Syracuse University
WRT 601: Introduction to Scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric

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Syllabus

Required Texts

Additional readings will be researched by class members or collected in course packets.

Goals of the Course:
For achieving critical literacy and an understanding of composition and rhetoric as a field:

This course introduces graduate students new to composition and rhetoric to the scholarship of the discipline and the issues and problems it addresses. Although it is designed as the gateway course for a doctoral program, students from varied backgrounds can expect to learn to read intelligently the work of the field. In order to acquire such a critical literacy, you need to build a context that allows you to place and interpret new work in relation to the intellectual preoccupations and debates around which the field has developed. This requires some organizing principles as well as simple acquaintance with a range of authors, texts, and arguments.

For your professional development as graduate students and future scholars:

The assignments and structure of the course are designed to cultivate skill in a number of tasks and processes that you will encounter as graduate students and need as future scholars, teachers, and professionals. These include, for example, taking written exams in advanced degree programs; engaging in collaborative study with your peers; and making polished public presentations of your work. The primary developmental focus, however, will be on rapidly developing the ability to read in this unfamiliar field with some accuracy, subtlety, and critical acumen. Since students at this stage are generally unprepared to produce finished, original scholarly papers in one semester, writing assignments stress forms and practices that foster inquiring habits of mind and prepare the way for later scholarship: e.g., reading notes, thought experiments, proposals or abstracts, synthetic reviews of work on a topic.
Together these specific kinds of learning in the course contribute to its global purpose: to model scholarly work and engage you deeply in its characteristic processes of reading, writing, inquiry, and criticism from the very beginning of your graduate experience. In this case, the scholarly inquiry you will undertake is to construct and test a schematic understanding of composition and rhetoric that will help you make preliminary sense of its texts and debates. Over the course of the semester, though, you will learn to become critical of such “maps” of the discipline: to assess their limits and values and to probe their role in the argumentation of the field.

Scholarship is both an intensively individual experience and also a collective enterprise. Through its assignments and organization, the course will try to demonstrate the interdependence and synergy of your own work with that of others in a learning community that includes both your peers in the class and the authors and texts of the field.

“Mapping” the Field: A Collective Inquiry

As a primary learning strategy, this class will undertake a collective inquiry into the field by “mapping,” a process of categorizing scholarship in rhetoric and composition according to some principle(s) of division, contrast, and opposition (for example, methodology, ideology, pedagogical practices). You will be organized into individual study groups of 3-5 students to share responsibilities for this inquiry through meetings and discussions outside of class.

*Composition in Four Keys*, an anthology based on the inquiry principles of this course, will be our basic text for the mapping inquiry. CFK provides a mapping scheme of four keys (“nature,” “art,” “science,” and “politics”), 42 reading selections (primary source material in composition and rhetoric from the 60s to the late 80s) organized by these categories, additional selections that propose alternate maps, instructional material including introductions to each key, and “invitations to inquiry” that you will take up in small study groups.

The first stage of our mapping inquiry has two aspects: using the map to learn about composition, and testing the map as an adequate representation of the complexity of ideas in the field. Thus you will begin by trying to read texts in composition and rhetoric in terms of the four keys while using the readings to develop analyses of the keys as constructs of positions or traditions in the field. Simultaneously, you will have inquiry assignments designed to help you discover problems and gaps in this map. For example, as we study these selected texts in terms of the “keys,” your study groups will browse in journals or collections to find examples of “wild cards” (texts that do not appear to fit the keys or that challenge these distinctions).
In the second stage of the inquiry, we will compare alternate mapping schemes proposed by authors in the field and discuss their influence on scholarship. We will analyze "wild card" examples and speculate on what they reveal and where they lead. Through these and other means we will try to develop an understanding of the intellectual and rhetorical functions of organizing schemes as tools of scholarship that must be used critically and wisely.

Overview of the Course Organization
Unit 1: (3 weeks) Introduction

This unit will introduce you to the course and its pedagogical method and then ask you to sample a cluster of definitions and characterizations of composition and rhetoric as a field, including selections from ICS and a course packet (e.g., Bartholomae, Connors, Emig, Hairston, Harkin, North, Lauer, Phelps). Study groups will be formed. Each one of you will choose a scholar for "becoming an expert" assignment.

Unit 2: (9 weeks) Working with the 4 Keys Map

This unit will spend two weeks on each of the four "keys." You will read introductions and selections in CFK and study groups will take turns selecting and carrying out invitations to inquiry from the text. In Week 8, the class will discuss the process of "defining a critical problem." Readings include "The Discourse of Controversy in Composition Studies" (Louise Wetherbee Phelps, unpublished ms.) and a cluster of articles on a single controversy, collected in a course packet. In Week 11, proposals are due for the final ("controversy") paper, and conferences will be scheduled.

Unit 3: (3 weeks) A Critical Retrospective on Mapping

In this unit, the class will broaden its perspective by reading alternate maps (CFK) and by discussing annotated wild card lists handed out to the class. Study groups will present their map constructions to the class. The class will conclude with a comprehensive exam.

Assignment Summary/Evaluation
Mapping Inquiry
Class and study group participation in mapping inquiry: 40% of final grade

1. Assigned Readings: From the two required texts and course packets.

2. "Become an Expert": Each student selects one major scholar in composition and rhetoric and reads a body of his or her work in order to serve as a class expert. Students should identify the scholar early on and read the work over the course of the semester. A list of items read should be turned in the final week, but this work will be judged primarily by class contributions.
3. Study group participation: Students are expected to meet in study
groups regularly, usually weekly. They should divide up and discuss
readings so that the group as a whole is familiar with the assigned work.
Each week one study group will report on an inquiry they have chosen to
do (from CFK, or one they invent themselves). Members of the group will
identify from their supplementary readings and bsvgings 5-8 “wild
card” examples and distribute a collective annotated list (Week 12).
Together (Weeks 14 and 15) each study group will develop and present
a written “construction” that summarizes its members’ collective under-
standing of the four keys, or of some modification or alternate to the map
that they have invented. The group will distribute a written summary and
present its characterization in visual or graphic form.

“Controversy” paper (individual assignment, 8-10 pages): 30% of final
grade.

This paper asks you to select and analyze a cluster of articles, usually
4-6, concerning/debating a controversial issue. The paper should criti-
cally review the debate, including summarizing various positions and
their disagreements, analyzing surface vs. underlying differences, and
contextualizing the controversy within broader debates and significant
problems of the field. Your purpose in doing so is not to develop an
independent position in detail, but to set the stage for doing so in future
writing. The paper should be structured to move from this analysis to a
concluding commentary that positions you for future inquiry: for ex-
ample, offering a judgment, posing a set of new or unresolved questions,
proposing a plan for further investigation.

Final comprehensive essay and identification exam: 30% of final grade.

A sample course packet for Unit 1 (definitions and arguments over
disciplinarity) might include:
Bartholomae, David. “Freshman English, Composition, and CCCC.” College Com-
Connors, Robert. “Composition Studies and Science.” College English 45 (1983): 1-
20.
Emig, Janet. “Inquiry Paradigms and Writing,” College Composition and Communi-
the Teaching of Writing,” College Composition and Communication 33 (1982):
76-88.
Harkin, Patricia. “The Postdisciplinary Politics of Lore.” Contending with Words:
Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age. Ed. Patricia Harkin and John
WRT 601: Critical Statement

Audience

Like many first graduate courses in composition and rhetoric, ours plays to a mixed audience. It has been designed as the gateway course to a free-standing doctoral degree in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric (CCR), the proposal for which will undergo curriculum review by the university and the state in 1995-96. In the meantime, graduate studies in CCR are in transition from their original location in a department of English. Courses offered by composition and rhetoric faculty are taken largely by a diverse group of students in English degree programs (M.A. and Ph.D. in English and Textual Studies; M.F.A. in Creative Writing). Some simply wish to take one or two courses in composition studies or rhetoric to strengthen their teaching or enhance their job prospects. But a growing subset of both M.A. and Ph.D. students in English, as well as a few in an interdisciplinary humanities doctoral program, take advanced CCR courses, and some doctoral students have reached the exam and dissertation stages in CCR. Finally, many professional composition instructors who teach in the undergraduate writing curriculum enroll in CCR courses for personal and professional learning goals.

WRT (Writing) 601 must therefore be understood as an attempt to offer an introduction to the scholarship of composition and rhetoric that has a principled relationship to the proposed doctoral program, while being adaptable to the highly diverse goals, qualifications, and needs of our current, wildly mixed audience. In this it is far from unique. However, it is unusual in being unabashedly an introduction to scholarship in the field, not an introduction to composition pedagogy for new writing teachers. (The latter function is handled by a practicum course taken by all new teaching assistants.) The commonality this course appeals to among its students is not their participation in the teaching of writing, but their urgent (and often unrecognized) need as graduate students or teachers to learn and practice the critical and creative intellectual habits of scholars. In this sense, while our course does introduce the "scholarship" of composition studies and rhetoric as subject matter—texts, authors, issues and arguments, that function is not as fundamental as the experiences of intellectual work it offers students and the scholarly attitudes and self-image that it fosters.
Philosophy and Structure of the Graduate Program

The double meaning of “scholarship” that this course invokes is deeply significant to our graduate program. Scholarship is at once a body of intellectual work—the written products of a professional community—and a set of practices—writing, reading, empirical research, use of information technology, interpretation and criticism of others’ work, teaching, public speaking—that students must learn to perform. Graduate education gives great attention to coverage of the former and little attention explicitly, especially at the introductory level, to the task of instructing students in scholarship as the performance of a meaningful and complex activity. But our experiences and observations of graduate students in English and of candidates for positions on our writing faculty have led us to believe that few graduate students enter a doctoral program with the inquiring attitude of a scholar, or with any deep commitment or understanding of what it means to live as an intellectual. They are searching for the meaning of their own aspirations, often vague, to become university professors. Many do not leave their programs with much greater understandings of these matters, in large part because graduate education has not explicitly taught them either conceptually or practically. Our program aspires to address these needs.

The intellectual base of this course is not, therefore, theories of writing and rhetoric per se. Theories figure rather as objects of student inquiry and as exemplars of scholarly practices engaged in by real people like themselves, showing the traces of rhetorical and political motive, error, self-deception, and other such human limitations. Instead, the course is grounded in our own attempts to theorize scholarship itself concretely as an activity and to begin developing a graduate pedagogy more fully informed by theories of adult development and studies of the cultural forces shaping this generation of students. Means of achieving this purpose include giving students immediate experience with learning through individual and collective inquiry, teaching them to analyze scholarly processes and monitor their own intellectual progress, and treating them as agents of their own education.

In these goals, we must cope with the acculturation to passive, disengaged learning habits and low self-expectations that affect even the brightest graduate students. Such attitudes have been inculcated not only in their undergraduate education, but also in graduate experiences where they may have been encouraged to submit themselves uncritically to dogmatic theories rather than to speculate, theorize, weigh evidence, and make critical judgments themselves. Our program aims to instill the adventurous spirit, curiosity, drive, and humility that distinguish true scholarship.
Our students tell us that they experience graduate school as powerfully isolating and competitive. Many have been pressured upon arrival to choose up sides in the divisive theoretical and political battles that afflict English studies. Until we began to discuss and teach a different notion of graduate education, they did not imagine the possibility of forming a learning community, and had not been taught the practical skills of forming and sustaining such associations. For this reason, our introductory course sets up study groups and makes assignments that encourage a great deal of interaction and cooperation in learning communities outside the class itself.

The future doctoral program into which this course fits has a three-part structure reflecting these pedagogical principles and the strengths of our faculty. It has a strong 6-course core intended to provide a generalist base for specialized study. As demonstrated by the introductory course, it is organized by the examination of intellectual tensions and problems rather than by theoretical dogma. (Thus this first course is highly eclectic in its readings and encourages students not to commit themselves too hastily to one of the traditions or ideologies of the field; indeed, it encourages them to view the usual constructions of these positions and schools as heuristic fictions and to explore alternate distinctions.) The curriculum cultivates from the beginning a pervasive historical perspective and a critical interest in the construction of history. Other principles introduced in core courses are expectations for sophistication in use of telecommunication technologies and information resources and for interdisciplinarity in sources and research traditions. Students move from the core into one of two four-course "tracks" that define a "major" emphasis in either composition or cultural rhetoric. Finally, students take electives within and outside the department to define specializations (e.g., in professional and technical writing or in writing program administration) and interdisciplinary thematic options. The general movement of the curriculum is from generalist to specialist knowledge, from structure to increasingly flexible and free choice, as students gain the background and skills to increasingly individualize and direct their own graduate education. Throughout, the emphasis is on helping students acquire the knowledge base, skills, and sense of purpose needed to define intellectual projects of sufficient depth, generativity, and complexity to sustain a scholarly life beyond the dissertation.

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