirty percent (30%) of your grade is based on participation. This is a small seminar class, so there will be ample opportunity to contribute. **Maintaining silence just shows you don't care about thinking, which means you don't care about learning.** Yes, I wrote that. If you can provide a valid argument (or series of arguments) that refute that statement, I'm ready to hear it. Remember, nearly everything's debatable. Non-participating students will essentially fail this course because 70%, a grade of 'C', won't count towards your degree, meaning you'll need to take another theory-intensive course.

Please see me ASAP if you're concerned about your participation grade because you're shy or if you don't understand these requirements. Telling me at the end of April that you didn't participate because you're the quiet type or because you didn't understand what "thoughtful" meant will be too late. Even worse, emailing me after the semester is over to complain that participation isn't a "valid" class assignment is too late. The purpose of discussions is for students to have control over their own learning and to reinforce critical thinking generally and dialogic exchange of ideas specifically. I am willing to provide a quasi-alternative to supplement a student's participation grade, but please note that discussion, which allows speakers to exchange ideas, is an extremely important component of critical thinking. Alternative assignments are rare and based solely on my discretion.

Academic Integrity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is an academic community dedicated to teaching, scholarship, service, inclusion, and the holistic development of Students. Academic integrity is a cornerstone value of the University's intellectual community. It is important to nurture an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and mutual responsibility. **Integrity is essential because it ensures that Students fairly benefit from their educational experience and pursuits of knowledge.** Violating the principles of academic integrity damages the reputation of the University and undermines its educational mission and goals.

The University recognizes that Academic Misconduct detracts from the value of a UNC Charlotte degree and has influence beyond the University community, including relationships with employers, other educational institutions, the business community, the UNC system, and the community at large.

The purpose of [the Code](#) is to:

1. support and promote an ethical learning environment;
2. create consistent standards for all members of the academic community;
3. **assist Students in learning responsibility for one's own academic work;**
4. protect the academic environment of the University community; and
5. **clarify Student values and how they relate to the behavior in question.**

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty (From University Policy: 407, Ch. 6—<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-407#c6>)

- A. **Cheating** means using or attempting to use materials, or giving assistance or materials without Authorization to another in any academic exercise that could result in gaining or helping another to gain academic advantage.

Cheating includes, but is not limited, to the following actions:

1. *Copying* - copying from another's assignment, examination, or other academic exercise;
2. *Use of Unauthorized Materials* - using materials or equipment in connection with an assignment, examination, or other academic exercise which have not been authorized by the faculty member, including but not limited to, notes, calculator, websites, **Artificial Intelligence and/or other technology;**
3. *Misrepresentation* - permitting another to substitute for one's self in an academic exercise, or submitting of an academic exercise that has been prepared by another;
4. *Unauthorized Collaboration* - communicating about and/or sharing the work or effort in an academic exercise with another individual or individuals without Authorization.

- B. **Fabrication** means providing fabricated information, including inventing or counterfeiting information, in any form in an academic exercise.
- C. **Failure to Comply** means failing to comply with a specific instruction related to a condition of protecting academic integrity that has been clearly communicated in a particular course, syllabus, test, assessment, assignment, or other academic exercise.
- D. **Falsification** means altering without Authorization any data or information, regardless of communication method (e.g., e-mail or other electronic communication), in an academic exercise.
- E. **Misuse of Academic Materials** means sharing, distributing, altering, acquiring, damaging, or making inaccessible academic materials without Authorization, that could result in gaining or helping another to gain an academic advantage.
- F. **Multiple Submission** means submitting academic work or substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) in more than one academic exercise without Authorization.
- G. **Plagiarism** means presenting the words or ideas of another as one's own words or ideas, including failing to properly acknowledge a source, unless the ideas or information are common knowledge. **[See [website](#) for more information]**

If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source—you will receive an 'F' in this course. If you use non-sanctioned resources (e.g., other classmates) to complete assignments, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

In addition to the above identification of Academic Dishonesty, students should be aware of technology-mediated concerns related to Academic Integrity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “**integrity**” as “The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety.” A second definition states that integrity means, “The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness.” Therefore, anything that draws students’ attention away from course activities and goals violates the essence of academic integrity because it corrupts the soundness and condition of learning. For instance, engaging in critical thinking/awareness is a sound, perfect state activity for this course; on the other hand, devoting attention to social media, texting/messaging, non-class-related internet activities (e-mailing, etc.) violates or corrupts the learning goals of this course. Although we may point to the internet in general and social media sites specifically in our discussions of technology, engrossing oneself in them during class to “catch up with friends” divides your attention and may be distracting to members of this class. This violation is as serious as plagiarism and will result in an ‘F’ in participation (20% of your overall grade) the first time and an ‘F’ in this course for a subsequent violation. This syllabus section is your warning. Yes, it is obvious when you are using laptops and handheld devices to take notes or when you use them to corrupt the learning environment.

You will also receive an ‘F’ in the course for other academic integrity violations. Do not expect another warning—this is it. Please see me if you need further clarification regarding cheating, fabrication or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, or complicity in academic dishonesty. Again, so there’s no confusion, you will most likely fail the course if you violate any part of the academic integrity code.

Title IX Mandated Reporting

{This section is often subject to change based on federal changes that could happen during the semester. We will abide by any new regulations.}

Below is a syllabus paraphrasing, but please refer to the following University Policies for more details:

- [Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence: University Policy 502](#)
- [Title IX Grievance Policy: University Policy 504](#)

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that many UNC Charlotte employees, including all faculty members, are considered [Responsible Employees](#) who are required to relay any information or reports of sexual misconduct they receive to the Title IX

Coordinator. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must [report the information to the Title IX Coordinator](#). Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, please contact any of the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator: (1) University Counseling Center (caps.charlotte.edu, 7-0311); (2) Student Health Center (studenthealth.charlotte.edu, 7-7400); or (3) Center for Wellness Promotion (wellness.charlotte.edu, 7-7407). Additional information about your options is also available at the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX](#) under the “Students” tab.

Safety and Security Information

UNC Charlotte’s Emergency Management offers the following safety tips. Visit emergency.charlotte.edu for more information, and Download the [Livesafe app](#), which connects you to campus police via phone or text 24/7.

- 911 dialed from a mobile phone connects to CMPD and can slow down response.
- Alternatively, you can put the UNC Charlotte Police emergency number in your phone: 704-687-2200.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and know the quickest escape routes: exit doors, windows, etc.
- Safety and Security offers a variety of trainings to students. For more information, visit: <https://police.charlotte.edu/safety>
- Remember: Personal pepper spray is allowed on campus. [These weapons are prohibited](#).

Action Directives included from Emergency Management’s “Preparedness”:

Run-Hide-Fight is the individual’s Action Directive for an active assailant.

- **RUN:** If outside or in a building and it is safe to flee, run and leave the campus if possible.
- **HIDE:** If you are in a building and unsure of where the threat is, find the closest room in which to hide. Close, lock and/or barricade doors if they do not lock. Do not huddle in one location. Remain quiet.
- **FIGHT:** This is a last-resort option. Do not seek the assailant. If you come into direct contact with the individual, use any means necessary to defend yourself.

A **Seek Shelter** directive is normally issued during severe weather or hazardous material releases.

If a Seek Shelter is ordered:

- Stay inside if you are indoors.
- If outside, quickly go to the nearest building.
- Once indoors, find a fitting room or space in the building to shelter. Stay away from windows.

An **Evacuation** can be for either a single building, area, or the entire campus. Further information and direction will be included in the NinerAlert.

Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the Disabilities Resource Center (ds.charlotte.edu/) to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. I don’t need specifics about a condition, but I will need to know what specific accommodations you will need.

Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to their own tastes and convictions (but don’t mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think

texts have single, objectively reasoned meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, etc. influence how we perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

Inclement Weather/Building Issues/Apocalypse

Some buildings can have HVAC problems. Occasionally, the powers that be close buildings and classes are canceled because it is too brutally hot to remain inside. If a building related "issue" cancels class, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and [Canvas](#) posts. The library has lots of space and many computers. We'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus when we return to class. This also goes for inclement weather and other situations that cancel class.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(have readings and assignments done before class)

January 14*	<p>Introduction to the Course. Say Hello. Go over the syllabus.</p> <p>Following Readings on Canvas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asimov, Issac. "Cult of Ignorance" • Gorgias, "Encomium of Helen," in Kennedy's Translation of <i>On Rhetoric</i>, pp. 251-256 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Or the Brian Donovan translation online • Isocrates, "Encomium of Helen," in Mirhady & Too's <i>Isocrates I</i>, pp. 31-48 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Or the J.A. Freese translation online • Biesecker, Susan. "Rhetoric, Possibility, and Women's Status in Ancient Athens: Gorgias' and Isocrates' Encomiums of Helen." <i>Rhetoric Society Quarterly</i>, vol. 22, no. 1, 1992: 99-108.
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*January 20th: Last day to register. If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course.

January 21	<p>Plato. <i>Phaedrus</i>.</p> <p>http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html</p>
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January 28	<p>Aristotle. <i>On Rhetoric</i>. Book 1 available here</p> <p>George Kennedy's translation is a more robust (meaning longer) work and the preferred reading.</p> <p>I'll reference Books 2 and 3, but they aren't required reading</p>
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February 4	<p><i>Isocrates I</i> (Selected readings through Atkins, which you can access through Canvas)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Introduction to Isocrates" and "Introduction to Part One," pp. 1-18 • "To Demonicus," pp. 19-30 • "Against the Sophists," pp. 61-66 • "Introduction to Part Two," pp. 137-138 • "Antidosis," pp. 201-264
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February 11*	<p>St. Augustine, <i>On Christian Rhetoric</i></p> <p>http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/ddc.html</p>
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*February 8th: Deadline to apply for May 2026 graduation

February 18	<p>Knoblauch. Ch. 1 and 2 (pp. 1-48)</p>
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February 25	<p>Midterm Mini-Rhetorical Analysis (DUE Friday, 2/27)</p> <p>Descartes, Rene. Discourse on Method</p> <p>Hugo, Victor. [selections from <i>Les Miserables</i>]</p> <p>Vol. 2, Bk. 1, CH. XVII: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/135/135-h/135-h.htm#link2HCH0087</p> <p>Vol. 2, Bk. 1, CH. XVIII: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/135/135-h/135-h.htm#link2HCH0088</p> <p>Vol 5., Bk. 1, CH. V: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/135/135-h/135-h.htm#link2HCH0303</p> <p>Vol 5., Bk. 1, CH. XX: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/135/135-h/135-h.htm#link2HCH0318</p>
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March 4*	<p>Knoblauch. Ch. 3 (pp. 49-75)</p> <p>McClish, Glen. "The Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Frederick Douglass." <i>Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric</i>, vol. 33, no. 1, 2015: pp. 34-70.</p>
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*March 21: Last day to withdraw from a course or courses; [grade subject to cumulative Withdrawal Policy](#).

March 9th – March 13th: No Class—Spring Break

March 18*	<p>No Class Meeting—Read ahead and go to Canvas</p>
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March 25*	<p>Wollstonecraft, Mary. <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Women</i>. (Available through Atkins Library)</p> <p>Poirot, Kristan. "Domesticating the Liberated Woman: Containment Rhetorics of Second Wave Radical/Lesbian Feminism," <i>Women's Studies in Communication</i>, vol. 32, no. 3, 2009, pp. 263-292, DOI: 10.1080/07491409.2009.10162391</p> <p>Browdy, Ronisha. "Black Women's Rhetoric(s): A Conversation Starter for Naming and Claiming a Field of Study." <i>Peitho</i>, vol. 23, no. 4, 2021.</p>
*March 30th: Registration for Summer and Fall 2026 begins	
April 1*	<p>Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and Politics." <i>The New Yorker</i>, 2 Feb. 1967. Canvas</p> <p>Roberts-Miller, Patricia. "Fighting Without Hatred." <i>JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition</i>, Vol. 22, no. 3, 2002, pp. 585-601. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20866511</p>
April 8	<p>Derrida, Jacques. <i>Positions</i>.</p> <p>Kandell, Jonathan. (2004). "Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74." <i>New York Times</i>.</p> <p>Barthes, Roland. "Death of the Author" on Canvas</p> <p>Barthes, Roland. "Novels and Children" from <i>Mythologies</i> on Canvas</p>
April 15	Knoblauch. Ch. 4 and 5 (pp. 76-129)
April 22	<p>Biesecker, Barbara. "Towards a Transactional View of Rhetorical and Feminist Theory: Rereading Helene Cixous's the <i>Laugh of the Medusa</i>." <i>Southern Journal of Communication</i>, 57:2, 1992: 86-96, DOI: 10.1080/10417949209372856. [need to be logged onto Atkins Library]</p> <p>Myers, Nancy. "Cicero's (S)Trumpet: Roman Women and the Second Philippic." <i>Rhetoric Review</i>, 2003, vol. 22, no. 4, 2003: 337-352. Canvas</p>
April 29	<p>Last Day of Class—Rhetoric/al Projects Due</p> <p>Finish Knoblauch. Ch. 6, 7, and "Afterword" (pp. 130-200)</p>
May 6th	<p>Final Exam—Presentations</p> <p>Unless we have to change it, please come during the regular class time, 6:00-8:45 pm</p>

Commencement May 8th and 9th (congratulations)